



## **PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE**

### **External Communication Strategy 2011-2014**

**January 2011**

## **PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE**

### **Vision**

**To be recognised as providing a first class prosecution service for the people of Northern Ireland**

### **Aim**

**To provide an independent, fair and effective prosecution service**

## **OVERALL PURPOSE OF THIS STRATEGY**

This is the Public Prosecution Services' (PPS) External Communications Strategy for 2011 – 2014.

Externally, over the last three years the public profile of the PPS has increased significantly. Following the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Assembly and the level and scale of change likely to take place over the next three years requires a highly effective and transparent communications framework to support the Service. While progress has been made in communicating externally it is essential that this positive momentum is maintained, particularly in regard to the need to explain the work of the PPS to the community and thereby assist in improving public confidence in the criminal justice system.

This Communications Strategy sets out how external communication will help to support the PPS in achieving its vision and aim.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Public Prosecution Service recognises that it is essential to provide a service in which the people of Northern Ireland can have confidence. It seeks to build public confidence and understanding of its role through effective communication with victims and witnesses, the community, key stakeholders, including the voluntary sector and the media.
- 1.2 The PPS also recognises that its staff remain its finest asset and that it is vital to build the commitment of all its people, by ensuring that they feel valued, are fully informed, contribute to debates and are proud to be part of a high performing organisation.
- 1.3 These requirements are essential if PPS is to realise its vision to be recognised as providing a first class prosecution service for the people of Northern Ireland and its aim of providing an independent, fair and effective prosecution service.
- 1.4 The commitment to engage and communicate with external customers is reflected in PPS's strategic priorities together with undertakings given in its stated key values, that it will communicate openly and honestly at all times showing courtesy, sensitivity and understanding in accordance with its professional duties.
- 1.5 PPS is aware of the crucial role it plays at the heart of the Criminal Justice System (CJS). It is committed to developing its communications and to increase awareness and understanding of the organisation. It will also work with its CJS partners and stakeholders to help build public confidence in the wider criminal justice system.

- 1.6 This Strategy seeks to realise PPS's commitment to adopt a more proactive approach to communications and engagement with victims and witnesses, the community, its partners and stakeholders, the media and its own staff. It is designed to develop and embed new and improved approaches and to establish a framework to fully communicate and promote a professional, confident, accessible, accountable and outward facing organisation.

### Role of the PPS

- 1.7 The PPS is the principal prosecuting authority in Northern Ireland and is responsible for reaching decisions as to prosecution and for the conduct of all criminal proceedings.
- 1.8 It is wholly independent of both police and government and reaches its decisions based on an impartial, independent and professional assessment of the available evidence and the public interest test in accordance with the Code for Prosecutors.
- 1.9 Established on 13 June 2005 by the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002, PPS has completed its rollout across Northern Ireland and is now a fully operational, regionally based organisation.
- 1.10 Since the devolution of policing and justice matters on 12 April 2010, PPS has become a non-ministerial department, accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 1.11 In addition to reaching decisions as to prosecution, the PPS also provides a range of additional services designed to enhance the effectiveness of the Service, including an enhanced service to victims and witnesses and provision of prosecutorial and pre-charge advice to the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. Public prosecutors now conduct the majority of prosecutions in the Magistrates', Youth and County Courts. A range of options for disposal other than prosecutions are also available to the PPS, including restorative cautioning, informed warnings and youth conferencing.

### PPS Structure

- 1.12 Regionally based, its four regions - Northern, Western and Southern, Belfast and Eastern Region are serviced by six regional offices, all of which are located in the heart of the community (see map at Annex A). There are also four specialist sections - Central Casework, Fraud and Departmental, High Court and International and Policy. Corporate Services is responsible for a variety of support services including finance, human resources and information technology.
- 1.13 The PPS is headed by the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland and together with the Deputy Director leads a team of just over 560 legal and administrative staff.
- 1.14 The Director and Deputy Director are assisted in the management of the Service by three Senior Assistant Directors. This group is known as the Senior Management Team. They are in turn supported by eight Regional Prosecutors / Assistant Directors, each of whom leads a region or specialist section.
- 1.15 A Management Board supports the Director in his leadership of PPS and assists in informing the organisation's strategic priorities and in meeting its corporate governance responsibilities. The Management Board comprises the members of the Senior Management Team, together with independent non-executive members.

## 2. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

### Strategic aim and objectives

2.1 The aim is to build public confidence through increasing awareness and understanding of the role of the PPS and the public prosecutor and to earn the confidence and trust of the whole community which it serves.

