

NORTHERN IRELAND PRISON SERVICE

STRENGTHENING FAMILY RELATIONS 2019 – 2024

Consultation Document

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Section 1: Introduction

This paper sets out a strategic approach that the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) will adopt to improve outcomes for people in our care and their families. For those imprisoned, positive relationships and family contact are important factors in influencing how people cope with imprisonment and their reintegration and rehabilitation upon release. Therefore improvement in this area will make a contribution towards achieving a number of outcomes set by the former Executive under the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021.

In the context of this approach, we recognise that individuals have many ways of defining what constitutes a family and what being a part of a family means to them. Everyone's circumstances are unique so we must consider each individual and the make-up of their family or social network. We will therefore use a broad definition of 'family' to help identify a wide range of people including extended family members and those who can create a web of support that promotes desistance from offending behaviour. People who have a sense of purpose and belonging in the community, who are both enabled and able to repair damaged links with their family, friends and neighbours, are more likely to become responsible citizens.

We use an individualised and person centred approach when assessing the needs of people in our care and their families. We recognise the important role that families can play in supporting prisoners in relation to their mental health and this strategy is consistent with NIPS' approach to safer custody.

We also recognise that some family relationships can be harmful and we must be sensitive to the needs of family members in these circumstances. Where there is an identified risk in maintaining family connections, for example where there is evidence that the family is involved in serious organised crime or have a long history of pro-criminal attitudes and behaviours, we must support those in our care who chose to desist from offending behaviour in making the required life choices which enable them to make the positive changes in transforming their lives.

This approach sets out how NIPS will develop and deliver policies and procedures for those who have a family member in custody. It will seek, not just to meet existing targets, but to

influence and challenge current and developing plans in order to generate better overall outcomes for prisoners and their families.

Questions

- 1)** Do you agree that positive relationships and family contact are important factors in influencing how people cope with imprisonment and their reintegration and rehabilitation upon release?
- 2)** Do you agree that the overall outcome of the strategic approach to strengthening family relations should seek to support and encourage family engagement, leading to positive outcomes for people in our care?

Section 2: Policy context

The Prison Review Team (2011) recommended that NIPS develop its family and community work to promote desistance. The DoJ 'Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending' (2013) and 'Supporting Change- a Strategic Approach to Desistance' (2015) strategies place families at the heart of criminal justice policy. We are also cognisant of the importance of working in partnership with other agencies such as education, health, policing, housing, and voluntary and community (VCS) organisations and social services to support family contact between people in our care and their families.

The Report of the Joint Inspection carried out by the Chief Inspector Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) and HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in England and Wales in Maghaberry Prison in November 2018 highlighted the continuing progress being made in working with families and also the range of positive family support initiatives currently on offer in the prison. Similarly, the CJINI Inspection on Resettlement Report, in May 2018, highlighted other positive initiatives carried out across all establishments. We recognise that in order to reduce re-offending and work towards safer communities that we need to continually assess what is currently being delivered, to develop consistency in services and have the best mix and reach of services available across prison establishments. Finally, we need to maximise engagement opportunities with those in our care along with their families.

NIPS is committed to continuously improving how we work and respond to the needs of children, families and wider support networks. This strategic approach will help us take forward that improvement, and ensure that it is aligned to wider NIPS, Department of Justice and Executive outcomes.

Why is it important for prisons to support and encourage contact between people in our care and their families?

Maintaining relationships between those imprisoned and their families has been identified by government policies, Her Majesty's Prison & Probation Service and academic research as being critical for encouraging desistance, reducing crime and facilitating reintegration.

Ministry of Justice research shows that for a prisoner who receives visits from a family member the chances of reoffending are 39% lower than for those who do not¹.

The review of the Families Matter Programme in Maghaberry Prison² carried out by Queen's University academics, led by Dr Michelle Butler, outlines the range of existing research into the effects of parental imprisonment. In particular, it shows that:

- Families can suffer greatly as a result of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. Families may experience: uncertainty, shame, anger, embarrassment, stigma, media attention or isolation. They may find themselves needing help in many areas, such as finances, accommodation, health, transport or childcare.
- Children may be upset and traumatised by separation from a parent. It may be difficult to sustain bonds between children and their imprisoned parent and this may affect the development of the child in terms of educational attainment, social inclusion and mental health. Parental imprisonment is recognised as a significant Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE);
- Difficulties in maintaining family contact can be associated with suicide and self-harm; and
- Constructive family contact can influence relationships and behaviours within the prison, making these more positive and settled; and thus contribute to safer custody.

