

ASSESSING THE OFFICER AND STAFF REQUIREMENT FOR THE POLICE SERVICE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Report from a rapid independent review of
PSNI demands and capacity

February 2024





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Foreword

This report on the officer and staff requirement for the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is the product of an urgent review which casts light on the stark differences between policing in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. Our review team's work to produce the report has been both eye-opening and humbling. Eye-opening because of the extent of difference between the PSNI operating environment and that faced by other UK police forces we work with. And humbling because of the insight we gained into the conditions under which officers in Northern Ireland must work. While often working in a stressful environment and encountering high risk situations, police officers elsewhere in the UK do not have to check under their cars on a routine basis for explosives or conceal their profession from acquaintances.

The conclusion of this report is that Northern Ireland's context drives a requirement for significantly higher number of officers and staff per capita than in other geographies. PSNI performs a range of functions that are carried out by national agencies in England and Wales, but it is the security context that drives the greatest differences in resource requirements. These requirements are ongoing and there has been no fall in traditional policing demands – which leads us to conclude that the dramatic reduction in officer numbers since 2010 cannot be tied to a measurable shift in the staffing requirement of the service.

A review of this nature and pace can never precisely pinpoint the service's needs, and we outline in the report steps that could further strengthen estimates. However, we believe our findings to be robust, and any necessary assumptions are shared transparently, along with their supporting evidence and caveats. We hope we are therefore providing a valuable resource to decision-makers shaping the service's budget and priorities for the future at this critical time.

Tom Gash, Managing Director, Leapwise



1 Purpose and methodology

1.1 Leapwise was commissioned by PSNI to conduct a rapid assessment of its officer and staff requirement

This report is the final output of a commission from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) on February 5, 2024. This commission asked Leapwise provide a rapid, independent assessment of the officer and staff requirement for PSNI, drawing on analysis of public and internal PSNI data and Leapwise's experience from supporting strategic planning and budget decisions across 14 UK police forces and five national policing bodies.

1.2 Our rapid assessment used a range of methods to triangulate likely officer and staff requirements

Our analysis had three main components:

1. **Contextual analysis.** To understand PSNI's financial and performance position, we examined independent analysis such as inspection reports and internal PSNI reports, including Service Management Statements.
2. **Top-down analysis of the PSNI resource requirement.** We aimed to assess the numbers of officers and staff PSNI would need to 'keep up' with other UK nations and PSNI public services – and conducted a rapid review of comparative crime and non-crime demands for PSNI and other UK police forces.
3. **More bottom-up analysis of officer and staff requirements.** We conducted targeted benchmarking, interviews and data review to identify and analyse areas where PSNI has additional requirements vs other UK forces, owing to its unique role (e.g. performing functions that are performed by national bodies in England and Wales), its security and risk environment, and differences in legislation, or other areas.

Assessments of differences in the PSNI requirement were initially validated through internal workshops and interviews with areas leads and those with experience working in forces outside of PSNI. Subsequently, we tested findings with chief officers elsewhere in the UK who had experience working in PSNI who could speak to differences in context independently of the Service. A letter of validation can be requested alongside this report.

We are, of course, aware of the limitations of a rapid assessment of this nature. However, we are confident that our methods for estimating requirements are clear and proportionate and have included confidence ratings for our analysis in Appendix 1. As part of its Service Management Statement process, PSNI has started a more detailed bottom-up assessment of requirements, based on demand forecasts and the unit times/ costs to service different categories of police demand in every function. However, this is a multi-year endeavour and, despite working with 19 UK policing organisations, we know of no police force in the UK has yet done this robustly for all policing functions.

1.3 Our findings should be viewed alongside other estimates of resource requirements

Ours is not the first estimate of the PSNI officer and staff requirement, and should be viewed in the context of other anchors. In his 1999 report, Chris (now Lord) Patten's Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland concluded: "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." In the mid-2010s PSNI invested considerable time and rigour to estimate the resourcing requirements of local policing teams based on analysis of demand and times to serve these demands. They added to



this rigorous work with further higher-level analysis for requirements of other functions and estimated a requirement of 6,963 officers. Analysis conducted specifically around the additional responsibilities related to new border and security concerns related to Brexit suggested that an additional 316 officers were required in scenarios that avoided a hard border with Ireland (but orders of magnitude more than this with one).

1.4 It is important not to fixate on officer numbers – as flexibility on resource use will drive the best value for money for taxpayers

We have deliberately ensured that our method takes account of staff as well as officer requirements. Police staff provide vital specialist skills in corporate services functions such as Finance, HR and ICT, but they also deliver frontline service, staffing the control rooms that handle calls for help from the public, and providing essential skills in areas such as financial crime, intelligence and forensics. If these functions aren't properly resourced, the force as a whole will be less productive.

The right mix of officers and staff should be based on proper analysis of operational needs, and will change over time – for example, as technological skills become more essential to policing, or when demand in functions such as the control room shift. We therefore recommend that our analysis of officers and staff requirements is translated into an overall budget requirement – or perhaps a 'service strength' requirement – in order to avoid the perverse effects of focusing solely on a target number of officers.¹

We are aware of the fact that PSNI's budget comes from multiple different sources and funding streams, but our analysis is concerned with the overall requirement, rather specific streams.

2 Context

2.1 PSNI plays a distinctive role in Northern Ireland

As well as delivering a traditional crime-fighting and public safety role, policing in Northern Ireland now plays a critical role in peace, security and community cohesion. Since the 1998 Agreement and 1999 Patten Report, the goal for policing in Northern Ireland has been "a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole".² And this requires extensive focus on community policing, as even today some communities are considerably less willing to report crime to the police than in other parts of the UK.³

The security context naturally places constraints on how far any police force's operations can be entirely de-securitized, however, and to maintain confidence policing must also protect the public. PSNI currently faces a "Severe" terrorist threat level, meaning an attack is highly likely, and this grading has been in place every year since 2010, with the exception of 2022-23. That year, the threat was briefly downgraded to "substantial" before the attempted murder of Chief Inspector John Caldwell in February 2023. Unless this security context eases, PSNI must operate with additional vigilance, both in day-to-day policing and in the breadth and depth of their work to prevent and detect terrorist activity.

