

PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
BOARD MEETING – THURSDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2025

9.30 AM – CONFERENCE ROOM, PBNI HEADQUARTERS

ATTENDANCE

BOARD MEMBERS

Mr Glenn Houston, Board Chair
Ms K Anthony (from item 5)
Mr J Johnston
Mr M Mawhinney
Ms E Patterson
Ms M Brunt (via MS teams)
Mr B Ingram
Ms D Hunt
Ms B Mongan
Mr K Cameron
Mr D Bowden

OFFICIALS

Ms A Stewart, Chief Executive
Mr S Hamilton, Director of Operations
Ms G Montgomery, Director of Operations
Ms G McGreevy, Head of Communications
Mr P King, Head of Finance & Estates
Ms C Sweeney, Head of HR and L&OD
Ms J Fitzsimons, Board Secretary
Mrs A Abraham, Business Support Manager (Minutes)

1. WELCOME, OPENING REMARKS AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Board Chair welcomed everyone and outlined the agenda for the meeting. A quorum was confirmed. Ms Brunt declared a conflict of interest in respect of Item 10. It was agreed that Ms Brunt would not participate in the discussion under this agenda item.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Ms McKeown. The Board Chair advised that an apology had also been received from the Hugh Widdis, Permanent Secretary, DoJ who had been invited but could not attend due to other work priorities. The Board Chair passed on apologies from the Justice Minister who had been due to attend the October 2025 Board workshop meeting and advised that she had been invited to the Community Service event to be held on 2 December 2025.

3. MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING – THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2025 (PAPER)

The minutes of the Board Meeting held on Thursday 18 September 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

The Board approved the minutes.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES – THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2025 (PAPER)

There were eight actions from the previous meeting. Seven had been completed. The action in relation to convening a Board workshop on New Initiatives in 2026 is being taken forward by the Board Secretary.

The Chief Executive had provided a briefing note on The Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. It is expected, subject to approval by the DAERA minister, that PBNI will be named as a public authority to be added to the Schedule to the Act.

The Board noted the paper.

5. CHAIR'S UPDATE (PAPER)

The Board Chair referred Members to the paper highlighting attendance at various engagements: five events in connection with the Corporate Strategy, visits to teams in HMP Magilligan, the PBNI Omagh office, the launch of the Employers Forum at Hydebank College, the PBNI Communications Team, the Turnaround Project and a Community Services Project at Dundela Football Club.

An invitation has been extended to the Justice Minister to attend an event acknowledging the commitment of PBNI's partner organisations who host Community Service Projects across Northern Ireland on 2 December 2025 at the 174 Trust, Antrim Road Belfast.

The Board Chair acknowledged the excellent contribution of Ms Montgomery, Director of Operations, to BBC Radio Ulster's Talkback programme on 28 October on the theme of outstanding arrest warrants.

The Board noted the paper.

5.1 Reports from Board Visits and Events (Paper)

Mr Bowden provided a summary of the visit to HMP Magilligan. Feedback from the Area Manager and Assistant Director after the visit was positive and staff appreciated the visit and the time given to the team.

Mr Ingram reported on the visit to the Community Service Project at Dundela Football Club. This was a good example of trauma informed practice where Community Service Supervisors demonstrate a range of skills to pass on to service users.

Ms Hunt provided an update on the visit to the Newtownards Road team and was impressed with the working arrangements in place to assist the Ormeau Road team whilst working to deviations due to sickness absence. The team felt well supported by the Assistant Director.

Ms Anthony reported on the visit to the Community Service Project at the Victorian Gardens in Downpatrick. Good inter-agency relationships have been developed.

Ms Patterson gave a summary of the visit to the Omagh office. Good relationships with partners, PSNI and PCSP were noted and the community service work with Mullaghmore and Castlevue Community Association.

Action: Board Secretariat to share the Board visit reports with the relevant Area Managers, once the reports had been reviewed at the Board.

Action: Board Secretariat to circulate a schedule of Board visits to Members for 2026 in the New Year.

The Board noted the updates.

