

PROBATION NEWS

Magazine of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland • Issue 17 • Oct 2023



WELCOME to the seventeenth 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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BELFAST LORD MAYOR SEES PROBATION AT WORK IN NORTH BELFAST

Assistant Director Aileen McLaughlin welcomed the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Ryan Murphy to our North Belfast office where he met Head of Communications Gail McGreevy, Area Managers Jacqueline Nicholson and Claire Houston as well as staff to learn more about Probation's work within the North Belfast community.



Meeting the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Ryan Murphy is Area Manager Jacqueline Nicholson, Assistant Director Aileen McLaughlin, Area Manager Claire Houston and Head of Communications Gail McGreevy

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S DIARY



Welcome to this edition of Probation News.

Probation is a central part of the criminal justice system, and we work to change lives for safer communities. In doing this, we work with people who have offended supporting them to understand why they committed their offence; the impact on others; including victims and enabling them to change their behaviour.

Today, we are working with approximately 4108 people serving either a community sentence or who have been released from prison subject to licence, and we have 500 people registered with our Victim Information Scheme. Last year we completed 7,101 pre-sentence reports for judges and magistrates in the courts to enable them to choose the most appropriate sentence. We also have staff working in prisons preparing people for release into the community.

Throughout this edition of Probation News, you will see highlights of the work we do to make communities safer. Probation is a service embedded in the community, with a distinct social work identity, and with skills and knowledge to undertake vital work with other partners throughout the criminal justice system. Importantly you will also read about our partnership work, which is key to changing lives, protecting the public from harm and creating safer communities.

In October we held an event as part of the HMPPS Insights Festival on the role of the substance misuse court which has been running in Lagside Magistrates Court with Judge Keown presiding. The aim of this programme which we deliver in partnership with Inspire Wellbeing is to target

individuals, whose offending behaviour is driven by drug and/or alcohol misuse, to provide them with support to help turn their lives around. The estimated cost of substance misuse in Northern Ireland is £900million and there has been a 203% increase in drug misuse deaths in the last 10 years. Through the Substance Misuse Court Probation in partnership with the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service, the Judiciary and Inspire Wellbeing contributes to a compassionate and caring justice system. We provide support to individuals including interventions from probation officers, psychologists, and counsellors to address drug and or alcohol misuse and break the cycle of offending.

PBNI's strength lies in its ability to work in partnership with a range of organisations including statutory partners such as the prison service, police service and courts as well as the large network of voluntary and community groups across Northern Ireland. I was delighted to meet with the newly appointed Director General of the NI Prison Service last month and I look forward to working with Beverley to further develop our partnership with the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Good quality probation practice makes a difference to outcomes for the people we work with and communities. If we are to be effective in preventing people from reoffending, we need to intervene at the earliest opportunity to deal with the issues that drive offending behaviour such as alcohol and drug addiction, insecure accommodation, and lack of employment and skills. We are working alongside a range of partners to support people into education, employment and appropriate accommodation. In this edition of Probation News, you can read about our work with the Northern Ireland Housing

Executive to tackle some of the issues faced by service users.

One of our priorities is to continue our work in developing trauma informed practice. We are delighted to be working in partnership with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland. We have just completed an organisational wide survey on trauma which will help us develop our work to becoming trauma informed.

While we continue to face budgetary pressures, we have tried to ensure that our partnerships with community and voluntary organisation are maintained. Following budget reductions in 2023-24 I asked the Department of Justice for the additional funding to enable us to continue to support our community and voluntary sector partners. We are grateful to the Department for that funding which is providing support to our service users, particularly in relation to addictions and mental health.

Looking forward and like all public services, Probation is operating in an incredibly challenging environment with shrinking budgets and the demand for our services increasing. In this context, my priorities are to ensure that the voice and interests of Probation get the leadership attention it needs, that we continue to deliver good quality probation practice and that innovation continues to be developed so that the impact of Probation can be felt in changing lives, saving lives and protecting the public.

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.

Exit interviews with staff tell us that the disparity in salaries particularly with social workers in health has influenced many to seek employment elsewhere. The Senior Executive Team working with the Board has submitted a Business case for Pay Modernisation to remedy the situation.

Board members were delighted to host a special themed Board meeting in September focusing on two of its strategic priorities 'our people' and 'our services'.

A senior representative from each of the Five Nations of Probation was invited to provide an overview of probation within their jurisdiction focusing on key challenges and staffing issues facing each organisation and any innovative solutions that are being implemented.

While some of the issues in England, Wales, Scotland, the Republic of Ireland and the Channel Islands differ from the issues faced in Northern Ireland it was clear there were similarities. These include increasing prison numbers, increasing mental health and addiction problems and staffing pressures with recruitment and retention very much to the fore.