¹ In all UK nations – but particularly in Scotland – a political commitment around officer numbers has led to a situation where officers are doing jobs that could be done better and at lower cost by staff, for example managing firearms licensing applications or receiving and directing calls from the public

² [The Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement](#), April 1998

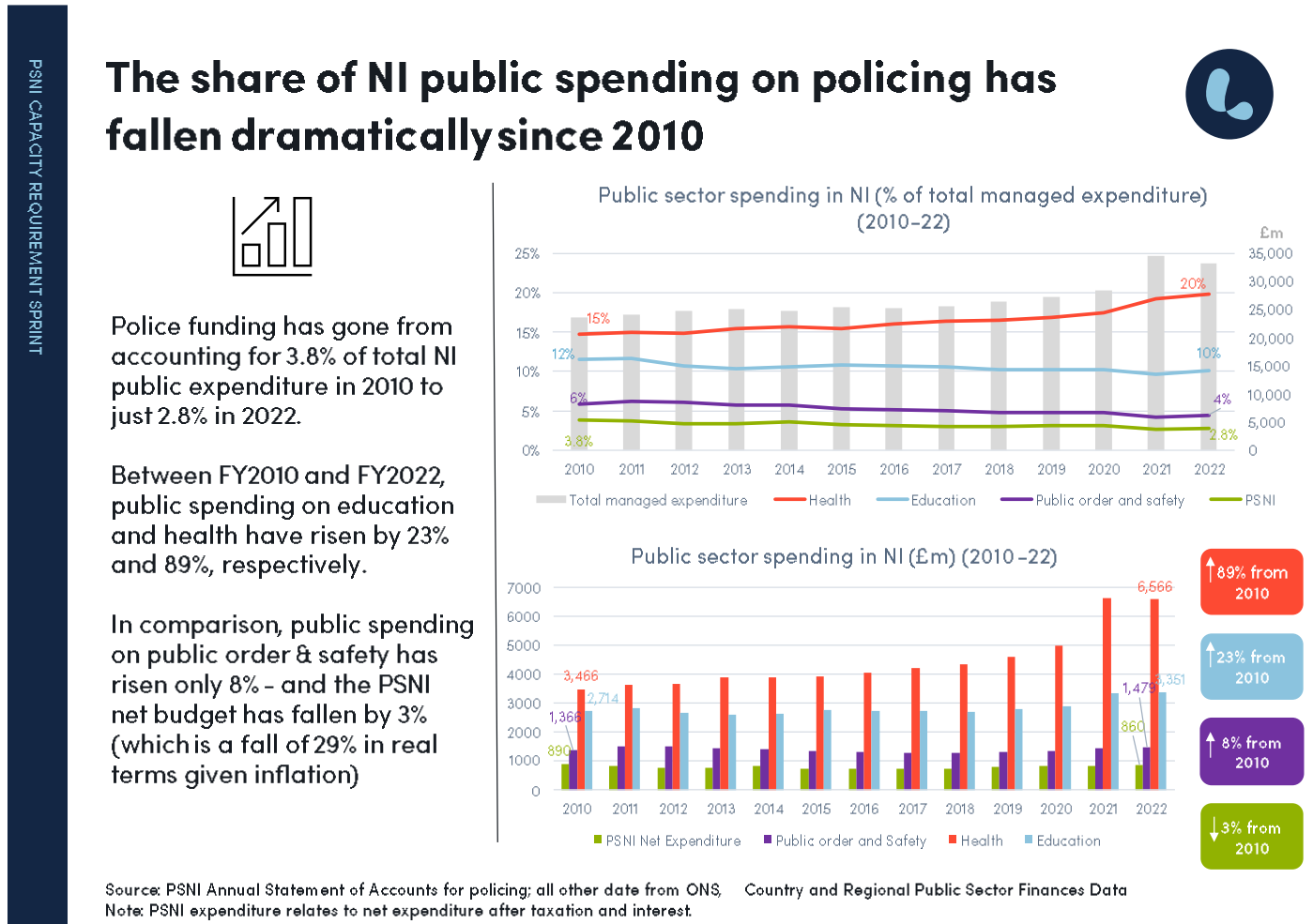
³ In both Northern and Ireland and England and Wales the main reason for not reporting crime is that a crime is judged 'too trivial' or because 'police would do nothing/ couldn't help'. However, in Northern Ireland 33% of those not reporting crimes report this is because the crime was a 'private matter/dealt with matter ourselves'.



2.2 Since 2010, PSNI has experienced the largest expenditure reduction of all UK police forces

While Northern Ireland’s threat environment has remained broadly constant since 2010, the same cannot be said for resources. PSNI has experienced significant budget cuts amounting to a 3% reduction between 2010 and 2023, and a fall of 29% in real terms given inflation.⁴ Spending elsewhere in Northern Ireland has not seen the same trend, with the ONS showing increases of 89% in total health spending, 23% in education spend and 8% in broader ‘public safety’ expenditures (see Figure 1).⁵

Figure 1: Trends in Northern Ireland public expenditure



At the time of writing, February 2024, PSNI has its lowest ever number of officers (6,440) and staff (2,310) and has been operating with a 2023–4 budget of £827m.⁶ This is despite relatively stable demand. The number of calls for service has remained remarkably consistent over the last 5 years for which we have data, with a dip in 2020–21 during the Covid-19 pandemic, and with increase in the proportion of emergency and priority incidents since 2019–20.