2.2 The key objectives are:-

- to increase public confidence in the PPS as providing an independent, fair, and effective prosecution service;
- to increase public awareness and understanding of the work of PPS through the promotion of its functions, policies and the role of the public prosecutor;
- to implement the PPS's Outreach policy;
- to encourage support for and understanding of prosecutorial issues amongst key influencers, including the Attorney and Advocate General, the Department of Justice, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Judiciary, key stakeholders and local communities, and thereby to encourage confidence in the criminal justice system;
- to actively seek opportunities to explain its role and address misconceptions;
- to ensure that all forms of communication are accessible, consistent and of a high quality;
- to proactively increase engagement and interaction with the media;
- to quickly and robustly correct any inaccuracy regarding the

- Service in media reporting and other public fora;
- to develop a media protocol between PPS [in conjunction with PSNI] and key media outlets.

## Principles

### 2.3 All communications will be:

- **Open and Transparent:** PPS is committed to openness and transparency in all its communication activities consistent with business needs and professional obligations and its duties under legislation, including for example the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Acts, Official Secrets Act 1989 and the Human Rights Act 1998.
- **Clear, concise and in plain language:** the PPS will endeavour to ensure that all communications are easily understood and will use clear, concise and plain language wherever possible. All publications and written documents will adhere to this principle.
- **Relevant and appropriate:** the PPS recognises its duty to explain its work, effectiveness and independence. It acknowledges its obligations to inform and explain its policies and decisions.
- **Based on the principle of equality:** the PPS is fully committed to meeting its equality obligations and its communications will be timely, inclusive and informed. Where required, it will develop systems to ensure that information is available in accessible formats, where it is appropriate and practicable to do so. Where necessary, it will consult with relevant interested parties.

- 2.4 PPS recognises and acknowledges the key role that all members of staff have to play in the delivery of this Strategy. It is vital that all members of staff are fully informed of the PPS's strategic priorities and that relevant individuals are properly trained to develop and deliver key messages to identified audiences.
- 2.5 The PPS is conscious of its pivotal role within the CJS and will seek to inform and work with its CJS partners in the delivery of common communication objectives.
- 2.6 PPS will continue to build and develop relationships and effective channels of communications with the Attorney General, the Advocate General, the NI Assembly, its members and its committees. The PPS will continue to work in collaboration with the Department of Justice and its partners on criminal justice issues of mutual interest and concern.

### Target audiences

- 2.7 The PPS's external audience can be subdivided into a number of target audiences:
- Victim and Witnesses
  - The community in general, which includes those sections of the community as identified in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998
  - The Attorney General for Northern Ireland and the Advocate General for Northern Ireland
  - Ministers (including the Minister for Justice), the NI Executive and Assembly (including the Justice Committee)
  - Elected representatives (MPs, MLAs, MEPs, local

councillors)

- Criminal Justice partners, (including the Department of Justice, NI Courts and Tribunals Service, PSNI, NI Probation Board, NI Prison Service, Youth Justice Agency and Forensic Science NI)
- Extended Criminal Justice stakeholders (including the judiciary, legal profession, NI Victims Support, Policing Board and District Policing Partnerships)
- Other partners (including NI Departments, HMRC, SOCA, the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland)
- Voluntary and community organisations
- The local, national and international media

## Approach

2.8 Various communication methods and tools will be used to deliver this Strategy. In addition, action plans will be developed for each PPS Region and Section to properly reflect and meet the particular communication needs of each.

## Engaging with Victims and Witnesses

2.9 The PPS is fully committed to engaging with victims, their families, their representatives and witnesses from the point that PPS assumes responsibility for a case until the case is completed. In doing so, it will treat all victims of crime and witnesses with courtesy and respect. It will keep them informed at key stages of the progress of their case.

2.10 It will ensure that all decisions as to prosecution are communicated clearly and concisely and will provide information and guidance regarding attendance at court, support services

and the mechanisms for requests for reviewing decisions and unduly lenient sentencing.

- 2.11 The PPS services to victims and witnesses is set out in its Victims and Witnesses Policy and related documents which are available at [www.ppsni.gov.uk](http://www.ppsni.gov.uk).

### Engaging the community and its representatives

- 2.12 The PPS continues to be committed to engaging with local communities and has successfully implemented its policy on community outreach 2006-2009 (copy available at [www.ppsni.gov.uk](http://www.ppsni.gov.uk)). This policy is being revised in line with its current corporate priorities and this strategy.

- 2.13 The PPS will increase its accessibility and accountability to the community and will actively identify opportunities to explain what it does and to listen to their concerns.

- 2.14 Elected representatives are an important group and a vital link with local communities. PPS will continue to engage with the Justice Committee, justice spoke-persons of the parties and welcomes engagement with other individual elected representatives.

- 2.15 The PPS will actively engage with voluntary and community organisations at both corporate and local level in addition to those organisations that represent specific groups and interests.

