



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Chief Constable's Accountability Report

to Northern Ireland
Policing Board

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26 April 2024

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2 May 2024



**we care
we listen
we act**

Contents

Foreword	3
Finance and Resource Update	6
Outcome 1: We have a Safe Community	7
Outcome 2: We have confidence in Policing	11
Outcome 3: We have Engaged and Supportive Communities	12
Our People, Your Service	14
Forward Look	15

Foreword

Ever since taking up post as Chief Constable of this remarkable organisation, I have consistently voiced my concerns over the current financial settlement and diminishing headcount. We have been providing a Service to the people of Northern Ireland based on what we can afford to do, not what they need us to do. Quite simply, it is affecting our ability to keep people safe and we are now at a tipping point. I recognise that each public service in Northern Ireland, and indeed each police force in Great Britain, continually make statements about inadequate funding. However, the Police Service of Northern Ireland has suffered more financially than any of these bodies. Even when compared against all other such organisations we are an outlier of inadequate funding.

I will always be open and honest with our key partners, the public and my colleagues, so everyone has a clear understanding of what a failure to address the decline in policing will mean for them and the type of service they can expect to see in the coming years.

I have written to the Minister of Justice, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Policing Board, among others, setting out a high level assessment of the immediate challenges we face, the impact on our ability to serve communities across Northern Ireland, and my ask with regard to future recruitment and funding.

Failure to properly resource the Police Service of Northern Ireland is beginning to have a serious impact and is becoming increasingly noticeable. The truth is that

things are now taking longer. We are becoming a less visible, accessible and responsive Service. I have made it clear to these key stakeholders that going forward, the public and our partners will find the following:

- Non - emergency calls will take longer to answer. The public will have to wait longer for officers to attend non-emergency incidents **and critically, emergency incidents.**
- Our capacity to investigate crime will be reduced and slowed. Fewer officers investigating a rising number of crimes will mean slower investigations, and a less satisfactory service to victims.
- There will be a detrimental impact on our ability to support national security operations, vital to driving down the threat from violent dissident republicans.
- We will have to prioritise investigations. There will be knock on delays for the criminal justice system.
- Our Neighbourhood Policing function will continue to shrink. Recovering from the impact on neighbourhood policing will take a protracted period.
- There will be a reduced proactive presence on our roads despite rising road deaths.
- Following on from the decision to reduce the number of Station Enquiry Offices in Northern Ireland to 17, we will continue to actively review access to, and closure of, further police stations across Northern Ireland.
- Our ability to respond to sustained protest and public disorder will be reduced.



- The Public sector in Northern Ireland is under huge pressure and in order to protect our core functions our ability to support other public sector colleagues will reduce.

I have set out the numbers I believe the Police Service of Northern Ireland need to protect people and fight crime. The findings of the recent independent review of our demand and capacity, which compared the available evidence and benchmarking with other jurisdictions and services, made it clear there is a compelling case for a police officer headcount of 8,500 and up to 3,000 police staff. Obviously, this is well in excess of the circa 6,400 police officers and 2,400 police staff we have currently.

Since 2010, public spending in Northern Ireland on public order and safety has risen by just 8%, demonstrating the real financial difficulties facing the Justice sector. However, during this same period, the Police Service of Northern Ireland budget has **fallen** by 3%. At the same time, the Health budget has increased from £3.5bn to £7.76bn (121%). Our policing colleagues in An Garda Síochána have seen their budget increase by 25% since 2020. These figures are beyond startling. I fully endorse the Justice Minister's position that a marginal redirection of funding in favour of policing would go a long way to avoiding irreparable damage to the Service and public confidence, by placing policing on a more sustainable footing.

Simply put, my request for the Police Service of Northern Ireland is that:

- We receive a baseline budget of **£900m, which will return us to our 2010 funding level.**
- The structural funding deficit is addressed and funding put on a sustainable footing;

- The contribution of policing to society and public services is both recognised and prioritised;
- The decline in numbers is reversed and replaced by a growth trajectory, to address the previous under funding.

The situation we face is serious and unsustainable. So, it is all the more remarkable that against this backdrop I see numerous examples of the fantastic work that officers and staff are carrying out across the Service.

My report this month provides detail on some of the successes made by detectives in Organised Crime Branch, notably, the seizure of 1.25m of cannabis at Belfast Port, where they worked in partnership with colleagues from Belfast Harbour Police, and in a separate investigation, the seizure of £600,000 of counterfeit goods following searches in Belfast and Portadown.

