

# PROBATION NEWS

Magazine of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland • Issue 18 • April 2024



**WELCOME** to the eighteenth edition of the Probation News Magazine. This magazine provides a biannual opportunity to engage through sharing of news, best practice and information to stakeholders, staff and the public. We hope you enjoy reading this edition.

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Probation gives evidence to Justice Committee

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## POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION OF PROBATION HIGHLIGHTED BY MINISTER

**Probation Board Chair Max Murray and Probation Board Chief Executive Amanda Stewart met with Justice Minister Naomi Long MLA recently to discuss the work of Probation in communities, courts, custody and with victims of crime to change lives for safer communities.**

Max and Amanda both highlighted to the Minister some of the challenges currently faced by Probation. It was also an opportunity to outline the important role that community sentences, supervised by Probation, play in keeping the public safe.

During the meeting, the Minister highlighted the positive contribution of Probation staff to the criminal justice system and communities.



Chief Executive Amanda Stewart and Board Chair Max Murray meeting with the Minister for Justice, Naomi Long MLA, to discuss Probation's work in keeping communities safe.

# CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DIARY

Welcome to this edition of Probation News which provides an overview of our work and explains the impact probation has on contributing to safer communities.

In terms of the public service we provide, Probation works to protect the public and reduce reoffending by supervising people who have offended in the community while overseeing their rehabilitation and resettlement. Sometimes it can be difficult to articulate to the public exactly what probation does. The best way of describing it, is that we help people to change their lives. We aim to provide an individualised and trauma informed approach to tackle the causes of offending which can be different for every person who walks through our door. There is real evidence that the relationship that our Probation practitioners have with people subject to probation supervision makes a difference in reducing the risk of reoffending and the creation of further victims.

As well as supporting people to change, Probation Officers also hold people to account so there is a dual role of supporting people when they want to change and holding them to account and taking enforcement action if they are not complying with the terms of their community sentence or licence conditions. This is an important part of Probation's role as it gives the public confidence that any individual who disregards or fails to comply with their community order is dealt with appropriately.

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that in certain circumstances community sentences are more effective than short prison sentences at reducing reoffending. In nearly every jurisdiction research has shown that community sentences are more effective than prison sentences of less than 12 months.

Probation is very clear that crime and reoffending can be reduced through effective and rigorous sentences served in the community. We would like to see an increase in the use of community sentences because we believe it will lead to better outcomes for individuals who have offended, victims of crime and communities. We do however need the right investment to provide rigorous community sentences and we need to continue to build awareness and confidence in the effectiveness of community sentencing.

Throughout this edition of Probation News, you will see examples of good practice and stories which evidence the effectiveness of our work.

Of course, for Probation to be effective our work with partners is essential. We have built some impactful partnerships across the Criminal Justice system with Police, Prisons, Parole Commissioners, Youth Justice and the Court service and with the community and voluntary sectors.

Indeed, we couldn't fulfil our functions without their assistance. Each organisation provides services which support our work in courts, communities, custody and with victims of crime. Many factors that can prevent reoffending, such as good physical and mental health, accommodation, education, and employment, sit outside the scope of the justice system. Therefore, our partnerships need to extend across government departments, and we believe there is a requirement for cross-government working to holistically tackle reoffending. The return of devolved Government provides opportunities for us to take a more joined up approach.

I want to thank all of you who have worked in partnership with us over the last number of months and I hope we can continue to build on those relationships to keep communities throughout NI safer.

**Amanda Stewart OBE**  
Chief Executive



# CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

**Over the past number of months the Board has become increasingly concerned at the impact on our staff of managing increased caseloads, most presenting with increased complexity and many suffering addiction and mental health problems. The situation is compounded by staff shortages due to the high attrition rate and the challenge of filling vacancies from the labour market impacted by a shortage of qualified social workers. All of this is contributing to high sick absence and when combined with the turnover of leavers is causing operational challenges.**

The Probation Board has had a period of significant engagement over the last number of months. In March we held a Probation Board event to discuss 'working in partnership across the criminal justice system'. The event which was held in Ulster University and facilitated by Dr Jonny Byrne brought together key partners to consider our interfaces within the justice system. We were delighted to be joined by Richard Pengelly, former Permanent Secretary at the Department of Justice, Presiding District Judge, Stephen Keown, Deputy Chief Constable, Chirs Todd and Detective Superintendent Jordan Piper from the Public Protection Unit. Probation is unique in that it works right across the justice sector, in courts, communities, prisons and with victims of crime. This event gave us an opportunity to consolidate our partnership working and to consider ways of working more effectively together.