### Engaging with Ministers and the Assembly

- 2.16 As a non-ministerial department, the PPS will engage and consult with the Justice Minister, the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, and the Advocate General for Northern

Ireland, the NI Executive and the Assembly and will ensure that all communication is timely, accurate and appropriate.

- 2.17 The PPS, working with its partners in the CJS to ensure there is a fair and effective justice system, will play its full part in increasing public confidence in that system.

### Media Strategy

- 2.18 The media is an important target audience as it is a key public opinion former and a main conduit to communities and other target audiences. In recognition of this, the PPS has established a Press Office, one of its aims being the development of positive working relationship with all sectors of the media.

- 2.19 PPS will build on its developing relationship with the media. In conjunction with PSNI, it will develop a proposed joint protocol with key mainstream media outlets.

- 2.20 It is evident from some media reporting and commentary that a misunderstanding of the role of PPS and its decision making processes exists. PPS will actively seek opportunities to address such misconceptions and will proactively take steps to participate in media coverage and seek to explain the background to issues of concern.

### Evaluation

- 2.21 There will be continual evaluation of the effectiveness of the Strategy through surveys, questionnaires, focus groups and feedback from our criminal justice partners and stakeholders.

- 2.22 Three key areas will be monitored and measured to establish

whether communications are effective and successful:

- Reach: is the communication reaching all stakeholders in a timely and consistent way?
- Understanding: do stakeholders understand what is being said and is the message clear?
- Impact and consequences: how effective was the communication; did it have the desired impact; did it have any real impact on understanding and awareness of the role of PPS and the prosecutor?

### Resource Implications

2.23 It is anticipated that there are substantial resource implications arising from the delivery of this Strategy. PPS recognises that current and future public expenditure restraints will have a significant impact on resources and potentially a negative impact on the delivery of this Strategy.

2.24 PPS recognises the value in developing a consistent corporate brand and style across the Service. A project has been commenced to refresh the content of the PPS's website, together with an audit and review of published literature and all written communications to victims and witnesses. Due to resource constraints, priority will be given to those initiatives that have a high impact at a proportionately lower cost. Where more significant costs implications arise, for example the redesign and publication of revised documents, this will only be undertaken where update is required to reflect substantive changes in policy or legislation, or when current stocks are diminished.

2.25 The current website is some five years old and has not kept pace with developments in the Service or with technology.

Furthermore there is a requirement to provide more cost-effective interactive services to PPS customers and service providers via the website. A rebuild of the website is currently being scoped commensurate with best practice in the public sector and current and future contractual obligations.

2.26 There are considered to be moderate resource implications arising from the delivery of this part of the Strategy. PPS recognises that current and future public expenditure restraints will have a significant impact on resources and potentially a negative impact on the delivery of its communications strategy. However it also recognises that delivery of these commitments is core to the delivery of all its strategic priorities and will seek to pursue initiatives that deliver high impact for low – moderate cost.

### **3. MAKING THE STRATEGY WORK**

3.1 Effective external communications requires the personal commitment of members of the Management Board and Senior Management Team and the active engagement of staff.

#### **Management Board**

3.2 This Strategy will be endorsed by the Director and the Management Board with an explicit commitment from the Director and Board Members to give their full and active support to making the Strategy work. The Director and the Deputy Director will be “Champions” for this Strategy.

#### **Senior Management Group**

3.3 The Senior Assistant Directors will be responsible for taking

forward this Strategy by actively and demonstrably applying its principles to all aspects of their work.

#### Assistant Directors/Regional Prosecutors and Heads of Service

- 3.4 Regional Prosecutors, Assistant Directors and all Heads of Service will be responsible for ensuring the successful implementation of the Strategy within their respective areas of responsibility. They will also ensure that staff members are aware of the Strategy and are acting in accordance with it.

#### Staff

- 3.5 Relevant staff will be expected to be fully committed to implementing this Strategy and act in accordance with it.

### 4. IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 Action Plans for the implementation of this Strategy will be developed following review and agreement by the Management Board and will be used to measure the progress towards fully achieving the aims and objectives of the Strategy.

**PPS REGIONAL OFFICES**



REGION	OFFICES
<b>Belfast</b>	Belfast Chambers (PPS Headquarters)
<b>Eastern</b>	Lisburn Chambers
<b>Northern</b>	Ballymena Chambers, Foyle Chambers
<b>Western &amp; Southern</b>	Omagh Chambers, Newry Chambers*

**PPS STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2010-11:**

Strategic Priority 1: Enhancing the prosecution process in partnership with our stakeholders;

Strategic Priority 2: Strengthening our accountability and capability to deliver;

Strategic Priority 3: Addressing the needs of victims and witnesses;

Strategic Priority 4: Building the confidence of the community;

Strategic Priority 5: Building the commitment and skills of all our people.