



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Chief Constable's Accountability Report

to Northern Ireland
Policing Board

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2024 to 29 February 2024

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7 March 2024



we care
we listen
we act

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Foreword

My report this month comes against the backdrop of the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive. It's great to have Stormont back up and running.

Since my appointment, I have clearly and consistently set out the consequences of the inadequate funding of policing here in Northern Ireland. I therefore welcome the allocation of additional in year funding, which will help address current pressures and support PSNI to come within budget.

However, this should not mask the fundamental issue that PSNI is chronically underfunded, and dangerously so. The additional funding covers the outstanding pay awards for officers and staff but does not extend into next year and the years beyond. On this matter I am absolutely resolute. Officers and staff deserve the award. I consider it non-negotiable and have written to the Justice Minister to confirm my intention to have it introduced.

A recent report based on Office of National Statistics data, highlights that since 2010 spending on public order and safety in Northern Ireland had risen by 8%, demonstrating the real financial difficulties facing the Justice sector. However, over the same period the PSNI budget has fallen by 3%. This seems to point to policing losing out significantly within the Justice family.

In the same period, the Health budget has increased from £3.5bn to £6.6bn (89%) and Education from £2.7bn to £3.4bn (23%). I am a huge supporter of Health and other public services, but it strikes me that a marginal redirection of funding in favour of policing would go a long way to placing policing on a more sustainable footing, enabling us to support communities and other public services.

It is my ambition to secure an improved budget settlement. For too long, officer and staff numbers have been allowed to decline, along with the supporting infrastructure.

For my part, I have already signalled my intention to stop the reduction in police officer numbers by restarting student officer recruitment again in April. We will not realise the benefits of this until October. The final attestation ceremony to be held until then took place during February. As well as being an extremely proud and special day for our newest police officers, I was pleased to welcome the First Minister, Deputy First Minister and Justice Minister to the event. I look forward to working with them to find solutions to this issue.

I have commissioned consultants 'Leapwise', a firm experienced in supporting strategic planning and budget decisions across UK policing, to provide an assessment of our officer and staff requirement. It is significant that their independent analysis, which takes into consideration the specific demands of policing in Northern Ireland, suggests that had PSNI officer numbers kept pace with those of England, Wales and Scotland since 2010, we would be expected to have levels of up to 8,500 police officers. These are the numbers needed to deliver the policing services we are statutorily required to deliver, not the 7,500 Patton suggested, and certainly not the 6,400 of today.

My ambition to reverse the decline in officer numbers will take a number of years. It is estimated that working to the current capacity of the Police College, it may take until February 2039 to reach the level of 8,500 officers.

This pace of recovery is being considered, along with new additional routes of recruitment, beyond the traditional student officer approach, for example, direct entry detectives.

The impacts associated with failing to address declining police officer numbers are noticeable and current. They are being felt across communities. I continue to look inside the Service to satisfy myself that we understand our demand, capability, capacity and future needs, and that we are making full and effective use of our available resources.

As I have previously highlighted to the Board, health related calls continue to pose significant challenges for Policing. The vast majority of these calls are not crime related and the Police Service are not equipped to provide the most appropriate response. As an example, in an incident lasting over 2 and a half hours, on 24th February, three of our Armed Response Units (ARU) were redirected from assisting with a high risk missing person investigation to assist an older lady in Belfast City centre, believed to have broken her pelvis following a fall. First aid was provided and an emergency evacuation plan developed, including delivering a Pangolin vehicle to the scene.

After a period of time, a Northern Ireland Ambulance Service paramedic was consulted via telephone. They advised that no ambulance was available and could not provide an estimated time for one to become free. Taking into consideration the protracted timeframe, the age and condition of the injured lady and the cold ground she was lying on, it was agreed that the ARU evacuation plan should be implemented. The lady was placed on a stretcher and conveyed via Pangolin to the Royal Victoria Hospital, accompanied by her daughter who had arrived at the scene by this time. Nursing staff were unaware of the circumstances or that a casualty was en-route and officers had

to assist with the booking in procedure before transferring care to NHS staff.

Our Right Care Right Person project team are carrying out work to gain a better understanding of demand. Indicative figures support professional judgement, telling us there is a significant problem. Starting in April, a twelve week data capturing exercise will take place to provide us with more substantial evidence to inform what we do next.

I have had to take difficult decisions, such as reducing the number of Station Enquiry Offices from 28 to 17. The detrimental impact of actual and perceived loss of accessibility, visibility and the ability to respond to the needs of the community, is not lost on me.

