

**OFFICIAL - PUBLIC****CHIEF CONSTABLE'S REPORT TO NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD  
4 FEBRUARY 2021 (report submitted 29 January 2021)****PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to update the Northern Ireland Policing Board about:

1. Finance and Resources
2. Policing in a COVID-19 environment
3. Community Relations Taskforce
4. Effectiveness of Operation 'Seasons Greetings'
5. EU Exit
6. Uniform Pilot
7. PULSE – Performance Framework
8. External Investigations

As part of the work to strengthen the skill-set of the Service Executive Team we welcome the appointment of our new Chief Operating Officer, Pamela McCreedy. The new Chief Operating Officer function will be absolutely vital to us in addressing the emergent budgetary and transformation challenges we face. I am confident

ent that Pamela's experience and perspective will ensure that we are significantly better placed to manage change and make optimal use of our resources in the months ahead.

**1. Finance and Resources**

Following the publication of the 2021-22 Draft Budget by the Department of Finance, we have now received formal notification of our '2021-22 Draft Budget Allocation' from the Department of Justice. As anticipated, it sets out an overall flat line 'main grant' budget,

a roll forward Additional Security budget and EU Exit funding which is some £6m short of our requirement. There is also no confirmation as yet, on funding for legacy, tackling paramilitary activity, COVID-19 or the Gillen Review. In the round, our assessment is that we currently face a projected funding deficit of circa £23m in 2021-22.

The Service Executive Team has begun to explore opportunities to close this projected funding gap. What is clear, even from these early discussions, is that the options available to us are limited and will inevitably adversely impact, to a greater or lesser extent, on our service delivery, operational resilience, capabilities and Policing Plan outcomes. It is highly likely, given the size of our funding gap, that necessary budgetary control measures will include significant reductions in:

1. Police Officer and Police Staff Headcount;
2. Police Officer and Police Staff Recruitment; and
3. Investment in capabilities and essential infrastructure

Illustrative options for reductions are outlined in the table below:

<b>Illustrative Reduction Options</b>	<b>£m</b>
Opening Over-commitment	5.0
50% Reduction Officer Recruitment Numbers (only @ 114 officers recruited 2021-22)	6.0
20% Reduction to Main Grant Overtime	3.0
50% Reduction Staff Recruitment (To new headcount of @ 2,478)	2.0
Further Non Pay and/or Managed Service Reductions	7.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>23.0</b>

The most significant impact will be necessary reductions in both police officer and police staff headcount and recruitment. Rather than increasing police officer numbers towards 7,500 as agreed under the New Decade New Approach, we could therefore instead experience a reduction of more than 300 police officer posts to 6,700 and almost 100 police staff to 2,470 over the financial year. Reductions of this nature will inevitably impact on a range of competing issues and tough choices will have to be made in the months ahead.

In terms of recruitment, our emerging planning assumptions are for a 50% reduction in both police officer and police staff recruitment. This will not only adversely impact on those on current recruitment campaign merit lists but, in the medium to longer term, on service delivery and resilience across our functions. It is foreseeable that progress against the commitments within the Policing Plan to increase organisational representativeness/diversity will be hindered and indeed setback.

The critical importance of neighbourhood officers in delivering visible, accessible and responsive policing and building confidence in the Police Service is well understood. **Consequently, protecting the Neighbourhood Policing function and its existing resourcing levels will be our priority.** This will however inevitably create knock on pressures in other areas of service delivery and capability. Those areas likely to be impacted are specialist functions, especially in what is described as the 'back and middle office', and the potential closure of front counter/enquiry office facilities in non-custody police stations.

We are taking steps to quickly assess the consequences of the situation we find ourselves in and make choices about how we use and invest the £758m we have been allocated from the Executive.

We will continue to update the Board on this critical issue.

## **2. Policing in a COVID-19 environment**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Since the Board last met, the Northern Ireland Executive has laid a series of further Health Protection Regulations and restrictions to reinforce the 'Stay At Home' message and reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

On Thursday 21 January 2021, the Executive announced a further extension of the current Health Protection restrictions, until 5 March 2021.

