

NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD

MINUTES OF THE 13TH PUBLIC MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD HELD ON THURSDAY, 3 APRIL 2003 AT 12:00 NOON IN WATERSIDE TOWER, BELFAST

PRESENT:

MEMBERS:

Professor Desmond Rea (Chairman)
Mr Denis Bradley (Vice-Chairman)
Viscount Brookeborough
Mr Joe Byrne
Mr Brian Dougherty
Mr Sam Foster
Mr Barry Gilligan
Mrs Pauline McCabe
Mr Alan McFarland
Mr Ian Paisley Jnr
Mr Suneil Sharma
Mr Sammy Wilson

POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Hugh Orde (Chief Constable)
Mr Paul Leighton (Deputy Chief
Constable)
Mr Sam Kinkaid (ACC North Region)
Mr Duncan McCausland (ACC
Operations)
Mr Roy Toner (ACC Corporate
Management)
Head of Command Secretariat
Chief Inspector, Command Secretariat

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Bob McCann (Chief Executive)
Head of Business Affairs
Head of Training and Community
Consultation
One Board Official

Apologies:

Apologies were received from Mr Attwood, Mr Cobain, Mr Hay, Mr Kelly, Lord
Kilclooney, Mr McGrady and Mrs Moore.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

I would like to welcome members of the public and media to the public session. This session will last approximately half an hour or less if all the questions are covered and then there will be a press conference on the 5th floor. I imagine that the reason there are so many press here today really relates to the feedback that we have received this morning in respect of what we have attempted to do as a Board in respect of the Omagh investigation.

I would also welcome the Chief Constable and his colleagues. At the earlier private session we took the opportunity to welcome Mr Paul Leighton, our new Deputy Chief Constable of the PSNI and we do so again at this public session.

Chief Constable, Mr Hugh Orde:

Thank you Chairman.

Briefly, in relation to some recent police activity in March. In keeping of the reports that I have already given in terms of our effort against drugs, this month again, there were a further 112 seizures of illegal drugs, with a total street value of over £1½ million and 79 more arrests. This reflects a significant increase in the amount of cannabis and amphetamines seized compared to last month. In terms of our continuing fight against counterfeit goods, approximately £1½ million worth of counterfeit goods were seized and interestingly, part of this resulted from a liaison with the Turkish police and the closing down of a factory in Turkey.

There was a murder on 9 March where CCTV footage recorded a man dumping a body into the river near a civic building in Lisburn. A man has been arrested and charged with that murder.

In relation to Craigavon, an historic but very important case, the conviction of Clifford McCowan for the murder of Michael McGoldrick, shows the level of commitment that was played in that case right up to the trial and the success for Craigavon in that regard.

Last night you will be aware, as you were there, the Organised Crime Task Force held a public meeting in Belfast City Centre which was attended by over 150 people. Importantly, a large number of those people were from District Policing Partnerships, so it shows that the new District Policing Partnership structure, is already starting to work and that the members are showing a real interest in the organised crime picture in Northern Ireland.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Thank you very much. Mr Joe Byrne has a question relating to Omagh.

Mr Joe Byrne:

Chairman, I would like to ask the Chief Constable, how is the ongoing working relationship between the Garda Siochana and the Police Service in relation to the Omagh bomb investigation? Today we have had Deputy Chief Constable Mike Tonge's report, which I think is a very positive and constructive report. I think the public need reassurance that all possible lines of enquiry are being maximised and exploited to the maximum, particularly given that it was a major cross-border bombing exercise.

Chief Constable, Mr Hugh Orde:

I will ask ACC Kincaid to give further details and if I could just widen the question slightly, in terms of the relationship between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Siochana, which in general is extremely

good. I met with the Commissioner last weekend in relation to general police matters. I meet him regularly and I know my ACCs also meet with their opposite numbers regularly. We do share information. Most of the success against the dissident republicans recently, certainly in South Armagh, have been as a direct result of joint cross-border co-operations, using police officers on both sides of the border. Indeed the Garda Siochana success against the Real IRA just shows their commitment and many of those successes have been as a result of cross-border operations. ACC Kinkaid will give more details on that specific question.

Assistant Chief Constable, Mr Sam Kincaid:

Thank you Chief Constable. I will start from the point that many of the suspects were outside the jurisdiction at the time or shortly after the bomb exploded in Omagh, so naturally any effective investigation is going to rely on good co-operation between the PSNI and the Garda Siochana.

Co-operation is on three levels, the two enquiry teams are in regular contact on routine actions, Detective Superintendent Baxter, the SIO, and the PSNI regularly deal with the dedicated Superintendent in the Garda Siochana.

They have meetings and obviously talk about lines of enquiry. On very sensitive areas, I and Detective Superintendent Norman Baxter would meet with the Deputy Commissioner of Garda Siochana and speak to him about issues that require a slightly different approach. As you have heard, the Chief Constable obviously is in a position with the Commissioner to raise issues.