Our assessment of impact is set out within this report, but it is clear that there will be a detrimental impact on our ability to support national security operations. It will take longer to answer and attend non-emergency calls; Neighbourhood Policing will continue to shrink, inevitably being subsumed into critical areas of business, such as Response Policing. Investigations will slow and introduce further delays to the criminal justice system. Our ability to respond to sustained protest and public disorder will be stretched and our capacity to support other public services will be significantly reduced.

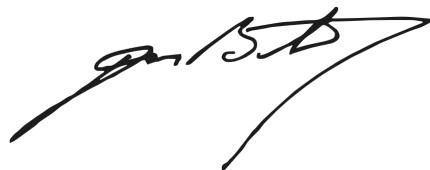
It is noteworthy that in the last three years, the An Garda Síochána budget has increased by over 20%. We simply cannot match their policing capacity, yet we are expected to deliver equitable policing services on the border, and in tackling shared strategic risks, such as serious and organised crime. We must act in the next financial year to arrest this decline and future proof the safety and security of Northern Ireland, as has occurred in the Ireland and Great Britain.

The reporting of officer and staff assaults continues to be a cause of great concern. During one 24 hour period in February, 25 police officers were assaulted while performing their duty. The work that officers and staff carry out is difficult enough. Being subject to an assault while doing so is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. These are men and women of the community working to help and support all members of the community.

The statistics on this are appalling. Over 5,600 assaults in four years, with 68% of officers from Response Policing, 52% Neighbourhood Policing, 51% District Support Teams and 82% of Custody Detention Officer's surveyed reporting they have been assaulted. Experience tells me the true figures are even higher as, typically, there is a significant level of underreporting.

In response we have developed an Injury and Assault Reduction Strategy with a working group established to progress a number of recommendations. In the coming weeks I will be providing an impact statement for sharing with the Public Prosecution Service to reinforce the seriousness of attacks on the individual officers and staff, the Service and wider community. We must change the public attitude to assaults on officers and staff. We can never accept it as the norm.

Despite the challenges that we face, I have no hesitation in stating that this is the most remarkable organisation in the policing world I have seen. I continue to be impressed by officers and staff on a daily basis. This month's report provides some insight into the sheer range of preventative, investigative and engagement activity that officers and staff carry out on behalf of us all.



Jon Boutcher QPM
Chief Constable
Police Service of Northern Ireland

Finance and Resource Update

As at the end of January 2023, the projected over spend against budget for the full year had grown to some £61m. This reflects our initial projected deficit of £38m for the year, as set out in our Resource Plan, inflated by some emerging pressures including a higher than expected pay award, unfunded legacy compensation settlements and rising depreciation costs.

The Service continues to respond to the critical incident of a material data leak last August and this has incurred costs of £3.4m to date, including initial uptake of the Universal Offer (this offer enables officers and staff to be reimbursed up to £500 for measures taken to improve their sense of security). As a result of progress on further financial assistance with Treasury and others, funding of £6m has now been confirmed and this will help to offset the projected costs directly related to the breach this year.

Following the return of the Executive, I am pleased to report that PSNI has now been allocated with additional in year funding. This funding is much needed to address our underlying financial pressures outlined above and should enable a break even position at year end. I am grateful that our case has been recognised and appreciate the support of the Board to date.

Whilst the award letter from the Department makes it clear that the additional funding includes the cost of outstanding pay awards, it also stresses that the funding is non-recurrent. As previously reported to the Board, I am determined to progress outstanding pay awards for both officers and staff. I have now written to the Minister to advise that I will be seeking formal approval to proceed. Again, I value your support in

making the pay awards a reality for my well deserving officers and staff.

The size of the Police Service

One of the recommendations in the review of policing in Northern Ireland by the Independent Commission on Policing report published in September 1999 (commonly referred to as the Patten report), is that: *'Provided the peace process does not collapse and the security situation does not deteriorate significantly from the situation pertaining at present, the approximate size of the police service over the next ten years should be 7,500 full time officers.'*

This was Patten's ten year vision for the Police Service of Northern Ireland and was reflected in the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) document, where the British and Irish governments set out a number of priorities for the Executive, including increasing police numbers to 7,500.

Delivery of additional officers is largely dependent on the availability of Executive funding. The financial package accompanying the NDNA document fell short of the amount required to deliver all priorities. A Strategic Outline Case for increasing police officer numbers to 7,500 has been approved by both the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance.

In February, I commissioned consultancy firm 'Leapwise' to provide a rapid, independent assessment of the Service's officer and staff requirement, drawing on analysis of public and internal data and their experience from supporting strategic planning and budget

decisions across 14 UK police forces and five national policing bodies.