⁴ PSNI spend data from PSNI Annual Statement of Accounts, 2023; inflation adjuster from ONS

⁵ Office for National Statistics, Country and Regional Public Sector Finances Data, 2023; PSNI spend data from PSNI Annual Statement of Accounts, 2023

⁶ February 2024 actuals from PSNI data, down from 6,736 in February 2023 (6,557 in Nov '23)



2.3 There are early signs of performance difficulties

While performance has held up quite well in many areas and the service is highly regarded for its detection outcomes, there are increasing signs of strain (see Box 1). PSNI voluntarily undertakes inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). In their 2017-8 inspection, they found PSNI to be performing at a 'Good' level in all areas. By 2023, HMICFRS inspection gradings had dipped, with ratings of 'Good' in two areas but only 'Adequate' in three.⁷ More worrying, there are signs of a recent dip in public confidence and average ratings of police performance.⁸

PSNI's Service Management Statement reports strain across almost all functions, though we did not independently validate this as part of our work. The Service Management Statement identifies that the service has experienced a moderate increase in demand and severe financial resourcing risk.⁹

Additionally, according to our benchmarking, PSNI's £31m annual overtime spend, is 1.5 to two times higher per officer than in similar English forces, which signals that core staff levels are no longer providing sufficient operational resilience.¹⁰ These overtime levels exist despite close monitoring and efforts to reduce spend by an Overtime Steering Group, and PSNI has therefore added "Service Operating Model sustainability" to their corporate risk register.

Sickness absence is rising, and staff morale faltering.¹¹ PSNI has been unable to act on the independent pay review board's recommendation for a 7% pay rise without incurring an even greater deficit than the forecasted PSNI 2023/4 overspend of £61m. The August 2023 data breach, which saw PSNI release personal information on 9,483 officers and staff, has left the workforce feeling exposed.

Difficulties may be somewhat due to how the shrinking of the service has been managed. The approach to managing budget reductions between 2010 and 2020 was seen as sub-optimal by the Northern Ireland Audit Office, and there is no doubt that the service has been left somewhat 'out of shape'.¹² As in Scotland, officers – including many on restricted duties after injury or other issues – are performing roles usually performed by staff at lower cost in England and Wales. And because officer reductions must be achieved through natural attrition, there are skills and capacity gaps emerging in key functions, and functional resilience has fallen.

PSNI now has new leadership and has set out on a significant transformation agenda to drive workforce efficiency and productivity in the medium term. But the immediate concern of the service is impending

⁷ HMICFRS, [Peel Inspection](#), 2018; HMICFRS, [Peel Inspection](#), 2023

⁸ Overall public confidence in the police and police accountability arrangements (based on a seven-strand composite measure) was 82% in 2021/22, down from 86% in 2020/21, and the proportion rating their local police as doing and excellent or good job fell from 62% to 55%. DoJ, [Experience of Crime and Perceptions of Crime and Policing and Justice: Findings from the 2021/22 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey](#) (NISCTS), March 2023

⁹ The Service Management Statement highlights high resourcing risk across frontline services including local policing, response to incidents, calls for service, serious and organised crime, public protection, and custody and custody healthcare, as well as enabling areas of information and communication services, procurement and logistics, and capital development and estates.

¹⁰ Leapwise rapid benchmarking of overtime spend vs most similar force group (see Appendix 1 for detail).

¹¹ HR data shows average working days lost for police officers rising from 16.1 in 2021-22, to 16.8 in 2022-23, and to 22.0 in 2023-24

¹² Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Reducing costs in the PSNI](#), 28 April 2020 reported: "The changes in the workforce are not related to an analysis of the actual number of officers the PSNI needed to deliver an effective service – they are driven solely by the need to meet immediate financial pressures... Over time, there is a risk of developing a significant gap between actual staff numbers and the numbers that the PSNI's analysis suggests it needs."



budget decisions, which will affect their ability to stabilise and strengthen the service and implement the 7% recommended pay rise to tackle workforce morale.¹³ The return of the Assembly and Executive and impending budget decisions will therefore be a pivotal moment in the service's future.

Box 1: Extract from HMICFRS Assessment of anticipated budget impacts on performance

"In the year ending 31 March 2023, the police budget shortfall was £80m. In order to meet its budget, the service removed £40m from non-pay costs, received additional funding late in the year of £30m and made £10m savings from headcount by cutting 424 posts (police personnel) – a reduction of nearly 6 percent. Police officer numbers have fallen to 6,699, the lowest since the service was formed. The budget settlement for this financial year creates a gap in the region of £120m from the resource requirement. Planning assumptions see officer numbers falling to around 6,000 by March 2025. This reduction is in sharp contrast to the growth of police numbers in England and Wales by 20,000 officers under the Police Uplift Programme.

Although we make some critical comments about the service's workforce planning, we acknowledge that this decrease in officer numbers is likely to have consequences, including:

- a significant reduction in neighbourhood policing patrol hours, meaning less visibility, problem-solving activity, engagement and reassurance for communities;
- a reduced number of detectives and less experienced detectives. This will limit capacity for the development of intelligence and proactive investigation of terrorism, organised crime and high-harm offences such as rape, sexual assault and domestic abuse; and
- fewer specialist uniformed support officers will mean reduced capacity for proactive search operations, specialist resource deployment and less resilience to deal with significant public disorder."

HMICFRS, [Peel Inspection](#), 2023

3 Key findings

3.1 Analysis 1: If PSNI resourcing had kept pace with England, Wales and Scotland since 2010, it would have 8,005–8540 officers and 2,464–3,018 staff today

Our first analysis focused on identifying resource shifts over time in PSNI and across other UK jurisdictions. Historically, the pressures of PSNI's distinct operating environment and additional national roles performed were reflected in their resourcing. In 2010, Northern Ireland had 7,405 officers¹⁴ – or 454 officers per 100,000 residents.^{15 16} This was 1.8 times the per capita resourcing of England and Wales police forces and 1.4 times the level in Police Scotland, which also houses some national functions.