1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642244/farmer-review-report.pdf

² https://pure.qub.ac.uk/portal/files/146842887/Families_Matter_Report.pdf

Potential Effects of Imprisonment on Families

Children	Partners/Caregivers
Separation Anxiety	Loss of income
Anger	Extra childhood burdens
Worry about safety and well-being of imprisoned parent	Feelings of social isolation
Behavioural disturbances	Difficulty maintaining contact
Deterioration in school performance	Relationships breakdown
Stigma	Stigma
Decrease in stable, quality parenting due to additional commitments by remaining parent/caregiver must take on	Added financial strain due to costs associated with imprisonment (e.g. Visiting, telephone contact, sending money into prison, etc.)
Teasing	Divorce
Bullying	Moving home
Increased probability of being involved in crime/antisocial behaviour	Psychological stress as they attempt to support themselves, imprisoned individual and children
Increased probability of being imprisoned	Poor visiting conditions
	Perceived hostile attitudes of some prison staff towards families Problems reuniting with partner on release from prison

(Source: Glover, 2009; Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2013; Murray, 2005).

The study funded by the EU and the Egmont Foundation from October 2009- May 2011 led by the Danish institute of Human Rights in collaboration with the University of Ulster et al, estimated that every day, some 800,000 children across the EU live separated from their parents due to the latter's imprisonment. It highlighted that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that no child should be discriminated against because of the situation or status of their parents (Art 2) yet children of prisoners often feel ashamed, unsupported, and 'different' because their parent is in prison. In short –children of imprisoned parents often bear the consequences of their parents' actions in a way that no child should be expected to bear; they become “the invisible victims of crime and the penal system”.

Family contact therefore cannot be underestimated in providing opportunities to sustain and improve relationships. However, it is recognised that not all family relationships are positive, and we need to be alert to those that are damaging and abusive, for instance if the imprisoned parent has been abusive to the partner or child in question. The principle of the best interest of the child should always be the primary consideration and no child should be forced to visit their imprisoned parent.

Where there are positive relationships (or the potential to build them) our prisons need to take steps that will enable families to sustain and improve their relationships.

This strategic approach has been developed, taking account of policy implications and legislative provisions, as listed in Annex A. Our policies and practice will be regularly reviewed and updated to comply with any changes necessary.

Questions

- 3)** To what extent do you think the current NIPS processes and procedures facilitate quality family engagement and what improvements could be made?

Section 3: Principles

The Farmer Review on the importance of family and other relational ties acknowledged that *“...harnessing the resource of good family relationships must be a golden thread running through the processes of all prisons”*³

The following principles will underpin the strategic approach and inform all practice relating to families affected by imprisonment:

- **Family Members are treated with fairness, dignity and respect** - Families should never feel stigmatised, with the assumption that family members have done no wrong. We must be mindful of this principle in all our dealings with people in our care and their families.
- **Wherever possible families are included in their relatives’ rehabilitation** - We will work in a more holistic way with those in our care and their families to improve outcomes, including consideration of their contribution to safer custody.
- **Every family is unique** - Different families will experience and respond in different ways to a family member’s imprisonment. All decisions and actions relating to the family should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- **The best interests of children are paramount to any decision making** - In line with the emerging Children & Young Persons and the Family and Parent Support Strategies, promoting wellbeing and positive life outcomes, will be at the heart of all practice affecting people in our care, children, young people and their families.
- **Effective Partnership working is key to successful outcomes** - All partner organisations must work collaboratively towards improving outcomes for people in our care and their families. We need to work with our partners to build on existing and future evidence of what works.

3

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/642244/farmer-review-report.pdf

Questions

- 4)** Do you agree with the principles outlined which will underpin the strategic approach to strengthening family relations?

- 5)** Would you like to see additional principles applied?

Section 4: Themes

The principles above will underpin the following themes which seek to achieve the desired outcomes for people in our care and their families. Each theme sets out NIPS priorities together with associated actions that each establishment must implement in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

Family Contact - We will actively support and encourage family contact where possible

NIPS recognise that family contact and social networks can be motivating factors that can influence behavioural change. We are committed to working with people in our care, their families, social networks, wider communities and partners in order to maintain or develop meaningful family contact throughout a period of imprisonment. We maintain safety and security for all. However, as far as practical, we will also create a welcoming, relaxed and comfortable environment to include a child-friendly space which encourages positive relations between people in, and leaving, our care and their child or children. All establishments will seek to maximise suitable visiting opportunities for families and children through regular and constructive contact.