This Independent Report takes account of the role of policing in Northern Ireland as a standalone jurisdiction with unique legislation and suggests a capacity requirement of up to 8,540 officers and 3,000 staff.

Service Impacts

These are the numbers I believe the PSNI need to protect people and fight crime. The absence of appropriate levels of funding impacts our operating model and service delivery. The simple truth is that things are now taking longer, we are becoming a less visible, accessible and responsive Service. This is not where we want to be. Difficult decisions have had to be taken to preserve core functions. Station Enquiry offices have been closed with the very real prospect of more to follow. Fleet availability is down from 95% to 70% in certain areas. Plans to transform and modernise have stalled, and opportunities to develop IT systems are limited, with a focus placed on keeping current systems operational.

We have introduced new ways of working in our Contact Management Centres, with the implementation of an automated Interactive Voice Recorder and introduction of new operating hours for staff. This has proven positive for performance overall. However, data for January 2024 revealed that nationally, we were the second slowest to respond to 999 calls. This was the result of the demand surge encountered during the period of Storm Isha, and demonstrates the performance knife edge upon which this service sits.

The reduction in officer numbers entering the Service has had a significant impact on operational capacity and capability of Local Policing. New officers coming into Local Policing Teams (LPT) allow for movement through organisational pathways, enabling transfer and promotion to other teams and

specialisms. This lack of movement has led to, for example, the shrinking of our Neighbourhood Policing Teams, from their height in 2015 of 905 officers, to the 532 of today.

LPT's currently have a resourcing deficit of 363 Constables. In order to ensure that the required level of resource is maintained in these teams, every day a significant proportion of Neighbourhood Officers are removed from their Neighbourhood duty to conduct Local Policing Duties. Abstraction from Neighbourhood Policing duties is further compounded by resourcing gaps in other critical functions, such as Station Enquiry Assistant and Station Security. We know that Neighbourhood Policing is a top priority for communities. Without appropriate funding and recruitment, it will continue to shrink as we will have no option but to continue to align resource to critical areas of need i.e. Local Policing Teams.

Fewer numbers of officers investigating more complex and challenging crime is having an impact on our investigations, their timeliness and the service provided to victims. Capacity to investigate serious crime has been affected by the number of reductions within those specialist teams supporting covert policing authorisations and maintaining critical compliance functions. Significant backlogs are accruing within our Cyber Centres and without additional resources decisions will have to be taken on scaling back the number of investigation teams in our Serious and Organised Crime Branches, along with the number of investigations they can progress.

Public Protection branch with their remit for investigations that cover a wide range of vulnerabilities involving adults and children are experiencing an ever increasing demand year on year. Online Child Sexual

exploitation referrals have increased by approximately 479% since 2014/15; domestic motivated crimes by 67.27% and sexual offences, including rape, are at their highest recorded levels. With this increase in offending comes increased convictions for serious sexual and violent offences. In turn, this increases the workload for Public Protection Branch who undertake the management of offenders.

We have already had to take the decision to reduce the number of our Tactical Support Groups (TSG) from 13 to 11. This represents a significant reduction in our level one Public Order capability. If we were to encounter any period of sustained protest and public disorder over a wide geographic area, our level one capacity and capability is unlikely to cope beyond 48 hours; and it is increasingly likely that additional resource (level two) would have to come from Local Policing and Crime Operations. There would also be an earlier and greater reliance on mutual aid from GB police services. Importantly, exiting thresholds for a short term continued deployment, a figure of approximately 43 Units would have to be exceeded before a request for support could be submitted.

As highlighted above this would have an exacerbated impact on their ability to deliver their core functions.

Similarly, in order to preserve our ability to prevent and detect crime and keep people safe on the strategic road network, we have had to reduce the numbers in our Roads Poling Unit and transformed the delivery of our service. The 21 posts removed during 2023/2024 were from our proactive road safety teams and any further reduction in numbers will unquestionably impact our proactive presence on the roads. It is relevant to note that 2023 was a difficult year in terms of road deaths. 71 people died in Northern Ireland (an eight-year high) and 186 lost their lives in ROI. This is a total of 257 on the

island of Ireland during 2023 which equates to almost five fatalities per week. This is particularly stark when you take into account the pressures faced by Local Policing Teams and their reduced capability to focus on road safety activities.

Our Performance

Official Statistics

The information in this section is extracted from our Official Statistics published reports. The full reports can all be accessed from the following link. <https://www.psni.police.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official-statistics>. These are in-year provisional figures and may be subject to change

Recorded Crime

In the 12 months from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2024:

- There were 106,200 crimes recorded, a decrease of 4,048 (3.7%) on the previous 12 months.
- There were 56 police recorded crimes per 1,000 population in the 12 months February 2023 to January 2024 compared with 58 in the previous 12 months.
- Lower crime levels were seen in violence against the person, criminal damage and public order offences.
- Sexual offences, robbery and drug offences showed little change to the previous 12 months.

