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**CHIEF CONSTABLE'S REPORT TO NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD  
5 SEPTEMBER 2019**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

I welcome the opportunity to provide my first monthly report to the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) as Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

I am honoured to have been asked by the Policing Board to lead a Police Service that I have held in high regard throughout my policing career. May I begin by recognising the leadership provided by my predecessor, Sir George Hamilton. He made an immense contribution to public service here in Northern Ireland.

I said from the outset that I thought the PSNI was a unique Service, with unique challenges and this has been clearly evidenced in my first two months in the job. There have been three callous attempts to murder colleagues over the summer during a period when the organisation has been working hard to respond to a range of demands, including criminal activity and community tensions arising from bonfires, parades and unresolved legacy issues. In addition to managing these challenges, officers and staff have continued to deliver a policing service to our communities day and night, as well as the policing of the Open Golf Championship in Portrush and the ongoing work to prepare for the implications of the UK's Exit from the European Union.

I am humbled but not surprised by the bravery of our colleagues in delivering a policing service despite the ongoing, very real security threat. Getting out and about meeting officers and staff has been one of the real highlights of my first few weeks. The engagements I have had so far have only confirmed for me that this is an organisation of committed, professional and courageous men and women.

## **2. BUILDING UPON FIRM FOUNDATIONS – INITIAL STEPS**

When appointed by this Board I explained that I wanted to make PSNI more accessible, visible and responsive. Combined with these aims, I want to ensure that officers and staff work in the appropriate conditions to deliver an effective and productive service. Whilst it is early days, and I have much listening still to do, I have commissioned or will commission the following work streams:

- A review of the PSNI uniform and protective equipment to ensure officers present a modern image to the community, whilst being afforded adequate protective measures for the everyday risks they face. ACC Alan Todd will lead that work and will report to the Service Executive in early November with his initial findings. Of course, I will ensure that adequate consultation takes place before any final decisions are made. As part of the review of protective equipment, I wrote to the Board on 30 July 2019 regarding our intention to issue spit guards to all operational officers. I look forward to discussing this matter with the Board in due course.
- In seeking to make PSNI as accessible as possible it is essential that there are multiple channels of contact available. I will be commissioning a review of how this area of business can be improved. The most pressing priority is to ensure that our contact management function has the confidence of those ringing 999 or 101. Over the past eight weeks answering times for 101 calls from the public have improved significantly as a result of an uplift in resources. A new Command and Control software system was introduced in late spring and this has now bedded in, also contributing to a recovery in performance.
- The PSNI estate is ageing and in many areas is not conducive to efficient and agile working for our employees. I am realistic about the cost of regenerating the whole estate. However, we cannot stand still. I believe the combination of improved infrastructure with a progressive approach to agile working can improve the productivity and wellbeing of our organisation. To that end, I want to work closely with the Board to review the Estate Strategy.

- I am aware that the Policing Board will launch its response to the public consultation later this year. Therefore, I do not want to detract too much from that and want to keep my comments focussed upon one key element to building community confidence in policing, effective neighbourhood policing. Locally recognised and visible officers are an essential building block to improving community confidence. Improving responsiveness requires added capacity. Therefore, between now and 31 March 2020, we will deploy an additional 400 officers to neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland. Each ward will have at least one dedicated officer, with additional capacity in those wards requiring prioritisation. The posts will be resourced by EU Exit related funding and reprioritisation within District Policing as a whole.

### **3. EU EXIT PREPAREDNESS**

It is now a matter of weeks until the date set for the UK to leave the EU. We have been involved in many months of planning and preparation and I know first-hand the tireless work being carried out across all of the key projects. We believe we are as well prepared as we can be at this time, despite there still being considerable uncertainty in a number of areas.

That is not to say that we are complacent, far from it. We will keep assessing key areas of work and amend our plans as and when required. Over the next number of weeks, as part of our collaborative approach, we will continue with our calendar of multi-agency training sessions and exercises.

At the end of last year, we were awarded £16.5 million of EU Exit funding by Government which will allow us to increase our officer and staff numbers by 308. As a result, those working in District Neighbourhood Teams, the Police College, the International Unit, Portal Units and in our Organised Crime Branch will all benefit from an uplift in numbers. The political uncertainties that exist require us to maintain a flexible approach to our planning and discussions are ongoing with Government as to the resources required in the event of a “No Deal” scenario.

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It is quite right that the public expect us to make plans to keep them safe in all eventualities. Part of that annual planning activity involves Mutual Aid. Usually these plans are in place for the summer months but this year, additional resources will be made available across the year, in line with National EU Exit contingency planning. I recognise that this has been the subject of some public comment by the Scottish Police Federation. I can assure the Board that we will continue to work closely with national policing colleagues to provide Staff Associations with the necessary reassurances they seek.

### **4. POLICING PARADES AND BONFIRES**

The Service continued to deal with tensions rising from parades, bonfires and contested legacy matters over the summer period. Most specifically, we faced a number of operational challenges related to the bonfires at Avoneil and New Lodge and during the Apprentice Boys parade in Derry/Londonderry.

Each operation involved detailed and lengthy planning processes to ensure our decisions and actions remained lawful and proportionate. Throughout the Strategic Commander sought to ensure that our chosen tactics would uphold people's right to conduct lawful activity, to parade and to protest, whilst minimising our recourse to the use of force. Such operations require sensitive decision making and we often have to balance competing rights. This is always done within a legal framework and we remain accountable for our decisions to the Policing Board and the Police Ombudsman.

The Deputy and I have met with a number of political parties over recent weeks and have listened to the concerns being raised. We took the opportunity to explain our actions and assured everyone that we will conduct a full debrief of how we dealt with all of the incidents that arose over the summer period. We will listen and learn when required.

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Moreover, given that there is no policing solution to these problems, we will redouble our work with statutory partners, stakeholders, political representatives and local communities to ensure the planning for next year's bonfires and parades starts early, in an attempt to avoid the last minute nature of some of the bonfire related issues that were placed before us this summer.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

In closing, I want to place on record my thanks for the welcome I have received from colleagues, partners and the wider community over the last two months. I have witnessed great work by colleagues, providing an every day service to communities, protecting life and responding to calls for service. From what I have witnessed and from what HMICFRS has told us, I am confident that I will be building upon firm foundations as I lead the organisation over the coming years.

In seeking to make PSNI a Service which shows we care, listen and act in relation to the concerns of our communities, partners and staff, I value the role of the Policing Board in holding me to account; advising, challenging and advocating for adequate resources to deliver a Service that meets public expectations.