Between 2010 and 2023, however, PSNI's officer numbers fell to 6730, or 353 officers per capita – a 22% real terms reduction in officers.¹⁷ Shifts in England, Wales and Scotland have been nowhere near this level. Scotland has seen a relatively stable officer number pattern – a product of the Scottish Government's strong focus on its numerical target for police officer numbers. England and Wales saw significant reductions in the wave of austerity from 2010–19. However, after inspectorate warnings and

¹³ BBC News '[PSNI: Jon Boucher says 7% pay rise will be implemented](#)', 7 December 2023

¹⁴ Northern Ireland Policing Board '[Question to the Chief Constable: What are the PSNI Officer numbers, year on year, since 2001?](#)' 02 November 2023

¹⁵ Police Service of Northern Ireland, Strength of Police Service Statistics (various editions). Sourced from UK House of Commons Library, [Police Service Strength, Research Briefing](#), January 2024.

¹⁶ Please note that in 2010 PSNI also had a full time reserve staffed at 382 on 31.03.10, then ceasing to exist on 31.12.2011 when all remaining officers exited the organisation.

¹⁷ Up to date comparative police workforce statistics are not yet published for 2024, but internal data shows that the PSNI establishment now stands at 6,440 (3.3 per 100,000) so this understates the true level of officer reductions.



signs of significant performance dips, these were largely reversed, as the government implemented its 20,000 officer Police Uplift Programme. Notwithstanding this increase, the National Police Chiefs' Council has recently shared analysis which suggests an England and Wales police funding shortfall of £3.2bn.¹⁸

Police staff perform vital roles supporting the frontline, bringing specialist skills in areas such as technology, financial management and digital forensics, and reducing the cost of administrative functions. Our comparative figures on police staff only date back to 2015, but police staff numbers per capita in PSNI have also fallen during this period. They have broadly kept pace with changes in Scotland but not with changes in England and Wales.¹⁹

Our analysis examined how many PSNI officers and staff there would be today if Northern Ireland had kept pace with shifts in England and Wales and Scotland (see Figures 2 and 3, below) – with the red lines on charts in Figures 2 and 3 showing the officer and staff trajectory PSNI would have had if it had kept pace with other jurisdictions.

Figure 2: Officer numbers in England, Wales and Scotland vs PSNI

PSNI CAPACITY REQUIREMENT REVIEW

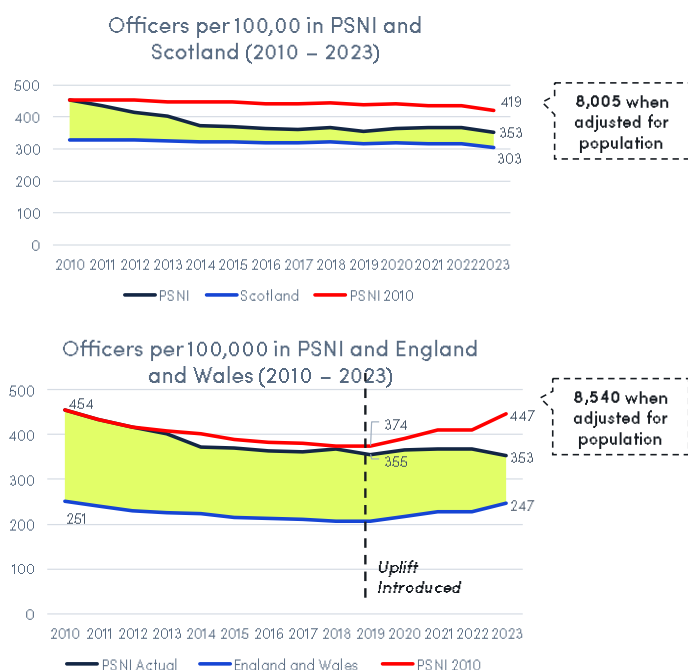
PSNI would have 8,005 to 8,540 officers if numbers had kept pace with Scotland or England and Wales



Historically, the pressures of PSNI's distinct operating environment were reflected in resourcing. In 2010, PSNI had 1.4x the officers per capita of Scotland and 1.8x the officers per capita of the England and Wales average.

Between 2010 and 2023, however, PSNI officer numbers plummeted. Scotland's number of officers per capita has remained relatively stable since 2010 while the Police Uplift Programme has seen England and Wales per capita levels recover after a dip from 2010-19.

If PSNI officer numbers had kept pace with the rest of the UK (maintaining the ratio with these nations), PSNI today would have 8,005 to 8,540 officers to reflect significant population growth over the period.



Sources: Home Office- Police Workforce Data Tables, 2010 – 2023; Police Service of Northern Ireland Strength of Police Service Statistics (various editions sourced from UK House of Commons Library, Police Service Strength, Research Briefing January 2024); NISRA Statistical Bulletin, 2022; 21-year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland

¹⁸ CC Gavin Stephens cited in V. Dodd, 'Thousands of UK police working away from frontline crime amid funding crisis' in *Guardian*, 5 January 2024. The key reasons cited for the additional requirement were the need to rebuild financial resilience (after a fall in police reserves of £1bn) and the need to properly fund staff functions to support the frontline (an estimated 6,000 police officers in roles that should be done by police staff at lower cost, or more effectively, yet forces are being asked to find an additional £1bn+ savings, mostly from staff functions).

¹⁹ It should be noted that Police Scotland has a very low proportion of staff compared to forces in England and Wales as staff numbers have been kept artificially low in order to control spending while still meeting officer targets. This has resulted in officers performing roles that would otherwise be performed by staff at far lower cost.