Alongside the Deputy Chair Eileen Patterson, Chief Executive of the Youth Justice Agency Stephen Martin and PBNI Director of Operations Gillian Montgomery I welcomed staff from the youth justice agency and Probation to celebrate world social work day. Social workers bring unique and valuable skills to the justice system in being able to assist people to tackle the causes of offending and using their expertise

risk assessing individuals and developing risk management plans to keep the public safe. Every Probation Officer is a qualified social worker, and that skill set is absolutely vital in helping protect the public.

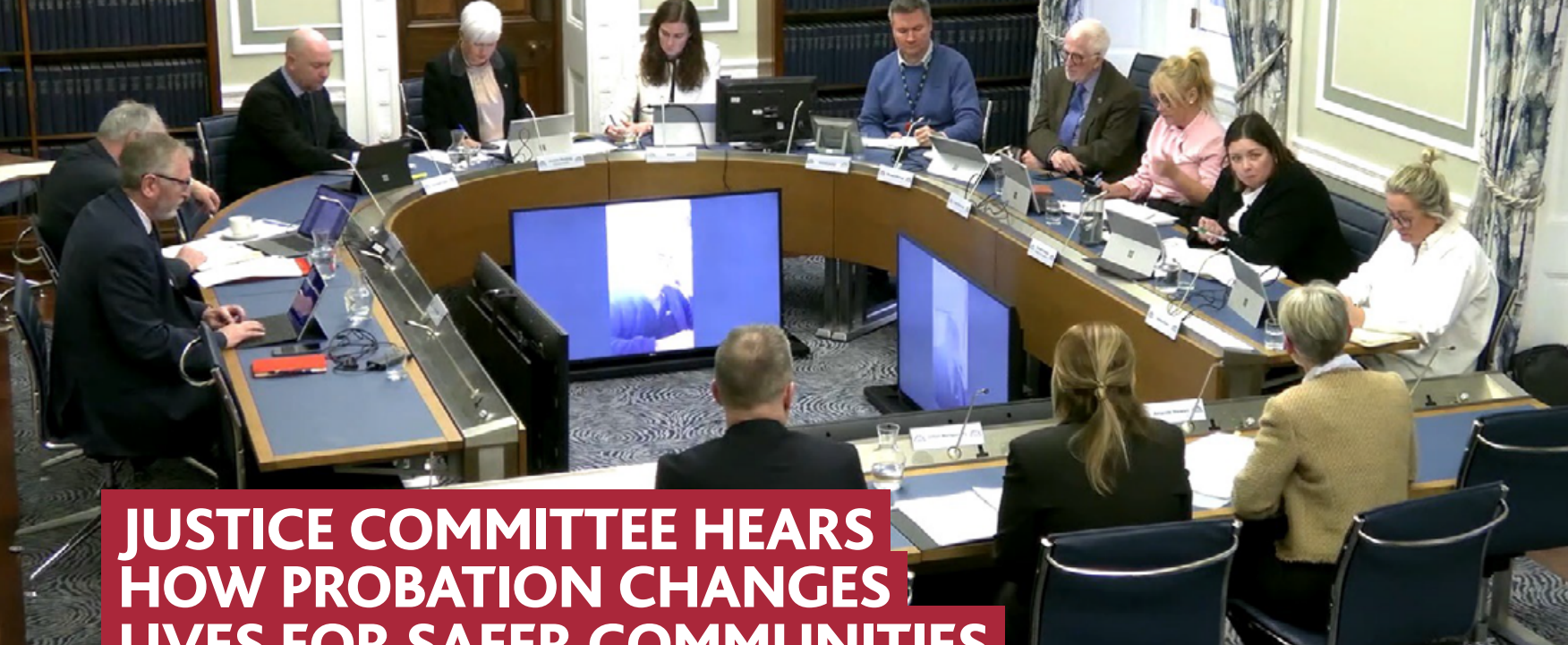
The Chief Executive and I were delighted this month to meet with our newly appointed Justice Minister Naomi Long. This provided an opportunity for us to outline the challenges Probation is facing, not least as a consequence of decisions taken to live within the 23/24 budget. In the last 12 months we have had a real cut of 6.1% of the budget which has fundamentally impacted how we deliver services. The challenging budgetary position has meant that we have had to make some very difficult decisions. We have already reshaped our service; revised our standards, reduced our estate, cut back-office posts, and reduced funding to the Community and Voluntary Sector, to live within the budget available whilst maintaining a focus on public safety and delivery of our frontline services within communities. We cannot sustain any future reductions. On the contrary Probation is in need of increased investment to ensure we can meet the increasing demands on the service and have a workforce who can manage a caseload of people with increasing vulnerabilities safely in the community.

