1. Introduction

This strategy sets out the framework for all communications and engagement activity undertaken by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI). It establishes the strategic direction for all internal, external and public affairs activity over the next three years. It has been informed by consultation carried out in relation to the Corporate Plan 2017-20 and surveys of stakeholders and staff.

Underpinning this strategy is our commitment to be open and transparent in all communications. We recognise that communication and engagement drive transparency, accountability and ultimately better services and outcomes.

We have taken significant steps to develop a robust approach to communications and engagement. We have worked hard to develop new and stronger stakeholder relationships and undertaken communications and engagement activity that have been well received by service users, staff and other key stakeholders. (See appendix 1 for communications initiatives undertaken to date)

Like all public services in Northern Ireland the probation service continues to operate against the backdrop of reducing resources and organisational change therefore communication and engagement is now even more critical to ensure that all stakeholders (including staff, service users, elected representatives and the public) are aware of, and understands how probation works to change lives for safer communities.

A central element of the strategy is internal communications. We have worked hard to enhance internal communications within the organisation and will continue to prioritise this area over the next three years. That includes helping facilitate effective communication with staff and union representatives. Our communications will not only transmit key messages, but also generate a two-way conversation with our internal audiences.
This strategy also focuses on external communications. An ongoing difficulty for probation services the world over is the public’s lack of awareness of what probation does. Public services such as health and education tend to be better understood because most people have gained knowledge through direct experience whereas the majority of people do not directly experience probation services. This presents a challenge in building understanding and necessitates an ongoing creative and proactive approach to engaging with the media. Digital and, in particular, social media will be at the heart of our external communications.

Public affairs is also a strand of this strategy and PBNI will influence opinion formers and stakeholders including other criminal justice organisations, the voluntary and community sector, elected representatives, the business community and members of civic society to help them better understand how probation contributes to community safety. Through public affairs activity we have an opportunity to shape and influence public policy.

2. **Aim of Strategy**

The aim of this communications strategy is to support the Corporate Plan for 2017-20 and facilitate engagement with internal and external audiences and increase the understanding, awareness and influence of probation in NI.

From this strategy there will flow more tactical and detailed annual communication plans.

3. **Communications Principles**

We will communicate a clear vision of the work probation carried out. Our communications and engagement will be:

- **Accessible & Inclusive** to all sections of our community but in particular hard to reach groups.
- **Clear and Professional** to demonstrate pride and authority in what we do.
- **Consistent** with our strategic vision and priorities as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2017-20.
- **Flexible** in ensuring communications are undertaken in a variety of different formats that reflect progressive communication and diverse local needs.
• **Honest and Transparent.** We are committed to being clear about why we are engaging and managing expectations about the work we carry out. At times we may have to communicate difficult messages to communities.

• **Targeted** to ensure we get messages across to the right people in the right way.

• **Timely** to ensure we respond to all enquires as quickly as possible and engage with people early as possible in the process of communication or engagement.

• **Two-way.** We won’t just talk - we will also listen.

4. **Objectives**

The objectives of this strategy aim to help the public better understand the role of probation in making communities safer; assist opinion formers and stakeholders understand the work of probation and appreciate the key role probation plays in criminal justice; and contribute to staff feeling they are being communicated with and engaged in a timely and appropriate way.

Specifically it aims to ensure we:

• **Build awareness of the role of the probation service** - Promote public awareness of the contribution probation makes to rehabilitation, preventing re-offending and reducing the number of victims of crime.

• **Develop brand identity** – Through consistent use of strong branding across the organisation, we will develop a clear identity for probation which reflects the organisation’s values and priorities.

• **Enhance engagement with stakeholders** – Build on our engagement and develop partnerships with a range of opinion formers and stakeholders to enhance our connection with local communities and promote probation’s key role in criminal justice.

• **Enhance engagement with internal audiences** – We will engage with all staff to enable them to contribute to and participate in changes affecting services.

