

## SUMMARY OF JOINT CONSULTATION RESPONSES

The PPS's Joint Consultation on the Draft Equality Action Plan / Community Outreach Strategy / Making a Complaint about the PPS issued on 31 January 2012 and closed on 20 April 2012.

Responses were received from:

Disability Action;

The Northern Ireland Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO);

A private individual (in respect of the 'Draft Equality Action Plan' only);

The Superintendents' Association of Northern Ireland; and

The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) (in respect of 'Making a Complaint about the PPS' and 'Community Outreach Strategy' only).

The comments raised were taken fully into consideration.

We have provided feedback to each consultee and a summary of the main points raised is set out below.

The policies consulted upon were as follows:

Name of Policy	Brief Description
Draft Equality Action Plan to March 2014	The purpose of this plan is to outline the PPS's action measures to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.
PPS Community Outreach Strategy	The purpose of this policy is to define a Community Outreach Strategy for the PPS which supports the achievement of strategic objectives.
Making a Complaint about the PPS	The purpose of this policy is to set out the arrangements and procedures which the PPS will follow in responding to complaints from members of the public regarding the standard of service provided.

The comments made are summarised as follows:

<b>DISABILITY ACTION</b>		
	<b>Draft Equality Action Plan to March 2014</b>	<b>PPS Response</b>
1.	<p>Disappointed that the Audit of Inequalities has not accompanied the Action Plan.</p> <p>PPS should state that the audit of inequalities is a “living” document.</p> <p>Where the audit of inequalities has identified information/evidence gaps the PPS must commit to commission of new research.</p> <p>PPS should detail within the audit of inequalities its functions.</p> <p>A number of other comments were made on the audit of inequalities including that there should be a clear link to the PPS actual functions, policy areas and strategies, the PPS must show how it used qualitative and quantitative data held by other public authorities etc.</p>	<p>Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ‘A Guide for Public Authorities’ issued by the Equality Commission recommends that whilst consultation should take place on the Action Plan, it does not place any obligation to publish or consult on its audit of inequalities. The PPS inequalities were identified through surveys/research, through evidence provided by service users and those affected by its policies e.g. interagency groups, CJINI reports etc and from the direct experience of staff within the Service who deal with and assist persons in affected groups.</p> <p>The Service will monitor and update the action plan as necessary throughout the lifetime of the equality scheme to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to its functions and work.</p>

2.	Key inequalities should be numbered.	Noted. Numbers added to Action Plan.
3.	<p><b>Key Inequality 1</b></p> <p>Welcomes the review of current information leaflets however would advise to review how information is communicated as well.</p> <p>Age Category should be defined to ensure both young and older people with disabilities are included.</p> <p>Review of letters has been completed and should be removed.</p> <p>Training for PPS legal staff and admin staff should have included</p>	<p>In reviewing correspondence and information leaflets PPS has made efforts to ensure that messages are conveyed in plain language, avoiding the use of jargon etc. We have formally consulted with other agencies, including Victim Support, Youth Justice Agency and CJINI in order to advise as to preferred content and quality assure all final documents. As stated PPS documents are available (on request) in a variety of formats such as large print, paper copy, audio CD/MP3 etc.</p> <p>Reference to younger and older people has been added to the Action Plan.</p> <p>Noted. Action Plan updated to note action complete. The letters have been forwarded to PPS ICT Branch so that the necessary changes can be made to the Case Management System.</p> <p>Action Plan updated to note action complete.</p>

