Police Service of Northern Ireland

User Guide to

Motoring Offence Statistics in Northern Ireland

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Keeping People Safe

Northern Ireland
Statistics & Research Agency

This document is intended as a User Guide to help users of the statistics form a fuller picture of the data quality and to help users put the data into context. Please contact us via our website if you require any further information.

Section 1 Introduction

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) records detailed information in relation to all motoring offences detected by the PSNI in Northern Ireland. Disposals for motoring offences have evolved over the years, with Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) first introduced in the mid-1980s. FPN statistics are available from 1998, with speed awareness courses offered and reported since 2010. In 2011, discretionary disposals became an option for low level offences before being discontinued for motoring offences in 2016. Statistics on those referred for prosecution for motoring offences were first reported in 2017 and are available from 2011 onwards.

Motoring offence statistics for Northern Ireland are collated and produced by statisticians seconded to the PSNI from the Northern Ireland and Statistics Research Agency (NISRA). The figures are produced in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Further information can be found in the PSNI Statistics Branch official statistics documentation on the PSNI website.

The type of information collated and reported in relation to motoring offences in Northern Ireland includes:
- Long term trends in motoring offences
- Types of offences detected
- Motoring offences by geographical area
- Age and gender breakdown of offenders
- Analysis of specific offence groups (The full list of motoring offences is available on the statistics section of the PSNI website)
- Analysis of each disposal type (An explanation of the different types of disposal is available at Annex 1)

The PSNI's motoring offence statistics are used to produce a number of publications throughout the reporting year including:
- Monthly updated motoring offence reports are published eight weeks after the end of reporting month and provides provisional rolling 12 months data
- Annual motoring offence report published 12 weeks after the end of the calendar year
- Annual preliminary breath test report published 5 months after the end of the calendar year
- Christmas drink drive bulletin published 2 weeks after the end of the Christmas drink drive campaign

Section 2   Information on users

2.1 Users and uses of PSNI's motoring offence statistics

Motoring offence statistics are subject to high levels of interest, as evidenced by the numbers of information requests and wide range of users / uses of the statistics. Based on our experience, knowledge and analysis of existing uses and requests for the statistics, as well as the responses to the PSNI's motoring offence statistics user surveys, the following examples provide an insight to the main uses made of PSNI's motoring offence statistics.

- **Policy making / policy monitoring**

There is a multi-agency approach to Road Safety within Northern Ireland, led by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) which is responsible for the implementation of road safety policy including the [Road Safety Strategy to 2020](#). DfI use motoring offence statistics for a number of purposes including the identification of offences, offenders and vulnerable groups, in order to target road safety policies and media campaigns more effectively. Other government departments use the PSNI's motoring offence statistics to help inform and develop policy, for example the Department of Health use drink drug driving figures to show the extent and cost of alcohol related crime in order to inform their alcohol and drug misuse policy.

Various local and national special interest groups or voluntary organisations have a particular interest in the motoring offence statistics that relate to their policy area, for example speeding or mobile phone usage, which they use to lobby government departments for policy or legislative change.

- **Performance monitoring / effectiveness of policing**

The PSNI and the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) have an annual [policing plan](#) which contains a number of quantitative indicators by which the NIPB monitor the PSNI's effectiveness. The 2019/20 plan employs an Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) framework which includes a number of indicators measured directly by PSNI's motoring offence statistics, including detections for speeding, drink driving and mobile phone usage, as well as the prevalence of speed awareness courses. As a result, these statistics are extensively used both within PSNI and also within NIPB and local Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) to monitor policing performance.

Operationally, police officers use detection figures to target problem areas or offences and monitor performance locally. In addition, the figures are used to measure the effectiveness of specific campaigns for example, Christmas / summer drink drive campaigns, at both a local and national level.