Anti-Social Behaviour

In the 12 months from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2024:

- There were 45,639 anti-social behaviour incidents, a decrease of 1,995 (4.2%) on the previous 12 months. This is the lowest 12 month figure since the data series began in 2006/07.

Domestic Abuse

In the 12 months from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023:

- There were 33,071 domestic abuse **incidents** recorded, an increase of 144 (0.4%) on the previous 12 months.
- The number of domestic abuse crimes **recorded** fell to 20,691, a decrease of 1,590 (7.1%) on the previous 12 months.
- There were 17 domestic abuse incidents and 11 domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 population¹, compared with 17 domestic abuse incidents and 12 domestic abuse crimes recorded during the previous 12 months.
- Levels fell across all major offence classifications, with the exception of theft (including burglary), criminal damage, and breaches of non-molestation orders.
- The largest volume decrease in domestic abuse crimes was seen within violence against the person which fell by 1,535 (8.6%). The fall was seen principally within the Stalking and Harassment sub-classification which fell by 984 (19.2%).

Domestic abuse homicide

In the 12 months from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2024 there were three homicides with a domestic abuse motivation recorded by the police, compared with ten homicides with a domestic abuse motivation recorded by the police in the previous 12 months. Two of the victims were female and one was male, compared with four female and six male victims during the previous 12 months.

Hate Motivation

In the 12 months from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023:

- The number of incidents recorded fell across four of the six hate motivations (sexual orientation, sectarian, disability, and transgender identity) when compared with the previous 12 months.
- The number of crimes recorded decreased across three of the six motivations (sexual orientation, sectarian, and disability) when compared with the previous 12 months.
- Incidents with a race motivation and crimes with a faith/religion motivation showed the largest increases (99 more race incidents and 14 more transgender identity crimes).
- Incidents and crimes with a sectarian motivation showed the largest decrease, with 165 fewer incidents and 178 fewer crimes.

Police Recorded Drug Seizures and Arrests

The number of drug seizure incidents has increased each year since 2006/07, with the exception of a slight fall in 2016/17.

The level recorded in 2022/23 (8,933 seizure incidents) is almost three and a half times the level recorded in 2006/07 (2,590 seizure incidents).

Drug Seizures

In the 12 months from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023:

- There were 8,281 drug seizure incidents, a decrease of 327 (3.8 %) on the previous 12 months when 8,608 were recorded.

- There was a rise in the number of Class A and Class C seizure incidents, and a fall in the number of Class B seizure incidents.
- Cannabis (Class B) was the most commonly seized drug, followed by cocaine (Class A), benzodiazepines (Class C) and pregabalin (Class C).
- The trend in drug seizure incidents is similar to that seen for the number of drug offences recorded by police over the same time period. Please note that as seizure incidents continue to be processed, this will lead to an increase in the number of drug seizures recorded since April 2023, particularly in respect to November 2023 and December 2023.

Drug related Arrests

In the 12 months from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023:

- There were 3,474 drug-related arrests, an increase of 305 (9.6%) when compared with the previous 12 months.
- Generally speaking the trend in drug-related arrests is fairly similar to that seen for the number of drug seizure incidents and drug offences recorded by police over the same time period.

Security Situation

In 12 months from 1 February 2023 to 31 January 2024:

- There was one security related death, the same number as during the previous 12 months.
- There were eight bombing incidents, compared to five during the previous 12 months and 31 shooting incidents, compared to 32.

- There were 30 casualties of paramilitary style assaults, compared to 26 during the previous 12 months. Just under half of these assaults (14) occurred in Belfast. All 30 casualties were aged 18 years or older.
- There were 17 casualties of paramilitary style shootings, compared to 9 during the previous 12 months. All 17 casualties were aged 18 years or older.
- There were 105 security related arrests under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act 2000, compared to 108 during the previous 12 months.
- 21 persons were subsequently charged, compared to 14 during the previous 12 months.

No File Decision Pilot

The no file decision pilot has been operational for several weeks and the number of investigations progressing through this quality assured process continues to grow. To date there have been over 300 investigations.

It is anticipated that in the region of 5,000 to 6,000 files per year will proceed through this pathway. It will create additional investigative capacity for our officers and partners throughout the criminal justice system, in particular prosecutors within the Public Prosecution Service. Focussing effort on areas of greatest need will help with the overarching aim of speeding up justice.