• **Enhance service user engagement** to improve probation practice.
5. **Delivering on the Objectives**

**Build Awareness of the probation service**

In the next 3 years we will build public awareness of the contribution probation makes to rehabilitation and preventing re-offending through:

- Using the publication of the Corporate Plan 2017-20 to profile the importance of probation within criminal justice. This will include a Board event to launch the Corporate Plan.
- Increasing the use of PBNI’s digital communications channels. We will develop our use of social media and enable staff throughout the organisation to use social media to communicate PBNI objectives. We will consider developing a Facebook and Instagram account for the organisation. We will develop further thematic social media campaigns throughout 2017-20.
- Using the power of storytelling to create an engaging, emotional connection with audiences through videos, real life stories and infographics.
- Developing PBNI’s service user app and promote it to service users and the wider public.
- Seeking opportunities to developing in depth programmes with broadcasters about the work of probation.
- Seeking opportunities with the print media to interview staff.
- Seeking to influence and raise awareness of PBNI with bloggers an on line communities.
- Providing communication plans to support key PBNI policies and projects including the development of problem solving courts; the development of Enhanced Combination Orders, and Probation’s role in delivering on the Fresh Start Agreement.
- Exploring the use of virtual reality devices to explain the work of probation.

**Develop Brand Identity**

In the next 3 years we will ensure consistent use of the brand identity in all publications and communications through:
• Using and communicating to staff and partners a defined style guide for documents and publications.
• All communications will be underpinned with our strapline and brand.

Enhance Engagement with Internal Audiences

In the next 3 years we will seek to engage with internal audiences, in particular PBN1 staff to enable them to contribute to and participate in change affecting services through:
• Organising regional staff days to communicate and engage with all staff
• Organising a staff awards ceremony to reward and recognise staff achievement and using external awards schemes to celebrate the achievements of staff.
• Developing and using technology including internal social media/forum to engage with staff.

Enhance Engagement with External Stakeholders

In the next 3 years we will ensure opinion formers and stakeholders have a greater understanding of the work of PBN1 and the environment in which it operates through:
• Developing an engagement plan for Board members using their expertise and experience to influence opinion formers.
• Developing an engagement plan for senior management to influence and build awareness of PBN1 with stakeholders.
• Develop guidance and provide training workshops for local managers to assist in local engagement.
• Planning ‘seeing is believing’ opportunities and events

Enhance Service User Engagement

In the next 3 years we will work to develop opportunities for service users to engage on a more regular basis with staff in the organisation. We will do this through:
• Inviting service users to participate in the further development of our service user mobile application.
6. **Key Messages for the New Strategy**

It is accepted that messages will need to evolve and be amended depending on the context in which PBNI is operating. However there are some overarching messages that need to be central to all communications. These include:

- Probation aims to change offender’s lives, stop them reoffending and reduce the number of victims of crime.

- Probation’s key purpose is to hold offenders to account and ensure they keep the requirements of their court orders or licence conditions post-release. Enforcement action is taken where there is non-compliance with the statutory requirements of their court order or licence.

- Probation challenges offending through supervision and engagement with offenders to produce positive changes in their offending attitudes and behaviour.

- Probation minimises harm to the public by the appropriate and proportionate use of constructive and restrictive measures which and contributes to minimising the risk of harm to others and promoting safety of victims. This is delivered through collaborative working with other agencies such as police.

- Probation supports offenders to become more responsible citizens and better integrated into local communities. This involves enabling offenders to access appropriate services, promote social inclusion and encourages them to make positive changes about their behaviour.

- Probation in Northern Ireland works. We know that from the criminal justice inspections that have taken place, the feedback provided from service users and from DoJ reoffending data. The most recent reoffending data released in August 2016 shows that 69% of people given a community sentence requiring PBNI supervision did not go on to reoffend within one year.

- Custody needs to be reserved for those offenders who pose a risk to the public. There is strong, compelling evidence suggesting that community
based interventions, when targeted at the right offenders, will have a greater impact than imprisonment at much reduced cost.

- Probation is value for money. We supervise 4,209 offenders, write 8,255 reports, and provide 148,000 hours of unpaid work with an annual budget of £16million. That is less than 2% of the entire criminal justice budget.