- **National media related and informing public/public interest**

The local media use the PSNI's motoring offence statistics to inform the public on trends and issues. Some of the information is sourced directly from the PSNI website while bespoke information is often obtained through information requests or under Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation. PSNI Statistics Branch receives a high number of FOI requests for information relating to motoring offence statistics and the numbers of these requests has been increasing year on year. The type of queries vary considerably from something very specific and localised (e.g. details of speeding or drink driving detections on a specific road) to more generic requests that are addressed to all police forces in the UK. The FOI requests are anonymous, however many can be attributed to the media (both national and local) through subsequent articles published.

- **To facilitate academic research**

PSNI Statistics Branch receives a number of requests for motoring offence data to assist with academic research projects, as well as requests from students for assistance with projects and presentations.

- **In support of local community policing needs**

PCSPs use the statistics to evidence levels of detection and enforcement in their areas in order to request action from a range of sources including the police, elected representatives, the Road Safety Partnership (RSP) or the DfI.

- **Personal interest**

The wider public regularly request motoring offence statistics, either directly or under FOI. One of the main purposes for this is to obtain evidence to support a need for road safety intervention in their particular area, which can be used to approach to DfI for traffic calming measures or the RSP for speed camera enforcement.

2.2 User feedback

As part of our commitment to meeting user needs we regularly consult with our users, both formally and informally, to obtain feedback on the statistics and service provided. We conduct a PSNI Statistics Branch customer satisfaction survey every two years which includes questions at individual output level.

The survey was conducted in November 2018 and 11 responses were received which were specific to the motoring offences statistics. All respondents reported that they were either very or quite satisfied with each aspect of the statistics assessed, which included the content, presentation, commentary, timeliness, format, ease of findings and overall data quality. No qualitative comments were received in terms of suggested improvements. However the previous user survey in 2016 reported a need for detail on the location of the offence, which we subsequently made available in our reports as a direct result of the feedback received.

User satisfaction survey results are available on the Official Statistics section of the PSNI website.

Our policy in relation to customer service and user engagement is available in the PSNI Statistics Branch official statistics documentation and highlights our aims and standards for dealing with key users and requests from members of the public.

NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED

Section 3   Recording processes, data quality and data availability

3.1 Data Sources and Collection Methods

As per the PSNI Statistics Branch official statistics documentation included in the Official Statistics section of the PSNI website, information on motoring offences is collected using the organisations own administrative and management sources. Historically, the main IT system involved in the collation of the FPNs was the Vehicle Procedures / Fixed Penalty Office (VP/FPO) system. This was replaced in December 2016 and data relating to FPNs and speed awareness courses are now extracted from the StarDome system. Discretionary disposals issued and those offences referred for prosecution are extracted from the PSNI Occurrence Management System (NICHE). These operational systems provide administrative datasets which are analysed and reported by the PSNI's Statistics Branch.
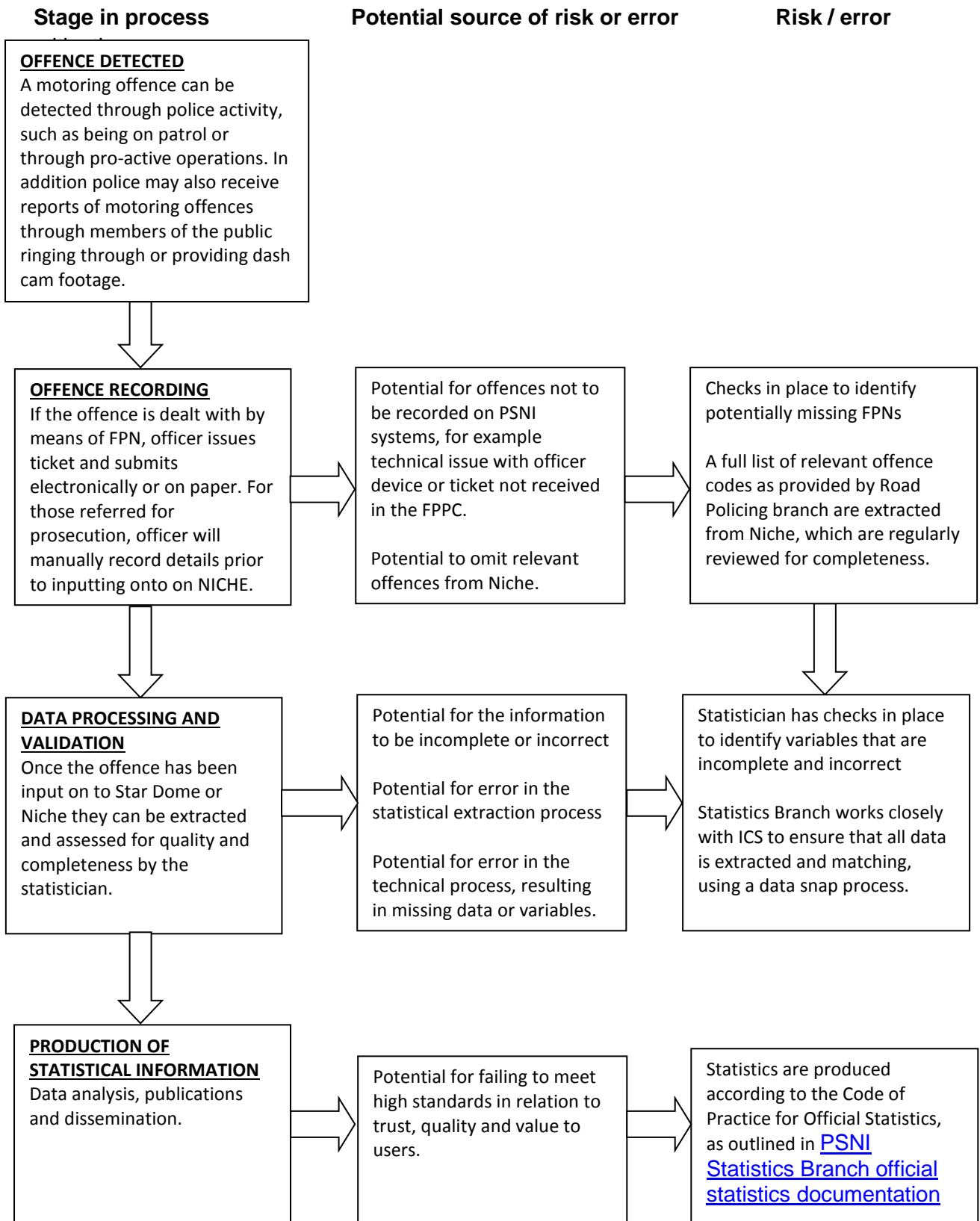
Some of the data collation for FPNs is still reliant on paper tickets being completed by police officers and then forwarded to the Fixed Penalty Processing Centre (FPPC) for input onto police systems. However, increasing use is being made of technology which was introduced in April 2012, allowing police officers to record the information electronically at the scene which is then transferred directly to PSNI systems.

Information and Communication Services (ICS) write script, in consultation with Statistics Branch, in order to extract only the required information, from both StarDome and Niche, for statistical processing. Statistics Branch download the information using SPSS on a regular basis for ongoing validation and analysis.

3.2 Quality Assurance

As with all administrative systems, statistics are a by-product of the process and are heavily reliant on the information being entered correctly by staff across PSNI. To address this risk, highly skilled and experienced statisticians have developed a wide range of quality assurance measures and data validation checks to ensure that the statistics are as accurate and meaningful as possible, within the given resource and time constraints. Figure 1 outlines the high levels process, risks and mitigation involved.