Outcome 1

We Have a Safe Community

Crime Department

Organised Crime Branch

During January 2024, detectives investigating the importation of a 50kg consignment of Class B controlled drugs into Northern Ireland in July 2023, arrested a male in the Carrickfergus area on suspicion of a number of drug related offences, possession of a prohibited weapon and converting criminal property. A number of items were seized during a search of premises, including suspected Class A, B and C Controlled Drugs, a Taser-type device and a motorcycle. The latter demonstrates our commitment to tackling the way in which criminal profits are hidden in valuable assets.

Paramilitary Crime Task Force

The Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF), along with partner organisations, continue to robustly and proactively pursue those who are intent on damaging our communities.

Significant outcomes achieved since our last report to the board include:

- Following the search of a property in West Belfast, detectives seized a quantity of suspected cocaine with an estimated street value of £100,000, along with assorted drugs-related paraphernalia, a sawn-off shotgun and ammunition. This was part of an ongoing investigation into suspected criminality linked to the INLA. Fourteen people were sentenced as a result of an extensive investigation into suspected criminality linked to the East Belfast UVF. The charges predominantly related to drugs criminality, with 13 of the 14 defendants sentenced for drug-related activities. Other offences related to Misconduct in a Public Office.

The court granted a Forfeiture Order in respect of £2,405 cash seized as part of the investigation.

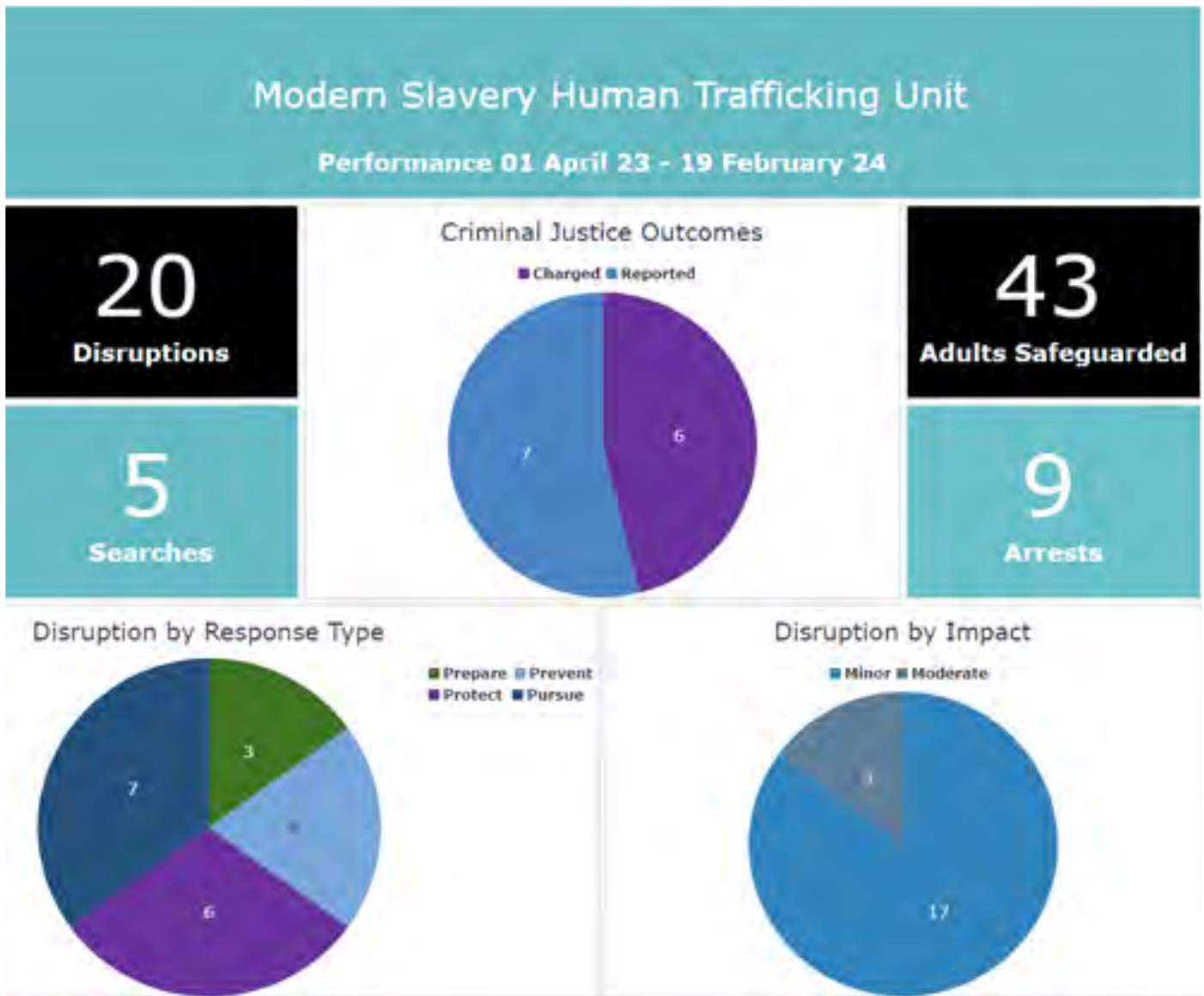
- During February, detectives arrested a man and seized a quantity of suspected Class A and Class B controlled drugs with a combined estimated street value of £225,000. This followed the search of a property in Ballymena connected to the ongoing investigation into drugs criminality linked to the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). The man was charged to Ballymena Magistrates Court with a number of drug offences.



