



**Police Service**  
of Northern Ireland

# Children + Young People Strategy

**we care  
we listen  
we act**

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# Foreword

**“My ambition as Chief Constable is that we are a police service that cares about, listens to and takes action to protect our children and young people.”**

Policing is changing as it evolves from the more traditional and visible crimes to new crimes such as cyber related offending which can cross many international boundaries making it more difficult and expensive to investigate. This evolution in criminality has created, and continues to create, significant vulnerabilities for our children and young people. The increase in calls for service, with a mental health component, also frequently involve a child or young person.

**“I want your Police Service to be a service with a core role of protecting the vulnerable in our communities including those who are vulnerable through age.”**

There are many circumstances where children and young people come into contact with police and I want to work with our partner agencies to take steps to develop a greater understanding of the needs of children and young people and to encourage more meaningful relationships by building greater trust and confidence. I recognise the importance of clearly setting out our commitments to the children and young people across Northern Ireland and to the people who support them and care for them.

Our strategy is aligned with the National Police Chiefs' Council guidelines and based on a number of key themes:

- Engagement
- Safety and protection
- Suspected Offending
- Victims and witnesses
- Stop and search

The strategy also takes into account our responsibilities as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as recognition through Programme for Government, acknowledging the importance of giving our children and young people the best start in life in its commitment to young people.

It is our aim that this strategy will build on the trust and confidence which children and young people have in their police service and give them a voice through the roll out of Youth Reference, Engagement and Listening events in partnership with the Education Authority Youth Service.

*Simon Byrne*

**Simon Byrne**  
Chief Constable  
Police Service of Northern Ireland



The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as everyone under 18 unless, “under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989).

This convention of 54 articles, covers all aspects of a child’s life and the rights they are entitled to. While the Police Service of Northern Ireland will work within all the articles it is important to highlight our understanding and implementation of articles 2, 3 and 12. The Police Service of Northern Ireland will prioritise the child’s best interests as per Article 3, and in keeping with Article 12, which highlights respecting the views of the child, we will work with partners on the delivery of the Youth Reference, Engagement and Listening events to ensure have the opportunity to voice their views.

The UK has ratified this convention. However there are a number of different laws across the UK that specify age limits in different circumstances. These include child protection, age of consent, and age of criminal responsibility.

The Programme for Government recognises the importance of giving our children and young people the best start in life in its commitment to young people.

## Why?

Keeping Children and Young People Safe.

- Preventing harm through working with partners to increase trust, reduce offending, reduce vulnerability and prevent crime.

- Protecting our communities by delivering policing operations and services that are relevant to children and young people and in accordance with Human Rights standards.
- Detecting offenders and investigating suspects working with justice partners, to carry out professional investigations and deliver prompt physical and fair outcomes for children and young people.

## How?

We are at our strongest when we work in partnership with communities and when we involve communities in policing.

**“The police working in partnership with the community: the community thereby participating in its own policing; and the two working together, mobilising resources to solve problems affecting public safety over the longer term rather than the police alone, reacting short term to incidents as they occur.”**

*- The Report of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland (The Patton Report) 1999*

# Introduction + Background

**Based on 2021 Census data, there are 435,081 young people under the age 18, and 238,301 children under the age of 10.**



# Our Story



## Our purpose

**Keeping People Safe**

## What we do

**We care : We listen : We act**

## How we do it

**By delivering visible,  
accessible, responsive,  
community-focused policing**

## Who We Are

The Police Service of Northern Ireland is the policing organisation for all of Northern Ireland.

**We see our role as a visible, accessible, responsive and community-focused service that reflects the needs of those who count on us.**

## Our Purpose

### Keeping People Safe.

We are the Police and our purpose is to serve our community and to keep safe those that live, work and visit here. It is when we work together with our communities, our partners and our colleagues, that we achieve our greatest success.

## What We Do

### We Care: We Listen: We Act.

We are an organisation that demonstrates through our actions and behaviours that we care, we listen and we act.





## Key Themes

**01** Engagement

Safety + Protection **02**

**03** Suspected Offending

Victims + Witnesses **04**

**05** Stop + Search

**The Police Service of Northern Ireland will continue to deliver local community policing, engaging positively with children and young people across all sectors of our communities within Northern Ireland.**

Engagement is everyone's responsibility and should be a core activity as part of district and department engagement plans, and encouraged at all levels across the organisation. We will work with children and young people, PCSPs and other partner agencies to achieve this objective.