Figure 1 Process, risks and mitigation

Stage in process	Potential source of risk or error	Risk / error
OFFENCE DETECTED A motoring offence can be detected through police activity, such as being on patrol or through pro-active operations. In addition police may also receive reports of motoring offences through members of the public ringing through or providing dash cam footage.		
OFFENCE RECORDING If the offence is dealt with by means of FPN, officer issues ticket and submits electronically or on paper. For those referred for prosecution, officer will manually record details prior to inputting onto on NICHE.	Potential for offences not to be recorded on PSNI systems, for example technical issue with officer device or ticket not received in the FPPC. Potential to omit relevant offences from Niche.	Checks in place to identify potentially missing FPNs A full list of relevant offence codes as provided by Road Policing branch are extracted from Niche, which are regularly reviewed for completeness.
DATA PROCESSING AND VALIDATION Once the offence has been input on to Star Dome or Niche they can be extracted and assessed for quality and completeness by the statistician.	Potential for the information to be incomplete or incorrect Potential for error in the statistical extraction process Potential for error in the technical process, resulting in missing data or variables.	Statistician has checks in place to identify variables that are incomplete and incorrect Statistics Branch works closely with ICS to ensure that all data is extracted and matching, using a data snap process.
PRODUCTION OF STATISTICAL INFORMATION Data analysis, publications and dissemination.	Potential for failing to meet high standards in relation to trust, quality and value to users.	Statistics are produced according to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, as outlined in PSNI Statistics Branch official statistics documentation

3.3 Validations

On a monthly basis and more often at the end of the calendar year, Statistics Branch undertakes a range of quality assurance checks on the fixed penalty notice and speed awareness offence data to ensure that the statistics we produce are of high quality, accurate and meaningful. SPSS is used to identify missing or inaccurate data and those detections which are not in a final state. These are sent to FPPC administrative staff, who will review the offence to complete the required information, contacting the issuing officer if necessary. FPPC then take appropriate action to move the offence to a final state so it can be included in the next monthly update of the PSNI's motoring offence statistics. All validations are completed on the source system so that the same errors are not returned in the next round of validations. SPSS syntax is used to automate extensive quality assurance and re-categorisation of the prosecutions data, which is applied and reviewed regularly to produce up-to-date and accurate datasets, with amendments made on the source system where possible.

Examples of the data quality checks include:
- All essential fields are populated to ensure monthly reports can be published
- Ensuring a speed is recorded against all Endorsable speeding offences
- Checks to ensure appropriate speed is input against the speed limit
- Checks to ensure offender age is appropriate for the FPN that has been issued
- Check for missing FPNs
- Check for inconsistency with date of offence and date input onto the system
- Checks to ensure there are no duplicates on the system
- Checks to ensure alcohol offences have an alcohol reading input
- Checks for missing date of birth and / or gender for offender
- Check to ensure correct offence code has been used

Our internal quality assurance and validation procedures are regularly tested, reviewed and updated. We have also used the UK Statistics Authority Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit to ensure that we have provided users with as much information as possible and to make users aware of the quality and background of the statistics. We have assessed that the level of risk of quality concerns to be low and that the public interest profile of the statistics can be considered to be high. As a result we assess that level A2: Enhanced Assurance is suitable for the PSNI's motoring offence statistics. The motoring offences QAAD assessment is published on the statistics section of the PSNI website.

3.4 Risks to data quality and associated mitigations during the recording process

The detailed processes underlying the main stages outlined in Figure 1 above have evolved over the years and will continue to evolve as changes to systems and structures are introduced. The NISRA statisticians who compile the motoring offences statistics have always been closely involved in any change processes to ensure that they take into any statistics that need to be derived from these systems. Detailed internal procedures manuals are maintained to document changes and ensure continuity and contingency in the event of new members of staff. A checklist of the main stages in the publication process ensures that no important stages are omitted – see Annex 2.

3.5 Data management roles and responsibilities

The NISRA statisticians are based within PSNI and are given access to PSNI's internal systems, once they have been appropriately vetted and trained. The source data and any associated data files are held on secure servers within PSNI and access to systems is controlled and auditable to ensure compliance with relevant legislation. Individual staff member's access to these systems is monitored and periodically checked by the PSNI. Having the statisticians working alongside the suppliers of the data and having close working relationships with IT colleagues means that statistics staff are involved in any relevant process/system design or change.