Press coverage recently has indicated that Garda Siochana refused to interview persons when requested by the PSNI. I want to place on record, that no requests for an interview that we have made have ever been denied to us. Garda Siochana have interviewed, on the basis of questions or issues raised by us, persons when requested to do so. There will naturally be further requests as this investigation goes on. This is a complex investigation, with a number of sensitive issues that have arisen. They have been commented on in the press, issues relating to, for example, allegations made by a serving

Garda Officers that naturally require sensitive co-operation between the two police services.

I am also the ACC for north region and support the comments made by the Chief Constable. We have many other issues regularly that we are dealing with in north region from Fermanagh through to Foyle, in relation to cross-border requirements and cross-border demands that we make from the Garda Siochana and many of our successes are due to the support and help that the Garda Siochana have given us in terms of cross-border investigations.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Mr Sam Foster has a question on other atrocities, particularly in Enniskillen.

Mr Sam Foster:

Thank you Chairman. Chief Constable, I welcome your intention to now begin to further investigate past heinous murders and crimes committed in Northern Ireland during the past thirty years. Such is very necessary, because a large number of people I represent feel that their loved ones are of no consequence as opposed to other people being high profile. For example, I had a cousin murdered in Belfast in 1981 for no apparent reason other than being a businessman. His wife and family still grieve very deeply, along with many others, about the loss of a husband, a father and a brother. Secondly, I was present when the Enniskillen Cenotaph bomb was inflicted upon the assembled gathering at such a solemn occasion and ceremony in 1987. Can you tell me when the renewed pursuance of the terrorists who committed that murder will begin and how vigorous that investigation will be because sixteen years is a long time to wait with no result? Lastly, with the scarcity of personnel, do you feel you will have extreme difficulty in these necessary investigations or how might you prioritise?

Chief Constable, Mr Hugh Orde:

Thank you, that is an interesting question and if I can answer this in order. We decided some time ago, as a matter of best practice, to set up what we call a Cold

Case Review Unit within the crime department of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to look at old cases. It is what has been done in the United Kingdom and we were keen to learn from best practice. Experience, certainly in London, shows that the successes in these cases are normally around forensic evidence and advances in forensic science. We were in the stages of developing that process when unfortunately the Police Federation chose to announce that we had already set up this unit or we were setting up this unit, which I fear has raised expectations, which currently I cannot fulfil for exactly the point you raised, which is the issue of resources.

Our commitment is to set up this unit, to look at those cases, to assess those cases and to focus on the cases where we think we can get a result. But you have hit the nail exactly on the head, I currently have huge demand and I have less resources than were available to the then RUC to investigate these murders in the first instance, albeit of course, the world has moved on substantially. So I now find myself slightly on the back foot in terms of managing expectations as a result of the recent press reporting while I am still in the situation of setting up the unit. So I cannot tell you which investigations will receive priority. What I can say is, when we have the unit up and running, we will announce it formally, we will explain the structure and we will explain how we will prioritise cases.

The far wider issue really that you have opened up is firstly, everyone who lost a loved one is of consequence and is important to us. I find myself in the difficult position of having to explain to people, almost routinely now, that the older the case the more difficult in simple investigative terms it is to secure success in terms of a police conviction based on evidence. The Steven's report, for example, my work in relation to one case where I had a full team of officers, working full-time to solve one particular crime, has not yet led to the conviction of anyone for that particular murder and there over 2,700 unsolved murders here. So in terms of the reality, I face a very complicated situation. It does not mean we are not committed to looking at it, what it does mean is, we will do our level best with the resources I have, which I will then have to balance against the recent murders. We have had fourteen I think now this

year already and my commitment to solve and to prevent crimes in the future. So it is a difficult balance and we will do our best.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Suneil Sharma has a question on racially motivated crime detection rates.

Mr Suneil Sharma:

In the light of recent publicity and the feedback that I am constantly getting of underreporting of racial incidents, can you give me detection rates or conviction rates for reported racial incidents, in reference, particularly, to damage to property and racial assaults?

Chief Constable, Mr Hugh Orde:

I cannot this morning, I was unaware of the question, but I will certainly get that to you by the end of the week.

What I would say in broad terms is, there was a recent television programme where we felt somewhat hard done by, because there is a huge amount of work going on at the district level which you are as aware of as I am, in relation to making sure members of our visible ethnic minorities are protected, be it the Chinese community, the Asian community, the African or Caribbean community. There is a lot of good work. What is interesting was, as a result of that television programme, we had phone calls from members of those communities expressing their concern about how it had been portrayed, because there is a far more positive relationship with the Police Service of Northern Ireland than seemed to come across, and which is a cause of concern, because it raises the fear of crime.

I can certainly get the figures to you and there are some extremely good examples of working, I have had a very constructive relationship with the Chinese community, I have been to their meetings and they seem to have a very well organised way of providing information to the Police Service. In terms of numbers, the numbers are low and are dropping. We tend to measure success in this area by increased reporting

because it tends to show an increased confidence, so we are, likewise with you, a little concerned about the numbers although overall they are fairly low.

Chairman, Mr Desmond Rea:

Mr Suneil Sharma has a further question on the policing plans.