### **2.2. Organisational Impact**

Notwithstanding a small number of localised outbreaks, the organisation has remained largely resilient, as the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the community increased over the Christmas and New Year period. To further promote a safe working environment, the decision was taken on 6 January 2021 that the wearing of Face Coverings/Fluid Repellent Face Masks would be mandatory in all shared workspace areas, unless this prevents an individual from performing their role. This practice will continue for the foreseeable future and will be kept under review. Further guidance has also been provided on the necessity test for arrests and custody protocols.

Tightening of restrictions and increased levels of community transmission led to a decision to pause all external recruitment, promotion and internal selection processes currently requiring face-to-face assessment and move these online where possible. This decision was not taken lightly and whilst I acknowledge that these postponements will be disappointing to many, our primary concern is to keep candidates and our police officers and staff safe at this time.

Conscious of the need to maintain our resilience, I wrote to the Department of Justice on 4 January with the support of the Staff Associations and Trade Union to ask that a decision to offer COVID-19 vaccine to frontline officers and staff is expedited once the most vulnerable members of the public and health profession have been vaccinated.

### **2.3 Reports by the Police Ombudsman and Northern Ireland Policing Board on policing of COVID-19**

In the week before Christmas, the Police Ombudsman published her report into the policing of protests on 6 and 13 June 2020.

Having carefully considered both reports and associated recommendations, the Police Service is in a position to accept most of the recommendations that have been made. We have not, however, been able to accept recommendations contained in both reports on rescinding Fixed Penalty Notices and prosecutions. We have also not been able to accept the Board's call for the withdrawal of Spit and Bite Guards. Those recommendations we have accepted have senior leads allocated to move into delivery and change.

On Fixed Penalty Notices and prosecutions, our legal advice from Senior Crown Counsel is that there is no scope for us to take the action directed. As is the case with all other prosecutorial acts taken by us, it is the Public Prosecution Service and courts who independently adjudicate on these matters. These principles lie in the 1999 review of the Criminal Justice System. We are therefore strongly of the view that we cannot review these matters or indeed withdraw any action taken. To do so may in fact engage the Article 6 rights of others. That said, we await any decision of the Public Prosecution Service or courts.

On 25 January, we began to further roll out Spit and Bite Guard equipment for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following commitments made at our last meeting in December 2020, we have written to the Board separately on this issue to explain our rationale, along with the associated checks and balances that will be introduced.

There have been a total of eight uses of Spit and Bite Guard equipment in the last review period, 18 December 2020 – 21 January 2021. This compares with a total of 35 spitting and biting incidents recorded by officers in the same period. This is in the context of a 12% rise in the number of assaults with injury on a Constable in 2020-21, equating to an increase from 549 to 615 incidents.

## 2.4 Enforcement

The tightening of restrictions and a return to a ‘full lockdown’ has created a need for even greater visibility of police officers and increased engagement across our communities. Officers have worked hard to support people to follow the Regulations, encouraging them to take personal responsibility to follow the ‘Stay at Home’ message.



Over the course of the weekend 22-24 January 2021, our level of enforcement hit a new peak with 246 Fixed Penalty Notices being issued. The majority of these notices were issued to persons engaged in house parties.

Our approach to, and indeed the powers we have for the enforcement of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and 2021 have remained subject of much public debate and concern. We recognise this and are continuing to engage with both the Department of Justice and Department of Health to develop further guidance and provide greater clarity on these matters. We will of course keep the policing style under review to ensure we balance enforcement of the Regulations with wider policing responsibilities and our desire to maintain and build public confidence in policing.

The policing approach to funerals and other gatherings have been the subject of particular public comment. From the outset of the pandemic, we have consistently said that our approach will be to engage, explain, encourage and enforce. Following a breach of the Public Health Regulations, the gathering of evidence and the building of a case for consideration by the Public Prosecution Service takes time. During this intervening period we understand how public perceptions of police inaction can materialise. However, far from inaction, police do investigate such cases within the context and constraints of the current legislation, with a view to reporting those breaking the law to the Public Prosecution Service.