	<p>specific training on Section 75 groups delivered by representative organisations in particular Disability Equality Training. Training has now been completed.</p> <p>Mental health and criminal justice – as per previous point.</p>	<p>The Department of Justice is in the process of developing a multi-agency vulnerable witness seminar. This training will be made available to relevant PPS personnel.</p>
4.	<p><b>Key Inequality 2</b></p> <p>Unclear as to what is the expected outcome for the statistical information on the use of interpreters.</p>	<p>PPS will continue to monitor the uptake of interpreter services by victims and witnesses and will monitor complaints by service users.</p>
5.	<p>Request the PPS to clarify what identified inequalities were not prioritised.</p>	<p>All key inequalities identified have been included in the Action Plan and will be prioritised according to need, impact and available resources.</p>
6.	<p>Request the PPS to clarify what action measures are “new” as a direct result of the audit of inequalities.</p>	<p>Measures are based on inequalities which had previously been identified by PPS as well as within the current review.</p>
7.	<p>Action Measures should be clearly linked to the functions of the PPS.</p>	<p>Noted. Action Plan updated to include a link to the PPS’s strategic objectives.</p>
8.	<p>Action Measures must be clearly specific to each of the 9 affected groups.</p> <p>Multiple identify action measures must also be clearly specified</p>	<p>Each Action measure details the Section 75 group impacted by the identified inequality.</p>

	across the 9 categories.	
9.	A number of other comments were made on the action plan including whether the measures are new or ongoing, a cross reference of the PPS audit findings and their link to action measures, inclusion of measures to address any gaps identified etc.	We note the comments and advise we have followed the Equality Commission's Section 75 guide, as outlined above, in preparing this Action Plan.
10.	The PPS must not concentrate only on the Action Plan measures to the detriment of its Section 75 obligations in terms of other functions and policy areas and newly emerging inequalities.	Comments noted. Other Section 75 duties e.g. policy screening continue to be met by the Service.
11.	Regarding performance indicators Disability Action advocates outcome focused measures.	Where appropriate PPS has highlighted the desired outcomes for each of the actions identified (for example, see page 4 of the Action Plan).
	<b>Making a Complaint about the PPS</b>	<b>PPS Response</b>
1.	The inclusion of an Equality Impact Assessment in this PPS document would have been useful.	The Joint Consultation letter issued with the draft consultation documents noted that initial equality screening had been carried out on the new Complaints procedures and no differential impacts were identified. A copy is available on the PPS website.
2.	The practice of placing the	PPS welcomes this positive

	notification that the document is available in alternative formats in a prominent place on the first page is welcomed (title page).	comment.
3.	'What is a Complaint' ends mid sentence in what Disability Action assumes is a production error. The section does not clarify if a complaint can be made about PPS action in court (page 3).	Noted. There was an issue with the pdf formatting however a corrected version is available on the website. This section notes that a complaint may relate to the manner in which a person was treated by a member of staff of the PPS or by someone acting on behalf of the PPS.
4.	'Who can make a Complaint' – it would be useful to include Advocate in this list (page 4).	Noted. A complaint can be made directly by an individual or through their nominated representative e.g. through a Solicitor or family member.
5.	'How Can a Complaint be Made' – telephone - if a person with disabilities who requires support to attend an appointment in a PPS regional office to discuss a complaint the document does not state that reasonable travel expenses will be paid or that support such as a sign language interpreter will be supplied if required (page 6).	A range of contact methods have been specified in the guidance including, in writing, e-mail, telephone, text phone etc. It is not currently PPS policy to pay travelling expenses under such circumstances, however it is PPS policy to try to meet the particular needs of a person by, e.g. offering to meet at a location convenient to them.  The Service will investigate the scope for provision of additional support, such as a sign language interpreter.

6.	<p>'How Can a Complaint be Made' – at court - it does not mention how a member of the PPS can be identified.</p> <p>If a matter is informally resolved is a record kept to ensure that patterns of behaviour are identified. (page 6)</p>	<p>Potential complainants should contact court reception who will assist in contacting/identifying PPS staff.</p> <p>Comments noted. If a matter is informally resolved a record is not held centrally.</p>
7.	<p>'What information Will I Need to Provide' – while a text contact option is given in the previous section, 'How Can A Complaint Be Made' the information required will not fit into a standard text (pages 6 &amp; 7).</p>	<p>Noted. An appropriate amendment has been made to the policy.</p>
8.	<p>Having a preferred method of contact question is considered good practice and is welcomed. However it is noted in the next paragraph, that a copy of the complaint form will be delivered by post on request. Are other preferred methods available, can the form be e-mailed / be completed with the aid of a PPS staff member?</p>	<p>Noted. An appropriate amendment has been made to the policy.</p>
9.	<p>DA would comment that as complaints are being referred to the PPS website, has the PPS website been tested for accessibility?</p>	<p>Our previous website achieved standard WCAG 2.0 AA. Our new website is currently being developed and will be assessed in due course.</p>