There was a good discussion about the need for probation to raise its public profile and image by evidencing the impact that probation makes in reducing reoffending and keeping communities safer. It's important that we have the data and evidence to demonstrate the difference we make to people's lives.

You can read more about the themed meeting on page 5.

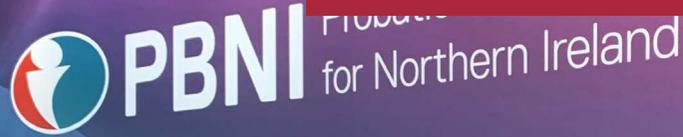
Board members have a very distinct role which includes providing support, as well as a level of accountability, oversight and strategic thinking. They also provide a key role in raising public awareness. You will see within this edition of Probation News that members have taken part in a range of engagements with community groups and stakeholders to explain the vital role probation provides. We were delighted to attend engagement events in Downpatrick, West Belfast and Newry. Our Vice Chair Eileen Patterson and myself attended an important roundtable discussion with the NI Housing Executive to consolidate partnership working and look at ways of dealing with some of the accommodation issues faced by service users.

In the coming month's Probation like all public sector bodies will continue to experience financial challenges. The Board is concerned at the potential impact on public safety and is working alongside the Chief Executive to ensure that the organisation meets its statutory commitments whilst living within its budget but that means we have had to adjust how we deliver services in some areas.

Over the coming months we will be continuing with our engagement with partners and we look forward to meeting with many of you.

Max Murray CBE
Board Chair

PROBATION WORKING WITH STATUTORY PARTNERS



PROBATION MEETS WITH PRISON SERVICE TO PLAN FOR FUTURE WORK

Chief Executive Amanda Stewart welcomed Beverley Wall, the new NI Prison Service Director General to Probation Headquarters. They met to discuss the partnership work of Probation and Prisons.

NI Prison Service Director of Rehabilitation Steven McCourt, Probation Assistant Director Melissa Spence, Prisons Director General Beverley Wall, Probation Chief Executive Amanda Stewart and Probation Director of Operations Stephen Hamilton in Probation Headquarters.



Probation held a joint workshop with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to look at the challenges and opportunities both organisations share. Evidence shows that people who have committed a crime are less likely to reoffend when they can access stable accommodation. Probation works closely with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in trying to provide access to accommodation for people who are being supervised on a Community Sentence.

Attendees found the workshop very useful in understanding the challenges faced by both organisations and by people under Probation supervision as well as the opportunities to change lives for safer communities.

PROBATION WORKING WITH NI HOUSING EXECUTIVE ON ACCESSING ACCOMMODATION

Board Chair Max Murray, Deputy Board Chair Eileen Patterson and Chief Executive Amanda Stewart were delighted to meet with the Chair Nicole Lappin, Vice Chair John McMullan and Chief Executive Grainia Long of the Housing Executive recently. The meeting was very constructive and continues to show the importance for service users to be able to access stable housing as it is an important element in preventing reoffending.



PROBATION BOARD HOLDS MEETING OF PROBATION FIVE NATIONS

During September, the Probation Board was delighted to host a special Five Nations discussion with representatives of Probation in England and Wales, Scotland, the Channel Islands and the Republic of Ireland.

Joining the meeting were National Probation Service Director, Yorkshire and the Humber Lynda Marginson, Social Work Scotland Justice Social Work Policy and Practice Lead Sharon Stirrat, Probation Service Director Mark Wilson and Jersey Probation Chief Probation Officer Mike Cutland.

The discussion focussed on two of Probation Board's Strategic Priorities, "Our people are supported through a positive and inclusive working environment to deliver an effective and stable probation service" and "We have a safer community through the delivery of high-quality effective probation services."

Each of the 'Five Nations' provided an overview of their own Probation services focusing on staffing and service issues, challenges and innovative solutions. All the Probation organisations was finding staff recruitment and retention difficult alongside the increasing pressures faced by staff, especially after the pandemic. Innovation in delivering Probation Services seemed to be part of each organisation's DNA as different innovative approaches were discussed regarding diversion, supervision and effective reduction in reoffending. Trauma Informed Practice and psychology approaches were also highlighted.



START360

WOMEN'S ENGAGE SERVICE

FUNDED BY PROBATION

Start360 is working with Probation Board as it delivers its Women's Engage Service to support women who have come into contact with the Justice System.

Probation is helping fund the service, which provides community based support for those women experiencing pressure within their communities, domestic violence, trauma, substance use and emotional health concerns. It supports around 80 women annually and provides one to one therapeutic trauma support, group work programmes and pathways to additional community support.