Changes to the PSNI's systems or processes that might affect the quality of the statistics are discussed in advance and managed through the relevant channels. Communication with IT colleagues takes place on a regular basis at many levels and ensures that data quality is maintained. The statisticians have access to data which is extracted from the NICHE recording system or Star Dome system. Automated processes ensure that the internal management information system and reports are updated each day / week. Access to these extracts enables Statistics Branch to produce reports for publication and to respond to ad hoc requests for information.

Statistics Branch also has a close working relationship with those responsible for road safety within the organisation, primarily Roads Policing Policy Branch and has a central point of contact within the Branch. This allows Statistics Branch to raise any issues directly with the senior officers who can then communicate to all police any areas of concern. Recently a new variable was added to the system as a result of an issue raised by key users regarding the need to collect the alcohol reading against an alcohol offence. Once this change was incorporated into the NICHE IT system and the relevant forms were amended, the Police Inspector from Roads Policing Policy issued a directive to all police officers explaining the change and the need for them to complete these details for all relevant offences in future. This collaborative relationship ensures that we provide the accurate information required for evidence based policy making but also allows us to have the support of senior officers to ensure that police officers submit the correct details in accordance with policy guidance.

3.6 Timeliness and revisions

A balance needs to be obtained between the requirement for figures to be as up-to-date as possible and the requirement to publish figures which are of appropriate quality and completeness for use. Provisional motoring offence statistics are published on a monthly basis, on the last Thursday of each month. Revisions are reported for users in each monthly publication, providing a percentage indication of the scale of the revision. This enables users to gauge the coverage of the provisional figures and more accurately factor for potential change. The monthly figures are superseded by a calendar year report which is published annually at the end of March and contains finalised figures.

There is a lag of around eight weeks between the end of the month and publication of the monthly bulletin, with slightly longer at the end of the calendar year. This is to allow for the processing of the tickets or for case files to be built and for statisticians to ensure that full coverage is attained and the final figures are as accurate as possible. This has been improved in recent years as it was one of the topics mentioned in the feedback from the PSNI Statistics Branch Key User Survey (see section 2.2).

3.7 Comparability

Long –term trends are included in the publication with all changes in relation to motoring offences processes clearly detailed to inform comparability over time. Sources of motoring offences data for other domains include An Garda Síochána - Republic of Ireland and England and Wales.

3.8 Accessibility

In line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, all publication dates are pre-announced in the Statistics Branch publication schedule on the UK publication hub.

Motoring Offence statistics for Northern Ireland are published on the statistics section of the Police Service of Northern Ireland website. The information is published in report format, with accompanying Excel tables and an Open Document Spreadsheet to promote reuse, as permitted under the terms of the Open Government Licence. This user guide is published to provide detailed information on the statistical process and definitions.

Publications are distributed via a range of channels including email distribution lists, social media and internal PSNI systems. Disaggregated motoring offences data is available on the NI Open Data Portal and bespoke information is available free of charge on request.

More information on how Statistics Branch promotes accessibility is available in the PSNI Statistics Branch official statistics documentation.

3.9 Confidentiality

The PSNI's Statistics Branch complies with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Further information can be found in the PSNI Statistics Branch official statistics documentation on the PSNI website. This document includes details of the arrangements for maintaining confidentiality of statistical data including physical security, technical security, staff training, statistical disclosure control and sharing of data with a third party.

Section 4 Strengths and limitations of the data

Strengths

Police recorded statistics relating to motoring offences in Northern Ireland are the main source of official information in trends and statistics relating to disposals issued for motoring offences. The administrative data systems provide access to all of the data, which is primarily input electronically, therefore improving the coverage and quality of the source data. With the addition of the referral for prosecution data in 2017, the statistics provide a full picture of motoring offence enforcement by the PSNI in Northern Ireland.

Limitations

Motoring offence figures relate to those motoring offences that took place within Northern Ireland, they do not include NI residents detected in the Republic of Ireland or in Great Britain.

The figures do not include routine parking and bus lane offences, which is the responsibility of DfI. In addition, motorists can be detected for speeding and red light running by the NI Road Safety Partnership, which is an independent cross departmental body for Road Safety. These figures are not included in the motoring offences statistics as it is a separate organisation however signposting is provided to the latest figures.