	<p>Can the complaint form be completed on-line or downloaded?</p> <p>Can the information and box sizes on the form be resized? (page 7)</p>	<p>Policy amended accordingly.</p> <p>Noted. A new form has been designed and is available to download from the PPS Website.</p>
10.	<p>'How Quickly Will My Complaint Be Dealt With' the document should state that the receipt for the complaint will be returned via the complainant's preferred method. (page 7)</p>	<p>Noted. Wording has been inserted stating that receipt of the complaint will be returned via the complainant's preferred method of contact.</p>
11.	<p>'Is there Any Appeal Against the Way the PPS had Decided to Deal with My Complaint' it is noted that the Independent Assessor cannot be contacted via text/unclear if the leaflet from the Independent Assessor is available in alternative formats/ if contact with the Complainant will still be by the preferred method (page 8).</p>	<p>Noted. Alternative formats of the Independent Assessor's guidance will be made available on request. A text phone facility for the Independent Assessor is currently unavailable however this will be investigated further in the months ahead.</p>
12.	<p>'Policy on Unacceptable Actions Or Behaviour By Complainants' – while Disability Action agrees that staff and the efficient running of the service must be protected, we would comment that some people with disabilities can appear to be, or are disruptive and aggressive. This should not mean that a protection system for staff or the effective management of the service validates the early dismissal of their complaints without or with minimal investigation. The document does</p>	<p>Noted. This policy is based on the Northern Ireland Ombudsman's guidance for staff in handling unacceptable actions or behaviour by complainants. We have reviewed pages 9 and 10 and amended them accordingly.</p> <p>The PPS is currently examining the provision of training/refresher training for all front line staff in terms of</p>



	<p>not specify what the strategy is in relation to such people/whether dismissal of the complaint is a matter of personal judgement of staff.</p> <p>Unclear if the policy document is available in alternative formats. (pages 9-10)</p>	<p>communicating and engaging with those with disabilities.</p> <p>Noted. Wording has been inserted stating that alternative formats of the policy document are available on request.</p>
13.	<p>'Can I ask about Prosecutorial Decisions' it appears that only written or e-mail contacts appears to be available. Alternative methods including personal visits should be considered (pages 11-12).</p>	<p>Separate guidance will be issued in relation to reviews and the giving of reasons.</p>
14.	<p>'Complaint Handling: Monitoring Arrangements' – Disability Action welcomes the commitment of the PPS to monitor complaints to provide a better service.</p>	<p>PPS welcomes this positive comment.</p>
15.	<p>Recommends that whether or not Complainants are disabled will be included in any monitoring process and that disaggregated data to allow a comparison between disabled and non-disabled complaints and that this will be published on a regular basis (page 12).</p>	<p>Noted. The monitoring form includes a question on whether or not complainants are disabled.</p>

	<b>PPS Community Outreach Strategy</b>	<b>PPS Response</b>
1.	The inclusion of an Equality Impact Assessment in this PPS document would have been useful.	The Joint Consultation letter issued with the draft consultation documents noted that initial equality screening had been carried out on the Community Outreach Strategy and no differential impacts were identified. A copy is available on the PPS website.
2.	The practice of placing the notification that the document is available in alternative formats in a prominent place on the first page is welcomed (title page).	PPS welcomes this positive comment.
3.	Disability Action acknowledges the usefulness of the people and groups framework but highlight the importance of the recognition of multiple identities in service provision. (Section 2, pages 6-8)	PPS recognise the importance of multiple identities and this will be considered as part of any outreach activity.
4.	<p>Information Events – Disability Action recommends that the document explicitly states that all venues will be fully accessible (physical and communication accessibility) and that support to participate will be provided.</p> <p>It is recommended that consideration be given to the payment of reasonable travel costs where need is established (Section</p>	<p>It is planned that all PPS buildings will be fully accessible and an assessment of user needs will be conducted prior to the running of any PPS outreach events.</p> <p>It is not PPS policy to pay travelling expenses under such circumstances.</p>

