Community Safety Framework

<u>Purpose</u>

The role of Government is to protect its citizens, keep communities safe and help them to feel safe and secure, including though tackling and reducing crime. Outcome 7 in the draft Programme for Government (PfG) - *We have a safe community where we respect the law and each other* – sets out the strategic focus in relation to creating safer environments, where people feel safe and protected in their communities and have the confidence they need to live productively and engage fully in society.

2.   The purpose of the Community Safety Framework is to ensure effective connectivity between the community safety work of the responsible agencies and provide an operational roadmap on how to collectively deliver the safer community objectives set out in the PfG and Community Plans, whilst providing the mechanism to respond proactively and reactively to operational need. The Framework recognises the ongoing relevance of many of the priorities, approaches and need for collaborative working among agencies, as set out in the previous "Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities, A Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-17" which centred on reducing crime, anti-social behaviour (ASB), fear of crime, building community confidence and ensuring local solutions to local concerns.

3.   The issues that cause people to feel unsafe in their communities are not always specific to crime, for example broader issues in relation to ASB which do not meet the criminal threshold. It is important we recognise and address those wider issues which cause communities to feel unsafe and damage confidence. The Framework reshapes and builds on the previous Strategy in how to support communities to be safe and resilient through crime prevention, whilst also addressing the issues of underlying harm and vulnerability that can lead to offending behaviour. It is important that we have the flexibility to respond to and address changing and emerging issues; mechanisms for pro-active as well as reactive working; support problem solving approaches both at regional and local level; and provide the opportunity to work with all agencies and partners who can influence an improved quality of life.

4. To assist this, the Framework aims to complement and support a range of related strategies and policies of various partners which assist in making communities safer; consider the impact of crime on victims; and work to reduce the risk of reoffending. Examples include the Policing Plan, PSNI Crime Prevention Strategy, NI Housing Executive Community Safety Strategy, Organised Crime Task Force Strategy, Tackling Paramilitarism

Programme, the Department of Health's New Strategic Direction for tackling substance misuse and the Department of Communities' Neighbourhood Renewal.

<u>What is Community Safety?</u>

5.   Based on the previous Community Safety Strategy definition, which remains relevant in today's operating environment, but recognising community safety can encompass issues that go beyond the perpetration of crime; and the importance and value of a preventative approach to contributing to reducing harm and vulnerabilities in communities, community safety is defined as:

"*an approach to preventing, reducing and responding to risk taking behaviour and crime, and the impact of related harm in relation to vulnerable individuals and communities, which:*

- *Provides **local solutions** to local problems;*
- *Places prevention and early stage intervention as the primary aim;*
- *Focuses on **wider social issues**, including anti-social behaviour, fear of crime, quality of life issues, and related public health, social and economic factors;*
- *Is delivered through a **partnership** approach, involving the statutory, voluntary and private sectors, as well as community groups and individual citizens; and*
- *Offers holistic and **problem-oriented** solutions.*"

6.   Community safety remains a shared issue, which must be delivered collaboratively and in partnership in order to provide meaningful operational solutions at a strategic, local council and locality level. Support for a collective response to community safety, through this Framework, will assist the understanding of community safety and contributors to it, and respective strategic and operational roles and responsibilities of partners within and outside the justice system.

<u>Delivery Model</u>

7.   The delivery of community safety requires the integration and collaboration of services and partnership working to ensure a wrap around, holistic approach. The opportunities provided by collaborative working will help us to maximise problem-solving in relation to crime prevention and disruption, enabling a proactive response to the top priorities and particular issues that are having the most negative impact on communities as they arise.

Those with a role in the delivery of community safety, can help to influence individual, family and community risk factors and promote positive outcomes.

8.   A multi-agency governance model - *Community Safety Strategic Delivery Board* - will support a two-way information flow between the strategic and operational response to emerging issues, and provide the opportunity for analysis to allow for changing and flexible priorities to be the focus of sub-groups or task and finish groups as required. In due course, consideration will be given to the requirement for separate implementation plans and measurements on achieving outcomes, subject to theme/priority. This flexibility will allow those with the collective skills and resources across different agencies, and who are best placed to undertake certain tasks, to lead on particular issues that are relevant in real time. It will facilitate the building of relationships; reduce duplication and silo working; ensure an understanding of who does what and when; enable strong communications and provide a mechanism for sharing of information and data to enhance public safety.   A flexible mechanism for collaboration will allow the design of a response model to centre around themes and interdependencies such as a place, a category of persons or type of crime, where relevant.

9.   Membership of the Community Safety Strategic Delivery Board includes:

- Department of Justice
- Police Service for Northern Ireland
- Education Authority
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland
- Youth Justice Agency
- Northern Ireland Policing Board
- The Executive Office
- Department for Communities
- The Northern Ireland Office
- Department of Health
- SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives)

10.   Membership will be subject to review to take account of Programme for Government developments, identified priorities and assessment of delivery of outcomes.

