

National Preventive Mechanism – Northern Ireland Subgroup Meeting

Minutes

Date: 16/09/25



In attendance:

RL	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland	Chair
SG	UK NPM	
BS	Independent Monitoring Boards	
JK	UK NPM	Minutes
JPe	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority	
SR	UK NPM	
JD_u	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland	
AR	Independent Monitoring Boards	
EM	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission	
ME	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland	
JM	Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People	
RW	Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People	

1 Welcome and apologies

RL welcomed everybody to the meeting and invited a round robin of introductions.

Apologies noted from **MM** and **JP_a** (NIPB Independent Custody Visitors Scheme), **WM** and **NM** (RQIA), **JDe** (IMB), and **ME** (CJI).

2 Approval of June Minutes for publication

All approve the minutes of the Subgroup meeting of 10 June and agree to publication on the NPM's website. JK to publish the minutes on the website.

3 Matters arising

Agreements and actions from the Subgroup meeting of 10 June 2025 were discussed, and closed, added to the agenda, or added to the actions of this meeting.

4 Subgroup member updates – Q & A

The Subgroup discussed members' pre-circulated updates.

SG invited feedback on the NPM's database launch and videos. Gave a verbal update on a workshop on environmental conditions of detention, co-hosted in Peru, where positive meeting was held with María Luisa Romero, Chair of the SPT. Update on international organisation cashflow issues: the SPT has completed three visits this year, to New Zealand, Peru, and Sebia, compared to the usual eight annual visits. The SPT might complete one further visit this year. UK NPM will engage on shorter format of visits.

Concern expressed that detail on long term preparation for release is only available at the Parole Board hearing; why are programmes and interventions not identified earlier?

Discussion about prisoners released without a paper copy of their license conditions. CJI understands that everyone receives a paper and oral notification. **JD** has contacted the Governor of Maghaberry to confirm this is the procedure. Mismatch between this and IMBs' observation. Specific examples of prisoners who did not get a paper copy are needed to escalate the issue: it is clear what should be happening, if it is not working in practice there must be concrete examples.

JD and **WM** have discussed the size of remand population and pressures on services, especially Maghaberry where most remand prisoners are held. Instead of an unannounced visit, a pre-planned meeting has been arranged with the Head of Healthcare Services and the Governor-in-Charge, which will be more productive to identify pressure points and remedial actions.

An inspection of Magilligan has commenced, with the main week of fieldwork w/c 22 September. This will provide further information on these issues.

5 Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People: Role and current concerns

RW gave overview of NICCY's role and remit, and a brief history since the Commission's foundation in 2003 under the [Children and Young People \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2003](#). The Commission's key aim is to protect and promote the rights and protections of children and young people in Northern Ireland and all relevant provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. NICCY keeps under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services, and provides advice to government and authorities.

JM gave an overview of the legal and investigations team, which has a casework function, assists with complaints and legal proceedings, and can make representations to any body or person about any matter concerning the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. NICCY advises government of any rights breaches discovered through contact or casework and engages relevant organisations about issues arising.

NICCY can conduct unannounced inspections and retrieve information under its formal investigatory powers in legislation. Legislation also allows informal investigation when casework reveals an egregious or systemic breach of rights; the NICCY can gather information and make recommendations outside the formal remit of the case and intervene in court proceedings where there is a serious breach of rights or strategic impact.

2023 formal investigation

Discussion focussed on NICCY's full inspection into the life of a child in the care of the state, "Vicky" (published 2023). The investigation identified a cycle of failings since Vicky's birth, culminating in her spending hundreds of days in the JJC despite receiving bail, due to no appropriate bail placement. NICCY made specific recommendations about deprivation of liberty, and a change in legislation so that the JJC is not named as a place of safety. To a question about sensory or material deprivations, **JM** noted that Vicky was deprived of material items for her safety, but that this had a very detrimental impact on her. NICCY advocated for training for staff dealing with children and young people with such a diverse range of needs. Health trusts are under pressure due to a lack of placements and workforce issues, which result in the deprivation of liberty of children in inappropriate placements, breaching convention rights. Progress is taking place following the launch of the investigation report, but more children in similar circumstances are coming to light. It is clear this was not an isolated case.