	3.2.2, page 9).	
5.	Disability Action while welcoming local regional meetings would comment that many representative groups for Section 75 operate on a NI wide basis for financial and service user distribution reasons. It is noted that the ADs will assume this larger area of responsibility however we are concerned that this arrangement will result in inconsistencies in service delivery unless good communication and best practice sharing arrangements are established (Section 3.3 full, page 9-10).	The outworkings of outreach will be reviewed on a regular basis by the PPS Policy and Quality Sub-Committee to ensure that best practice is shared across the organisation.
6.	Inter-agency Work – Disability Action believes that it is important that new partners are sought by the PPS notably in relation to the reporting of and support for those experiencing Hate Crime (Section 3.4, page 11).	Currently the PPS’s list of key consultees includes a range of groups which have a direct or indirect interest in each of the groups which may be affected by Hate Crime.
7.	Disability Action welcomes the importance placed on reporting and monitoring of the service by the PPS. Disability Action would comment that evaluation information must be made public in a disaggregated format for the information of the public and for people with disabilities to highlight best practice and potential problems as highlighted by Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	The scope for providing further information will be considered by the Service.

	(UNCRPD). Any publication must be published in accessible formats. (Section 5, page 15-16 and section 7.1.5, page 21)	
--	---	--

	<b>NIACRO</b>	
	<b>Draft Equality Action Plan to March 2014</b>	<b>PPS Response</b>
1.	<p>Recommend that a much more detailed paper is produced which explains how the inequality audit was conducted, which specific groups are affected by the inequalities highlighted and how these issues will be addressed for each group.</p>	<p>Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 'A Guide for public Authorities' issued by the Equality Commission recommends that whilst consultation should take place on the Action Plan, it does not place any obligation to publish or consult on its audit of inequalities. The PPS inequalities were identified through surveys/research, by evidence provided by service users and those affected by its policies e.g. interagency groups, CJINI reports etc and from the direct experience of staff within the Service who deal with and assist persons in affected groups.</p> <p>The Service will monitor and update the action plan as necessary throughout the lifetime of the equality scheme to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to its functions and work.</p> <p>It should be noted than an</p>

		EQIA was conducted in respect of the Recruitment and Use of Panel Counsel which helped to inform the PPS Audit.
	<b>Making a Complaint about the PPS</b>	<b>PPS Response</b>
1.	We are concerned that it is permeated by a sense of fear and/or suspicion about potential complainants, and fails to focus on improving customer satisfaction with the services provided. It would be helpful if baseline data was, therefore, provided to establish how many complaints are received in the course of a year indicating dissatisfaction with services; how many are considered to be vexatious and/or threatening to staff; and how many are actually related to prosecutorial decision making.	Statistics regarding complaints received by the PPS are published in the PPS Annual Report on a yearly basis. It is recognised in the policy document that there are relatively few complainants whose actions/behaviour will be considered to be unacceptable. It should be noted that this section of the guidance has been significantly reduced.
2.	We recommend that the disclaimer on page 2 is removed and all communications expressing dissatisfaction with the Service provided by the PPS are initially treated as “complaints”.	It is already PPS practice to treat all forms of correspondence whether a complaint/request for review/information request appropriately i.e. complaints made in the context of general correspondence will be recorded as such. However for the purpose of the complaint handling process it is important to set out clear guidelines/principles