Assistant Director Melissa Spence visiting Start360's Service Manager Fiona Anderson and Engage Practitioner Caroline Boyle to highlight Probation's funding of the Engage programme and the close partnership work of the two organisations.

PROBATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITIES

DOWN AND ARDS TEAM OPEN UP THEIR DOWNPATRICK OFFICE

Probation's Downpatrick office in the Downshire Civic Centre opened its doors on Thursday 21 September to local partners to engage and share experience. Area Manager Roisin Leckey welcomed Board Chair Max Murray and Chief Executive Amanda Stewart who met probation staff and stakeholders. Guests, including Chris Hazzard MP, were invited to tour the office and meet staff from the team to hear about our work within the local community. There was also an opportunity to visit the Community Service project at the Downshire Victorian Garden.



At the Andersonstown office event were NIACRO representative Paul Farrelly, Probation Officer Tina McSherry, Area Manager Nicola Bradshaw, Board member Briá Mongan, Chief Executive Amanda Stewart, Deputy Chair West Belfast DPCSP Michael O'Hara, Assistant Director Aideen McLaughlin, Councillor Aine McCabe and Board member Maureen Brunt



Board member Briá Mongan, Assistant Director Emer Loughran, Board Chair Max Murray MBE, MP Chris Hazzard, Councillor Oonagh Hanlon, Chief Executive Amanda Stewart OBE and Director of Operations Gillian Montgomery at the PBNI Downpatrick open office event. Also attending was Board member Jackie Johnston.

ANDERSONSTOWN OFFICE HOST ENGAGEMENT EVENT

Area Manager Nicola Bradshaw along with her Andersonstown Road Team hosted a very successful local engagement event as they opened the West Belfast office to health, social care, voluntary community sector partners and political representatives. It was a very busy open office with a lot of interested partners coming along for a chat and to find out more about Probation and its work within the West Belfast community.

The event had such a good response it was split into two sessions. Among the attendees were politicians such as Belfast City Councillor Aine McCabe and representatives from NIACRO and Community Restorative Justice. To highlight the importance of the work carried out in the area Board Members Briá Mongan, Maureen Brunt, Chief Executive Amanda Stewart and Assistant Director Aideen McLaughlin were also delighted to attend to see both staff and the partner organisations in the local area.



PROBATION MATTERS PODCAST

“How Probation is making a Difference to the Lives of Service Users” has Probation's Head of Communications Gail McGreevy talk to Director of Operations Gillian Montgomery as well as Maria, one of our Service Users supervised by our North West team.

“How Probation uses Restorative Practice for a Victim Centred Service” has Probation's Communications Officer Ivor Whitten talk to Assistant Director Aideen McLaughlin about how Probation incorporates Restorative Practice into the work we do with Victims of Crime registered with our Victim Information Scheme.



LOCAL COUNCILLORS VISIT EAST BELFAST OFFICE

Assistant Director Emer Loughran and Area Manager Clare Osbourne were delighted to welcome Belfast City Councillors Sammy Douglas and Davy Douglas to our Newtownards Road Office to talk about Probation's work with the local community of East Belfast.

PROBATION SUPPORTS SUICIDE PREVENTION INITIATIVE

Principal Psychologist Michael McCracken and Area Manager Jacqueline Nicholson were delighted to meet with Lighthouse Executive Director Paul Finnegan at the Lighthouse Beacon Of Hope conference highlighting 20 years of suicide prevention.