Figure 3: Police staff numbers in England, Wales and Scotland vs PSNI

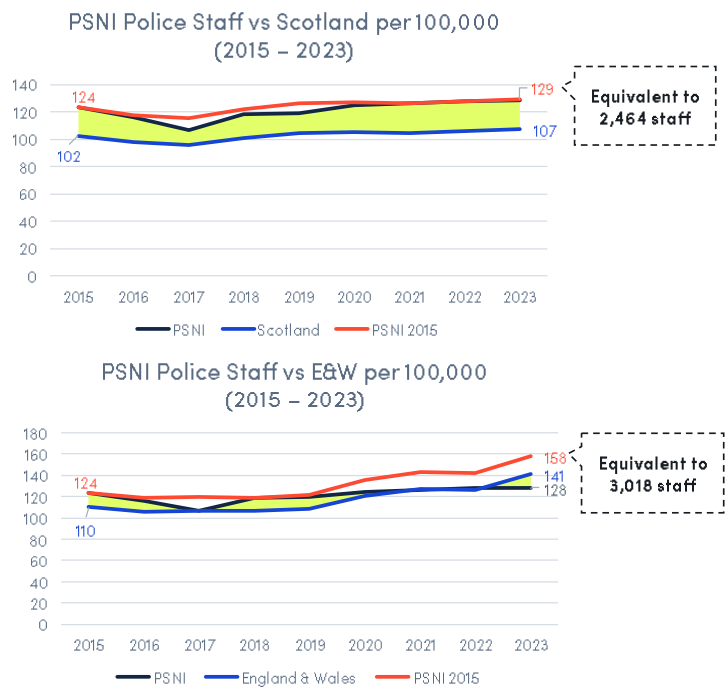
Total staff numbers would be 2,464–3,018 if PSNI had kept pace with Scotland or England and Wales



PSNI's modest increase in staff numbers since 2015 has not kept pace with population growth

Due to a Scottish Government focus on increasing officer (vs staff) numbers, Scotland has not significantly increase staff numbers either – but there has been a significant uplift in England & Wales

Had PSNI staff numbers shifted in line with Scotland they would have 2464 (ie less than the current 2481) staff today – but if PSNI had kept pace with England and Wales, PSNI would have 3,064 staff (ie 583 more staff than currently)



Sources: Home Office – Police Workforce Data Tables, 2015 – 2023; HRDP Data 2015 – 2024 (PSNI);

3.2 Analysis 2: PSNI-specific roles and risks require 1,594–2,487 additional officers and 404–495 additional staff, plus increased cash costs

Our analysis identified five main types of differences in PSNI’s officer requirement in comparison to forces in England and Wales. These were:

- **Role:** PSNI has addition responsibilities in comparison to English and Welsh forces as it runs a set of functions performed largely at national level in the UK. This includes counter-terrorism, air support, border security and delivery of national technology capabilities.²⁰
- **Operational risk:** PSNI’s Severe threat of terrorism drives a significant set of necessary counter-measures in both specialist and regular policing functions. For example, PSNI is a fully armed service (requiring additional training and equipment), deploys officers at a minimum in pairs (at a resource level in response to threat and risk which is consistently above the rest of the UK), and deals with a significantly higher volume of close protection (bodyguarding) activities.
- **Infrastructure risk:** PSNI operates with significantly fortified estates and vehicles and has different security protocols, driving additional staffing and spend.

²⁰ Some differences relate to both role and risk and where this is the case, we have included in the ‘role’ category.



- **Legal and judicial context:** PSNI's legal and criminal justice environment creates additional requirements. For example, officers in PSNI are required to deliver certain summons and execute fine enforcement warrants, which are done by post/electronically or by court enforcement officers in England and Wales. In addition, in Northern Ireland, there is a greater separation between the police and PPS due to contextual considerations driving the need for greater PPS independence, and so PSNI requires internal capacity for legal advice regarding charging.
- **Other:** We include long-term sickness as a separate reason for differing officer and staff requirements in PSNI. This is driven by higher historic incidence of trauma and related mental ill health, injuries created or exacerbated by the carrying of firearms and ballistic body armour (recently significantly improved), and potentially wider factors. High levels of long-term sickness in PSNI and reducing capacity also increases the burden and stress levels amongst the workforce. While efforts are being made to address these issues, there is now a real structural deficit which affects the service significantly.

The impact of these differences in terms of officer and staff requirements – and occasionally cost terms – are summarised in Figure 4 below. Line by line difference are found in Appendix 1, with full details of assumptions and sources. Estimates are predicated on the current security environment, and escalation of the threat of terrorism would naturally see a dramatic increase requirements, and downgrading of threat levels would allow gradual disinvestment over time.

Figure 4: Differential Resourcing Requirements (officers and staff)

Area of difference	Additional officer requirement	Additional staff requirement
Role	550-640	220-231
Operational risk	811-1,451	0-1
Infrastructure risk	3-4	179-257
Legal and judicial	10-20	4-6
Other	220-372	0 ²¹
Total	1,594-2,487	404-495

PSNI often compares itself to a group of “most similar” forces in England and Wales: Northumbria, Nottinghamshire, Greater Manchester, West Midlands, and West Yorkshire. If you add our estimate of the PSNI-specific requirement to the number of officers PSNI would have if staffed to the per capita level of these forces, PSNI would have 6,709-7,602 officers (mid-point 7,155) and 3,112 to 3,203 staff (mid-point 3,158). We also note that this officer requirement estimate is strikingly similar to the post-Brexit officer requirement estimate of 7,279, which drew on mid-2010s analysis (6,963 officers) and then added on officers required to support new Brexit-related security requirements based on bottom-up analysis (316 officers).

Please note that certain factors impacting our estimates mean these may be either significant under- or over-estimates. They may be underestimates because there are categories of difference we have not attempted to quantify. For example, PSNI has a higher vetting requirement (due to its proportion of counter-terrorism and national security officers) and higher firearms licensing demand (due to the fact that handguns are legal). Similarly, many of our requirement estimates relate to existing staffing levels.

²¹ We were not able to find comparative data on staff (rather than officer) sickness absence in England and Wales, so do not assume excess structural ill health in the staff workforce. The drivers of excess absence for officers are a) troubles-related trauma b) a lack of psychological safety and c) muscular-skeletal issues relating to firearms and equipment. The first two issues are likely to affect staff to a significant degree, but we are unclear on the proportion of PSNI's excess officer long-term sickness that is driven by each factor.