<u>Focus of Activity</u>

11   Being safe and feeling safe is recognised as an important element of wellbeing that can provide the foundation for wider improvements in quality of life. People from all backgrounds and ages, influenced by a range of socio-economic factors, can behave in ways which lead to participation in anti-social behaviour or more serious offending.   The nature and complexity of crime is changing and therefore needs a responsive approach that is adaptable to ensure a speedy and effective response. While reporting[1] of traditional visible crime such as criminal damage and theft has reduced, there have been rises in certain crime types which can be more harmful in their impact, for example, cybercrime, child sexual exploitation, violent and sexual offending, and domestic violence.

12.   In seeking to deliver a safer and resilient society, inclusive of urban and rural communities and the diversity of its people, focus of activities will centre on:

- **Taking a preventive approach** – with particular attention paid to prevention of the crime in the first place and creating conditions for a safe community, either by reducing the conditions for a crime to be committed or addressing the behaviours that can lead to offending. The ultimate aim is to protect people and communities from any form of behaviour which can cause them to be and/or make them feel vulnerable and unsafe and become a potential victim.

  At population level, early stage interventions include helping citizens and communities to be safe and resilient through awareness raising activities on various preventative activities, whether in the physical or cyber space, to protect themselves and property. This may relate to promoting methods to design out crime and reduce opportunities to commit crime via physical and technological security measures to protect property and person, including home and business and public space environments; safeguarding personal and financial data on-line; or raising the awareness of the consequences of drug and alcohol in-take on risk taking behaviours and impact this may have on self and others in the community.

  For people at risk of becoming involved in, or pushed into, ASB or crime as an offender, social intervention initiatives and projects remain important in order to promote lawfulness and build a long-term civic society respectful of the law and

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[1] Draft 'Prevention First' Police Service of Northern Ireland Crime Prevention Strategy

others. Targeted interventions can support those on the margins of the justice system and educate individuals on the consequences of risk taking behaviours, for example via outreach programmes during the summer period. Such projects and programmes will aim to challenge negative behaviours by identifying intervening points to address vulnerability and risk taking behaviour and reduce the risk of individuals being drawn into offending. In supporting communities to be safer, work will, in parallel and ensuring appropriate connectivity, continue to tackle paramilitary activity and associated criminality and help those, particularly young people, vulnerable to paramilitary control move away from that influence.

For individuals already involved in criminal behaviour, diversionary methods and specific treatment mechanisms are utilised to minimise their contact with the Justice system, where relevant, with the aim of diverting them away from offending behaviours.

- **Addressing Volume Crime and ASB**– a higher quantity of some less harmful crime types and sustained ASB incidents can be experienced by a disproportionate number of people in society and have a greater effect on the community. Whilst the impact on the victim may not be as immediately severe as more violent crimes, it can result in feelings of invasion, loss of privacy and fear which can spread across the community and can cause harm to people's mental and physical health. A failure and/or perceived failure of relevant agencies to respond can have a significant impact on community confidence and decrease community and individual engagement. This can result in valuable information on community safety concerns and solutions not being shared with those in a position of addressing the root cause and source of criminality or negative behavioural traits.

Traditional, visible crimes can relate to recorded offences such as burglary, vehicle theft (including agricultural) and shoplifting. ASB refers to behaviour which has caused or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to one or more persons not of the same household, for example excessive noise, graffiti, drinking alcohol or taking drugs in the street.

In supporting work to make communities safer, a problem solving and partnership approach with operational agencies responsible for tackling volume crime and dealing with ASB is taken to identify persistent offenders, target hot-spots, maximise

detection rates and increase public confidence. Targeted regional and local programmes focus on reducing volume levels and harm impacts.

- **Addressing Harm, Vulnerability and Repeat Victimisation** – it is important to recognise the impact of all crime but some will have a greater harm impact than others. A high proportion of calls to police relate to wider societal issues, many of which include issues of vulnerability and increased harm, for example mental health, sexual offences and violence against the person. When thinking about community safety we need to be cognisant of the work of other partners in addressing socio-economic needs such as unemployment, poor living conditions, substance addiction and poor educational attainment, which can enable communities to be more resilient and help to reduce negative outcomes and vulnerability of individuals becoming a potential victim and/or offender.

  In reducing crime, there are various agencies that are uniquely placed to identify problems and behaviours in relation to people who are the most vulnerable in society and who require protection. It is recognised that those most vulnerable and at risk of harm caused by crime may not always engage with those agencies best placed to help them. In order to reduce the harm and vulnerability caused by crime and ASB, it is important that initiatives are developed and action taken in order to prevent problems or deescalate them. Risk factors, including groups of people who may be at higher risk of harm caused by crime, for example looked after children or people targeted because of specific characteristics or their (perceived) membership in a certain social group or race, need to be identified and supported as part of this.