Justice Bill

The Justice Bill before the Northern Ireland Assembly proposes removal of the JJC as a place of safety, but proposes delayed commencement until late 2026. Currently, a robust challenge to placement in the JJC must be escalated to Permanent Secretary or Ministerial level if it is not appropriate for a child. Single separation for more than 3 days should be referred to independent assessor.

RL asked about NICCY's submission to the Justice Bill. NICCY has held a number of meetings with Department of Justice leads, primarily about biometrics, rather than bail and remand. [NICCY Submitted evidence to the Committee on the Bill in March](#), welcoming some sections while raising concerns about the accommodation clause, the non-commencement announcement, and some wording issues. **RW** to share submission with the Subgroup. The Committee agreed to share the briefing to departments for feedback. More engagement is expected following summer recess, and with the new Committee of Justice chair. CJI will continue to recommend combined efforts between the Departments of Health and Justice to provide new accommodation for children given bail.

JD asked about other current work alongside policy efforts on the Justice Bill. NICCY is continuing engagement with parents of children in the JJC and will include their concerns in its submissions, and maintains its advice line and casework. It is also meeting with Lakewood Regional Secure Centre.

SG opened the floor for reflections about what form of collaboration with the NPM Northern Ireland Subgroup would be beneficial to NICCY and gave an outline of the role of children's commissioners in other UK jurisdictions. **JM** noted that highlighting recommendations in conjunction will be impactful, particularly given the Children's Services Cooperation Act requirement for Department cooperation. All to reflect throughout meetings and engagement of the Subgroup.

6 Roundtable: children in detention in Northern Ireland

JPe gave an update on the current work within RQIA's Children's Services team, which consists of a Director, Assistant Director, Senior Inspector and five inspectors. The function of the team is to register, inspect and regulate children's services in Northern Ireland. This includes children's homes, secure care, a residential family centre, adoption agencies, and a nursing home for example. The team's review role includes inspections of young adult supported accommodation, supporting CJI's inspections of the Juvenile Justice Centre, and boarding schools, amongst other settings.

The team is currently scoping a way to publish reports whilst protecting children's identity and their right to a private family life. A pilot since November 2023 aims to raise awareness of the quality and availability of children's services, whilst maintaining privacy and anonymity. **JPe** welcomes feedback on the pilot. **JPe** and **SG** to link in about feeding reports into the NPM database.

Current concerns and challenges in children's services include:

- An emergence of some restrictive practices not typically seen in children's homes.
- An emergence of younger children coming into residential care.
- Resource available to meet the care and accommodation needs of children.
- Availability of the right staff, with the right training to meet children's needs, including gaps across medical staff.
- Impact of delayed discharges, with children entering detention with nowhere to move on to, related to residential placement capacity.

- Thresholds of admission to services and discharge planning.

RQIA has scope in its mandate to take regulatory action where required. RQIA are currently liaising with the Department of Health's Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG, who commissions services) to discuss findings. RQIA are also considering the Regional Restrictive Practice Policy, and its application to community settings, with the aim to ensure clarity within services.

Questions and comments:

- **JDu** emphasises the value of RQIA's partnership, which makes a big difference in JJC inspection and gives vital professional and child-focussed approach. RQIA and CJI will work together on the next Woodlands inspection.
- Legislative change is what drives real change. A lack of alternative accommodation has delayed the commencement of the parts of the Justice Bill relating to children's bail, but it is likely that legislative change will prompt increased provision. It is hard to find information about what's being discussed about children's care reform. Younger children coming into children's homes suggests a lack of fostering places more broadly, so fostering for children needing bail unlikely to be forthcoming. Even kinship placements are struggling because of lack of respite services and breakdown in family homes. Delayed discharge feeds into this as discharge would usually free up respite places. Police figures suggests the proportion of domestic abuse incidents that are child on parent also factor; even if a parent would accommodate a child on bail, theirs is not allowed as a bail address.
- Current model of provision was not based on modern understandings of neurodiversity, complex behaviour and mental health issues. It is not fit for purpose and does not use infrastructure in a way to meet demands.