NIPS will:

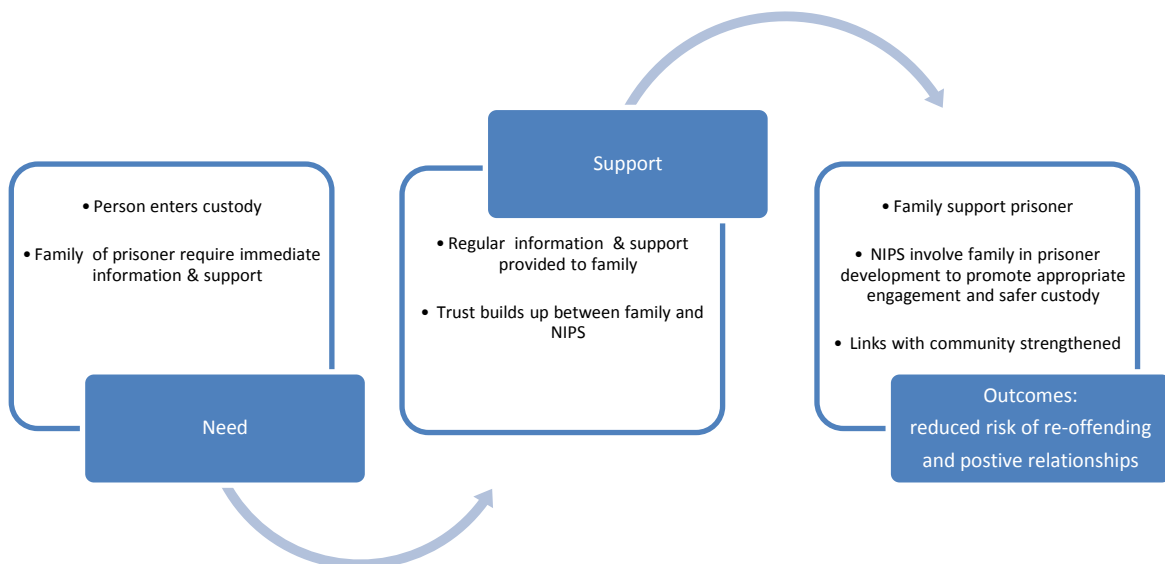
- Facilitate children's visits that take account of school hours in order to avoid disruption to schooling where possible;
- Encourage and promote meaningful relationships by enhancing family contact as much as possible;
- Pay particular attention to the care of women in custody to ensure that their role within the family is maintained (in line with the strategic approach to females who offend);
- Where it is not possible for families to use the standard arrangements for visits, establishments will be proactive in taking alternative steps to assist people in our care to sustain family relationships;
- Encourage and promote meaningful contact through various methods including visits, letters, telephone calls and electronic means;
- Work with establishments and partners to develop capacity to provide facilities conducive to supporting children and families affected by imprisonment and create a welcoming environment and reception;

- Provide a visiting space that meets the needs of the children and families and create clean, comfortable and child-friendly spaces that encourage personal contact, and are conducive to play and positive relations between parents and their children;
- Provide a welcoming waiting area and visits area which offer a range of facilities;
- Provide opportunities for family induction sessions to take place that promote and encourage family attendance;
- Promote activities which encourage family interaction and learning;
- Provide a programme of family days and events;
- Display contact details of relevant staff and information about their roles for people in our care and their families;
- Communicate local visit processes and procedures clearly to people in our care and their families; and
- Review the provision of transport services for families of prisoners.

Outcomes:

- Families and wider social networks are facilitated to maintain positive relationships with people in our custody; and
- Have a positive experience when visiting our establishments

An illustration to highlight a family member's journey:



Families feel included and engaged - We will actively encourage and support meaningful engagement by acknowledging the strengths and assets that families and wider social networks have to contribute to an individual's desistance journey

When a family member has been given a period of imprisonment, it can be a stressful and confusing time for both the individual and their families. Evidence suggests that people without family support during imprisonment are up to six times more likely to re-offend in the first year after release than those with an active family interest. Therefore the central focus is on how we encourage families to engage in a meaningful way, knowing they are likely to have a depth of knowledge and understanding of the individual and are well placed in making a positive contribution to reducing offending.

