

NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD HELD ON THURSDAY 16 APRIL 2020 AT 2.00PM IN WATERSIDE TOWER, CLARENDON DOCK AND VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE FACILITY

Present:

Mr Doug Garrett, Chair
Mr Tom Frawley, Vice-Chair*
Mr Michael Atkinson
Mr John Blair MLA
Mr Tom Buchanan MLA
Mrs Joanne Bunting MLA
(1) Mr Alan Chambers MLA*
Mr Trevor Clarke MLA*
Mrs Janet Gray
Mr Edgar Jardine
Mrs Dolores Kelly MLA*
Mr Gerry Kelly MLA
Mr Sean Lynch MLA
Mr Colm McKenna
Mrs Carmel McKinney*
Mr Frank McManus*
Mr Mervyn Storey MLA
Mrs Deirdre Toner
* Attended via video conference facility

Police Service of Northern Ireland In Attendance:

Chief Constable Simon Byrne
Assistant Chief Constable Alan Todd
Superintendent John McCaughan, Command
Secretariat

Board Officials In Attendance:

Mrs Amanda Stewart, Chief Executive
Mr Adrian McNamee, Director of Performance
Ms Jenny Passmore, Director of Resources
Ms Aislinn McGuckin, T/Director of Police
Administration
Mr John Wadham, Human Rights Advisor
Three Board Officials

- (1) Item 1 to part item 3. Part item 3 to end (Left meeting at 2.15pm and returned at 2.35pm).

At the outset of the meeting, the Chair noted that the paper at agenda item 4, Key Issues of Public Interest, included information that Members may wish to refer to when asking the Chief Constable questions during the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Ms Liz Kimmins MLA.

The Board agreed the agenda for the meeting.

2. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No one declared a conflict of interest in relation to the agenda.

3. PRIVATE SESSION WITH THE CHIEF CONSTABLE ON THE PSNI RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Chief Constable and Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) Todd, PSNI Covid-19 Gold Commander provided Members with an update on the policing response to the public health crisis following the outbreak of Covid-19, including:

- The actions taken by the PSNI to adapt to the changing working environment including home working where possible and also initiating

a pattern of 1 in 3 people being in the workplace at any one time so that social distancing measures could be observed. The Chief Constable also noted that the PSNI were acting in tandem with medical advice, including when any medical advice changed.

- The Chief Constable's weekly meetings with the Staff Associations to ensure good communications and relations were maintained.
- The availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to officers and staff.
- The PSNI's positive and proactive work in dealing with domestic abuse situations, including the rollout of the 55 silent call initiative to enable people to contact the police.
- The PSNI's collaborative work with criminal justice partners, including the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), to ensure that the administration of justice continued in a safe manner.
- The PSNI's engagement with the Department of Health (DoH) seeking that local government personnel be designated as able to issue Penalty Notices under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020 (the 2020 Regulations). It was agreed that the Board Chair would write to the DoH in support of the PSNI's request. **(AP1)**
- It was agreed that the Board Chair would write to the DoH for greater clarity in respect of the wording and intent of the 2020 Regulations and in particular Regulations 5 & 6, as well confirmation on the designation of other public bodies to assist in the ultimate recovery period.

During the meeting, Members also asked the Chief Constable and ACC Todd questions including on the matters of:

- Morale levels within the PSNI. The Chief Constable noted that morale was strong and that he was pleased with how officers and staff had adapted to the change in working conditions.
- Funerals, at a number of locations around Northern Ireland, where a large number of people had gathered against Covid-19 restrictions. The Chief Constable noted that PSNI District Commanders and officers continued to engage with communities but files were being prepared for the PPS to consider charges against those who had breached the 2020 Regulations. He further noted that officers were using the engage, educate and encourage approach but that over the Easter weekend officers had used the enforce approach over 100 times.
- The detention of people during the outbreak of Covid-19. ACC Todd noted that if an arrest warrant was issued then officers may arrest an individual. ACC Todd noted that Musgrave PSNI Station had been adapted to allow people to be detained in a safe manner compliant with Covid-19 restrictions and social distancing measures. He also stated that PPE in custody was available where needed. The Chief Constable stated that he would write to the Board again in relation to the Custody Visiting Scheme.
- The structure and intent of the 2020 Regulations to include the fact that currently, the only entities permitted to enforce the Regulations are the PSNI and the Harbour Police. Whilst the Regulations also provide for persons designated by the DoH to similarly enforce the 2020 Regulations, the Chief Constable noted there had been a marked reluctance to do so particularly in respect of local councils.
- Procurement arrangements during Covid-19. The Chief Constable noted that the PSNI has established a Platinum group to manage Covid-19. He confirmed that governance arrangements were in place in relation to procurement and that records of decision making were being kept.

- The rollout of spit and bite guards. The Chief Constable updated Members on the use of spit and bite guards within Custody Suites, Covid-19 response officers and officers on cell van duties. He advised and that their usage was being monitored on an ongoing basis.
- The difference in the Guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Executive in comparison to the rest of the UK with regard to an exception to the once a day exercise rule for those families living with autism or learning difficulties in the rest of UK; the Guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Executive did not include the same exception. The Chief Constable noted there was no clear interpretation of what was permissible under the 2020 Regulations or supplementary Guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Executive but that the PSNI were trying to interpret the Regulations and Guidance in a prudent and fair manner.
- The Chief Constable discussed a potential future staged “re-opening” and with it the need for further designation of other public bodies. The Chief Constable confirmed that he did not see the the “re-opening” of the jurisdiction as the sole responsibility for the PSNI. Rather, other public bodies must be engaged to include local councils, health and safety wardens etc.
- Members congratulated the Chief Constable and ACC Todd on the positive engagement with the media and its impact in ensuring that the public were informed and understood the implications of Covid-19 restrictions. Members also confirmed that the Board would consider, support and assist PSNI with any/all requests to stakeholders and third parties in respect of the ongoing crisis.

4. KEY ISSUES OF PUBLIC INTEREST

The Board noted a paper which detailed recent issues of public interest.
NOTED.

5. COMMUNICATION ISSUES

It was agreed that a communication would be issued noting that the Board had met with the Chief Constable, via video conference facility, to discuss the PSNI's response to Covid-19.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was conducted.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Board meeting would be held on Thursday 7 May 2020.

The meeting closed at 3.40pm.

Corporate Services

Date: April 2020

Chair