The objective of this is to increase children and young peoples' confidence in policing, particularly in areas where it was identified as being lower through initiatives carried out in collaboration with Police and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) and other partner agencies in the community.

We believe that early intervention with children and young people will prevent problems from escalating.

Our engagement with children and young people has the potential to improve service delivery and ensure high risk issues are dealt with effectively.

Children and young people are an integral part of our communities and should have a policing service which has been shaped by them and for them. Therefore we will listen to them, care about their concerns and act in their interests and the best interests of the communities around them. We will work with children and young people to make them safer at home, in school, in public and online.

**“Children and young people have a huge contribution to make to community safety today, but we recognise that they also have a greater role to play in the future of community safety.”**

**Bobby Singleton**  
Assistant Chief Constable  
Police Service of Northern Ireland

# Engagement

## WE WILL:

Develop opportunities to meet with police to discuss what is important for you in your community and allow you to have an input to local policing

Explain to you what we are doing in your community and why we are doing it

Better understand you, what you need from us, and our partners

Help promote children and young people and focus on the positive contributions they make within communities

Be visible, accessible and responsive to you and your community



# Safety + Protection

## WE WILL:

Make your safety our priority

Make sure we are sensitive to your needs; your welfare is at the core of everything we do

Listen to what you tell us and make sure that we act appropriately

Work with partners to ensure we are doing the right thing for you

**The Police Service of Northern Ireland will aim to identify those children and young people who may be at risk of danger, offending or anti-social behaviour and work with partner agencies, parents and carers, in the provision of appropriate support and intervention.**

Protecting children from harm is a key police priority. We have teams of specially trained child protection officers located throughout Northern Ireland, whose job is dedicated to minimising the risk of sexual harm and exploitation to young people; and to identify and prevent those persons who would do young people harm, whether that harm is in private, in the community or online.

We will publish a comprehensive multi-year Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy. Strategically aligned to this Children and Young People Strategy, the VAWG Strategy will focus on prevention, early intervention and securing better criminal justice outcomes to increase confidence in reporting and decrease violence and intimidation against women and girls.

The strategy will include an extensive engagement programme with stakeholders who work with children and young people and in an educational setting to identify the specific needs and issues facing girls.

We will listen to you when you feel unsafe, research and develop in partnership with other agencies the targeted provision of appropriate diversionary programmes/ measures for children and young people.

We will ensure that we have the right training and the right people to deal with sensitive issues that may affect your wellbeing and where appropriate, guide you to additional support from other partner agencies.



**The Police Service of Northern Ireland aims to ensure that young people only enter custody for the right reasons at the right time and that we properly explore other options first.**

We will work with partners to improve our custody facilities for young people but, more importantly, we will seek alternative disposals and ways of addressing behaviour.

It is important that young people are not criminalised for behaviour which can be dealt with more appropriately by other means. We will work in partnership with the Youth Justice Agency to ensure that the right support and intervention is in place to reduce offending. When appropriate, we will ensure the use of the Youth Diversion Scheme when dealing with children and young people who have offended.

We will develop the appropriate use of restorative interventions as a problem solving tool to address the behaviours of children and young people that fall short of being criminal, but is considered anti-social behaviour.

We will engage in a multi-agency approach to secure the provision of appropriate interventions and support for children or young people and their parents or carers. We will ensure that information sharing takes place with key partner agencies and information is shared legally and safely.

As an organisation, we will ensure that we meet the agreed organisational standards and procedures from first contact to eventual outcome. We will ensure that those children and young people who offend are dealt with in a manner which is consistent with the Human Rights Act 1998, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other local government agreements and policies.

## Suspected Offending

### WE WILL:

Treat you fairly and ensure your rights are upheld if you have come to police attention

Speak to you in a clear and respectful way, explaining fully what is happening

Listen to you and allow you to tell your story about an incident or your involvement in an incident

Help you understand the impact your actions have on others

Work with the appropriate agencies to help deliver necessary support for you

Make sure any investigation that you may find yourself involved in is dealt with promptly and effectively



# Victims + Witnesses

## WE WILL:

Treat you with courtesy, fairness and respect if you are a victim or witness of a crime

Aim to meet your request to speak to an officer of your preferred gender if you are the victim of a crime

Take into consideration the level of your vulnerability and if necessary bring in other partners to ensure you are being given the appropriate support

Talk to you about the processes involved in your case and keep you informed about its progress

**It is vital that the Police Service of Northern Ireland engages with children and young people in an open-minded manner to understand and address their concerns in the most appropriate way for each young person.**

In doing so, consideration of wider familial or situational factors of each individual needs to be recognised. It is also important to bear in mind that young people are much more likely to be victims of crime than older people.