	<p>Approach should also be considered in light of responses to the current DOJ consultation on the Governance and Accountability of the PPS.</p>	<p>to be followed by complainants. This is to ensure that all complaints are prioritised and actioned accordingly.</p> <p>This is an ongoing matter.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Excessive references in the document to potentially vexatious complainants. 1.5 pages sends out a strong message that this is a huge problem for the PPS – we recommend that, if that is in fact the case, the PPS undertakes a more fundamental review of the way in which it engages with its customers, as such a volume of vexatious complainants would indicate a more fundamental issue underlying the way in which staff approach customers.</p> <p>Reference to “persistence” – we strongly recommend that extreme care is taken when using language that could be considered to be an attempt to discourage people who are persistent in pursuing their calls for justice.</p>	<p>Noted. This policy is based on the Northern Ireland Ombudsman’s guidance for staff in handling unacceptable actions or behaviour by complainants. We have reviewed pages 9 and 10 and amended them accordingly.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Confidence in the complaints handling procedure – we also recommend that an explicit commitment is given to dealing effectively with all issues raised and</p>	<p>As specified on page 2 of the booklet complaints data is reviewed by the PPS on a regular basis and the information is used to improve</p>

	<p>to using the information gathered to review and reconsider policies and procedures.</p> <p>Consultation processes – we recommend that a commitment is given to publishing the PPS response to the issues raised.</p>	<p>the overall standard of our service over time. The annual report of the Independent Assessor of Complaints is also published including recommendations for PPS action.</p> <p>All PPS responses to the consultations will be published as a matter of course.</p>
	<p><b>PPS Community Outreach Strategy</b></p>	<p><b>PPS Response</b></p>
<p>1.</p>	<p>In terms of the approach of this consultation, there are three underlying issues that we feel need to be addressed –</p> <p>It simply provides a draft document and asks generically for comments – it does not set out what has already been agreed in terms of resource allocation, what aspects PPS are willing to change or how such a strategy has been devised in terms of engagement beyond the organisation;</p> <p>It appears to be based on the notion that simply providing more information, measured in a quantitative way, will improve the PPS’ ability to engage with people which, we contend, is not in fact the case;</p>	<p>A fundamental issue for the PPS is raising public awareness of the PPS and the role that it plays. This is the cornerstone of the Service’s Communication Strategy and a range of approaches have been adopted to raise awareness, including engagement with the media and the voluntary sector. The PPS recognises the importance of partnership working and has developed close working relationships with a range of bodies both with and without the criminal justice system.</p>



	<p>It fails to recognise that many people are unaware of the purpose or role of the PPS, and that if the aim of the strategy is to increase public confidence in the administration of justice, that this will require a partnership approach with other organisations.</p>	
2.	<p>Concerned at the focus on outputs, rather than outcomes in what is intended to be a document that establishes a model of engagement. Focus ought to be on the quality of the outcomes. Engagement is a two-way process, and must be measured qualitatively and quantitatively.</p>	<p>It is not accepted that there is a lack of focus on outcomes.</p> <p>The PPS will use feedback from a variety of sources in order to gauge the success of this policy. This will include formal research (e.g. public/victim surveys, the evaluation of outreach events and regular meetings with stakeholders). Senior management also receive, for example, a monthly report on the range of outreach events delivered, the range of audiences reached and whether the particular event achieved its objectives. This is monitored on a regular basis.</p>
3.	<p>As a result of the lack of focus on outcomes, there is no definition included of what a more “engaged” community would actually look like, or what would be different about the PPS’ processes in such a context.</p> <p>Concern that the approach outlined in the document is more of a</p>	<p>The PPS is determined that outreach will be a two-way process and that feedback will be used to inform the development of PPS policies.</p> <p>This is not intended in any way to hinder communication with stakeholders, but rather</p>