Drugs seized in the Ballymena area

- On 20 February 2024, a 42-year-old man was sentenced at Laganside Crown Court to 32 months for a number of drug offences, receiving 16 months in custody and 16 on licence. This followed the investigation into the seizure of herbal Cannabis and cocaine with an estimated street value of £300k during a search at a caravan park in Carnlough.

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking



Our Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) are currently investigating seven Organised Crime Gang's (OCG) specifically involved in this form of criminality.

The impact of our activity is continually reviewed and assessed against a grading system in order to understand the disruption that we have made on OCG capability.

Our current assessment is that since April 2023, we have managed to significantly reduce the threat of risk and harm posed by four of these OCG's. Most notably, we judge that significant police activity and impending criminal justice outcomes have significantly disrupted the two groups originally assessed as posing the highest level of threat.

The following are examples of the operational activity contributing to the reduction in the threat of harm posed by these OCG's:

- In August 2023, a man was arrested for several offences including human trafficking, rape and paying for Sexual Services. He was a remand prisoner having been previously charged with numerous other offences in relation to the same investigation. The victims are all young local women, who were vulnerable by virtue of drug addiction, mental health issues and socio-economic factors.

- During July 2023, MSHTU detectives collaborated with Romanian authorities on a policing operation that focused on the activities of a group suspected of trafficking young Romanian women throughout Northern Ireland for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Officers carried out searches and arrested three people in the Greater Belfast and Newtownabbey area. Two men and a woman were subsequently charged to court for the offences of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, controlling prostitution for gain, brothel keeping and money laundering.

It's suspected that this crime group enticed young Romanian women to travel to Northern Ireland with the false promise of gaining lawful employment in a commercial setting. The grim reality is that upon arrival they were forced into prostitution and exploited.

- During June 2023, detectives arrested and subsequently charged a man from Newtownards to court with two counts of human trafficking, two counts of controlling prostitution for gain, two counts of paying for sexual services and sexual assault. This was the result of a proactive investigation into human trafficking of local females for sexual exploitation throughout Northern Ireland.
- A Restraint Order was obtained in September 2019 and following the conviction in July 2022 of a male for human trafficking, prostitution and money laundering offences, Economic Crime Unit successfully secured a Confiscation Order on 8 December 2023 for the recoverable amount of £40,445.28.

Major Incidents

Following the Manchester Arena Attack in May 2017 and the related Manchester Arena Inquiry (MAI), a number of recommendations are being progressed by emergency services in Great Britain and here in Northern Ireland. The Department of Justice are leading on the co-ordination of these recommendations and the Blue Light Forum, a recently established strategic forum for police, fire, ambulance and coastguard in Northern Ireland, is supporting the implementation.

In addition to implementation of the MAI recommendations, our Operational Support Department have progressed a formal assessment of the Police Services' ability to respond to an attack or incident similar to Manchester. Whilst our planning, resourcing, training and exercising is of a high standard, there are some gaps which have been identified and, importantly, need to be addressed despite the dire financial circumstances.

As a result, it has been agreed to increase the number of officers in our Incident Control Centre (ICC) and to develop a new 'Command Training Programme' for all of our senior officers. Whilst our current budget does not support investment in training or provision of additional resources at this time, the decision taken has been based on operational requirements as opposed to our restrictive funding. The additional officers will be recruited to ICC in the coming months and the new training programme, which will be undertaken by all officers of Chief Inspector rank and above, will roll out during 2024.

ACC Vicki Evans, the UK lead for the policing response to MAI and recently appointed Senior National Co-ordinator for Counter Terrorism Policing, has agreed to conduct a peer review of our new arrangements in the coming months.