Mr Suneil Sharma:

Chief Constable, the policing plan has a number of performance indicators, can I have your views on whether you would regard conviction rates as a legitimate performance indicator?

Chief Constable, Mr Hugh Orde:

It is rather back to the point that Sam Foster made around getting convictions which tends to suggest a greater satisfaction for victims, I think it is one part of the performance regime but it is not the only one. Currently for example, we are more successful than last year in terms of clearing up crime, but if crime is also increasing then that may not actually represent success, so in terms of the broad policing plan I am fairly relaxed about the targets that have been set in the performance measurements that have been set, there are obviously health warnings on all of them.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr has a question on alleged moles in the NIO and the Police Service.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:

Thank you Chairman and welcome Chief Constable and welcome to your new Deputy,

Mr Paul Leighton. Can I ask, as I am sure you are aware in the paper, there has been a cry, even today, that there has been another £200 million wasted money into another inquiry. I am just wondering, would your resources be better spent on investigating something like this, where there is a claim that there is another mole, either working at the Northern Ireland Office or indeed having access to police material and that material cannot properly be investigated because your resources are stretched?

Would it be the case that you are aware of this report? Can you tell us if there is an investigation going on and can you let us know if there is an arrest imminent with regard to any of the claims that have been made about ongoing spying at both the NIO and in the police establishment?

Chief Constable, Mr Hugh Orde:

I assume you are referring to the Telegraph article. First of all, there is a major investigation as you are aware, into Stormont and Castle Buildings which were substantial leaks, which has proved there was a serious compromise, which is what we are investigating. Arrests have been made so I cannot really talk about that and I have to say, having discussed this particular question, which you were kind enough to give us advance notice of, my senior investigating officer is very concerned that too much gets in the public domain, because obviously it is a very live investigation.

What I can say is, there is no evidence at present to support the allegations made in that particular article. You will be aware that four people have been charged in relation to the matter I have referred to and the file has gone to the DPP.

In general terms, our security review, which we had undertaken within the Police Service of Northern Ireland following the Castlereagh break-in, does include not only just target hardening, but all sorts of issues to make sure we do not have people leaking information from within our own organisation and the learning that we have had has certainly been transferred to other agencies who have suffered compromises, as identified in that particular investigation.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:

So there is information in that article that is actually accurate, that was not just speculation or wild speculation. Was it the case that there could be an IRA mole still leaking information?

Chief Constable, Mr Hugh Orde:

Well there could be all sorts of people, what I am saying is, we have no evidence to suggest any of that has taken place but in the real world that we all live in, there may

well be other people in other organisations that nobody knows about, not one side or the other but in relation to the specific allegations there is no evidence to suggest that is right.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Mr Sammy Wilson has a question on the cost of enquiries.

Mr Sammy Wilson:

Chief Constable, one of the jobs of the Policing Board is to ensure that policing is effective and efficient and that also involves the use of resources. Two months ago I had asked about the cost of the Finnucane and Nelson enquiries, I got a response this morning which

I am very surprised at because we are told the figures available to date that it cost £10.9 million but the police have no records from three years ago. Do the police burn records after three years? Do we have no financial records? Why is it so difficult to get this kind of financial information. One other financial piece of information which I have been trying to get is, why it has cost £11 million on hotel bills for training and conferences over the last year and again have not been able to obtain that information.

Are you concerned first of all, at the lack of financial information which is available and secondly, are you concerned about the way in which money appears to be taken away from front line services for purposes other than what people would regard as proper policing?

Chief Constable, Mr Hugh Orde:

In relation to the figures for the last three years, the Steven's investigation is just under

£4 million, as you are now aware and the Port investigation £6½ million. I spoke to my Head of Finance around the fact that there were not figures going back before that and he has assured me he can get them, but he was concerned to get these figures out, so you had some information. I will get you the other figures, they can be achieved, I

don't know exactly what the procedures were a few years ago as I was not here, but I am sure we can find that out.

In relation to the £11 million, I am unsighted on that but I will certainly look into that as it seems training and conferences can mean all sorts of things. Training is essential, I have inherited a training deficit but I am very keen to train my officers, for example, in CID training we have 200 new officers to train and that is an expensive business, conferences add value but I have no idea how that breaks down as I have not been asked that particular question before. It is something we would need to look at and one big plus I think is, by devolving budgets to local districts, by giving power and responsibility to those who have to deliver front line policing, then you will start to see a lot more interest being taken at the right level about what the money is being spent on. If you are a District Commander and you have to make hard choices because you have a fixed budget, then it will be focusing on police priorities rather than things that would be nice to do, but maybe we cannot afford to do. We have also got District Policing Partnerships who may have a role to play in that regard as well. Also, a performance regime that is now in place that the ACCs will visit every district and ask them to explain what they are spending their money on. So in terms of the future, I am confident we do have a robust system in place that will hold people to account.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

We have no further questions, could I say thank you Chief Constable and your colleagues for taking the questions in this session. We will now adjourn for the press conference which will be held on the 5th floor. Thank you.

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