The police can issue a Vehicle Defect Rectification Notice for minor faults on vehicles and provide the driver with 7 days to have the vehicle rectified and suitable for use on public roads, however statistics on the number of notices issued are not available.

ANNEX 1   Motoring offences disposals explained

Fixed Penalty Notices

Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) originated as an administrative way to deal with simple parking offences without referring such matters to the courts. The scheme was then expanded to cover minor road traffic offences in the mid-1980s and was again further expanded to incorporate Endorsable and Non Endorsable offences with the introduction of penalty points in October 1997.

a. Endorsable Fixed Penalties

Police officers (in uniform) are able to issue Endorsable Fixed Penalty Notices (EFPNs) for a variety of road traffic offences. The offences range from stopping on a motorway to defective tyres. However, the most common ones are excess speed, using a handheld mobile phone and driver failing to wear a seatbelt. EFPNs involve the endorsement of penalty points on a driving licence and they carry a heavier fine which is currently £60. Penalty Points remain on your licence for a period of 3 years. More serious offences such as driving without insurance can incur fines of up to £200 and six points. Fine collection and revenue reporting are managed by NI Court Service.

b. Non-Endorsable Fixed Penalties

Police officers in uniform currently issue Non-Endorsable Fixed Penalties. There are over 130 offences associated with a non-Endorsable notice ranging from lighting offences to incorrect form of registration marking. They carry a fine of £30 and there are no points endorsed on your driving licence.

The Traffic Management (NI) Order 2005 came into effect on 30th October 2006. The effect of this legislation was to decriminalise the vast majority of parking and waiting offences in Northern Ireland. Responsibility for enforcement of parking/waiting restrictions has transferred to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and is now carried out by Traffic Attendants employed by them.

A driver may be issued with a maximum of one Endorsable Fixed Penalty Notice plus two Non-Endorsable Fixed Penalty Notices relating to the same incident.

Referral for prosecution

Police led traffic prosecutions occur when the offence is of a serious nature and has no corresponding Fixed Penalty Notice or where multiple offences have occurred or where the alleged offender wishes to have the matter(s) heard at court. Where an offending driver has already accumulated a number of penalty points, to the extent that a driving disqualification is now in scope, such cases must be heard at court and will consequently also be subject of a prosecution.

Speed awareness course

Speed awareness courses were introduced in Northern Ireland in 2010. Drivers, depending on the speed at which they were detected, may be offered an opportunity to attend a Speed Awareness Course as an alternative to penalty points. The course, which is available at eight locations throughout Northern Ireland and delivered and managed by an appointed contractor, must be attended within a period of 120 days from the date of detection. Certain restrictions apply to who can qualify for the speed awareness course option.

Discretionary Disposals
Discretionary disposals were introduced in 2011 to provide a speedy, effective outcome tailored to the needs of the victim. In addition they challenge offenders to recognise the impact of their behaviour. They can be used as an alternative method of disposal for dealing with motoring offences. Discretionary disposals were renamed as Community Resolution Notices (CRN) as of 30th June 2016. They follow the same basic principles as discretionary disposals but differ insofar as they should not be routinely issued for motoring offences.

ANNEX 2   Motoring offences publication process checklist

☐ Download FPNs and speed awareness courses from StarDome

☐ Download prosecutions data from PSNI management information system

☐ Email prosecutions data to ICS team for internal reporting system

☐ Snap FPN and speed awareness figures with ICS to ensure match

☐ Check figures in power play development cube which populates internal reporting system

☐ Compile report

☐ Send report and accompanying spreadsheet to Line Manager for QA

☐ PDF word document

☐ Create open document spreadsheet

☐ Email files to Branch admin to populate website for 9.30am release

☐ On day of publication send email to internal customers

☐ On day of publication send email to external customers

☐ On day of publication inform NISRA and PSNI Corporate Communications branch for dissemination via social media