Outcome 2

We Have Confidence in Policing

Cross Border Collaboration

In February, the Chief Constable and senior officers met with An Garda Síochána Commissioner Drew Harris and his senior team. During the meeting, there was discussion on cross border policing strategy, crime trends and officer and staff exchanges as envisaged in the Patten report.

Whilst there remains a clear willingness to progress cross border co-operation, there was an acknowledgement of the limitations presented by current funding issues.

Agreement was reached on refreshing the cross border policing strategy, to include accessing of potential funding streams. In addition, and taking into account crime trends, there was agreement that whilst cross-border co-operation was in a very positive place, further collaboration would be helpful around organised criminality, drugs, immigration, road safety, cyber crime and training.

To support these interventions the Chief Constable and Commissioner agreed to refresh and relaunch the cross-border exchange programme which will result in improved inter-service secondments, improved continuous professional development for those involved and improved collaboration between the two police services.

Enquiry Office Closures

As a consequence of the current financial and resource pressures we are facing, it has been necessary to review services and costs and to make savings in order to deliver a sustainable and effective organisation.

One such service that has been subject to review is the provision of our Police Station Enquiry Offices. This is delivered as part of a Managed Service Contract by a third party who provide Station Enquiry Assistants (SEA's) to assist those callers to the station.

Currently it is proving challenging for our partners to meet the key performance indicator for this service, namely providing resource for 98% of the required hours. The result is that police officers are having to be removed from other duties to backfill the function or, alternatively, the Enquiry Office is closed at short notice.

Neither option is considered sustainable and a decision has been taken to reduce the number of operational Enquiry Offices from 28 to 17, with a view to introducing further reductions and limited opening times in the year ahead.

Voluntary Attender Project

The Police Service has introduced a new process to facilitate 'voluntary attendance' interviews at Police Stations. Interviews will now take place in designated rooms away from the custody environment, making use of our upgraded Niche system functionality to digitally record details throughout.

Officers at Tennent Street and Woodbourne stations have begun using the process, which will now roll out to Coleraine and Armagh. Over time, 23 of these dedicated interview rooms will be introduced across the Service.

Outcome 3

We Have Engaged and Supportive Communities

Northern Ireland Policing Board visit to Paramilitary Crime Task Force

On 15 February 2024, Organised Crime Branch welcomed members of the Northern Ireland Policing Board at a meeting of officers, staff and partners involved in the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF).

Members were provided with an insight into the work of the Branch, with a particular focus on the role of the PCTF and how this multi-agency task force of police officers, staff and partner agencies, work together on a daily basis to disrupt the activities of paramilitary groups.

From its inception back in November 2017 through to the end of January 2024, the PCTF has:

- Conducted 1071 searches;
- Recovered over £4.8m of controlled drugs;
- Seized 339 weapons and firearms;
- Made 468 arrests;
- Charged/reported 508 people for prosecution;
- Seized over £1m of cash and over £2.36m worth of property;
- Secured the issue of £1.8m in Property Recovery Orders;
- Prevented over £22m in revenue loss.



Vice Chair of NI Policing Board Partnership Committee Mukesh Sharma and Detective Chief Superintendent Emma Neill



Detective Chief Superintendent Emma Neill and Detective Superintendent Avine Kelly with visiting members of the NI Policing Board

Connecting with school's from across Belfast

During February, work experience pupils from schools across every part of Belfast took part in a three-day programme lead by our local community planning team.

This was an opportunity for us to engage and connect with the young people, break down barriers and increase mutual understanding.

Different aspects of policing were demonstrated, including:

- Crime Scene Investigators (CSI)
- Viper Suite
- CCTV suite
- Silver Control Room
- Road Policing Unit
- Headquarters Mobile Support Unit
- Air Support, and
- Dog handlers

The students were fantastic and a credit to themselves, their families and their schools. Feedback has been positive and we give a big thank you to everyone involved.

Help in Hand

We recognise that Hate Crime is an underreported crime type. This can occur as the result of a number of factors, not least, through fear and lack of knowledge of the local criminal justice system.

In an attempt to remove the fear and stigma, the Chinese Welfare Association has worked with ourselves and the Department of Justice, to develop an App (Help in Hand) designed to educate local minority communities on hate crime and the system for reporting, as well as supporting victims and witnesses with reporting.

The App's functionality helps to remove language barriers, offering practical assistance to users as it steps through each part of the process to log and record an incident. Users can chose to enter all relevant detail of the incident in their own language and then connect with ourselves via 101. Once connected with our Contact Management Centre, either directly or through an interpreter, the App shares the input information in English, which assists with decision making as to the most appropriate Police response.

The App currently supports four languages, Chinese, Polish, Arabic and Romanian.