6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE (PAPER)

Engagements

The Chief Executive referred to the paper, highlighting engagements which had taken place since the September 2025 Board meeting. She highlighted meetings with the Turnaround Project, attended with the Board Chair, the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Professional in Practice Awards, the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, the Public Protection Advisory Group and the first meeting of the Sponsor Group for the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime.

Key Issues

Ms Stewart advised that a date had been agreed for the staff in the Public Protection Team (PPT) based in Seapark, Carrickfergus to move to the Antrim Road Police Station. Engagement with staff impacted and with Trade Unions has taken place and risk assessments completed.

The Justice Minister has requested a review of arrangements for Terrorist Risk Offenders (TROs) in 2025 and CJINI is currently undertaking this review. Early feedback to the Chief Executive is that most partners would like a local response to the TRO issue. The Strategic Risk Register notes this issue in the Horizon Scanning.

ACTION: The Chief Executive will provide a paper at a future meeting of the Board to agree PBNI's response to the CJINI MARA Inspection Report.

Meetings are ongoing with Unions in relation to assistance for teams with high levels of staff absence and what actions can be taken. Ms Montgomery provided an update on teams working with Deviations. Consideration is being given to reducing levels of supervision with service users at the end of their Order / Licence, similar to practice in England and Wales. Despite the high absence rate, the Courts have not raised issues about late reports and judges have been apprised of the situation in relevant areas.

A Terms of Reference has been developed for the proposed Organisational Review. Further discussion will take place at the next Corporate Resources Committee (CRC), with the main issue being affordability.

In respect of the recent media coverage on the issue of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's safeguarding procedures, the Board noted that Mr Hamilton, Director of Operations represents PBNI on the PPANI Strategic Management Board, where any interface issues with PBNI would be raised.

An evaluation of the Substance Misuse Court is in progress, and the report will be brought to a future Policy and Practice Committee (PPC) and Board meeting.

The Board noted the paper.

BOARD BUSINESS

7. PBNI ONBOARDING TO CAUSEWAY – PROGRESS UPDATE

CRC was provided with an update by Pauline Sommerville, Head of IT at its September meeting. Issues have emerged in the testing phase which currently indicates that the

proposed January 2026 onboarding date may not be achievable. CRC will be updated at the December meeting. An Extraordinary Board meeting may be required thereafter. The Board noted the paper.

8. QUARTERLY MANAGEMENT INFORMATION REPORT Q2 2025-26 (PAPER)

Members were asked to note the detailed paper on Quarter 2 2025-26. Mr Hamilton gave a summary of the caseload and explanation of reoffending rates in the 2022/23 cohort. Ms Montgomery updated Members on Serious Further Offences and Victims.

Ms Sweeney, Head of HR and L&OD, reported on sickness management and what actions were being taken to address increases in absences. In the recent recruitment exercise, there was evidence that PBNI is attracting experienced and newly qualified candidates. Attrition rates are down with staff leaving for 'other reasons' rather than salary. Work is commencing on a three-year support programme for Probation Officers who are new to the service in the Assessed Year in Employment, post qualifying as a social worker. An update on the work of the Learning & Organisational Development Team on learning events, e-learning courses and workshops over a range of work-related requirements was provided. An Area Manager training programme on reflective supervision is in progress.

The Board Chair requested clarification on the absence figures, including a break down between long-term and levels of self-certified absences. It was suggested that PBNI adopt the NISRA absence reporting proforma for reporting sickness absence.

Ms McGreevy, Head of Communications, provided an update on Complaints in Quarter 2. Two cases had gone to NIPSO – no further action is required.

Mr King, Head of Finance and Estates, updated Members on Climate Change Regulations reporting. PBNI had submitted its first mitigation report and undertaken an exercise to set its carbon baseline from the 2024-25 year. The initial carbon mitigation report will be published by 31 October 2025 and details shared with all staff and regular sustainability articles to be included in Probation News. Mr King advised that all business cases now require a climate management screening to rule out environmental impact.

Action: Sustainability to be a standing item on the CRC Agenda.

Action: Board to consider appointing a Board Sustainability Champion in due course.