- **Enforcement and supporting the reduction of re-offending** – prevention of crime and ASB is recognised as the preferred and primary approach to protecting people and communities. This relates to behaviours which can make them feel vulnerable and unsafe and become a potential victim; as well as reducing negative influences for people at risk of getting involved in, or pushed into, behaviours leading them to become a potential offender. Targeted interventions are used to support individuals from being drawn into offending or repeat offending, and away from risk taking behaviours leading to crime or ASB. However, where these have not worked or are not appropriate due to the severity and/or nature of the crime, it is important the relevant agencies have the necessary powers to ensure action is taken, where necessary. This is important to remove the threat to community safety, ensure

suitable sanctions are actioned and to provide a clear message to others on the consequences of their actions, as a deterrent. The public also need to have confidence that the relevant agencies will bring offenders to justice and that they have the right tools and powers to respond proportionately to those who do not respect the law and are unlawful.

It is important that central and local government, with relevant agencies, ensure they have necessary civil and criminal enforcement powers and systems to take action, in the public interest, on community safety issues for which they are responsible. For example, in maintaining public order and safety, where the nature and complexity of crime is changing, the police require relevant enforcement laws to prevent, detect and investigate criminal activities. Working in partnership with a number of law enforcement agencies, with varying powers, supports a robust response to intimidating and threatening behaviour from elements such as paramilitary and organised criminal gangs. Where people act in a way that continually disrupts the wellbeing of their neighbours and communities, including inconsiderate behaviour or public order linked to consumption of alcohol, powers will are necessary to reduce the harm of anxiety and distress caused by ASB. In relation to offences motivated by hostility/bias based on personal characteristics of the victim, utilising powers sends a clear message that prejudice-motivated conduct will not be tolerated. Work to establish relevant offences and penalties in legislation, in response to changing crimes and public feedback, is important. In the sentencing of those convicted of offences, ongoing reviews will ensure a sufficient range of sentencing disposals are available to the judiciary to pass the most appropriate sentence in individual cases.

Approach

13. In delivering this work, underpinning approaches will include:

- **Problem solving -** working collaboratively with partners will help to collectively identify key issues; address links between behaviours and crime; and tackle the root cause of offending behaviour leading to crime and/or what makes individuals more vulnerable or susceptible to harm. Linked to the primary objective of prevention, it is important to identify solutions that prevent community safety problems reaching the point where individuals and communities need the help and support of emergency services; and help address the needs of the most vulnerable and frequent users of agency support.

In partnership with local government departments, agencies and the voluntary and community sector, a portfolio of problem solving justice projects is being developed for individuals with the aim of reducing criminal justice contact, where relevant, by addressing offending behaviours and supporting vulnerable people.

Through locality working, in areas experiencing a disproportionate level of negative influences which are impacting on quality of life, a problem-solving approach with communities needs to be adopted to meet societal changes and need. It is recognised that one system, model or solution will not always suit all issues or geographical challenges. A multi-agency approach, working in partnership with communities to empower change, build resilience and support delivery, by utilising local skills and knowledge, is important. Local communities understand more than anyone their specific needs to grow and develop, and solutions to build community resilience in addressing community safety issues in that area. It is important that appropriate mechanisms to ensure feedback loops, between local delivery agents and the Board, are developed and maintained with clear links into community planning.

- **Partnership Working** – by strengthening a collaborative departmental and multi-agency approach in addressing wider social issues, linked to crime and ASB, a partnership approach will support a prompt, proactive and visible response. The building of relationships will assist maximising skills and experience; sharing of information and data; and directing of available resources based on need and not demand, to where they can make the greatest impact. A whole system and integrated approach, engaging with key partners including with the local community on the ground, will provide a more effective combined response, reduce duplication of effort and enable long-term problem-solving.

Information and data from multiple partners and relevant services will be appropriately shared and analysed to provide a holistic picture of community safety issues. Joint working approaches, initiatives, pilots and projects will be evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure solutions remain relevant, are evidence based and the required outcomes achieved. Research commissioned, where required, assists learning from other jurisdictions, international best practice and technological advances to provide evidence based and innovative solutions.

This pooling of knowledge increases understanding in relation to the individual, group or community requirement and relevant community safety solution. Through collaborative working, we can develop effective and acceptable means of pre-empting, inhibiting it and reducing crime and define crime problems and how to respond to them. This ensures every contact counts to reduce harm and vulnerability and the chances of people becoming victims, offenders or both.

Summary

14.   It is important for people to have confidence in the agencies which serve to keep them safe. By linking the strategic and operational response to community safety issues, this Framework aims to increase community and individual engagement to share information on community safety concerns and solutions which they believe are helpful, which in turn will assist agencies to strengthen their delivery on community safety issues. For example, community confidence can come from responding to ASB and low level repeat incidents, which can negatively impact on individuals and erode the resilience and cohesion of communities. Increasing confidence, through local and regional programmes, and multi-agency partnerships, can break down barriers to create shared assets, promote connectivity and identify local and/or thematic issues and solutions.