Given current rates of overtime and PSNI's own Service Management Statement findings, these may understate the true officer requirement in these functions.

Estimates may also be over-stated however, largely due to double-counting risks. Issues like excess sickness or firearms training absences affect the whole workforce so by counting these alongside functional differences, we risk counting the Northern Ireland difference twice.²²

Finally, there are also additional costs for PSNI due to the allowances paid to PSNI officers and staff in recognition of the higher stress and risks associated with serving in the Northern Irish context. These create an additional annual budget requirement of £24.9m for the current PSNI establishment – and while this does not impact the workforce requirements, and therefore has not been included in this analysis, has major implications for PSNI's budget and ability to expand the workforce.

3.3 Efficiency opportunities exist but they are not easy to realise in the short-term

It is beyond the scope of our commission to comment extensively on how PSNI might over time be able to improve its efficiency – thereby somewhat mitigating the requirement for additional officers and staff indicated by our analysis. We simply make the following observations, which affect the scale of the challenge and possible solutions:

- After the period of spending reductions, PSNI is currently operating with a significant set of backlogs and debts that need to be cleared. For example, paused estates maintenance work has left a backlog of 145 projects (up from 0 in 2010).²³
- Some obvious potential efficiencies require the support of government and partner agencies. For example, PSNI, due to its scrutiny environment, typically faces higher expectations around evidence recording than forces in England and Wales, even for cases where no charges are to be brought. Close work with PPS, courts and health can significantly reduce pressures on the Service, while better supporting the public.
- There remains significant potential to reduce the number of officers doing roles that could be done more cheaply and/or effectively by staff, noting the significant number of officers on restricted duties for whom there is a duty to them and the public to use their skills and experience.
- There is a wealth of experience on effective efficiency and productivity improvement work across UK policing that can be drawn on, including successes in prevention and demand management, simplifying processes, and harnessing technology and automation.²⁴
- PSNI's current funding arrangements undermine effective efficiency planning. Annual budgets, with funding decisions rarely made in time to allow the force to either recruit, downsize or invest in change effectively, are counter-productive. And the inability of PSNI to hold reserves exacerbates these difficulties.²⁵

²² Our judgement is that these risks likely cancel each other out, but we can by no means be confident in that conclusion.

²³ Northern Ireland Audit Office, [Reducing costs in the PSNI](#), 28 April 2020

²⁴ Leapwise, [High Performance Policing: Challenge and Solutions for a Service Under Pressure](#), November 2023

²⁵ We echo the view of HMI Lee Freeman in HMICFRS's 2023 report: "We continue to be concerned about the annual funding arrangements for the PSNI. This needs to be addressed if the service is to operate more efficiently"



4 Conclusion

Our rapid review has, in essence, shown two fundamental realities. First, that police resourcing in PSNI has not kept pace with other forces across the United Kingdom. If it had done, the service would have in excess of 8,000 officers, rather than the 6,440 it has today. Second, that there are clear, evidenced reasons why the officer and staff requirement in Northern Ireland is considerably above all other parts of the UK. We have found Northern Ireland to have an estimated additional officer requirement of 1,594–2,487 and an additional staff requirement of 404–495 compared to English and Welsh forces. This would again drive an officer and staff requirement well above current levels. Our estimates broadly align with previous estimates in the 6,900–7,200 range for officers.

The precise officer and staff numbers achievable within Northern Ireland today will ultimately be a political decision, of course. And decisions will need to carefully balance the risks to the country of continued disinvestment in the service against spending pressures elsewhere.

We hope, however, that the evidence in this report provides a valuable support to decision-making, and puts in context the difficult position that the Police Service of Northern Ireland now finds itself in.



5 Appendix: Detailed analysis of PSNI differences






5.1 Overview of approach

For our more bottom-up analysis, the Leapwise team were provided a list of areas/functions produced internally within PSNI that reported several types of additional resource requirements specific to PSNI. Interviews, document and data review identified additional areas of difference, and we also ruled out analysis of differences in some suggested areas – either due to our judgement around the difficulty of robustly quantifying differences or because we believed the degree of difference was likely to be insufficient to make a meaningful difference to the PSNI officer or staff requirement.

Each area of difference was examined through a combination of data analysis, interviews and working sessions between 5–16 February 2024 with the goal of assessing and quantifying the areas where PSNI has additional requirements compared to other UK forces.

Our estimates of PSNI-specific differences that drive additional officer and staff number requirements are best efforts to estimate the genuine additional demands resulting from Northern Ireland’s unique context. However, levels of confidence in assessments vary significantly depending on benchmark data availability. Gaps are often due to the lack of data on the total officer numbers disaggregated for certain roles in England & Wales, meaning we needed to rely on reports from officers with experience in specific E&W or Scottish forces which may not be representative of overall E&W averages. In addition, for some areas we needed to make assumptions on PSNI capacity dedicated to certain functions, which likewise affect our confidence.

Consequently, we have used ranges and a confidence scale to make clear levels of confidence on each estimate:

Confidence rating		Rating criteria
	Subjective / indicative	There is some evidence of additional capacity requirement but lacking data to quantify, so estimates are largely directional.
	Some evidence	There is strong evidence of additional capacity requirement, but confidence is lower due to challenges in benchmarking against England and Wales.
	Adequate	Quantifiable evidence of capacity requirement and additionality in PSNI, which could be further strengthened with by benchmark data for England and Wales.
	Good	Good confidence in the estimates of capacity requirement in PSNI as well as additionality vs forces in England and Wales.
	Excellent	Rigorous quantified estimate of capacity requirement and additionality in PSNI, verified through triangulated data.

We have also identified next steps to strengthen some of our estimates, where appropriate. These can be accessed on request.

5.2 Role differences





PSNI is responsible for specialized functions largely performed and funded nationally in England & Wales, and therefore has capacity requirements associated with these additional responsibilities (e.g. E.g. CT, air support, national technology). It should be noted here that due to the additional security risk, PSNI also requires a significantly higher capacity for these functions, as noted below.



