

NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD

**MINUTES OF THE 5TH PUBLIC MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND
POLICING BOARD MEETING HELD ON 6 JUNE 2002 AT 12 NOON IN
WATERSIDE TOWER, CLARENDON DOCK, BELFAST**

PRESENT:

MEMBERS:

Professor Desmond Rea
(Chairman)
Mr Denis Bradley (Vice-Chairman)
Mr Alex Attwood
Viscount Brookeborough
Mr Joe Byrne
Mr Fred Cobain
Mr Brian Dougherty
Mr Sam Foster
Mr Barry Gilligan
Mr William Hay
Mr Tom Kelly
Lord Kilclooney
Mrs Pauline McCabe
Mr Alan McFarland
Mr Eddie McGrady
Mrs Rosaleen Moore
Mr Ian Paisley, Jnr
Mr Sammy Wilson

**POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN
IRELAND:**

Mr Colin Cramphorn (Acting Chief
Constable)
Superintendent, Command
Secretariat
Director of Media & Public Relations

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Six Board Officials

IN ATTENDANCE:

Representatives from the Police
Staff Associations

Apologies:

Mr Sharma.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

I am now calling upon the Acting Chief Constable to make his opening statement.

Acting Chief Constable, Mr Colin Cramphorn:

Thank you, Chairman. I think there is little else that I can usefully feature on in this opening set of remarks Chairman other than the circumstances that we have been facing over the last five days in East Belfast. I know there is a pre-notified question coming to that effect. So I will be brief.

Certainly the circumstances that we have seen and I have gone on record publicly as saying that this is probably the worst public disorder that we have seen in the last four years, and that certainly we have faced a level of violence, which is of the utmost severity. I used the phrase that I felt that both communities were sleep walking into the abyss. Some journalists have accused me of hyping up the scenario but I do not believe that to be the case at all. I really do believe that the public order we've been facing is of that severity. I will not rehearse here the bold statistics we can go into them later on if required.

I would just like to reiterate my earlier remarks and appeals to members of this Board, to the wider civic community and anyone with influence in these communities. This really is a lose/lose situation. No-one is winning, no one is getting any benefit from this and everybody needs to recognise that, and we need to de-escalate the situation.

I am grateful that some help has been given in that regard in perhaps the last twenty-four to forty-eight hours and some small steps have begun to be achieved in that direction. So I am grateful for that and I would ask for that to continue. But Chairman I think it is perhaps better use of the time if I now make myself available for questions that Members undoubtedly have.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:

Can the Acting Chief Constable give us an indication of the number of republicans that the police have been able to identify and arrest as a result of the wanton destruction that we witnessed on our streets recently in that part of Belfast? Can he indicate to us the reduction in the police ability or capability to deal with public order problems because of the decline in personnel? Can he indicate to us whether or not they have any snatch squads available to lift these people who are hell bent on destroying our city? Can he indicate to us what his strategy is to actually deal with this, if before as he quite rightly says sleep walks them into the abyss.

I have a second question Mr Chairman with regards to drug seizures. The Acting Chief Constable has given us some very interesting statistics on the increase in the number of units of cocaine which have been seized, it has trebled from last year, and also the issue to do with heroin. There has been a slight decrease in the amount of heroin that has been seized. Can he indicate to us if their campaign to stamp drug abuse problems is being hindered by the lack of personnel that you actually have available to you, and indeed these other growing problems of street disorder that we have seen in parts of Belfast.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Mr Sammy Wilson

Mr Sammy Wilson:

Can I first of all say that I agree with the Acting Chief Constable of his assessment of the situation in East Belfast, indeed I think many people feel that they have fallen over the edge of the abyss already - in terms of what has happened to their own personal lives as a result of the disruption.

Can I just ask one question Acting Chief Constable from you? I support the way in which the police have tried to keep the problems of the interface to a minimum but its not just a perception, the reality is that the unionist side of the divide is policed and on the nationalist side the police are relying on self policing. Perhaps you could tell us whether or not, despite the fact that five people have been shot, have there been any search operations for the guns or to gather evidence against those who carried out the gun attacks on the people in the Cluan Place?