With regard to the redevelopment of PBNI HQ, an initial outline business case has been developed and issued to the DoJ for their review of a proposed ten-year lease and extensive renovation. It is hoped to finalise plans for the HQ works programme in Q3.

The Board noted the paper.

9. QUARTER 2 BUSINESS PLAN PERFORMANCE 2025-26 (PAPER)

Mr Hamilton outlined the progress on actions in respect of Business Plan Performance Q2 2025-26. Of the 18 actions and underpinning measures listed, two were complete, fifteen have Amber (on target) ratings and one (in relation to programmes) has a Red rating.

The Board approved the paper.

10. JOB EVALUATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES (PAPER)

Ms Sweeney outlined the job evaluation process laid out in the Procedures which had been developed following the introduction of the NJC pay award, with consultation of NIPSA and NAPO unions and staff. She explained that all new posts, posts where the job role had changed and grading had been challenged would be evaluated through this process. A range of staff had completed job evaluation training so that evaluation panels could be convened. Each panel will include a member of HR, Senior Manager and a Union representative. An appeal process had also been incorporated. Currently, there are two requests for evaluation. It was agreed to report the outcomes to the Board via CRC in due course.

ACTION: Ms Sweeney to provide a report to CRC and the Board when the two job evaluations are completed.

The Board approved the paper.

11. PBNI'S ROLE IN DIVERSIONARY REFERRALS AS PART OF THE DOJ ADULT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE STRATEGY (PAPER)

Ms Montgomery outlined PBNI's role in Diversionary Referrals as part of the DoJ Adult Restorative Justice Strategy. Senior Leadership had reviewed the proposals and recommended that PBNI undertake the Independent Referral Body role but not become part of the Accreditation Panel. Board approval was granted for this proposal which will be communicated to the DoJ. Ms Montgomery advised that the process was on target to be launched in February/March 2026 and would be evaluated after eighteen months.

The Board approved the paper.

12. BOARD SECRETARY'S BUSINESS (Verbal)

12.1 Board Members' Register of Interests (Paper)

The Board Secretary asked Members to advise of any additions or amendments to the Register.

The Board noted the paper.

12.2 Draft Board Meeting Schedule 2026-27 (Paper)

The Board Secretary had previously circulated the draft Board Meeting Schedule 2026-27.

The Board approved the paper.

12.3 Board Work Plan 2025-26 (Paper)

The Board Secretary referred Members to the Work Plan 2025-26. The next Board meeting will be in February 2026 and any immediate business will be dealt with through the Committees until then.

The Board noted the paper.

The Board Chair reminded Members that the Cyber Security e-learning was to be completed by end of December 2025. There had been no update from the DoJ regarding the advertisement for the Board Deputy Chair post.

Members were reminded of the Community Service recognition event on 2 December 2025 and anyone interested in attending should contact the Board Secretary.

13. COMMUNICATIONS DASHBOARD (PAPER)

Ms McGreevy highlighted the key engagements and current initiatives including the conclusion of the Leadership Programme, the cross border PPAG event, the launch of the Irish Probation Journal 2025, Ms Montgomery's radio interview on Talkback and the development of a new workload management tool which will be presented to CRC in 2026. Summaries were provided of external consultations and significant cases in September and October 2025.

The Board noted the paper.

AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

14. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (PAPER)

The Committee Chair referred Members to the paper, highlighting the ongoing work of the Committee. He updated Members on the three audits 2025-26: the Area Manager Monitoring final report had provided a satisfactory level of assurance with two priority 2 recommendations and one priority 3 recommendation; a further Terms of Reference had been agreed for the Case Management System; and the Creditors Payment audit will commence in Q4. Members were asked to note the ongoing Standards Deviations 'deep dive' within West Belfast/Lisburn, Mid Ulster, North West and ISU North West teams.

The Board noted the paper.

14.1 Draft Strategic Risk Register Q4 2025-26 (Paper)

The Board Secretary referred Members to the Draft Strategic Risk Register Q4 2025-26. Currently there are two Risks with a Red rating (Risk 1b and Risk 6) and five with an Amber rating. Risk 1b is in relation to sickness absence. The Chief Executive outlined actions being taken to reduce the rating. She also advised that the Risk Appetite for this risk will be further assessed prior to seeking Board approval. Risk 6 is in relation to the Causeway On-boarding Programme as discussed at agenda item 7. Due to the Board not formally meeting again until February 2026, the Chief Executive recommended that the SRR be brought to both the CRC and PPC meetings in December.