Area of additional capacity requirement†	Dept/team size	Rationale for PSNI additional capacity requirement	Method (with confidence rating)	Officers		Staff	
				Min	Max	Min	Max
Legacy Investigation Branch	78 officers, 125 staff	Legacy Investigation Branch focus on Troubles related deaths including Security Force killings between 1969–1998. Under the the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act, PSNI will need to share all relevant information, and will require a team to receive, research and disclose information.	Considered a stand-alone unit distinct to the NI context. ★★★★☆	78	78	125	125
Intelligence, Surveillance, Paramilitary Crime Task Force, Terrorist Investigation Unit, Securing air and sea ports ²⁶		(1) Higher capacity requirements for intelligence units due to security risk and national security functions in PSNI. (2) Higher capacity requirement due to risk level in NI. (3) PCTF is a multiagency collocated team that targets paramilitary groups that pose the highest threat, risk and harm to local communities. PCTF relies on experienced investigators who understand the complexities of these investigations given the scale and complexity of their operations. (4) Higher terrorism threat risk in NI. On the other hand, GB has lower risk and forces rely mainly on national resources. (5) PSNI responsible for securing air and sea ports, whereas in the UK this is largely done by Border Force officers.	(1) Additional capacity calculated benchmarking against average intelligence capacity in E&W based on Home Office Police Workforce data. (2) Calculated based on estimate shared by PSNI for surveillance officers supporting NI-specific operations. (3) Considered a stand-alone unit distinct to the NI context. (4) Considered a stand-alone unit in NI (upper estimate). PSNI estimation of NI-specific deployment at 70% of unit (lower estimate) as contribution of E&W forces to national policing counter-terrorism units is not published. (5) PSNI capacity benchmarked against average number of officers in E&W in airport and ports policing units from Home Office, Police workforce England & Wales (2023). Upper and lower estimates based on PSNI establishment and actual capacity. ★★★★☆	408	495	0	0
Air support	27 officers, 13.6 staff	PSNI has its own air support and does not use NPAS.	Considered a stand-alone unit distinct to the NI context. ★★★★☆	27	27	14	14

²⁶ Aggregated to ensure data security due to the sensitive nature of the functions across these teams.



Security branch	6 officers, 3 staff	Team needed to provide specialist advice on securing police stations, provide counter terrorist security advice and support to protect officers under threat.	Considered a stand-alone unit distinct to the NI context. 	6	6	3	3
Safer transport	7 officers	NI does not have BTP service, PSNI safer transport officers fulfill this function (funded by Translink).	Considered a stand-alone unit distinct to the NI context. 	7	7	0	0
Consent and supervision of explosives blasting	3 officers	As per legal advice, PSNI is required to provide an Explosive Blasting Unit to consent and supervise explosives blasting in NI due to the security threat (non-chargeable per legal advice under the Special Police Services policy). Based on professional experience, this is not a relevant local role in E&W.	Considered a stand-alone unit distinct to the NI context. Current establishment number considered as lower estimate. Upper estimate based on 50% of current additional demand of 12 officers from other units to be drawn on for this function. 	12	14	0	0
Technology supporting national functions/ security	217 staff	In addition to mainstream IT services provided within forces in E&W, ICS teams in PSNI also: (i) Deliver & support radio telecommunications services to all Emergency Services, 20+ other public sector partners (equivalent to the Airwave service, maintained by HO in E&W); (ii) Support a significant footprint of Perimeter Intrusion Detection Systems & CCTV cameras including city/town centre schemes due to heightened security risks; (iii) Support sharing of case files electronically with CJ partners via the Causeway platform (equivalent to Digital Case File in E&W, managed by Police Digital Service); (iv) Provide support services relating to C4 and Partner Infrastructure, Technical Surveillance support, Covert radio support and Surveillance Ops rooms; (v) ASU role equipment installation & support across 5 aircraft including secure video downlink services; (vi) Provide support for networks classified at S* and TS*, associated Intelligence systems operated on these networks (leads & supports interoperability with UKIC and HMG Depts).	PSNI estimate of 35-40% of ICS capacity dedicated to teams focused on the functions listed above, which is not required in E&W forces. Significant number of ICS staff are required to hold enhanced security clearance (DV) to deliver many of the services listed above but additional DV burden and soft factors around broader information security environment have not been quantified. 	0	0	76	87





Detainee/ prisoner transport to court	3314 officers	Police cells to courts, juvenile remand from court to detention centre (private contractor in GB).	PSNI data for CY 2023 reported 60% of 4,200 detainees charged and denied bail were transported from custody suites to court by police (~3-4 hours per detainee per PSNI estimates). Considered a stand- alone function, contracted in for E&W forces. PSNI police officers facilitate sitelinking for remaining detainees (~40%), but additionality not quantified. ★★★★☆	4	5	0	0
Extradition	8 officers, 2 staff	Forces in England & Wales have access to the National Extradition Unit from the NCA, but PSNI resource own unit. ★★★★☆	Considered a stand-alone unit distinct to the NI context.	8	8	2	2
Total				551	640	220	230

5.3 Operational risk differences



PSNI requires additional resources to manage its unique risk environment. Compared to England & Wales, PSNI often requires more people (mainly frontline officers) to service demand due to higher risk assessment vs England and Wales. In addition, PSNI also requires a higher number of officers with specific capabilities (e.g. firearms trained as all officers are armed) owing to the security risk.