Secondly, I toured the area on two occasions and have seen piles of stones being stock piled, not even in secretive places but in the middle of the street for the next assault on the nearby houses. I wonder if there is effective policing in the area, how those stock piles are allowed to be so publicly accumulated?

Thirdly, on a number of occasions along with your own police officers I have observed from the bedroom windows of nearby houses mobs of up to 200 assembling right beside the dividing line which separates the nationalist area from the unionist area without any police presence there to either disperse those crowds or to stop them launching attacks. Perhaps you would tell us what restraints there are in policing the nationalist side of the divide in the same way as the unionist side of the divide has been policed? In other words why is it not possible to keep youths and others away from the dividing line on the nationalist side, as I believe it has been desirable to do on the unionist side?

Chairman:

Lord Kilclooney

Lord Kilclooney:

It is not simply on the question of these rioting people, but also on crime generally in Northern Ireland. It is all reflecting on the size of the police service in Northern Ireland, the number of personnel available. Patten foolishly recommended a reduction from nine thousand to seven and a half thousand. We are already way down towards six thousand, and I am concerned that in areas which were generally peaceful like Newtownards for example, that there has been a significant increase in ordinary crime, whether its attacking a pregnant lady or stealing cars or burning down a special care school, things like that happening on a regular basis now in the Ards area, and it comes back to the size of the police service. So I would like the Acting Chief Constable to comment on the availability of personnel in the police service at the moment in Northern Ireland. Is it true that across the whole of Northern Ireland at night-time, when many of these criminal events take place, we now have only five hundred police officers in service?

Chairman:

Sorry, I think the questions have piled up, so would you mind Acting Chief Constable.

Acting Chief Constable, Mr Colin Cramphorn:

Yes Chairman, there is a fair agenda there, which I will try and do my best to work through. I think it might help if I just perhaps go into a little bit of East Belfast generic before moving on into some of the detail perhaps.

As you are aware, we actually have to go back to Saturday 11th May to trace the origins of the current difficulties that we are having in East Belfast. The

disorder of course centres on the interface between the Short Strand and the lower Newtownards Road. As you all know it was serious then, and both police and military resources were deployed and baton rounds had to be used.

Critical comment was made about the search operation that we conducted in the Short Strand on the 14th May. That search operation was necessary as in the previous weekends rioting, shots had been fired from the Short Strand area and we had received reliable information as to where we might find evidence associated with those actions.

It was clearly the aim of the search operation that was undertaken to recover weapons and arrest offenders, if that was possible, and of course to prevent any similar reoccurrence. During that operation six houses were searched, of which five permitted access voluntarily. Damage was caused to one front door and the search record shows that accidental damage was also done to a vase and a bedroom mirror. Significant damage was however caused to that house by rioters, who attacked the house with the police inside it, missiles including acid and ammonia bombs were rained on the house and rioters also used roadwork barriers to boulder down the door of that house. This was purposeful and organised activity and significant numbers of men were involved in it.

At two particular locations throughout the Short Strand there was evidence of organisation taking place and indeed cars were driven into positions to block police vehicles in place to hinder their exit and removal from the Short Strand. Searches at the locations were therefore cut short and that was a rational decision in view of the escalating violence that was being experienced. Police fired three baton rounds with two hits. Ten were fired by military colleagues. Nine police officers were injured at that time and two soldiers.

Now, following that earlier outbreak of disorder, there was a brief period of calm in the area but then the interfaces began to show serious tensions on

Friday 31st May. Large numbers of properties were damaged as you all know and in particular Clandeboye Gardens and Cluan Place. In that particular interface a number of properties were abandoned.

Twenty-eight police officers have been injured over this period since Friday 31st including one that received a gunshot to the leg. Police returned fire in that regard and it is believed that a gunman was injured. The basis for that being that blood was found at the firing point that the gunman had occupied. Sixty-one baton rounds were fired with the majority fired during the sustained rioting that took place on Monday 3rd June during the evening and early morning. Over a period of three days, over forty live rounds have been fired by gunmen from both sides at police. We cannot be more precise than that because many of these bursts of live fire have been that, automatic bursts, and its difficult to be one hundred percent accurate in counting rounds in those circumstances. Six civilians have been shot. Gunmen from both sides have been active as I have said, and indeed last evening the most recent incidents of shooting were shots fired through the windows of dwellings in Seaford Street, Mountfoot Street, but I am pleased to say no one was injured by those other than shock.