Crucially, to support our colleagues in Health, each and every day my officers sit patiently in A&E departments across Northern Ireland looking after people experiencing mental health crisis for hours on end. This is not our core function and this situation cannot continue.

Officers in Local Policing are working at an unrelenting pace and continue to have some fantastic operational successes. Some recent highlights include, the excellent police work that led to the identification and arrest of a person suspected of a number of armed robberies in East Belfast and the early arrest and subsequent charging of the suspect in a robbery at a snooker club in Carrickfergus. In South Armagh, the Local Policing and Neighbourhood Policing Teams, working with partners in HM Revenue and Customs, detected, and are now investigating, what has been estimated as a £6m fuel laundering site.



These are examples of the excellent work that is being carried out, but they are not exceptional, in the sense that they are not unique. They typify the work that is carried out, day in and day out. I have nothing but the utmost admiration for the professionalism and unflinching resolve of officers and staff as they continue to deliver for communities across Northern Ireland.

From the 1 May 2024, the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 limits criminal investigations, legal proceedings, inquests and police complaints in relation to troubles-related deaths. The Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR), is conferred a number of functions including carrying out a review of such deaths. 'Legacy inquests' will no longer take place, The Courts have confirmed ICRIR is independent and is capable of carrying out investigations which are compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights.

We remain fully committed to assisting victims and families of the cases that fall within the Act. All material we hold will be provided to the new Commission, if a request is made by them. To ensure that this is a seamless process, we have designed and implemented a new ICRIR Hub to process any requests for information.

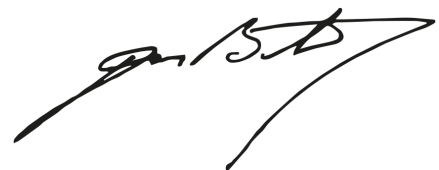
Legacy Investigation Branch (LIB) will continue in its role and will be responsible for the review and investigation of legacy homicide cases that do not fall within the timeframe of the Legacy Act. Cases that will be included within LIB's remit will be non-troubles related homicides between 1 January 1969 until 1 March 2004 and terrorist related homicides between 10 April 1998 until 1 March 2004. A number of legacy cases currently within the Criminal Justice System will also be supported by LIB through the various disclosure and court processes.

I am delighted to announce that Detective Chief Inspector John Caldwell has been nominated for an International Police Officer of the year award. John and his family epitomise the brilliance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Finally, last week I reported to the Justice Committee my concerns that the volume of work and pressures placed upon a shrinking workforce within the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in my view, contributed to one of our officers taking their own life. At least one in five people in policing are experiencing a mental health condition. Mental health is now one of the biggest causes of workforce absence within policing. The lack of sufficient resource in the Police Service of Northern Ireland is causing these pressures to both endure and increase.

This situation cannot be allowed to continue. I will not allow it to continue. We have to fund the organisation that underpins all other public services, the organisation that acts as a contingency for other services to call upon when they cannot deal with their own demand. We clearly need to do something different in explaining the criticality of our situation, because for whatever reason, people don't appear to be listening.

I thank the Board and the Justice Minister for your support, but we need to find a way to achieve a position where people realise the severity of underfunding of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the consequences to policing in Northern Ireland.



Jon Boutcher QPM
Chief Constable
Police Service of Northern Ireland



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Finance and Resource Update

2023-24

I am pleased to report that following the additional funding made available by the Department in February, the Service was able to record a break even position at year end. This is a significant outcome and underscores the professionalism and discipline applied by officers and staff to the financial management of scarce public resources. The provisional underspend recorded against our Non Ringfenced Resource DEL budget was just £751k or 0.09% and £166k or 0.25% against the Capital expenditure budget. These results were only possible because of the additional, but non-recurrent, funding in year and serve to provide further evidence of our structural funding deficit.

It is also worth noting that we secured additional earmarked funding of £6m to help our response to the data leak last year. An underspend of just £200k was recorded against this budget, with over 90% of officers and staff accessing support from the Universal Offer on personal security. This has gone some way to providing much needed reassurance to our workforce following the data leak.

2024-25

As we enter this year, we do so without a budget. This is simply not good enough and we must collectively do more to resolve this repeated cycle. I have previously set out the inevitable consequences of late budget notifications and annuality, but this remains the reality we face as a key public service. I have already reported that the anticipated resource pressure this year is some £130m just to stand still, or £140m if we provide for some marginal growth in officer and staff

numbers. This excludes provision for some major legal liabilities including those associated with Holiday Pay and the Data Leak.