A significant amount of effort has gone into resolving our long standing pay issues within Probation. Senior management working alongside trade unions have developed a business case which has been approved by the Department of Justice and is now with the Department of Finance. Probation's own Finance and Human Resource departments have addressed a number of queries that have been returned to DoF and we remain hopeful that a decision on the Business case will be forthcoming imminently. It is essential that we have a modern and fit for purpose pay structure within the service to attract and retain social work and corporate staff.

The work carried out by Probation staff across Northern Ireland is vital and Board members are constantly impressed by the dedication, commitment and passion displayed by our staff members. We have achieved a significant amount over the last 12 months and as we move into a new business year look forward to continued work with partners to change lives for safer communities.

**Max Murray CBE**  
Board Chair





# JUSTICE COMMITTEE HEARS HOW PROBATION CHANGES LIVES FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES

**On 14th March, Probation had the opportunity to appear before the Northern Ireland Assembly Justice Committee to highlight the work of Probation to keep communities safe.**

In the evidence session, Probation Chief Executive Amanda Stewart, along with Directors of Operations Stephen Hamilton and Gillian Montgomery, gave an overview of the work of Probation explaining how it protects the public and reduces re-offending by supervising people in the community.

During her introduction speech, Amanda said "Sometimes it can be difficult to articulate to the public exactly what Probation does. The best way of describing it, is that we help people to change their lives. We aim to provide an individualised and trauma informed approach to tackle the causes of offending which can be different for every person who walks through our door.

There is real evidence that the relationship that our Probation practitioners have with people subject to Probation supervision makes a difference in reducing the risk of reoffending and the creation of further victims."

Amanda highlighted some of the challenges the organisation is facing including operating within a reduced budget, high attrition rates of staff, and many more service users presenting with complex needs.

Amanda finished by saying "I am incredibly proud to be the Chief Executive of the Probation Board.

The context we work in can make it difficult for the positive work that we are involved in to be amplified... Our staff work tirelessly to do the very best for people in helping them to turn their lives around and to keep communities safer, and I have referenced the complexity of substance misuse and mental health issues. Everything that we do in Probation is about preventing people becoming victims of crime and making our communities safer." Amanda, Stephen and Gillian then took questions from the members of the Justice Committee.

You can read the full Hansard Report on the [NI Assembly Website](#) or download from the [website](#).



# 2023/24 CASELOAD STATISTICS

QUARTER 3

## AT THE END OF DECEMBER:

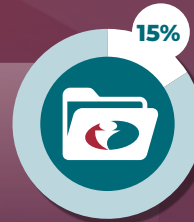
**5,807**

orders and licences, belonging to **4,238 people**, under supervision by PBNI at the end of December



**15%** (624)

of caseload were categorised under the Public Protection Arrangements for NI (PPANI).



Most common type of probation supervision was a

**DETERMINATE CUSTODIAL SENTENCE**

accounting for **34%** of the caseload. This was followed by Probation Orders which accounted for **33%** of the caseload



**185 SERVICE USERS**

(**4.4% of caseload**) had been assessed as Significant Risk of Serious Harm (SROSH).

**84% (155)** were under supervision by Probation prison teams



**30-39 YRS**

The most common age group for people on caseload was 30-39, with **36%** of people belonging to this demographic



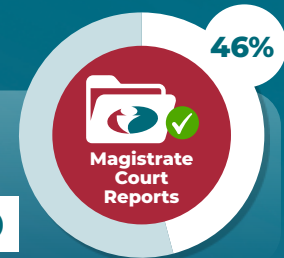
## IN THE LAST 3 MONTHS:

**836 NEW ORDERS**

belonging to **754 people**, had come onto caseload



**1,669 COURT REPORTS COMPLETED**



The most common new order / licence in the quarter was

**PROBATION ORDERS**

followed by **Determinate Custodial Orders**.



**83 VICTIMS OF CRIME REGISTERED**

Victims of Crime can register with the Victim Information Scheme. The total number of registrants is **497**





## WOMEN WITHIN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

**In March we brought together some of the women currently serving a community sentence to meet with Ulster University's Dr Ciara Fitzpatrick, Dr Gabrielle Nugent-Stephens and Alexandra Chapman along with Women's Support Network's Siobhán Harding.**

The women talked about how the individual relationships with Probation Officers had helped them desist from crime and turn their lives around. All of the women in the group had suffered childhood trauma and adversity and Probation had worked with them to tackle issues including addictions and mental health.