Operationally, recorded crime levels continue to be below the five-year average with a notable reduction since the latest lockdown measures came into effect on 26 December 2020. The daily average number of crimes recorded in January 2021 is comparable with levels recorded during the first lockdown, during April 2020. When comparing this financial year to date with the previous financial year to date, there has been a 13.2% decrease (11,501 fewer crimes).

Whilst antisocial behaviour (ASB) reduced during 'Operation Seasons Greetings', it is still 37.7% higher than the previous financial year, equating to an additional 17,042 incidents. The majority (57.9%) of the increase relates to COVID-19 related ASB incidents. When COVID-19 related incidents are excluded, the level of ASB remains consistent with the five-year average.

### **3. Community Relations Taskforce**

Since announcing the new Community Relations Taskforce in December, we have taken steps to bring it to life. Recognising the importance of a community voice and influence in the development of the Taskforce, we have been working inclusively to secure membership from across communities. Academic partners, critical friends, professional leads, and Staff Associations and Networks have also been involved from the outset.

Two initial workshop sessions had been planned to agree Terms of Reference, appoint Chair roles and develop an Action Plan reflecting the agreed priorities of the community and the Police Service. Whilst preparatory work was ongoing for the first of these community workshops, the disturbing arson attack on the Belfast Multi Cultural Association occurred. Existing plans were consequently adapted to facilitate a community-only workshop focusing on the Belfast arson attack. The intention is now for this workshop to act as a pathfinder to inform the strategic direction of the Taskforce, supported by independent experts practiced in community engagement, community development and capacity building. It is anticipated that the pathfinder phase will continue until around the end of February, with work to formalise the Taskforce completing by late spring/early summer. We will, as promised, remain in dialogue with Board members about the final Terms of Reference.

### **4. Effectiveness of Operations Seasons Greetings**

The Christmas period saw us launch 'Operation Seasons Greetings', our month long operation providing a highly visible surge in policing activity over the festive period. The Operation's aims were, as in previous years, to reassure the public, prevent crime and respond to crime incidents across Northern Ireland, albeit in a different operating context.

In the period between 1 December 2020 and 5 January 2021 overall crime levels decreased by almost 17% as compared with the same period in 2019-20. A higher than average number of crimes was recorded on Christmas Day, however, compared with the previous five years.

The figures in the following table summarise the number of patrols conducted and the effect in targeted areas.



In terms of road safety, a total of 5,655 road side breath tests were conducted as part of our Christmas Drink Drive Campaign. Whilst the number of detections for drink and drug related offences are lower than previous years they are, however, reflective of comparatively lower levels of traffic movement during the Christmas and New Year period.

The number of hate motivated incidents and crimes reported during Christmas and New Year exceeded levels experienced over the past five year period, with 143 crimes and 211 incidents recorded over the Christmas and New Year period. This represents an approximate 20% increase in incidents and 17% increase in crimes when compared with the same period in 2019. This is notable when compared to the almost 17% decrease in overall crime during the same period.

The following table shows the individual strands of hate crime compared to the previous five years:

<b>Hate Motivated Crimes and Incidents - 5 Year Comparative Overview</b>								
		<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2020 v 2019</b>
<b>Religious</b>	Incidents	4	3	10	4	2	5	3
	Crimes	2	1	2	1	2	3	1
<b>Racist</b>	Incidents	91	101	96	88	71	82	11
	Crimes	62	65	55	50	45	50	5
<b>Homophobic</b>	Incidents	27	15	23	24	27	28	1
	Crimes	16	7	10	17	17	14	-3
<b>Transphobic</b>	Incidents	0	1	3	2	6	11	5
	Crimes	0	1	5	0	3	6	3
<b>Disability</b>	Incidents	11	9	5	7	7	33	26
	Crimes	5	3	3	6	5	26	21
<b>Sectarian</b>	Incidents	66	46	51	46	66	56	-10
	Crimes	50	32	28	37	54	49	-5
<b>All Hate</b>	Incidents	197	172	185	168	176	211	35
	Crimes	134	106	99	109	122	143	21

In addition, between 1 December 2020 and 5 January 2021 we received 3,072 reports of domestic abuse, representing an almost 7% decrease compared with the same period in 2019. There was also a slight decrease, by around 3%, in the number of domestic-related crimes recorded in 2020 as compared with 2019. However, whilst overall crime levels were below average during the 2020 festive period, recorded levels of domestic-motivated violence against the person offences were above average. During this time our officers made 636 arrests in connection with these reports and 208 people were charged.