COMMUNITY SERVICE HELPING LOCALLY

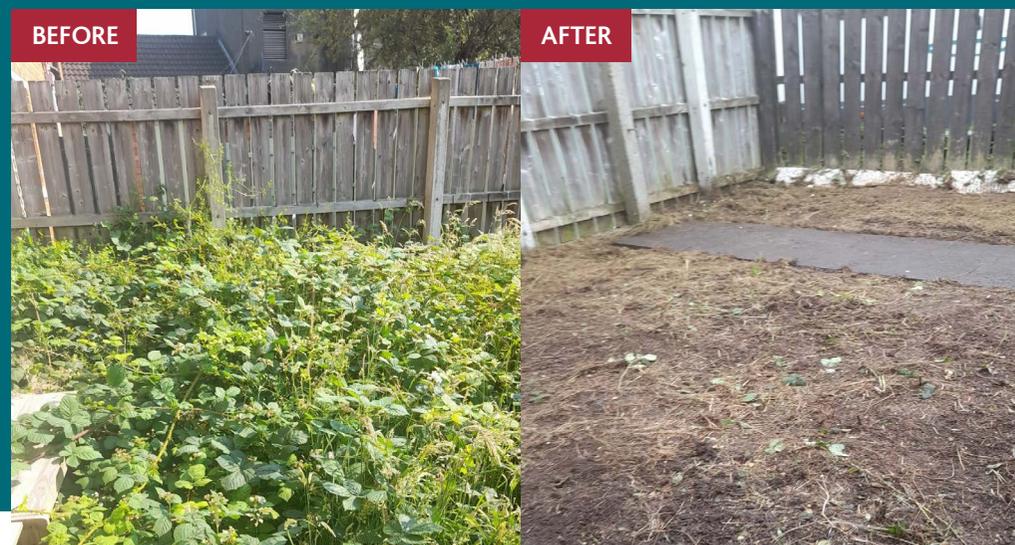


GARDEN OF ANGELS COMPLETED FOR BEREAVED MOTHERS

Community Service teams working at St Columb's Park House recently helped build a remembrance Garden of Angels for bereaved mothers. The Garden is to remember babies who passed away before or shortly after birth and Service Users helped build the garden laying new grass, building the planting beds, placing the benches, planting and painting. There was a ceremony to celebrate its completion with the Derry and Strabane District Council Mayor officially opening it for use.

COMMUNITY SERVICE IN BELFAST PARTNERS WITH NIHE

South and East Belfast Community Service has been working in conjunction NIHE on a special project to clear up a garden at one of the NIHE resident's houses. The lawn and pathway was in real need of clearing, cutting and tidying up. The team did a great job.



Do you have any suggestions for your local area that could be a Community Service project?

Probation Officer
Claire McIntyre,
Director of
Operations Gillian
Montgomery,
Probation Officer
Aine Dougherty and
Probation Officer
Rachel McColgan
outside the
Shipquay office.



HIGHLIGHTING THE WORK OF SHIPQUAY STREET

Director of Operations Gillian Montgomery recently met with staff and service users in our Shipquay Street office to hear more of the community based work benefiting the local area.

Probation praised for its addiction support

Maria, a service user in the North West, came in to talk to Probation about how Probation staff helped support her to change her life around. She had been caught in a cycle of addiction that led her to entering the justice system.

Service user involvement in the North West

Director of Operations Gillian Montgomery met with staff and service users in Shipquay Street office recently and took some time to promote service user feedback as well as make a video highlighting the importance of service user involvement.

PROBATION ATTENDS PRIDE AND MELA OVER THE SUMMER



John Blair MLA meeting our Probation Service Officer Lara Burt at our Pride stall

We took part in the Justice Corner over the summer at Belfast Pride and Mela with our Justice colleagues from the Department of Justice, Public Prosecution Service, Policing and Community Safety Partnership, NI Policing Board, Criminal Justice Inspectorate, Ending the Harm and Police Ombudsman.

Opportunities like Pride and Mela allow us to meet and engage with the public as well as local politicians to tell them more about how Probation works to change lives for safer communities.



Claire Hanna MP is welcomed to the Probation stall by Assistant Director Aideen McLaughlin



Chief Executive Amanda Stewart meeting Mike Nesbitt MLA at Pride

BOARD MEMBERS VISIT COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT IN NEWRY

Board Members Brian Ingram, Bria Mongan and Maureen Brunt met Area Managers Michelle Murray and Niall McEvoy along with staff in the Newry Office before visiting Gerry O'Reilly, Vice Chair, Thomas Davis Community Hub to see a Community Service Project in action.



Board Members Brian Ingram, Bria Mongan and Maureen Brunt meeting Area Manager Niall McEvoy at the Newry office

Visiting Gerry O'Reilly, Vice Chair, Thomas Davis Community Hub to see a Community Service Project in action are Board Members Bria Mongan and Maureen Brunt along with Area Managers Michelle Murray and Niall McEvoy.



CONTACT PROBATION AT

PROBATION HEADQUARTERS

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028 9025 7340

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

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AREA TEAMS

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Glenshane House, 202a Andersonstown Road, Belfast, BT11 9EA
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North Belfast and South East Antrim

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028 9034 7474

South and East Belfast

297 Newtownards Road, Belfast, BT4 1AG
330 Ormeau Road, Belfast, BT7 2GE

028 9052 6655
028 9054 1444

Down and Ards

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028 4461 8281

North Antrim

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Contact Ballymena

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028 7131 9670

Rural South

1d Monaghan Street, Newry, BT35 6BB
12 Church Street, Portadown, BT62 3LQ

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028 3839 7575

Rural West

Sperrin Centre, 1 Market Street, Omagh, BT78 1EE
Cathcart Square, 14 Dublin Road, Enniskillen, BT74 6HH

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028 6634 3345

Rural Mid Ulster

9 Kirk Avenue, Magherafelt, BT45 6BT
25 College Street, Armagh, BT61 9BT

028 7930 2115
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