	<p>reputational handling strategy than it is about actually engaging with different groups of people and improving understanding of the community’s varied interest and concerns.</p> <p>This concern is only underlined by the primacy of the role given to the PPS Media and Communications Officer, who must “ensure that those engaged in outreach on behalf of the PPS deliver a clear, consistent and accurate corporate message”.</p>	<p>to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted by PPS staff. This is important if the community is to have a clear picture of the role of the Service.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>There is no reference to any mechanism that allows for information to be fed back into the system, nor any suggestion that outreach might be a longer conversation, rather than a one-off event.</p>	<p>Regional prosecutors meet on a regular basis and will routinely discuss matters of common interest in their areas, including outreach. Communication within the Service is not limited to this strategy and PPS will welcome correspondence from any organisation or individual and respond accordingly.</p> <p>Outreach is regarded as a continuing relationship.</p>

	<b>PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL</b>	
	<b>Draft Equality Action Plan to March 2014</b>	<b>PPS Response</b>
1.	<p>Action Plan needs to be extended to include</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. an automatic right to alternative formats for hearing the evidence concerning severely disabled victims;</li> <li>2. detailed parameters for those alternative formats; and</li> <li>3. specific instruction for PPS staff on implementing these.</li> </ol>	<p>A new 'Intermediaries' service will be implemented during 2012-13. The aim of the service is to help PPS and other criminal justice agencies to work better with witnesses who have communication difficulties. The service will provide specialist assistance to those victims and witnesses with speech and/or learning difficulties to enable them to give their best evidence.</p> <p>The PPS will consider making applications to the court for an order to appoint an intermediary. The intermediary will ensure they can understand and participate fully in the prosecution process leading to the admission of evidence and better quality evidence.</p> <p>A similar scheme is in place in England and Wales. Staff guidance will be produced in due course.</p>

	<b>THE SUPERINTENDENTS' ASSOCIATION OF NORTHERN IRELAND</b>	
	<b>Draft Equality Action Plan to March 2014 / Making a Complaint about the PPS / PPS Community Outreach Strategy</b>	<b>PPS Response</b>
1.	No adverse observations to make in relation to the issues.	Comments noted.

	<b>COMMITTEE ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE</b>	
	<b>Making a Complaint about the PPS</b>	<b>PPS Response</b>
1.	The 2005 version of the complaints booklet is published on the PPS website instead of the 2007 version and is not available in any other languages, or in alternative formats.	The 2012 guidelines, which will be available via the PPS website, specifies the availability of alternative formats.
2.	Why at page 2 of the booklet having made a clear distinction between a complaint and a request for reasons for a decision or for a review of a decision, this section does not go on and explain what the difference is between these. It would be clearer and more expedient for a person, who may be unsure as to whether their concern is a complaint etc if the difference between these was highlighted at the beginning of the booklet, rather than towards the end (pages 11-12).	We have retained the wording of the consultation draft as this document is primarily about complaints and there is a risk of confusion. Separate guidance will be issued in relation to reviews and the giving of reasons which will be clearly sign-posted on the PPS website.
3.	The functions of the PPS (page 2) need to be clearer and more accessible.	A range of material is already available setting out the role and function of the PPS. This information is published on the PPS website. In designing the complaints guidance the priority was to make the document as user friendly and accessible as

		possible focusing on the matter in hand i.e. complaints.
4.	Definition of a complaint (page 3) – suggest that the booklet clearly explain what a prosecutorial decision is at this point, as an individual may not understand the difference between this and a complaint.	Several examples are provided in support of the PPS definition.
5.	Explain the phrase ‘someone acting on the behalf of the PPS’ (page 3).	We have incorporated your suggestion into the policy.
6.	Request clarification of whether the Community Liaison Team (CLT) deals with complaints when they do not relate to services provided by the PPS for cases before the Magistrates’ and Youth court. (Page 5)	The Community Liaison Teams will act as an initial contact point for all complaints received by telephone.
7.	Clarify why the period for responding to a complaint has increased from 15 to 20 days.	This was in recognition of the complexity of many of the matters dealt with. Individual correspondence may include a range of material for example, relating to complaints, prosecutorial matters, requests etc. Material may be held at a location or locations which is different to the location where the complaint was received and may require a report from a number of staff and / or other agencies such as NICTS in order to provide a full reply.