During the same period six pipe bombs and thirty-nine petrol bombs have been thrown at the security forces. I have made my position very clear over the period as to what I think we face and why I think its important that we should, all of us reflect on what lies ahead, if this is not de-escalated. Two persons have been arrested thus far arising from this rioting. I am afraid I do not know what their community background is and clearly we are now into a phase of reviewing evidence of this weekends activity, and that will no doubt lead to further arrests in due course.

In terms of capability both Mr Paisley and Lord Kilclooney had asked me different aspects of what I will summarise is under that heading. It is quite clear that our capability in terms of our available numbers have reduced over the last twelve months. We had as a result of the re-structuring of the service

to re-organise our entire public order organisation and we have come down by about seventeen/eighteen percent in terms of our actual numbers of units available to deploy, and clearly that is a significant reduction. It is not just about public order as Lord Kilclooney rightly indicates when these TSG Units, as we now call them, are not engaged in public order work, then they are engaged in crime initiatives, they are engaged in community safety work, they are engaged across a whole range of police activities. And self evidently if they are committed day after day, night after night on long shifts involving public order, then they are not available for the kind of anti-crime work that I am sure we would all like to see them engaged in, rather than the public order tasking and that must have a knock-on affect in terms of recorded crime and our ability to combat crime.

Moving now to Mr Paisley's question about a snatch squad, that is one of a whole range of public order tactics that may or may not be appropriate depending on the level of threat that is faced and the environment in which any given public disorder is occurring. I was asked the other day, how was it that if a football crowd of a thousand rioted there would be a large number of arrests, but if in these circumstances there would only be a small number of arrests.

Of course it is perhaps rather trite to reply, but football crowds do not go armed with weapons, including blast bombs, petrol bombs and firearms. That is the difference. The threat must be taken into account in all that is done, and when police and soldiers are coming under live fire it would be a breach of my responsibilities, and the operational commanders on the grounds responsibilities, under health and safety legislation, to actually deploy people in that way, because the threat is such that they must take other steps including adopting hard cover. So a snatch arrest operation may be appropriate in certain types of public order scenario, but certainly not the sort of threats we have been facing over this past weekend.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Alan McFarland and Fred Cobain have related questions.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:

Mr Chairman I think it is an indictment to this Board that we ask this man to do a job for us and he tells us the reason why he cannot do it is because he does not have adequate resources.

Chairman:

Could you give your question at this stage Mr McFarland and then Mr Cobain because it is related to public disorder. Acting Chief Constable I was also going to give you the scope to reply to Mr Wilson.

Mr Alan McFarland:

Acting Chief Constable I am sure you welcome as I do the Ombudsman's report on baton rounds, which clearly sets out the responsible way in which the police have handled the riot situations and the use of baton rounds on seven occasions last year. Indeed the Ombudsman I think on one occasion takes you to task or takes the service to task for using them belatedly rather than in time. The Board has a duty of care as you do to look after our police officers and I notice that while twenty-six rioters I think were hit on the legs on these occasions over one hundred and seventeen police officers were injured. I wonder why rioters are being allowed to get so close to police lines and why the system allows so many police officers to be injured.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Mr Fred Cobain

Mr Fred Cobain:

Can I just go back to East Belfast situation for a moment? The Acting Chief Constable talked about communities walking into the abyss, can I say this Acting Chief Constable, these are not spontaneous riots, you know and I know perfectly well, a lot of this is organised by paramilitaries in these areas. Ordinary communities do not have AK47's or petrol bombs or pipe bombs, these are not spontaneous riots, a lot of people, come into these areas from outside of the areas and you have identified a number of individuals, high ranking paramilitaries in these areas. It is very difficult for communities in there to stand up to people in these areas, so I think you need to differentiate between ordinary people living there in Cluan Place or in Clandeboye Street, and paramilitaries who are going in exploiting the situation for paramilitary means, that is the first thing.