We will continue to provide children and young people and their parents and carers with appropriate support and information, to help prevent and reduce the likelihood of being subjected to crime. We will effectively deal with any crime that children and young people may experience with the aim of increasing their levels of reassurance and confidence in policing.

In order to deliver effective collaborative working we will ensure that children and young people are provided with the best available information to enable them to avoid crime and disorder.

In order to deliver effective policing we will ensure that effective information sharing mechanisms are in place internally and externally to assist with the identification and assessment of the needs of young people as victims and witnesses. This will include referrals to social services in appropriate circumstances.

We will also ensure a thorough and appropriate investigation of all reported incidents where there is evidence of a crime having been committed and the provision of appropriate support through a partnership approach.



**Stop and search can be highly emotive and if misused it can be harmful to the trust and confidence of children and young people towards the police.**

Children and young people's confidence in our use and transparency of stop and search is critical because it is one of the most intrusive powers we have and can give rise to strong feelings of resentment.

**'The percentage of stop and searches involving young people has reduced. In 2014/2015, 15.7% of people stopped and searched were children and young people under 18 years of age. This percentage reduced to 11% in 2021/2022.'**

*(Police Service of Northern Ireland's stop and search statistics provided 2022.)*

The numbers of searches conducted indicate a significant number of interactions and opportunities to improve our relationship with young people. We will scrutinise our use of stop and search powers to ensure these are being exercised fairly.

Year	Number of persons stopped and searched/ questioned	Number of persons under 18 years old stopped and searched/ questioned
2014/15	27,539	4,330 (15.7%)
2015/16	34,171	4,859 (14.2%)
2016/17	31,274	3,656 (11.7%)
2017/18	29,882	4,157 (13.9%)
2018/19	28,116	3,629 (12.9%)
2019/20	25,450	3,211 (12.6%)
2020/21	26,590	2,996 (11.3%)
2021/22	22,823	2,477 (10.9%)

# Stop + Search

## WE WILL:

Make sure if you are stopped and searched that it is explained to you why you have been asked to go through the process

Make sure that officers conducting the search respect your rights and treat you fairly

Make sure that the powers we have to conduct a search are not abused

Consult with children and young people groups to ensure our practises are subject to scrutiny and provide detailed data about stop and searches if requested



## Engagement

**We will get feedback from you to inform how the Police Service delivers policing – we will listen to your experiences and follow up on complaints**

We will review our actions and consider changes to policy, practice and guidance. Changes will be discussed with children and young people and representative groups.

**We will gain a better understanding of you and what you need from us**

As a member of the Northern Ireland community, we will encourage opportunities for you to get involved with us in your community.

- Schools Programme
- Youth Volunteer Academy
- PCSP initiatives
- Youth Reference, Engagement and Listening events
- Youth Forum

**You will have access to resources to learn more about policing**

- Open University
- Online e.g. Police Service and NIPB websites, social media and partners websites.
- Information leaflets at public locations e.g. family support information; custody release leaflets; crime prevention and personal safety.
- We will review our actions and consider changes to policy, practice and guidance. Changes will be discussed with children and young people and representative groups.

**We aim to improve your confidence in what, why, where and how policing is delivered across Northern Ireland**

## Managing Your Safety + Protection

**You are a priority**

When you seek police assistance, our call management team will assess your call using THRIVE assistance (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability and Engagement).

**We work with partners to enhance skills and understanding in dealing with issues affecting children and young people**

- Police training
- Referral pathways
- On-street help (Police, Ambulance Service and Health practitioners)

**Use of technology**

- Service and Health practitioners
- Police systems and CCTV in custody
- Digital interview recording in custody and other locations for victims and witnesses
- Body Worn Video
- Use of force monitoring

# Children + Young People Centred Policing

## Victims + Witness

If you are a victim or a witness in an incident, you will be given timely advice to age appropriate support when you report a crime or provide information to police e.g. Northern Ireland Appropriate Adult Scheme, Registered Intermediaries, interpretation and translation services, Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland and investigation updates from police.

If you are scared or in immediate danger  
**DO NOT DELAY, CALL 999.**

If you are scared or fear for your own safety and want to talk to someone in confidence **CALL 101** Non-emergency or the independent charity **Crimestoppers 0800 555111.**

## Suspected Offending

You may not be arrested but instead be invited to attend a police station or other agreed location e.g. this may be your home, school or hospital for a voluntary interview.

We will help you to understand the impact of your actions.