8.	Dissatisfied with the way my complaint has been dealt with (pages 7-8) mentions how a complaint can be brought directly to PPS Headquarters from the outset – it may be more useful to include this information under the section dealing with how a complaint can be made (pages 4-5).	Noted. In order to maintain the clarity of the document the existing structure has been retained.
9.	Complaints to the Independent Assessor – explain what a prosecutorial decision is and emphasise that the Independent Assessor is fully independent of the PPS (pages 8-9).	Noted. The words ‘The Independent Assessor operates with full independence from the PPS’ have been added.
10.	The Independent Assessor will have access to ‘correspondence’ rather than ‘files’ – clarification if this means the Independent Assessor will have less access to materials relating to complaints than under previous complaint handling policies (page 9).	Noted. This wording has been amended accordingly.
11.	<p>PPS policy on unacceptable actions or behaviour by complainants (pages 9-10) – concerns that by displaying this policy prominently within the complaints booklet, this could discourage potential complainants from coming forward.</p> <p>The Policy should effectively be held in reserve, to be used where it is required, rather than being highlighted to all potential complainants.</p>	<p>Noted. This policy is based on the Northern Ireland Ombudsman’s guidance for staff in handling unacceptable actions or behaviour by complainants. We have reviewed pages 9 and 10 and amended them accordingly.</p> <p>The PPS is currently examining the provision of training/refresher training for all front line staff in terms of communicating and engaging</p>

		with those with disabilities.
12.	The Section outlining how a person can ask about prosecutorial decisions has become more detailed, which we welcome (page 11).	The PPS welcomes this comment.
13.	Suggest that the process by which reviews/giving of reasons are conducted be more clearly explained (pages 11 & 12).	We have retained the wording of the consultation draft as this document is primarily about complaints. Separate guidance will be issued in relation to reviews and the giving of reasons.
14.	Follow-up questionnaire – we welcome the PPS commitment to monitor this process in a way that is confidential and ensures the anonymity of participants. This furthers compliance with the PPS’s duties under S75 (page 12).	The PPS welcomes this comment.
<b>PPS Community Outreach Strategy</b>		<b>PPS Response</b>
1.	Section explaining what the functions of the PPS are could be clearer and more accessible (page 3).  CAJ thinks that a clear explanation of the functions of the prosecution service is necessary to ensure consistency with the CoE <i>Recommendation on the Role of Public Prosecution within the Criminal Justice System</i> which highlights the need to inform the	A range of material is already available setting out the role and function of the PPS. This information is published on the PPS website.



	<p>public of the work of the prosecution service.</p> <p>CAJ believe that it is vital therefore that the role and functions of the PPS are understood and clearly articulated at every opportunity.</p>	
2.	<p>CAJ agrees with the aim of the strategy and the various objectives outlined (page 5).</p> <p>We further note that the strategy aims to support the achievement of strategic objectives contained in the PPS Corporate Plan 2011 – 2014 and that it complements the PPS Communication Strategy (page3).</p> <p>We note the objective to provide information about the operation of the PPS here, such as the Test for Prosecution and the criteria used in making prosecutorial decisions here (page 5).</p>	Comments noted.
3.	<p>CAJ think that the reference the international standards make to the expertise and experience of prosecutors informing public debate on the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights could be recognised as part of the objectives of this strategy. Prosecutors should be encouraged to exercise their freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly in this way. Meetings with local communities could be used as a</p>	<p>Outreach events will include meetings with local community groups, District Policing Partnerships etc. and prosecutors will aim to engage with attendees at these events.</p>