The second thing is, over this last number of days you can see related incidents in Belfast. Last night the attack on Springfield Road Police Station, completely out of the blue we have a number of youths who petrol bombed the Springfield Road Police Station. It may be a coincidence of course that the Whiterock parade is about to go on that road a fortnight from now. We had an incident on Duncairn Gardens where the Tour of the North is going to parade there in a weeks time, there is nothing new in all of this. This is large scale. Paramilitaries in these areas are exploiting peoples fears in these areas, and you know and I know, and this is what the other question I need to ask you. You said when there was shooting in East Belfast, it was carried out by the UVF, there were five protestants shot in that area and you cannot tell whether it was the provisional IRA in on it. Could you give the Board an idea how you know it is UVF gunmen operating, but when there is protracted gunfire in this area you do not know whether it is the UDA, whether it is the Provisionals or INLA?

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

We will start with Mr Wilson's question please. Thank you very much.

Acting Chief Constable, Mr Colin Cramphorn:

Chairman, returning to Mr Wilson, in my initial statement I referred to search operations conducted earlier in May, and I said there that those search operations were conducted on the basis of intelligence, and of course that would be the basis on which we would conduct further search operations. Lawful requirement means that you cannot just conduct blanket search operations. You have to have reasonable suspicion and you have to have something to form a reasonable suspicion, and that is usually intelligence material. Now at this stage, there has been nothing for us to action in that regard over the immediate weekend but it is still very much in the hot aftermath of the weekend, and I would expect that situation and picture to develop over the coming days and weeks.

You talk about stock piling of ammunition, yes indeed there is a lot of it. Like you, I have been out in that area over this weekend with my officers. Two nights I was in both the locations you indicated, yes there is a lot of debris lying around, where low retaining walls and dividing walls between the front yards of the property have been demolished and broken up and so and so forth. You know, frankly it is not our capability to go in there and clean the streets, and because of the disorder there is not a willingness on the part of other agencies or contractors or anybody else to go into those areas. For instance, contractors were supposed to be finishing the work on the gate in Madrid Street on Tuesday, they declined to attend because of their perception of the risks and the threat involved in the area at this point in time. So its not just a case of the police can go in there and gather up all the bricks, where we can remove the ammunition, it is in our self-interest to do so, and we will do so. But its not always viable, or possible for us to do that.

In terms of what you asked me, were there any restraints that I was operating under. Well, the restraints are all the ones that you would be familiar with, starting with the European Convention on Human Rights, working our way down to the issue of capability and available resources that we have been talking about. If your question was asking me have I been given political directions as to how I am to approach this problem, the answer is most certainly not.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

I am anxious now; there are lot of people to ask questions.

Mr Sammy Wilson:

The question I did ask there is a physical police presence keeping people away from dividing walls on the unionist side, why has there not been the same physical presence on the nationalist side so allowing youths to gather?

Acting Chief Constable, Mr Colin Cramphorn:

There has been a physical police presence on the Clandeboye Gardens side, I know you have spoken to the local commander about that on several occasions, because I was with him on one occasion when you were speaking to him about that. You know we have kept that presence in there since the events of Sunday night and we will continue to do that. So it is not right to say that we were only on one side of the interface.

Chairman, with your blessing I will move on now, to the issue of the Ombudsman's report and the question of baton rounds. Obviously I have studied that report and we will continue to look at the details to see what lessons we can learn from that report. The specific point you raise is about closeness to police lines and the impact that has on police casualties.

The text book on public order policing says the one thing you should never do is allow yourself to be fixed in static positions because that is when you become vulnerable, and that is when you have to watch for the risk of casualties. Unfortunately, in policing public order in Northern Ireland, so often that is exactly what we are forced to do in the police because these are very often set piece events. Marches are a text book example, if I may say so, where we have to adopt certain positions in order to try and ensure that the lawful determinations of the Parade Commission are carried out. We have to stay in those positions and that makes us vulnerable. So the very nature of the deployment contributes to the problem that you highlight. And as you have also highlighted, yes the Board has health and safety responsibilities in this respect as I do. We have also, of course, to operate within the framework of proportionality and whatever measures we take must be proportional to the threat that we are facing.