We will work with other people to help you stay away from crime.

Alternative disposals may need to be agreed with you, and an adult will need to be with you to do so. You will only be taken to a police custody suite after all other alternative disposals are fully considered.

If you are arrested, we will ensure your rights are respected. You will be offered support from a legal representative / solicitor, appropriate adult, or registered intermediary service if required, along with documentation and a prompt investigation by police.

If you are brought into police custody, we will work with partners to minimise the likelihood of being held overnight.

When you leave custody, we will ensure you understand the next part of the justice process and what will happen and ensure that you are referred to relevant agencies for support.

## Stop + Search

Stop and search cards will be provided to explain why you have been stopped.

We will use Body Worn Video to ensure police act in accordance with guidance and police powers are not abused.

We will ensure stop and search is independently scrutinised and data published.

We will review outcomes of independent stop and search reports.



# How you will be treated

**How you will be treated when you come into contact with police, for any reason at any time**

## WE WILL:

We will always treat you with fairness courtesy and respect

Your welfare will come first

We will be sensitive to your needs

We will listen to you and understand you and act appropriately

We will use simplified language and check you understand

If appropriate you will be provided with expert support from partners in juvenile Justice, Education, Health and Social Service, Probation and Specialist services e.g. Victim Support.

The officers and staff you come in contact with will be trained to deal with sensitive issues relating to children and young people.

We will endeavour to provide an officer/ member of staff of your preferred gender to speak to you in custody and in relation to specific crimes.

## Organisational Culture/Learning

Training and development of our officers is an important aspect in the successful implementation of our strategy. Equipping our officers and staff with the necessary skills to effectively engage with children and young people will ultimately provide a better service to the communities we serve and increase confidence in the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

It is our vision to have a workforce that is inspirational, motivated, competent and skilled. We aim to have staff who are responsive to meet the changing needs of our young people in the world they live in today. To accomplish this we aim to work, where possible, with other statutory agencies and partners to provide our officers with training opportunities tailored specifically to children and young people.

## Measuring and Monitoring Success

### Partner Engagement

There are many factors which influence the lives of children and young people and therefore the success of our interactions with them. We will engage with partners to assist in the successful delivery of this strategy. We also intend to establish Youth Reference, Engagement and Listening events to monitor our progress and consult the opinions of our children and young people, along with Outcome Based Analysis of actions put in place.



# Partner Agencies

## Action for Children

[www.actionforchildren.org.uk](http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk)

## Autism NI

[www.autismni.org](http://www.autismni.org)

## Barnardo's

[www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

## Childline

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

## Children's Law Centre

[www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk)

## Education Authority

[www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk)

## Equality Commission

[www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)

## Health and Social Care Trust

### Belfast:

[www.belfasttrust.hscni.net](http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net)

### Northern:

[www.northerntrust.hscni.net](http://www.northerntrust.hscni.net)

### Southern Eastern:

[www.setrust.hscni.net](http://www.setrust.hscni.net)

### Southern:

[www.southerntrust.hscni.net](http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net)

### Western:

[www.westerntrust.hscni.net](http://www.westerntrust.hscni.net)

## Include Youth

[www.includeyouth.org](http://www.includeyouth.org)

## MENCAP

[www.northernireland.mencap.org.uk](http://www.northernireland.mencap.org.uk)

## NIACRO: Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders

[www.niacro.co.uk](http://www.niacro.co.uk)



**NICCY: Northern Ireland  
Commissioner for Children and  
Young People**  
[www.niccy.org](http://www.niccy.org)

**NIPB: Northern Ireland  
Policing Board**  
[www.nipolicingboard.org.uk](http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk)

**NSPCC: National Society for  
the Prevention of Cruelty to  
Children**  
[www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

**PBNI: Probation Board  
Northern Ireland**  
[www.pbni.org.uk](http://www.pbni.org.uk)

**Start 360**  
[www.start360.org](http://www.start360.org)

**VOYPIC: Voices of Young  
People in Care**  
[www.voypic.org](http://www.voypic.org)

**Youth Justice Agency**  
[www.justice.ni.gov.uk](http://www.justice.ni.gov.uk)

**Northern Ireland  
Youth Forum**  
[www.niyf.org](http://www.niyf.org)

**National Cyber Security  
Centre**  
[www.ncsc.gov.uk](http://www.ncsc.gov.uk)

*This is not an exhaustive list.*

# Partner Agencies



## Special Thanks

The Police Service wish to extend a special thanks to the members of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum who assisted with reviewing the strategy and whose feedback was integral to the completion of the work.



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