	<p>vehicle to encourage prosecutors to engage in public discussion and debate.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>CAJ welcomes the recognition that in order for the strategy to be effective, it must recognise the diverse people and groups within the community.</p> <p>CAJ appreciates the reference to the PPS listening and considering the views and concerns of voluntary sector organisations and the acknowledgement of the challenge function that these groups can provide (page 8). CAJ also welcomes the commitment displayed within the strategy to initiate meetings, rather than holding in response to requests (page 10).</p> <p>CAJ considers that the vital issue will be how it is implemented in practice. We note that the strategy makes reference to the need for it to be achievable (page 5).</p> <p>The strategy states that a key principle of implementing the strategy is for all staff to have responsibility to participate in community outreach as required (page 12).</p> <p>The strategy places responsibility for delivery on the Director and Deputy Director, the Management Board, the Senior Management Group, Regional Prosecutors and</p>	<p>Comments noted.</p>

	<p>Assistant Directors within their own region or section (pages 13-14).</p> <p>We also note that participation in community outreach will be included in the performance agreements for all staff at Assistant Director level and above (page 12).</p> <p>CAJ would seek clarity as whether this will also include Regional Prosecutors, and why other members of PPS staff, such as senior public prosecutors or public prosecutors will not appear to be subject to such performance agreements, despite their inclusion as being part of delivering the strategy (page 14).</p>	<p>Participation in outreach will also be included in the performance agreements of all Regional Prosecutors. Other staff will participate as required.</p>
5.	<p>Whilst CAJ acknowledges the resource implications behind implementation of the strategy, we would encourage the PPS to consider the viability of creating specific posts both centrally, sectionally and regionally to engage solely in community outreach.</p> <p>Individual post holders could work in conjunction with PPS staff already in place.</p>	<p>Noted. At present this is not viable due to the resources available to the PPS.</p>
6.	<p>CAJ notes that the draft strategy specifically discusses how progress against the strategy will be monitored, which we welcome (pages 15-16). We also note the list of key milestones that the</p>	<p>Comments noted.</p>

	<p>strategy states the PPS will ‘seek to achieve’ (page 17).</p> <p>CAJ would urge that these milestones be seen as the minimum target for achievement, rather than the maximum of what can potentially be achieved.</p> <p>Amongst these milestones are commitments to publish an update of outreach activity on the PPS website quarterly and to participate annually in the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey in order to gauge public awareness of the PPS (pages 18-19).</p> <p>We note the commitment to deliver a minimum of six outreach events within each PPS region on an annual basis (page 18). CAJ would request more detail in relation to these proposed events.</p> <p>We note that the strategy suggests potential contact points between the PPS and local communities. Is it envisaged that event will be held individually with each of these contacts, or is the PPS proposing a series of forum style events in each of its regions?</p>	<p>Updates will be placed on the PPS website.</p> <p>The nature of local events will vary. The possibility of regional ‘open days’/policy launches has been discussed by senior management.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>CAJ would question whether community outreach is actually the appropriate forum for communicating with some of these statutory bodies, such as the PSNI and NICTS given that the PPS</p>	<p>It is important for all bodies to engage collectively where appropriate – for example where discussions may focus on issues of interest/concern to more than one CJSNI</p>

	presumably already has relationships with them.	agency.
8.	<p>CAJ agrees with the strategy's conclusion that the conduct of prosecutions in an independent, fair and effective manner will be the key fact in determining the level of public confidence (pages 20-21). We note that the strategy discusses increasing levels of transparency and public accountability (page 21). The importance of this latter point is clear from the IAP Standards, which state that it is not enough that prosecutors strive to be consistent, independent and impartial. They must also be seen to be so. This will require a willingness and commitment on the part of the PPS and its staff to explain, discuss and debate matters surrounding their policies, how prosecution decisions are reached, how the PPS is structured and the composition of its workforce. The PPS can also play a vital role in contributing to public debate on the law, the administration of justice and the protection and promotion of human rights.</p>	Accepted.

The PPS would like to thank all those who responded for their comments.



**Anna Scott**  
Equality and Corporate Governance Officer  
Central Management Unit  
Belfast Chambers  
93 Chichester Street  
BELFAST  
BT1 3JR

Direct Line: 028 90 544882  
Fax: 028 90 544839  
Textphone: 028 90 544896  
Email: [equality@ppsni.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:equality@ppsni.gsi.gov.uk)