NIPS will:

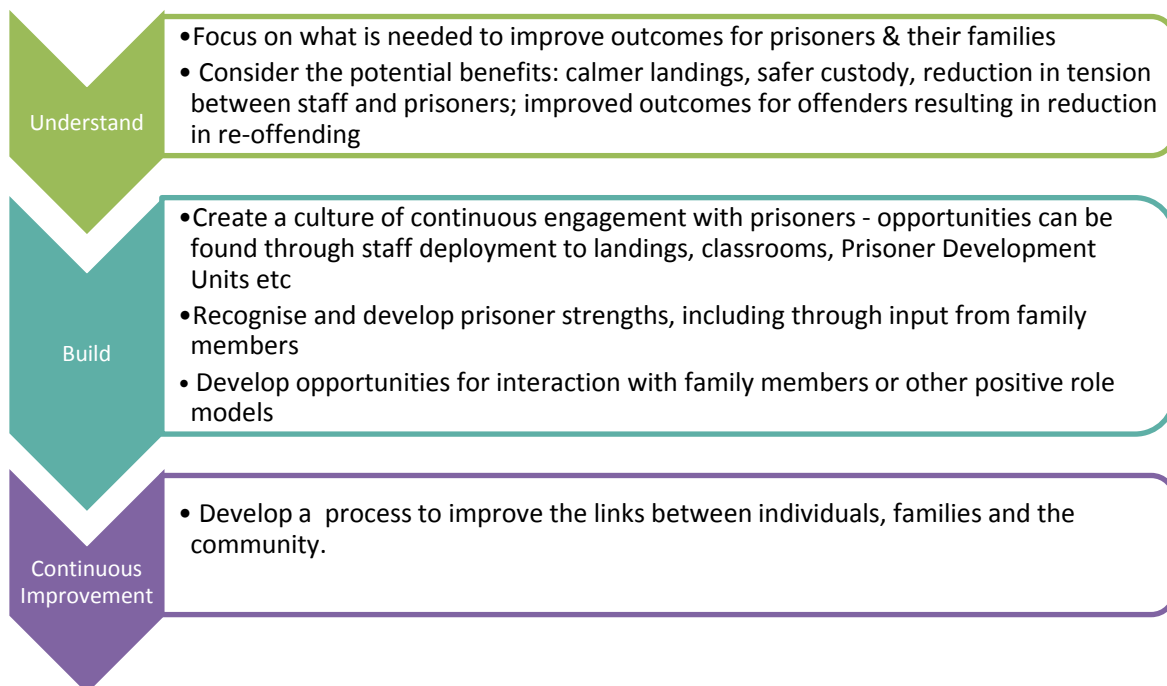
- Be respectful, consistent and open with families and provide a welcoming environment;
- Identify opportunities for families to access and participate in activities which promote wellbeing;
- In partnership with others, involve people in our care and their families to ensure their views and any potential impact are considered in the decision making process;
- Work effectively with partners, particularly PBNI, to improve transitions and outcomes following release;
- Provide guidance on how families gain access to information about the wellbeing of their family member; and involve them in safer custody interventions;
- Implement local procedures for responding to family events in a consistent manner;
- Ensure that families know how to raise complaints so that we can gather and analyse feedback to improve local practices;
- Clearly communicate policy, procedures and expectations to enable families to engage positively; and
- Provide families and those in our care with information, as appropriate, to allow them to support family members during their time in custody.

Where applicable and appropriate, based on individual family circumstances, NIPS will:

- Provide opportunities to work more holistically with families involving them in their family member's time in custody;
- Include families in the planning and preparation for an individual's return to the community;
- Share appropriate information with families;
- Include families in decisions that may involve or affect them; and
- Use information on family contact in safer custody assessments.

Outcomes:

- Families feel included and engaged in decisions that may involve or affect them;
- Families feel they are treated with respect and do not feel stigmatised in any dealings with our staff;
- A reduction in reoffending; and
- Staff have a greater understanding of the impact of imprisonment on people in our care and their families through:



Families are safe and well - We will support wellbeing and positive life outcomes for people in our care and their families affected by imprisonment

NIPS will work with families and social networks to enhance wellbeing, in particular those families who are affected by imprisonment. People who suffer family breakdown as a result of imprisonment often experience feelings of isolation, loneliness, guilt, anger and despair and are therefore at increased risk of suicide and self-harm.