In the meantime, we will of course exercise caution in an attempt to avoid increasing the gap and will likewise avoid significant decisions that could impact service delivery. Our downward pressure on support costs will also continue. However, this is not a sustainable approach and the longer the delay in budget settlements, the less influence we can bring to bear in the remainder of the year. I believe we have a strong case for increasing investment in policing to recover past losses, but this ambition is also thwarted by the decision making vacuum brought about by the uncertain financial picture.



Outcome 1

We Have a Safe Community

Crime Department

Organised Crime Branch

- On 28 March 2024, detectives seized a significant number of counterfeit Apple and other electronic High Street brand products during searches at two properties in Belfast and Portadown.

Over 20,000 items, including, AirPods, Apple chargers, iPhones, smartwatches, mobile phones, phone cases, cables and vapes were seized during the searches, which were carried out with assistance of policing colleagues from the local District Support Teams. A sum of cash was also seized.

Collectively the products represent an estimated brand loss of £600,000 to Apple and other High street brands.

A 24 year old man has been arrested in Portadown and the investigation is ongoing.

- On 2 April 2024, detectives investigating drugs criminality searched a property on the Lisburn Road area of Belfast. Officers seized £118,650 and €730 in cash, along with a number of electronic devices that will now be subject to forensic examination.

A 46-year-old man and 43-year-old woman were arrested for the offence of possessing criminal property. Both were later released on police bail pending further enquiries.

- On 4 April 2024, detectives, supported by officers from our partners, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), conducted a number of searches at properties in the Banbridge area.

A number of items, including tens of thousands of cigarettes, high end vehicles, a sum of money, weapons, including a lock knife, knuckle dusters, a firearm, and ammunition were seized and have been removed for further forensic examination.

Two men, aged 36 and 31, were arrested on suspicion of a number of offences, including possessing criminal property. Both have been released on Police bail pending further enquiries.



Image of a suspected firearm seized during one of the searches

- On 10 April 2024, detectives carrying out a house search in the Castlewellan area seized, a quantity of suspected Class A and Class B controlled drugs with a combined potential street value of £54,500.

A 40-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of possession of a Class A controlled drug with intent to supply and

possession of a Class A controlled drug. Enquiries are continuing.



Suspected Class A and Class B controlled drugs

- On 20 April 2024, detectives seized suspected cannabis, with a street value of approximately £60,000, following searches in the Ballymoney area.

A 37-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of possession of a Class B controlled drug with intent to supply. He was released on bail to allow for further police enquiries.

Sentencing

- On 12 April 2024, a 44 year old man appeared before Londonderry Crown Court, having been charged with offences linked to **EncroChat**, an encrypted communication channel used by criminals.

He plead guilty to more than 40 offences, including two counts of conspiracy to commit murder, encouraging or assisting murder, conspiracy to possess a firearm, conspiracy to inflict grievous bodily harm and various drug offences, including, conspiracy to import Class A controlled drugs. He was sentenced to 12 years – half to be served in custody and half on licence.

The investigation and sentencing stems from Operation VENETIC which, led by the National Crime Agency (NCA), was the collective UK law enforcement response to dismantle EncroChat.

This case relates to an investigation initiated in 2020 and included the search of a property in Warrenpoint that led to the recovery of a number of items, including encrypted mobile phones and other encrypted devices, SIM cards, drugs and cash.



Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF)

- On Sunday 7 April 2024, detectives investigating criminality linked to the North West INLA, and working with Belfast Harbour Police, seized herbal cannabis with an estimated street value of £1.25 million at Belfast Port.

A 41-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of possession of Class B controlled drugs and possession of Class B controlled drugs with intent to supply. He has been charged to appear at Laganside Magistrates Court.

- During April 2024, PCTF detectives and officers from Economic Crime Unit used an Account Freezing Order to freeze a bank account containing a total of £7,890.

This is part of an ongoing investigation into the criminal activities of the West Belfast UDA. The account belongs to an individual suspected of being involved in illegal drugs supply and will be frozen for an initial period of six months.

- Detectives have welcomed the sentence handed down to two men at Laganside Crown Court for the offences of possessing Class A and Class C drugs and possession of Class A and Class C controlled drugs with intent to supply. One was sentenced to four years in prison and ordered to serve half on licence and the other, three years in prison with half on licence.

