

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER

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Kathy O'Hanlon
Clerk to the Committee for Justice
Room 242
Parliament Buildings
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22 December 2025

Dear Kathy,

JUSTICE BILL ORAL EVIDENCE – RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Thank you for your letter dated 12 December regarding the Committee's oral evidence session with Departmental officials on the Justice Bill. The Committee has requested a number of documents following that session.

Details of the areas involved in the first phase of the roll-out of restorative justice

As this is a new approach to accreditation, and numbers of practitioners and cases are unknown at this stage, a phased approach has been agreed by a multi-agency Task and Finish Group (which includes departmental representatives, Court Service, PBNI, PPS, and PSNI). The focus will be on diversionary referrals in the first instance, similar to the successful diversionary youth conference approach.

The initial locations will be Ards & North Down and Lisburn & Castlereagh in the Spring, followed by Antrim & Newtownabbey and Mid & East Antrim approximately four months later. This arrangement allows for co-located policing districts and more easily facilitated police officer training across adjoining districts.

These areas were chosen as it was considered viable to initially launch in regions with limited-service provision and unknown future accreditation levels. Geographical



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coverage will be kept under review following introduction, with a view to expanding across Northern Ireland as soon as possible.

A copy of the documentation outlining the role and remit of the Interim Protocol Lead and to re-share the accreditation framework and practice standards

Detail of the Adult Restorative Justice Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework and the 2023 Restorative Justice Protocol can be accessed via the following links:

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-10/Adult%20Restorative%20Justice%20%20%20%20Practice%20Standards%20and%20Accreditation%20Framework%202026.pdf>

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/restorative%20justice%20protocol%202023.pdf>

The Protocol Lead is an independent person appointed to support delivery of the revised Protocol. The role includes:

- Designing, implementing and overseeing a new accreditation process for non-statutory restorative justice organisations, their practitioners and independent restorative justice practitioners. This includes assessing accreditation applications submitted by organisations and practitioners, quality assurance of restorative justice practice under the new process as well as monitoring the impact and effectiveness of the accreditation process and the provision of associated restorative justice services.
- Keeping the Accreditation Framework and Practice Standards under review.
- Oversight of the Restorative Justice Hub that will deal with referrals under the new accreditation process.
- Training and continuous development, including developing a training package for accredited practitioners and monitoring practice standards of accredited restorative justice providers to ensure best practice is being delivered.
- Promoting Departmental work on restorative justice.
- Responsibility for dealing with complaints related to accredited restorative justice work.
- Working to raise awareness of restorative justice among the wider public.

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Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Máinnystrie O tha Laa

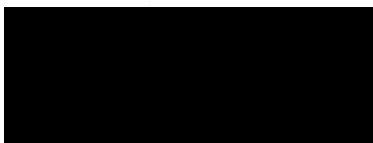
www.justice-ni.gov.uk

- Working with the Executive Office in considering how the role and functions of a Centre of Restorative Excellence for NI, covering restorative practice and beyond the criminal justice system, may be best progressed.

The appointment of the Protocol Lead has enabled significant progress to be made against the actions outlined in the Department's Adult Restorative Justice Strategy, including the aspects outlined above.

I trust this addresses the queries raised by Members and assists in the Committee's scrutiny of the Bill. Officials will be happy to provide any further clarification required.

Yours sincerely,



CAOIMHE MCKEOWN
DALO



**Northern Ireland Assembly
Committee for Justice**

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12 December 2025

Dear Caoimhe

Justice Bill oral evidence

At its meeting on 4 December 2025, the Committee for Justice heard oral evidence from officials on the Justice Bill.

Following the evidence session the officials agreed to provide the following:

- Details of the areas involved in the first phase of the roll-out of restorative justice; and,
- A copy of the documentation outlining the role and remit of the Interim Protocol Lead and to re-share the accreditation framework and practice standards.

I would appreciate a response by 8 January 2025.

Yours sincerely

Kathy O'Hanlon

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