Research shows that Women offend for different reasons than men, and often emphasize different factors when they successfully desist from criminal behaviour.

We also know custody can be particularly damaging for women. The women heard from Siobhán Harding about the work of the Women's Support Network and about the Women's Centres they run that can assist and support women in the community.

The Women service users are members of the Belfast Women Service Users group set up to provide feedback on how delivery of Probation services affects them.

The group meet on a monthly basis and is organised by Probation Officer Leona Tate, Probation Service Officer Stephanie Brennan and Probation Officer Billie-Jo McDowell.

All our Service User Forum groups are important to us for provided feedback to better inform our best practice and effectiveness of the community sentence.



## STAFF ENGAGEMENT HELPS BUILD BETTER PRACTICE

Our Chief Executive Amanda Stewart recently hosted a Staff Engagement Forum as a result of our Staff Engagement Survey. Communication and managing change were discussed alongside further developing our values based organisational culture to deliver better services.

The event was kindly facilitated by Hugh Campbell, Ulster University, who helped tease out some of the next steps to increase staff engagement in the future of Probation and how best practice is delivered to change lives for safer communities.

# PROBATION WORKING WITH LOCAL PARTNERS



In changing lives for safer communities, we believe community-based partnerships are crucial. Probation is a member of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, which are an important way to make local connections, form partnerships and deliver a practical difference to local communities. These partnerships are made up of local independent members alongside local elected Councillors plus organisations like the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Health and Social Care Board, Youth Justice Agency, NI Fire and Rescue, Education Authority and ourselves to name a few.

We were delighted to take part in the Belfast PCSP Spring Safety Event in Belfast City Hall to meet with the public and raise awareness with them what we are doing in local communities. There were also a number of councillors who dropped by to find out more.

## BOARD HOSTS JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP EVENT

In March the Probation Board held an event to discuss 'working in partnership across the criminal justice system'. The event which was held in Ulster University and facilitated by Dr Jonny Byrne brought together key partners to consider our interfaces within the justice system. Richard Pengelly, former Permanent Secretary at the Department of Justice, Presiding District Judge, Stephen Keown, Deputy Chief Constable, Chirs Todd and Detective Superintendent Jordan Piper from the Public Protection Unit joined the event.

Probation is unique in that it works right across the justice sector, in courts, communities, prisons and with victims of crime. This event gave Probation an opportunity to consolidate our partnership working and to consider ways of working more effectively together.



Now former Department of Justice Permanent Secretary Richard Pengelly, Judge Keown, Probation Chief Executive Amanda Stewart, D/Superintendent Jordan Piper, Probation Board Chair Max Murray, Deputy Chief Constable Chris Todd and Ulster University Dr Jonny Byrne.

Probation Chief Executive Amanda Stewart and Probation Board Chair Max Murray talking to D/Superintendent Jordan Piper.



Head of Communication Gail McGreevy attending the All Party Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence alongside the Commissioner for Victims of Crime Geraldine Hanna and the Justice Minister Naomi Long MLA.

## PROBATION DELIGHTED TO SPEAK AT ALL PARTY GROUP ON DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Chief Executive Amanda Stewart was invited to speak at an event arranged by the Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence.

The All Party Group was formed to ensure that the issues affecting victims of domestic violence are high on the agenda for the Northern Ireland Assembly prioritising Assembly policies and focus enabling Northern Ireland to respond effectively to victims and challenge perpetrators. It is also to encourage debate and engage discussion with relevant agencies and organisations and MLAs while raising awareness about the issue and prevalence of domestic violence in our society.

During her speech, Amanda pointed to the progress that has been made including the introduction of new legislation but also cautioned that we have a long way to go to collectively address and prevent domestic abuse and sexual violence. Amanda highlighted the work being carried out by Probation in respect of the Building Better Relationships Programme and the Promoting Positive Relationships Programme, both of which are effective at preventing abusive behaviour.

There was also an opportunity to talk with attendees to share best practice and discuss service delivery improvements.

Probation Chief Executive Amanda Stewart speaking at the Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence event in the Long gallery, Parliament Buildings.