7. Evaluation

From this strategy there will flow annual communication plans. These plans will form part of the organisation’s overall business plans. This strategy will be reported on regularly at Board meetings.
Appendix 1

What we achieved in 2013-2016

We have developed a substantial communication and engagement function over the last three years and demonstrated year on year delivery of the objectives set. We have delivered a number of important communication initiatives including:

**Internal Communications**

PBNI has worked hard to enhance internal communications over the last three years. This has included:

- putting in place a regular communique from the Acting Director
- producing and distributing the monthly Probation News
- having annual regional staff forums
- redesigning our intranet following staff feedback and focus groups
- establishing engagement forums with union representatives

PBNI Internal Communications Survey 2014 found that 74% of respondents agreed that ‘On the whole communication within PBNI is good’. Probation News was read by 96% of staff. 94% of staff read the content on the intranet, 58% read minutes of organisational meetings and 11% read Twitter postings.

The preference for being kept informed about organisational development work was 85% through team meetings; 68% through face to face meetings with line manager; and 62% through Probation News. These findings will be used to determine internal communications objectives for the next three years.

**External Communications**

In the last 3 years PBNI has worked hard to develop its digital communications capacity and social media channels. We also led on partnership communications through Reducing Offending in Partnership and the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland. We put in place:

- PBNI Twitter account which now has 1,800 followers
- PBNI LinkedIn account
- PBNI YouTube channel
- A new mobile and desktop PBNI website
• A new external newsletter
• A new sentencers newsletter
• A new DVD
• A social media campaign ‘#Probationworks’ which ran in 2016
• A new mobile app for service users
• Communications plans for Reset, Enhanced Combination Orders and Restorative Practices.
• Social Media training for key PBNI staff and Board members
• Organisation of a range of conferences and events including Probation Seminar in March 2016
• We have also continued to develop relationships with key media and have participated in a number of broadcast and print interviews

A survey of external stakeholders which was carried out in November 2015. It found that 96% people said they knew what PBNI did. 44% said they followed PBNI on Twitter, 28% said they followed PBNI on LinkedIn and 75% read the external newsletter. In response to the question what more could PBNI do to promote its work there were a range of answers including ‘have more public events’, participate in current affairs programmes’ and keep using social media.

Public Affairs

PBNI developed its relationship with department of justice officials, the justice committee and constituency MLAs and councillors. Area Managers participating in PCSPs received engagement training. Engagement took place with MLAs and Councillors on a number of crisis issues including; the bombing of a PBNI office in Derry City, protests in relation to hostel accommodation in Derry and Portadown. Engagement also began in a more co-ordinated manner with sentencers. A sentencers newsletter was published and distributed and a series of ‘seeing is believing’ visits were organised for sentencers. Following a COMRES survey of 40 MLAs in June 2016 which indicated a lack of familiarity with probation’s role, an action plan was developed and implemented to enhance MLA’s understanding of our work.
Appendix 2

**Stakeholder Mapping**

PBNI communicate with a range of audiences. Key stakeholders are within these broad groupings:

- Staff
- Union representatives
- Service users
- General public
- Criminal Justice organisations
- Sentencers
- Social Work representative bodies
- 11 District Councils
- PCSPs
- Elected representatives
- Voluntary Organisations
- Local businesses
- Civic society
- Media
- International Probation organisations
A mapping process has taken place to prioritise stakeholders for PBNI. This will enable us to plan and prioritise groups of stakeholders in the next three years and develop our engagement strategy for Board and senior management. The results are as follows:

**Stakeholder Analysis**

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<tr>
<th>1. Work with Closely</th>
<th>2. Keep Satisfied</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Staff</td>
<td>Service users</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union representatives</td>
<td>Councils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media with interest in justice</td>
<td>Policing and Community Safety</td>
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<td>Justice Committee members</td>
<td>Partnerships</td>
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<td>Justice Minister</td>
<td>Constituency MLAs</td>
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<td>Minister’s special advisor</td>
<td>Local media</td>
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<td>DoJ officials</td>
<td>NI MPs</td>
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<td>Sentencers</td>
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<td>CJINI</td>
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<td>Partnership organisations through PPANI</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>Local businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social work representative bodies</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other NI Executive Ministers and special advisors</td>
<td>Information Commissioner’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church leaders</td>
<td>NI Ombudsman</td>
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<td>Mayors</td>
<td>YJA</td>
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<td>Centre for Democracy and Peace Building</td>
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<td>Centre for Cross Border Studies</td>
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<td>NI Chamber of Commerce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confederation of European Probation</td>
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<td>Unity of Purpose Group</td>
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