I think it is fair to say that there was concern last year and that was the period that the Ombudsman's report refers to of course, that the new rules of engagement, if I can call them that, which are UK wide in respect of the use of baton rounds now, were prescriptive and I think there was a period where officers began to have a lack of confidence in what would happen if they did deploy baton rounds. That confidence is I think partially restored by events as they have turned out over the last year and indeed the Ombudsman's report makes clear, again as you have highlighted, that perhaps individual commanders on the ground were being overly cautious in their responses.

Clearly this is a delicate balance to be struck because you know if somebody gets it wrong on the other side and deploys a baton round when it is not proportional and necessary then clearly that becomes an illegal act. So there is a fine balance to be struck. But I think our officers are feeling more comfortable having had twelve months now with those new rules of engagement in operation. They understand what they mean and they understand how they must work them and document them, and of-course the Ombudsman continues to investigate every incident. Her first report related

to the first seven, I think it was, incidents last year. No doubt there will be follow up reports on subsequent incidents and we have just a snap shot there. We do not have the broad landscape, so we must take it for what its worth, and move on and look at each of the subsequent incidents. I know Chairman you have received some of the subsequent incident reports that the Ombudsman has issued. Thus far we have been managing to strike that balance in a way that has met with the approval of the Ombudsman in her investigations.

Mr Cobain then raises the issue of paramilitary involvement in the disorder, yes of course we have been saying for several days now that we have evidence of paramilitary manipulation of the circumstances on both sides of the line, in both communities. Yes, it is right that Springfield Road was attacked last night, fortunately not too seriously and the matter was soon dealt with and indeed there was a robbery incident I am aware of in Duncairn Gardens last night.

I think really what you were driving at, and you will correct me if I am wrong, is attribution for the events that have gone on in the last four and five days in East Belfast. The reason I am able to be clear about who has fired shots on one side is because that is the depth and breadth of the intelligence picture that has become available to me. And that of course is as you have highlighted in respect of loyalist paramilitaries. In respect of nationalist paramilitaries, there are actually three groups who have been operating in the Short Strand area, and that is part of the problem. I cannot be sure which of those three groups has actually been responsible for the shots fired, and until I am sure of course I am not going to make an attribution. I can certainly say that we, the police have come under fire from those nationalist paramilitaries as well as the other rounds discharged that you are aware of that have caused the casualties amongst the loyalist communities there. But as I say there are three nationalist paramilitary groupings that have been active on the ground and I cannot differentiate sufficiently well between them at this present time to definitively say it was group A, B or C.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Could I ask you if you could take, Mr Attwood who has another question on public disorder, and then if you could reply to Mr Paisley Junior's question about drugs seizures. And then two final questions, one from Mr Byrne in relation in particular I think to his constituency, and also to Mr Foster questions about Fermanagh and Enniskillen.

Mr Alex Attwood:

Chairman, could I first acknowledge Acting Chief Constable the frank and sobering nature of the comments that you have made so far in relation to public order situations generally, and in East Belfast in particular. You should know I think that certainly the people that we represent have been contacting our offices and I am sure it is a common experience round this table that there is growing exasperation and frustration within the general community about what a few in some communities are doing both to themselves and to others, and that there is an acknowledgement of the very difficult positions that the police are being put in. Whilst questions will always be asked and will be asked by the likes of us about policing operations, that should not detract from the fact that there is a wider acknowledgement and appreciation of the situation that the police are in and what is really going on. Part of which is, I do not expect you necessarily to comment on this, is that there are people who are not in favour of the new beginning for policing, who want to destabilise that new beginning on one hand and on the other hand are fast running out of excuses for not signing up to the new beginning. Consequently they are developing strategies to exploit community tensions in the one hand and creating public situations of disorder which put the police in difficult places during those moments. And that is part of what is driving what is going on in East Belfast because what is there is clear similarities between activities of paramilitary groups in North and East Belfast and last night in West Belfast, and there is certainly on the republican side particularly an agenda there.