JDu recently visited the JJC between unannounced full inspections. It was quite a positive visit with three inspectors, seeing fourteen girls and boys resident at the time with complex needs. The team looked at use of force and single separation records. It was mostly a positive visit, but some concerns were identified to follow up at inspection:

- The growing number of girls in the system.
- Not long after the public disorder in Ballymena, children had to be kept apart across the four houses. Concern about delay and time children spend in detention.
- Too many children spend too long on remand or in and out of the JJC because they cannot get a bail address or because of the revolving door phenomenon.
- One child was sentenced to an Extended Custodial Sentence, the first time this sentence has ever been applied to a child. Due to time spent on remand, the child is already eligible for review by Parole Commissioners. Due to public protection measures it may be difficult to secure an appropriate placement on release.
- Young people's expectations of bail do not match with the possibility of finding them somewhere appropriate to go. Without an appropriate address to move onto, being granted bail does not automatically mean release.

The roundtable concluded by considering possible actions for the Northern Ireland Subgroup. NICCY is supportive of a Subgroup letter, combining the voice of all Subgroup members, to emphasise the severity of the current state of accommodation, bail and remand; a shared position on what needs to happen in consideration of this Bill.

All agreed: JK to draft a letter to the Ministers for Health and Justice and the Committee for Justice, outlining key issues in the Justice Bill. **All** to consider and approve at the Subgroup's December meeting, for sign off on 9 December. SPOCs to be copied in. **JK** and **RL** to correspond, **all** to send **JK** previous letters and reports.

7 Workplan updates

Updates on Information sharing (SAI and deaths in detention), personality disorder, adult safeguarding in places of detention, prisoners held over tariff, and guidance for IMB members, are contained in the Subgroup key issues spreadsheet. **Actions are included in the summary of actions and agreements.**

7e. Workplan functionality, additions or changes

JK to add children's bail and accommodation to the key issues workplan.
All to contact **RL/JK** to make any additions to the workplan ahead of December meeting.

9 Update on RQIA's state of the nation report

The State of the Nation report was presented to the RQIA's Mental Health Committee, data to be sent to trust for further interpretation.

10 AOB

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1. **All** to advise **RL** if their organisation can host the next in person meeting. Alternatively, CJI can seek a larger room in the Stormont Estate.
 2. CJI will tag NICCY in an update on LinkedIn. NPM central team to share.
 3. JD shared that HMIPS commenced an inspection standards review in August, to run to mid-2027, and will arrange stakeholder engagements.
 4. **All** to advise **JK** of any clash for the Subgroup's next (online) meeting, **9 December**.
 5. **JD** reminds the Subgroup that "[A Prison Inspector Calls](#)" will be broadcast.
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Summary of actions and agreements

Task	Lead	Status
JK to publish minutes from 10 June on the NPM website.	JK	Completed
RW to share NICCY's submission on the Justice Bill with the Subgroup.	RW	
JPe welcomes feedback to the report.	All	
JPe and SG to link in about feeding reports into the database.	JP, SG	
JK to draft a letter to the Ministers for Health and Justice outlining key issues in the Justice Bill. All to consider and approve at the Subgroup's December meeting. JK and RL to correspond on this. All to send JK previous letters and reports	JK, all, RL	
Prisons: Further communication is needed on sharing information in the monthly management report, and to clarify whether this includes court custody (RL)	RL	
RL/ME to circulate an update about information shared by the JJC in writing.	RL, ME	
Ongoing: RL, ME and WM to arrange a session to review RQIA's data tracking system.	RL, ME, WM	
JK to add content on child given and ECS to the NPM Members briefing and re-circulate to the Subgroup.	JK	
JK to add children's bail and accommodation to the key issues workplan.	JK	
All approve the event proposal for a roundtable on personality disorder on 19 January		
JK to draft formal invitation to event on 19 January.	JK	
RL to speak to WM and ME to consolidate speaker plans (PIPE unit expert, Forensic Network, CSU officer, Dr Mandy Irvine), new Head of Psychology at Maghaberry (maintaining a Northern Ireland focus with best practice).	RL, WM, ME	
JK, RL and WM to meet in week 1 October to progress.	JK, RL, WM	
All to send suggested invitees to JK by the end of the week.	All. JK	
SG to present event to the Steering Group w/c 22 September.	SG	
All to contact RL/JK to make any additions to the workplan ahead of December meeting.	All, RL, JK	
All to advise RL if their organisation can host the next in person meeting. Alternatively, CJI can seek a larger room in the Stormont Estate.	All, RL	
WM to set up link with DoH representative	WM	
All to advise JK of any clash for the Subgroup's next (online) meeting 9 December .	All. JK	
All agree to keep IMB guidance/training on the agenda and review.		