Key Campaigns and Events

Greivio Special Rapporteur Visit 19 January 2024

On 19 January, representatives from Public Protection Branch, along with other representative bodies including the Public Prosecution Service and the Judiciary, met with, and provided a briefing to, the EU Greivio Istanbul Convention Committee Special Rapporteur, Maria- Andriani Kostopoulou.

The visit provided the Service with an opportunity to share with the Special Rapporteur the ongoing work in relation to Violence Against Women & Girls, Domestic Abuse & Serious Sexual Violence. The meeting was also complemented with a visit to 'The Rowan' Sexual Assault Referral Clinic, where the Special Rapporteur received briefings from officers attached to Rape Crime Team and doctors and nurses attached to the facility.

Access NI

On 9 February, Criminal Justice Branch's Protective Disclosure Unit (PDU) held a joint Continuous Professional Development Event alongside colleagues from Access NI.

The event aimed to develop better working relationships between both organisations and promote a wider understanding of the role we each play in protecting the most vulnerable in our society.

Not only did Access NI and PDU provide presentations on the end-to-end process for delivering Enhanced Criminal Record Certificates used by employers and registered bodies, the Public Prosecution Service's Independent Reviewer also gave an overview of their role. A representative registered body also outlined how they use the certificate to better protect children and vulnerable adults.

Safeguarding Board

Working together with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), we have been promoting online safety messaging across our social media channels with the aim of educating young people, their parents and carers about online risks and reporting pathways. During February, there were notable shares of the messaging from partner agencies including the Policing Board, the Department of Justice and various local Police and Community Safety Partnership's.

The campaign will continue to run throughout March and will again focus on the three main areas of:

- Sextortion
- Online grooming
- Risks around young people sharing intimate images online.

Our People, Your Service

Injury and Assault Reduction Strategy

In the past four years, 5,622 assaults on police officers and staff have been reported to our Health and Safety Branch. These assaults include punching, spitting, kicking and biting. We know that not all assaults or injuries are reported, so the numbers affected could be much greater.

Being assaulted at work is not part of the job for officers and staff. It is never acceptable.

To understand the scale of the problem, and help us tackle it, a working group has been established. This is made up of representatives from across the Service including, Protective Services, Health and Safety, Occupational Health and Wellbeing, Criminal Justice Branch, the Police Federation and NIPSA.

In 2022, we carried out a survey of all officers and staff seeking the experiences of those who had been assaulted in the previous 12 months, as well as opinions from everyone about the current training and equipment available from the organisation.

43% of police officers that responded confirmed that they had been the victim of an assault during the period. Local Policing Teams represented the highest percentage with 68%, followed by Neighbourhood Policing Teams at 52% and District Support Teams at 51%

21% of police staff who responded indicated that they had been assaulted. All of these were Custody Detention Officers (CDO's). This number represented 82% of all CDO's who responded.

In their feedback, officers and staff observed that increasing societal drug use and mental health issues are having a direct correlation on the level of violence faced.

This information has helped inform the development of our Injury and Assault Reduction Strategy. While there is no easy solution to this issue a number of recommendations have been made to help reduce injury and assault. The working group is taking these forward.

The Chief Constable has prepared an impact statement aimed at highlighting to the court the seriousness of assaults on the victim, the Police Service and the wider community. Come March 2024, his statement will be included in all prosecution files submitted to the PPS involving an on duty assault of a police officer or member of police staff.

Problem Solving Awards

Our second 'Problem Solving in Partnership Awards' took place on Thursday 22 February. Acting in partnership with the Northern Ireland Policing Board, we were kindly hosted in the Harbour Commissioner's Office in Belfast and had the pleasure of Declan Lawn from 'Blue Lights' as our guest speaker.

The awards recognise and celebrate effective problem solving projects from across the Service and Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP's).

On the night, category award winners included:

- Neighbourhood Policing – Tackling anti-social behaviour against the Glider Service in the Colin Area;
- Partnerships – South Belfast Prevention in Partnership Project;
- Investigations – Operation Limnetis;
- Business Support – Leading by estate;
- Policing and Community Safety Partnerships – Causeway Coast and Glens Disability Project.

The South Belfast 'Prevention in Partnership' project received the award of overall winner, taking home The Chenery Award for excellence in problem solving - the award being named after criminologist, Sylvia Chenery, who has been instrumental in supporting us to embed problem solving across the Service.

The winning entry was a fantastic project that focused on tackling enduring anti-social behaviour and associated criminality in the Holylands area of South Belfast. The team will now have the opportunity to attend the National Problem Solving Conference and Tilley Awards in Sheffield in October this year.

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