## PROBATION TAKES PART IN THE ALL PARTY GROUP ON HOMELESSNESS

The **All Party Group on Homelessness** met in Parliament Buildings on Monday 11 March. The focus of the session was on homelessness and the Criminal Justice system. The group were briefed by; Liz Arthur, **Probation Service's** Assistant Director for Public Protection; by Maria Watson, Interim Deputy Director of Rehabilitation at the **Prison Service** and Brenda Parker, Interim Head of Services and Support for **Housing Rights**. At the session Liz Arthur outlined the importance of having access to stable and appropriate accommodation in order to prevent reoffending. She explained why it was important to have approved accommodation in place which provides additional safeguards to people who are supervised in the community. All of the research undertaken demonstrates that access to housing is a key factor in preventing further offending and preventing people becoming victims of crime.





# COMMUNITY SERVICE CLEANING UP

## MEN'S SHED GET THE NORTH WEST GRAFFITI REMOVAL COMMUNITY SERVICE SQUAD TREATMENT

Derry City & Strabane District Council has also partnered with Probation to provide a graffiti removal service for the North West area. The service, just like the Belfast City Council partnership, is for Community Service squads to work to remove non-contentious graffiti as well as deliver a cleaner environment for residents and tourists alike. The squad was recently out at Ballykelly where they cleaned up the environment for the Men's Shed based there.

If you, your family and friends or any community groups you may know have seen unsightly graffiti or have a project suitable for the Graffiti Removal squad they can contact Derry City & Strabane District Council at [pcsp@derrystrabane.com](mailto:pcsp@derrystrabane.com).

## COMMUNITY SERVICE CONTINUES CLEANING UP GRAFFITI

Our Graffiti Removal Community Service squad in Belfast were out successfully removing unsightly Graffiti to improve the City centre environment.

Remember if you, your family and friends or any community groups you may know have seen unsightly graffiti in the Belfast area they can contact Belfast City Council on 028 9027 0230 or online at their website.

If you have any Community Service squads or placements you would like to highlight please send them to Ivor Whitten at [ivor.whitten@probation-ni.gov.uk](mailto:ivor.whitten@probation-ni.gov.uk)



## PROBATION MATTERS PODCAST

Probation publish Podcasts to raise awareness and understanding of the work we do supervising community sentences to change lives for safer communities.

Each podcast examines different areas of our work in Courts, Communities, Custody and with Victims of Crime.

# CONTACT PROBATION AT

## PROBATION HEADQUARTERS

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Communications Unit 028 9052 2522

## SPECIALIST TEAMS

**Aspire**  
80/90 North St, Belfast BT1 1LD 028 9031 6436

**Programme Delivery Unit**  
1st Floor, 80-90 North Street, Belfast, BT1 1LD 028 9052 2585

**Public Protection Team**  
PSNI Seapark, 151 Belfast Road, Carrickfergus, BT38 8PL 028 9025 9576

**Victim Information Unit**  
80/90 North St, Belfast BT1 1LD 0300 123 3269

## AREA TEAMS

**West Belfast and Lisburn**  
Glenshane House, 202a Andersonstown Road, Belfast, BT11 9EA 028 9030 6630  
Unit 4, Wallace Studios, 27 Wallace Avenue, Lisburn, BT27 4AE 028 9262 3456

**North Belfast and South East Antrim**  
171 – 179 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast, BT15 2GE 028 9034 7474

**South and East Belfast**  
297 Newtownards Road, Belfast, BT4 1AG 028 9052 6655  
330 Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 2GE 028 9054 1444

**Down and Ards**  
15 Castle Street, Newtownards, BT23 3PA 028 9185 8282  
Downshire Civic Centre, Ardglass Road, Downpatrick, BT30 6RA 028 4461 8281

**North Antrim**  
3 Wellington Court, Ballymena, BT43 6EQ 028 2566 2345  
19/20 The Diamond, Coleraine, BT52 2DN 028 7034 6880  
1 Curran Road, Larne, BT40 1BS *Contact Ballymena*

**North West**  
25 Shipquay Street, Londonderry, BT48 6DL 028 7131 9670

**Rural South**  
1d Monaghan Street, Newry, BT35 6BB 028 3025 3030  
12 Church Street, Portadown, BT62 3LQ 028 3839 7575

**Rural West**  
Sperrin Centre, 1 Market Street, Omagh, BT78 1EE 028 8225 4872  
Cathcart Square, 14 Dublin Road, Enniskillen, BT74 6HH 028 6634 3345

**Rural Mid Ulster**  
9 Kirk Avenue, Magherafelt, BT45 6BT 028 7930 2115  
25 College Street, Armagh, BT61 9BT 028 3752 9876



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