My two questions are these. The first is can you indicate when you anticipate that water cannon will be available to the PSNI to assist in managing public order situations? Secondly, given what you said about the depth and breadth of the intelligence picture that you have got in respect of loyalist paramilitaries, and given the fact that there has not been that much of a prosecution rate against loyalist paramilitaries given the depth and breadth of your intelligence picture now, do you have any more confidence that you will be able to identify and prosecute both those who are engaged in public disorder and more particularly those who are orchestrating it, on both the loyalist side and the republican side?

Acting Chief Constable, Mr Colin Cramphorn:

Thank you for your comments of support Mr Attwood and as you rightly say I will not comment on the second part of your statement. Moving to the issue of water cannon. There are two aspects to this, one is the immediate concern over the coming months of the summer season, and the other is the longer-term issue of procurement of water cannon in respect of the PSNI. We have entered into an agreement again with our Belgium colleagues for the summer and two of the water cannon from Belgium have arrived in Northern Ireland. We have them undergoing training at the present time and we hope to have them available by Friday night for deployment if necessary, but that depends on successful training being completed. It may be that it rolls over into next week before that is completed, but we are making all due haste that we can in that regard. That will be the immediate resource that will be available to us this summer.

I would have to stress that water cannon are not a cure all and there are certain scenarios in which the Belgium water cannon, because they are of a particular generation of this particular type of equipment, would not be suitable for deployment in the circumstances, for instance, that we faced on Monday evening and Tuesday in East Belfast.

The second part of water cannon is of course procurement and I think members will be aware Chairman that we put a business case to the Northern Ireland Office for purchase of water cannon under Patten non-severance funding. That agreement for purchase has now been forthcoming from both the Treasury and the Northern Ireland Office and we are proceeding with that purchase now. But as I have said to one or two members in private conversations this is not like buying a Ford Mondeo, one does not just go down to the local water canon dealership and obtain one. These are bespoke vehicles and have to be built to order and therefore there is a long lead time for manufacture and it will be next year before our own water cannon are in service in Northern Ireland and therefore available to us year round for whatever challenges may come.

Moving onto the issue of prosecutions, we have actually been in our own quiet way achieving quite a lot in respect of the North Belfast situation. I have some figures here, if you can bear with me just a second, I think I am right in saying that we have arrested sixteen and reported another nine individuals for public order offences in the North Belfast area during the month of May. Now these are offences that may date back a number of months but it illustrates the point that we do not just forget about it once the riots finished. We get on with the issue of reviewing the evidence available and identifying who we can and moving forward with that. And that will of-course be the case in the troubles that have occurred in East Belfast. What I do not have is a breakdown of those by community background and it is not normally the way we would gather such data. I would be confident that some of the key players in East Belfast recently would be identified in due course, for instance the gunman I alluded to earlier. We have blood at the firing point. Clearly that gives us a DNA profile of our gunman. So at some point it is very likely that that individual will be identified and a prosecution will be brought as a result.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Could you take the drug seizure question?

Acting Chief Constable, Mr Colin Cramphorn:

Chairman, certainly. You were highlighting if I recall Mr Paisley, cocaine seizures up, heroin seizures down, and you were asking me to give you a view on did I think we were being successful or otherwise and were we being hindered by lack of personnel.

I do not think you can read too much into fluctuations of particular seizures over a short time frame, there is a need to look at it over a longer time frame to get any sensible sort of trends. For obvious reasons because we may have a particularly successful operation at a given point in time for a particular type of drug which may give a blip, if I can put it that way, in the trend line of seizures. So I would not read anything of great significance at this stage into a slight decline in the heroin seizures.