This was a result of an investigation into the activities of the East Belfast UVF and followed the seizure made during a vehicle stop and search in the East Belfast area in March 2023.

Public Protection Branch

Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure (DVAD) Scheme training

From the beginning of the year we have been working with Women's Aid Foundation Northern Ireland (WAFNI) on the delivery of 'Disclosure Scheme' training to officers from across Public Protection Branch and our Local Policing Teams.

The learning centres on the change in thresholds which followed the introduction of updated policy in December 2023. Participants have been provided with the opportunity to review a series of case studies. It is heartening to note that performance has been very successful, with red flags and safeguarding opportunities being consistently identified.

This increased officer understanding and awareness will help us build on the 15% increase on DVAD's applications being progressed.

Final sessions are being delivered in early May.

Op Hydrant Self-Assessment

The Hydrant Programme is a national policing programme supporting the work of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Child Protection and Abuse Investigation Working Group. It was originally established in 2014 to coordinate the response to non-recent child sexual abuse, but now supports UK policing across all child protection and abuse investigation issues.

During April, our Child Sexual Exploitation teams undertook the preliminary steps for an Operation Hydrant self-assessment in advance of a visit from the Hydrant team in May. This allowed an in-depth focus on the



functions of the team, their demand, the professional impact that the team have on safeguarding vulnerable children, and in tackling the behaviours of those who seek to prey on their vulnerabilities. This has enabled the team to bench mark what is working well and what additional support and steps need to be taken.

The Hydrant Programme's Deputy Director and National Child Sexual Exploitation Development Coordinator are visiting with us in May, when they will provide advice and guidance on best practice and development ideas that are bespoke to the needs of PSNI and Northern Ireland.

PPANI Demand review briefing

During Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland's (PPANI) Strategic Management Board, held at the end of March, we had the opportunity to discuss the interim findings of the review into the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland.

The aim of the review is to provide an evidence base to determine how current processes and systems can be altered to ensure risk management is not compromised and was born out of the increasing demands faced by all agencies. It looked at the roles of the individual agencies, their responsibilities, capabilities and capacity in managing registered sex offenders and violent offenders through multi-agency arrangements.

The Review process is scheduled to conclude in June 2024. PPANI Strategic Management Board will consider any recommendations and develop implementation plans accordingly.

Evaluation of Pavement cafés Act

The Department for Communities are undertaking an evaluation to help it assess how, and to what extent, the original policy intent of the licensing scheme has been achieved. The original policy aim was to facilitate the controlled expansion of premises such as cafés, restaurants and pubs in support of the creation of a more vibrant daytime and evening economy.

Whilst District Councils have been given the power to grant licences, they are required to consult with the Police Service on any application for premises with a pub licence.

As part of this process, multi-agency visits took place previously in Belfast City Centre and Derry/Londonderry City Centre.

A final visit is scheduled to take place on 24 May 2024 to the Coleraine Triangle area.

Outcome 2

We Have Confidence in Policing

Tactical Support Group Awards

On the 11 of April 2024 the Police Services' Tactical Support Groups (TSG) received a Bravery and Resilience award at the National Public Order and Public Safety Awards held in the College of Policing, Ryton, England.

The circumstances behind the award relate to the bravery, resilience and professionalism shown during searches in the Creevagh Heights area of Derry/Londonderry area in September 2023.

Acting in support of colleagues from our Terrorism Investigation Unit and the Military's Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), TSG officers helped maintain a sterile area for a period of six hours, all while coming under attack from approximately 100 rioters armed with heavy masonry and petrol bombs, in what was an outbreak of orchestrated public disorder.

As a result of the disorder 16 officers were injured, and several Armoured Land Rovers were severely damaged.

With TSG support a successful policing operation was delivered and resulted in the discovery and safe removal of a quantity of cash, two handguns, 2 Military hand grenades, over 50 rounds of ammunition, over a kilogram of plastic explosives, and the arrest and charge of a number of suspects.

Working as a team our TSG officers have demonstrated how effective public order policing can help deliver community safety and build community trust and confidence.



Chief Inspector Jonathan Wilson OSD with the Bravery and Resilience award on behalf of TSG



Outcome 3

We Have Engaged and Supportive Communities

Station Enquiry Offices

At last month's Board meeting the Chief Constable highlighted that Enquiry Office provision in eleven stations would be withdrawn.