NIPS will:

- Ensure people in our care and their families are supported appropriately in relation to wellbeing concerns;
- Support and empower people in our care and their families to access relevant services that could help them sustain improved wellbeing and crime free lives on release;
- Work with partners to support families to access services that improve safety and wellbeing;
- Work with partner organisations to provide services and interventions which support families;
- Through our processes and procedures, sensitively and effectively, seek, record and act upon information as required in order to support family wellbeing and safety; and
- Have clear protocols in place for how people in our care and their families can be kept informed about the wellbeing of their family members, in line with the Supporting Prisoners at Risk Policy.

Outcomes:

- Staff have a good understanding of safety and wellbeing and are confident in responding to concerns appropriately and proportionately; and
- People in our care and their families have access to a range of services and supports designed to improve their safety and wellbeing

Children - We will actively promote the wellbeing and positive life outcomes for children affected by parental imprisonment

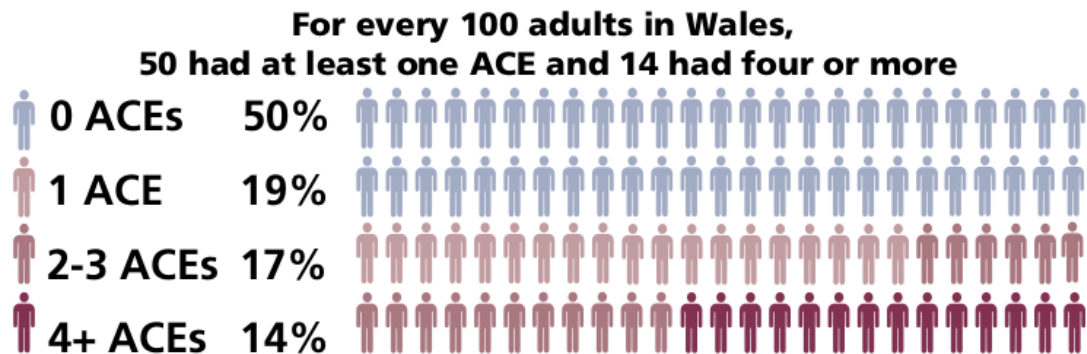
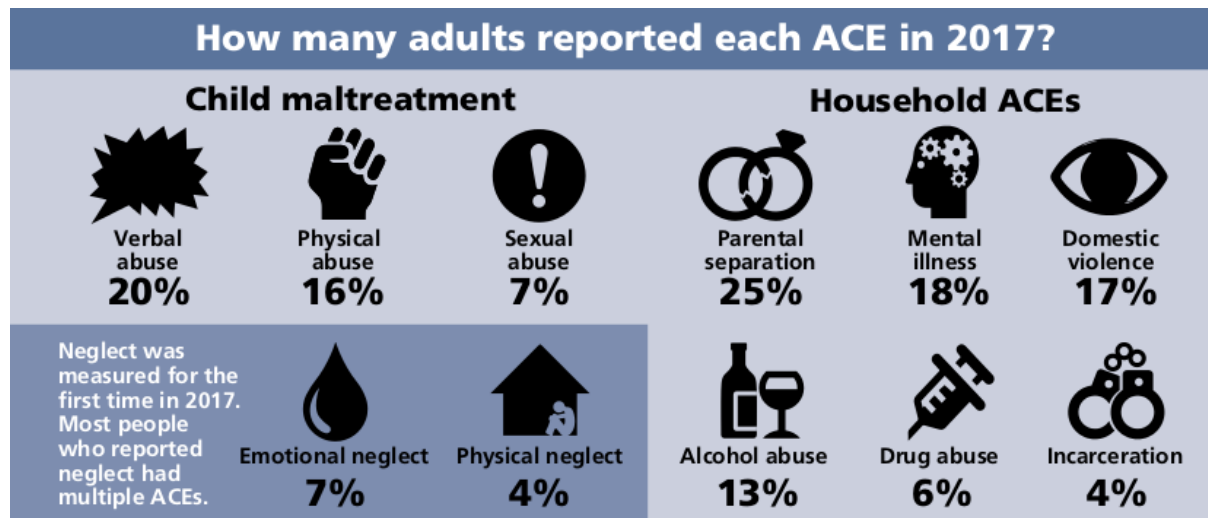
NIPS must ensure all reasonable steps are taken to protect children and young people who visit or make contact with anyone in our care from harm and abuse. Child protection is the responsibility of all who interact with children and families, regardless of whether that work brings them into direct contact with children and young people.