I think it is fair however to highlight the growth in cocaine seizure because that is something that we have been seeing on a longer term trend line. Cocaine was a drug that was almost unknown in Northern Ireland in the relatively recent past and yet clearly that continues to grow and is a cause for concern to us. And yes of course if we were not having to deploy the large numbers of officers that we are to public order then some of them could be engaged in operations that would be countering drugs. Although that would tend to be street level drug abuse and distribution, rather than the higher level import and organised elements, organised criminality elements involved with the drug trade. That is specialist work that is undertaken by specialist units like the drug squad. They are suffering in terms of strains on their resources in the same way that the entire organisation is at this point in time. But of course we do work with many colleagues on this particular issue at that higher level, our colleagues in police services in Great Britain, our colleagues in the Garda, our colleagues in the custom service and so on. So you have to

I think look at the global picture and not just one segment of it if I may say so in the resourcing terms.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Mr Joe Byrne

Mr Joe Byrne:

Acting Chief Constable. Can I ask you Acting Chief Constable about a serious apparent development of what I would call serious crime in Strabane and Omagh districts?

In Strabane at Christmas time there was a robbery took place at a major retail store, about £100,000 cash and about four weeks ago we had a robbery at a drinks and cigarette cash and carry in Omagh, where cigarettes to the tune of £520,000 were stolen. We also had a business man attacked in Omagh recently allegedly looking for money, and the man ended up with eight stitches, petrol poured over him and his son had to witness it. Can I give him assurance, Acting Chief Constable that maximum investigation resources are going to be deployed at these sort of serious crimes and that we hopefully will see some results soon.

Acting Chief Constable, Mr Colin Cramphorn:

That depends how you define maximum resources, Mr Byrne. We have featured quite heavily on resources here today. One of the areas that are particularly stretched within the services at this point in time is detective resources. Quite clearly there are a number of enquiries, which simply have to be staffed to the full level at this point in time. They are obvious, I am not giving any secrets away if I were to mention the Omagh bomb enquiry, if I were to mention Castlereagh aggravated burglary enquiry, two obvious examples. When those levels of resourcing are removed the cover is spread

very thin in terms of what is left for major crime investigations. I do not think its any secret that there are homicides that enter into what we would call category A on the national classification system, which in any other part of the UK would get a very sizeable pool of resource ploughed into them to investigate because of the concerns that they create in the public mind, which we simply cannot resource to that standard.

You have commissioned work Chairman from, or rather you have invited me to commission work and I have taken that invite up with, HMI David Blakey who will be coming into look at all these issues relating specifically to homicides, but it could extend to the broader issue of major crime. The fact simply is that we do not have the level of detective resources to deploy in the way that colleagues would in other parts of the UK. So within that constraint, yes of course we will be directing resource to the types of major crime that you indicated, but it is only right that I should set the parameters for you in that way so that you understand that the same offence if it had taken place in a fictitious county shall we say in England, which I will call Lancashire for the ease of exposition, would likely to have much greater resource attached to it than we can give it here.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Mr Sam Foster.

Mr Sam Foster:

Thank you Chairman. With what the last answer has suggested, it does not say much for my question. It is past tense, but its still very, very presently concerning. That is, yesterday, we had ex President Bill Clinton in Enniskillen opening the Clinton Centre. That bomb took place almost fifteen years ago, the 8th November 1987, I was there on that particular day. From that day to this there is no sign whatsoever of anybody being brought to account for that. People are very much concerned in the Enniskillen area, they seem to

imagine, and possibly rightly so, that they are forgotten about, when everyone else is being highlighted. That is one point of my question Acting Chief Constable.

The other point to is that individual murders throughout the land some have never been heard tell of, no explanation at all as to why they were murdered. I have relatives myself who were murdered and not a thing has ever come up about them. The loved ones of those people feel very, very disgruntled that everybody else has been highlighted. Are they people who have been forgot about or are they people of no consequence.

The third part of my question is, the suggested closure of two border stations in Fermanagh. I am aware that this consultation has now gone to the public, I have had an explanation as to the reasons why, but I do not think that is going to satisfy the people of those border areas who are going to feel very, very much exposed, they are bringing the police to the people they say, but at the same time this is going to make it more awkward. So could you give me some idea of what the intention really is, or can you give me some consolation whatsoever, sir?

Maybe a small last one, in your report you refer to no explosives had been picked up recently, semtex used to be a big one. Are we aware of any of the large stock piles of semtex by the IRA at this particular time?