Since then, District Commanders have been engaging with communities, representatives and partners in the areas which may be affected, namely:

- In Belfast: Lisburn Road, Strandtown, Tennent Street and Woodbourne
- Bangor
- Banbridge
- Magherafelt
- Dungannon
- Lisnaskea
- Waterside
- Newtownabbey

Again, this is not a decision that has been taken lightly and we are conscious there may be an actual and/or perceived loss of accessibility, visibility and ability to respond to the needs of the community. However, in all of the locations the average number of visitors to the Enquiry Office was 2.1 people per day, with the highest average number of visitors 3.6 people per day.

Many of the visitors to Enquiry Offices are contractors & police officers from other stations seeking access. In the main, members of the public are attending to produce documents / sign bail. Delivery of this service can be supported by facilitating members of the public at alternate stations.

As a Service we are facing unprecedented financial pressures. The savings these closures represent are necessary to

preserve a viable and effective organisation. Difficult decisions now have to be taken. The Police Service is shrinking and as a result, the level of service the public can expect to see is going to change.

It is important to emphasise that these are not station closures. Police officers and staff will continue to serve the community from these locations. There will be no reduction to station security at these locations.

This decision will reduce the need for officers to backfill Station Enquiry Assistant provision thus maximising their availability for critical service provision within communities. Our analysis shows that, even with the reduced arrangement, over 90% of households in Northern Ireland are within 15 miles of a station Enquiry Office. The average household will be 10.7 miles from their nearest office (an increase of 4 miles) or 18.5 minutes by car (an increase of 1.5 minutes).

At this stage, whilst we cannot give an exact date for services in the eleven Enquiry Offices being withdrawn, it is likely be within the next three months. **Further reductions in Enquiry Office provision or opening hours cannot be ruled out.**



Key Campaigns and Events

More Than a Statistic

Our 'More Than A Statistic' safe roads campaign has now been running for a number of months and will continue to feature over the summer months.

A proactive communications approach is in place to support the aims of this campaign:



- To provide advice and guidance which will encourage people to stay safe on roads.
- To challenge people about their behaviour, and potential consequences of their actions.
- To reduce the number of road traffic collisions, deaths and injuries
- To empower the public to take steps to ensure their own safety and the safety of non-road users.
- Encourage awareness of the new Fatal 5 in an engaging and impactful way through creative, social media and traditional media.
- To encourage people to report crime and share information about criminal activity.



Ticket fraud



Close to £300,000 was lost to ticket fraud in Northern Ireland last year.

During April, we ran a social media campaign to raise awareness of this type of fraud, using a range of imagery with key messaging and safety advice. A news release was also issued.

This resulted in significant coverage from regional and national media, in print, online and broadcast, and our partners in ScamwiseNI.

Communications on scams will continue throughout the year to raise awareness and empower people to spot the signs of fraud so they can stop scammers and keep their money safe.

Our People, Your Service

ARU Uniform

In line with a National project to standardise the uniform for all firearms officers (something which had already been undertaken by other Specialist Firearms Officers), our Uniform and Protective Measures (UAPM) Committee was tasked to review the uniform provided to officers in our Armed Response Units.

Following this review, which included consultation with ARU officers and staff associations, the decision has been taken for Armed Response Units to move to wearing a black coloured operational uniform .

Key considerations in this decision included:

- The Health and Safety requirements of this tactical uniform.
- Costs associated with its acquisition,
- The current green uniform does not align with the black worn by UK policing colleagues.
- The current green uniform sits outside the uniform designation for Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Protocols (JESIP).
- Similarities between ARU uniform and that worn by NIAS Hazardous Area Response Team (HART) could cause serious problems in a live time incident - identified in a training environment.

This decision addresses identified health and safety risks and ensures we have a fit for purpose uniform that aligns with national standards



Hazardous Area Response Team (HART)



Armed Response Unit (ARU)

Forward Look

Irish Open

The Irish Open will be held at Royal County Down Golf Club in Newcastle between 11 and 15 September 2024.

Article 48A of the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 gives the Department for Communities the power to make a 'major event order'. A major event order will:

- Designate an event taking place in Northern Ireland, which the Department considers will attract significant public interest, as a major event; and
- specify the permitted hours for the sale of intoxicating liquor for any place or premises to which the order applies.

The Department has received a request for a 'major events order' and they must consult such persons as it considers appropriate and this includes the Police Service.

This is the first application under this new legislation and we will be fully involved in discussions with key partners including the request for an extension to the permitted hours for the event.



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