The impact of adversity on child development is of particular relevance and there is an increasing research evidence base demonstrating that children exposed to adversity are at increased risk of negative psychological, emotional and health outcomes in later life. This risk is cumulative in nature with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) research demonstrating a strong relationship between the number of adversities experienced in childhood and a broad spectrum of negative outcomes in adulthood. Previous work commissioned by Barnardo's NI, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the National Children's Bureau has identified eight major areas of childhood adversity that are consistently linked with negative outcomes in later life. These areas are:

1. poverty, debt, financial pressures;
2. child abuse/child protection concerns;
3. family violence/domestic violence;
4. parental illness/disability;
5. parental substance misuse;
6. parental mental illness;
7. parental offending/anti-social behaviour; and
8. parental separation through relationship breakdown/divorce, bereavement or parental imprisonment.

The latter two areas are of most relevance to this strategy. Research would suggest that exposure to 4 or more ACEs may significantly increase the risk of long term health problems.

National Study of ACEs in Wales (18 – 69 years)



Compared with people with no ACEs, those with 4+ ACEs were, independent of poverty,

- **4** times more likely to be a high risk drinker
- **6** times more likely to smoke tobacco or E-cigs
- **11** times more likely to have smoked cannabis
- **16** times more likely to have used crack cocaine or heroin
- **20** times more likely to have been incarcerated in their life

In order to support children and young people, NIPS, in collaboration with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) will seek to become a trauma informed organisation. In particular it will avail of SBNI Trauma Informed Practice Training, developed through the Early Intervention Transformation Programme, to gain a better understanding of the extent to which children and young people in Northern Ireland are impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

The aim of the Trauma Informed Practice Project is that all SBNI organisations and partner agencies will:

- Have an awareness of the adverse childhood experiences which cause trauma in a child's life
- Be aware of the impact of these adversities on the development of a child
- Be able to identify what creates resilience to cope with adversity
- Be able to develop policies and practice, to embed trauma informed practice in their work.

Thus creating a system where:

- The workforce recognises and responds to the impact of childhood adversity on children, caregivers and service providers
- Trauma awareness, knowledge and skills are an integral part of organisational cultures, practices and policies
- Effective practice is used to maximise the physical and psychological safety of the child, facilitate recovery of the child and family and support their ability to thrive
- Children and families impacted by and vulnerable to trauma are more resilient and better able to cope.

As a consequence, NIPS will:

- Identify and respond appropriately to child protection and wellbeing issues in line with the NIPS Child Protection Policy.
- Ensure relevant staff are trained in child protection and wellbeing issues;
- Ensure a range of age appropriate information is available for children and young people;
- Support people in our care to participate in their child's education;
- Raise awareness in partnership of the impact of imprisonment on children;
- In partnership with SBNI, seek to become a trauma informed organisation; and
- Engage with partner organisations to develop and consolidate family contact.

Outcomes:

- Effective partnership working to improve services for people in our care and their families;
- Children are at the centre of our policy and practice; and
- Children and young people will be given the best start in life

Questions

- 6) Do you agree with the outcomes / themes outlined?
- 7) What additional themes would you like to see explored?
- 8) Do you think the NIPS priorities are aligned to the themes identified?
- 9) Outline how best NIPS could work with partner organisations to achieve the overall outcome of supporting and encouraging family engagement, leading to positive outcomes for people in our care?

In developing this Strategy NIPS has conducted appropriate screening exercises to ensure compliance with legislation and convention requirements including:

- The Prison and Young Offenders Centre Rules (NI) 1995;
- European Prison Rules 2006
- European Convention on Human Rights;
- The Human Rights Act 1998;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995;
- The Data Protection Act 1998;
- General Data Protection Regulation 2018;
- Northern Ireland Act 1998;
- NIPS safeguarding Children Framework & Guidance; and
- Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment.

In developing our approach we have considered policy implications deriving from the following:

- Draft Programme for Government 2016-21;
- NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan 2018-19;
- Prisons 2020 recommendations;
- Review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service recommendations;
- Lord Farmer's Review – The importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime;
- Draft Children and Young People's Strategy 2018-2028;
- Developing cross-departmental Family and Parenting Support Strategy;
- Resettlement Pathways;
- A Strategic Approach to Desistance;
- CJINI Reports;
- 2016 NIPS Professional Standards Unit Audit on NIPS Family Strategy 2010;
- 2018 NIPS Visits Experience Consultation; and
- The Corston Report 2007.