Acting Chief Constable, M Colin Cramphorn:

Perhaps just to deal with the last one. You can take it from me if we were aware we would be doing something about it, to decommission it. The fact that there is not been any immediate seizures tells us the tale that we have not anything to go after at this point in time.

To go back to the principal thrust of your question. We briefly at the last meeting, Chairman, discussed the Enniskillen enquiry and I indicated at that

stage that the Regional ACC was having a desk top review carried out. There is a link to my previous response to Mr Byrne in the sense that in Great Britain it would have had what is called a cold case review. We as a service aspire to get to the point where we can do that sort of cold case review activity. But once again it is simply beyond our resources to do that at the present time.

I suspect that this would be something which will again emerge from David Blakely's work in due course and that picks up your second point about the relatives of various murder victims down the years feeling that perhaps they have been forgotten and so forth. What has happened in the last four years is that a full central archive of all these unresolved cases has been created and the material is available to us properly indexed and so forth so that we are in a position to start doing cold case reviews at some point in the future, when resources may become available to us. But I would not hold out any immediate hope at the present time.

In the last reporting period for instance since we were last together, we have had something like seven murders, I think, that is non-security related murders. We are running to stand still to put it bluntly, let alone trying to do cold case reviews. Well you may say that I would have to say that. If we were not deploying the sorts of huge numbers of police officers to public order and security duties that we are having to deploy day in day out, then perhaps personnel could be switched into some of these other areas of activity. It's a chicken and egg question.

Finally, you talk about border stations. Now you are quite right, there has been a review being led by the DCU Commander in Fermanagh of all the real estate in Fermanagh and how to make the best use of it given the resources now available to him and so on. You asked me what is the real purpose. Well the real purpose of consultation is exactly what it says it is, to go out and talk to people and find out what their thoughts, views, feelings, fears, hopes and all the other relevant concerns are so that they can be taken into

consideration when any recommendations may be brought forward to this Board. But I would have to say to you that an estate of 190 odd buildings, which we have at this point in time for a down sized service, is unsustainable whichever way you look at it.

We are going to reach a point where we have got lots of police stations and people guarding them and nothing else happening if we are not very careful. So there does have to be some rationalisation of the building estate in due course. That will be done through this process of consultation, through this Board, because you are the owners of that property, and ultimately of-course you have to set the budget and that is another major constraint frankly, the affordability of the estate that we currently have given the budget that we have. So all of those factors have to be taken into account and will be taken into account, in this Board I am quite sure. So, first things first, consultation, then we will move onto the next stage and I am sure we will have plenty of other discussions and opportunities for them.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Mr Sammy Wilson tells me he has got a one-line question. I hope justifies a one-line answer.

Mr Sammy Wilson:

At the last Board meeting you supplied us with information regarding the SPED scheme. Seventy-five according to the information given to us, seventy-five applications have been made from officers who were affected by the Castlereagh break-in. If you feel that degree of threat is apparent and the information is in the hands of the IRA as we have heard on previous occasions, what is that saying about the IRA's cease-fire?

Acting Chief Constable, Mr Colin Cramphorn:

Well, Chairman. The cessation of hostilities by the various paramilitary groups is essentially a political issue; it is essentially an issue on which Secretary of State makes a political judgement. My job is to provide the security assessments that sit behind that political judgement. I have been in discussion both with yourself and with the Ministers this week on that very issue and that assessment is to be made by Secretary of State is not a matter than I can give you an assessment on here today.

Chairman, Professor Desmond Rea:

Just to bring this to an end, I am sorry I have said no to a number of other people, but we are over. Could I say thank-you Acting Chief Constable. A very sincere thank you for your frank and honest answers to the questions that have been put to you today.

Just with respect to the human resource issue, which has come up on a number of occasions in this open session. The background security situation is of course a constraint upon your management of your resources. The current civil disorder in Belfast is also a severe constraint and I think all of us on this Board would endorse what Mr Attwood said earlier. But this Board takes extremely serious the human resources that you have available to you and it is high in our priorities as you well know. We are pushing on at this and seeking to devise a model which would assist your decision making and ours in respect of the issue. It is an issue, which we deem to be critical and that has to be addressed.