

Date: 26 January 2026

Jonathan Rankin

Policy, Strategy and Communications
Supporting People

By email: Supporting.People@NIHE.gov.uk

Dear Jonathan

**RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON DRAFT SUPPORTING PEOPLE STRATEGIC
INTENT 2026–2031**

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Supporting People Strategic Intent 2026–2031. Please accept the following observations from PBNI on the draft document.

Should you require further information about the PBNI response, we would be pleased to discuss it at any point.

Yours sincerely,

Liz Arthur
Assistant Director (Public Protection)

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Probation Board for Northern Ireland – response to the Draft Supporting People Strategic Intent 2026–2031

- PBNi notes the absence of explicit reference to individuals with offending histories within the document, including in the Supporting People Mission Statement. While the mission emphasises promoting independent living and preventing homelessness, Approved Premises (APs) play a broader and distinct role in managing risk and protecting the public through external controls. It may therefore be beneficial for the document to more clearly reflect the role played by Supporting People in funding services in public protection and offender rehabilitation.
- The draft refers to supporting individuals leaving institutions; however, prisons are not specifically identified. Although the document highlights the interface between Supporting People, HSCs and, to a lesser extent, Justice, PBNi considers that the Department of Justice should be referenced more prominently. Stable accommodation is well-evidenced as a key factor in reducing reoffending, and enhanced collaboration with Justice partners is essential to achieving the strategic aims.
- PBNi recommends consideration of existing work undertaken through the CJINI Review of Approved Premises and the subsequent Working Group chaired by Maria Watson, Acting Director Rehabilitation and Reducing Reoffending Division. For example, while the Strategic Needs Assessment cited in the draft is intended to provide a robust evidence base to work towards closing the gap between need for services and supply, the Task and Finish Group established by the DoJ Working Group is already examining future demand for AP beds (funded by SP) and may recommend an increase in provision.
- In relation to improving outcomes for service users, the CJINI Review of Approved Premises recommended strengthened outcome-measurement frameworks. For example, tracking the number of service users who successfully transition to independent living or the number who have their licence revoked and are recalled to custody—both of these indicators can demonstrate the effectiveness of AP interventions.
- PBNi welcomes the reference to incorporating feedback from individuals with lived experience. PBNi notes that while its service users differ from the broader Supporting People cohort—often residing in APs under statutory requirement rather than through choice—this should not preclude the inclusion of their feedback to inform service design and improvement.
- Regarding financial efficiency, while value for money is fundamental, the Probation service suggests the document may acknowledge wider system pressures, including prison overcrowding and the ongoing shift toward supervising more individuals in the community. These pressures highlight the strategic importance of sufficient AP capacity, particularly given the significant cost differential between custody and community-based supervision.
- In relation to the strategic aim on partnership working, PBNi recommends that the Department of Justice is explicitly referenced as a key strategic and commissioning partner.
- Finally, PBNi notes several overarching challenges relevant to future planning: financial constraints; societal attitudes toward offenders, asylum seekers and other marginalised groups; the importance of trauma-informed practice; and the increasingly

complex needs of service users, particularly in relation to an ageing prison population. It may be beneficial for the Strategic Intent document to acknowledge these contextual factors.