ACTION: Board Secretary to add the Strategic Risk Register Q4 2025-26 as an item to both the CRC and PPC December meeting agendas.

The Horizon Scanning had been reviewed by the Senior Leadership team and changes included adding "Increase in cases relating to Domestic Violence and Violence against the Person" and "Public attitudes to sex offenders being housed in the community".

The Board approved the paper.

CORPORATE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

15. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (VERBAL)

The Committee Chair advised that an update from the CRC had been provided at the September 2025 Board meeting. The next CRC will be held on 4 December 2025 and a report will be provided to the Board in February 2026.

The Board noted the update.

15.1 Financial Outturn Report – October 2026 (Paper)

15.2 DoJ Monitoring Round (Paper)

Mr King updated Members on both papers. The current pressure on resources of £254k would be eased with a successful bid for Restorative Justice funding. It is hoped that the monitoring round will be open after the Budget on 24 November 2025. If there is no increase in the PBNi budget, a paper outlining measures to bring the organisation close to target will be provided at the next Board meeting.

It may be necessary to surrender £149k in the Capital budget as Estates projects may not be achievable by the end of March 2026. It is likely the Capital budget will be under pressure in 2026-27 as DoJ have confirmed they have received bids in excess of £150m against their budget of £100m. The priority site for refurbishment is the Newtownards office and consideration is being given to extending the Ormeau Road office to accommodate the Newtownards Road team.

The Board noted the paper.

POLICY AND PRACTICE COMMITTEE

16. COMMITTEE CHAIR'S UPDATE (VERBAL)

The Committee Chair advised that there had been no update since the September 2025 Board meeting.

The Board noted the position.

17. CORRESPONDENCE (PAPER)

There were ten items of correspondence to note, most of which were self-explanatory. The Board Chair asked Members to note, in particular, items 17.4 and 17.5.

17.1 Between Chief Executive and Director, Safer Communities, DoJ – Emergency Accommodation Provision for Service Users

17.2 Between Liz Kimmins MLA and Chief Executive – Matter relating to a Service User

17.3 Between Equality Development Officer, ECNI and Head of HR – Annual Progress Report 2024-25

17.4 Between Delivery Unit, Executive Office and Chief Executive – Transformational Proposal – Rollout of Enhanced Combination Orders

PBNI had been unsuccessful in its bid for funding for provincewide roll out of Enhanced Combination Orders. Discussions are, however, ongoing in achieving this in the future.

17.5 Between Permanent Secretary, DoJ and Chief Executive – Public Office (Accountability) Bill

The Public Office (Accountability) Bill is still to be extended to Northern Ireland, in which case, PBNI will need to seek expert opinion and Crown Solicitor's advice.

17.6 Between Chief Inspector, CJINI and Chief Executive – Follow-Up Review of Probation Approved Premises in NI

17.7 Between Board Chair and Justice Minister – Meeting with Board

17.8 Director General NIPS to Chief Executive – NIPS Review of Rehabilitation and Psychology

17.9 Between Chief Executive, Deputy Secretary, Access to Justice, DoJ and ITS Computing with response from Head of Causeway – PBNI Onboarding to Causeway Project

17.10 Between NIPSA Co Chairs and Chief Executive / Board Chair – Job Evaluation

17.11 Chief Executive to Justice Committee Chair – Corporate Plan 2025-2028

17.12 Professional Adviser, NISSC, to L&OD Manager – Designated Practice Learning Providers – Annual Monitoring 2024-25

The Board noted the correspondence.

OTHER BUSINESS

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS (VERBAL)

There was no other business.

The next Board meeting will be held on Thursday 19 February 2026 at 9.30 am in PBNI HQ, Conference Room.

The meeting ended at 12.53 pm.

Mr Glenn Houston
Board Chair

Date