The 'Seasons Greetings' social media plan ran across the Police Service corporate and local social media feeds. Key messaging focused on:

- Safer streets for shopping and socialising
- Safer roads and public transport
- Safer homes for those at risk of domestic abuse
- Safer businesses and online transactions
- Adherence to the Health Protection Regulations

Our social media messaging reached more than 4.5 million on Facebook and Twitter and more than 250,000 people engaged with our content. We reached more than 286,000 with organic messaging on Instagram. In addition to this, we used targeted adverts on Facebook and Instagram to promote our key messages. In total these reached 608,653 people with a total post engagement of 40,875.

***\*Please note that crime figures contained in this section are indicative only, having not been subject to formal audit and ratification\****

## **5. EU Exit**

At midnight on 31 December 2020, the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland left the European Union commencing a period of transition that terminated on 31 December 2020. The Service's operational response to this development was in place from Monday 28 December to Monday 4 January 2021. This involved a significant uplift in resourcing, primarily utilised to focus on enhancing our visibility including increased patrolling and Vehicle Check Points at key locations including ports and on major road networks. There was also a focus on other policing priorities, including the arrest of high harm offenders and our response to the pandemic/public health restrictions.

As the transition terminated we experienced no significant issues, we do however continue to monitor the situation. We will continue to work with criminal justice and law enforcement partners to ensure that new arrangements are implemented and effectively support our operational requirements.

The next phase of our response will run from February 2021 to end October 2021. It will focus on supporting communities disproportionately impacted by the consequences of EU Exit. This includes development of new approaches to collaboration and engagement, focusing on safeguarding, reduction of harm and community empowerment.

We have contributed to the updated National Crime Agency Intelligence Assessment on the impact of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol on Serious and Organised Crime. This Assessment will form a large part of the basis for strategic planning going forward in terms of tackling the threats outlined within the Assessment and the need for a collaborative approach with relevant external partners including with An Garda Síochána. At this point the full impact of the new arrangements remains unclear, in terms of potential exploitation by Organised Crime Groups. In addition, we continue to monitor and assess potential exploitation of the Common Travel Area by Organised Crime Groups.

ACC Mark McEwan, the Gold Commander for EU Exit, appeared before the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 27 January 2021, to provide an update on our latest views, assessment and operational impact.

## **6. Uniform Pilot**

Members will be aware that our uniform trial commenced in October of last year involving 50 officers from a range of operational positions and locations. The trial, which ended on 17 January, has been very positive, enabling us to gather views on new shirts, trousers and headwear from the perspective of both our officers and the public.



A total of 1,122 officers responded to our internal survey. Almost three-quarters of officers surveyed (73%) would support the introduction of the new uniform, while 17% would not and the remaining 10% were unsure. 60% indicated they had received feedback on the uniform which was perceived to be 'totally positive' or 'mostly positive'.

In terms of feedback from the Police Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), our Independent Advisory Groups and from the community in general, I am pleased to confirm that this has again been generally positive. Feedback from PCSPs, in particular, was very positive with most returns highlighting that a functional uniform for operational police officers was necessary.

As with all change, there have inevitably been a range of views including some concerns, the majority of which we are confident can be addressed.

An Outline Business Case with a number of options and associated costs will now be prepared for consideration.

## **7. PULSE Performance Framework**

Changes to our operational and organisational performance management arrangements are now well under-way with 'PULSE' our Performance Management Framework now agreed and supported by a new real-time performance 'gate-way' system of the same name. A full demonstration is planned for the Board's next Performance Committee.



## **8. External Investigations**

Files for Operations Kenova, Klina and the Bobby Storey Funeral remain under consideration by the Public Prosecution Service.

A 'deep dive exercise' with the 'Officer in Overall Charge' of Operation Kenova, Jon Boutcher, has been commenced.

Terms of Reference for the independent review of lessons learned in Operation Yurta are being finalised and will be shared with the Board when complete.