Area/ function	Dept. /team size	Rationale for PSNI additional capacity requirement	Method	Officers		Staff	
				Min	Max	Min	Max
Local policing crewing pattern due to security risks	3314 officers	Due to the security risk, PSNI officers very rarely single crew, and more often crews of 2 or more vehicles travel together to ensure security for the vehicles. These are accompanied by TSG for additional protection of responding officers as required.	Comparison of PSNI vs average E&W capacity requirement in local policing based on differential crewing patterns. PSNI data on crewing pattern of ~1% single officer crew, 80% of double crew (two officers), and 15% crews with more than 2 vehicles of 2 officers each. Professional judgement (validated by officers with experience in E&W) with estimated distribution of 25% single crew, 70% double crew (2 officers), and 5% crews with 2 or more vehicles. We employ a conservative estimate of 2 cars (4 officers) for the upper threshold. We assume time spent in response/patches to be 75% for response officers, 50% for neighbourhood officers, 25% for investigations or other local policing teams for upper limit	383	766	0	0




			(and half of this for lower estimate). 				
Firearms training abstractions and trainer staffing	154-171 officers - total abstraction, trainer & licensing capacity	All PSNI officers are armed and require annual firearms training. In addition, PSNI have 3 teams requiring additional firearms training due to demands related to the security risk - close protection unit, armed response, counter terrorism surveillance.	Aggregating time spent on mandatory firearms training by officers (3 hours for L1, 16 hours for L2, and 20 hours for longarms/others) as well as specialist firearms officers (50 hours for close protection unit, 135 hours for armed response, 198 for counter terrorism surveillance). For benchmark comparison, average of 20% of E&W officers receive taser training (based on data from West Midlands, an MSG) (estimated 12 hours), and 4.6% of E&W officers with firearms authorisation assumed to receive annual enhanced training (estimated at 135 hours). Estimated travel time 1-2 hours each way per day of firearms training for both PSNI and E&W officers. (2) PSNI capacity requirement of 65 instructor officers (50 for mandatory training, 15 for specialist training), E&W trainer requirement estimated to be pro-rata equivalent. (3) PSNI have 4 officers and 1 staff dedicated to licensing capacity around firearms training, E&W requirement estimated to be pro-rata equivalent. 	85	94	1	1
Tactical support groups for varied public order, security & protection functions	358 officers	PSNI have greater requirement for tactical support OSD have assessed that around two units on average are allocated to terrorism related matters. Our public order search advisors POLSA's spend a significant amount of time liaising with the military and our Security Co-ordinators have a unique role here in Northern Ireland compared with those in other UK Police Services	TSG capacity required by PSNI has been benchmarked against MSG West Yorkshire, which has 5 TSG units (vs 11 units in PSNI). PSNI also have larger units (additional Seargents) due to higher requirements associated with risk levels - 33 per unit vs 24 per unit for West Yorkshire. Potential higher deployment levels in PSNI not quantified. 	195	238	0	0





Lack of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)	3314 officers	PSNI's security context prevents the use of PCSOs, which can be used to enhance neighbourhood and local policing capacity in most E&W forces. PCSOs typically cover neighbourhood policing duties at c.20-40% lower cost than officers.	Our model of cost differences is based on estimates for (i) PCSO costs from MSG force West Yorkshire, which pays PCSOs £24.9k p.a.-£27.4k p.a (after 4 years). (ii)Expected FY2024 costs of early career (Year 2 or Year 4) PSNI officer – factoring in the 7% pay increase recommended by pay review; (iii) Estimates of on-costs for training and equipment (which are significantly higher for officers than PCSOs); (iv) We deduct PSNI spend on part time reserves (PTR) of £700k for 2023-24 (190 PTR that contribute 144 hours in the year) that could have roughly equivalent responsibilities as PCSOs. 	50	178	0	0
Lack of Special Constables	3314 officers	As above, PSNI's security context and fact that officers are armed prevents the use of Special Constables, which can be used to enhance local policing capacity in E&W forces. Specials typically work 200-400 hours per year, are trained at the forces' own cost and paid allowances, with some compensated for their time (typically at or below minimum wage).	The efficiency benefit of specials depends significantly on allowances, hours worked and special retention (due to the costs of initial training) Our modelling includes a range of options on Special Constable cost profiles – and compares vs the costs of a 2 year PSNI officer (both including on-costs). Some models for Special Constable involvement in policing are not cost effective (e.g. if they have top end allowances, higher training investment and work an average of only 200 hours p.a.) which we calculate as a lower estimate of 0, but others offer efficiencies of over £17 per hour vs police officers which is modelled for the upper estimate. 	0	45	0	0
Close protection for public official	130 officers	PSNI provides regular ongoing close public protection for judges and a number of other officials doing a public service, distinct demand in NI due to security considerations.	Considered a stand-alone function distinct to the NI context for upper estimate. For lower estimate, we consider Met Diplomatic Protection team capacity of ~1000 and assume ~0 capacity for other E&W forces. However, given MET capacity relates largely to the protection diplomats and royals, whereas PSNI CPU is focused largely on	98	130	0	0



			protecting those in public service and justice, the upper limit is likely to be a more appropriate comparison. 				
Total				811	1,451	0	0

5.4 Infrastructural risk

This includes areas and functions where PSNI has differential capacity requirements due to PSNI requiring more people to build & maintain infrastructure/ enabling capabilities. The capacity requirements across these areas include a combination of officers, staff and contracted services. This analysis does not differentiate between PSNI staff and contractors, as these are largely interchangeable and the balance of staff and contractors reflects choices made on the basis of marginal cost differences.

Area/ function	Dept. / team size	Rationale for PSNI additional capacity requirement	Method	Officers		Staff	
				Min	Max	Min	Max
Maintenance requirements for armoured fleet	33 staff	Due to the security risk, PSNI has a fleet (2700 vehicles) includes 500 armoured cars (including for local policing) and 300 armoured land rovers which require regular maintenance. The majority of this is undertaken within PSNI but also includes contracted-in services (due to challenges in retention).	PSNI armoured vehicles are inspected and serviced every 12 weeks, which in total requiring 8 hours of work per vehicle (combination of staff and contractors). This is benchmarked against a conservative estimate of 25-50% of this capacity in E&W. We assume that the non-armoured fleet in PSNI have similar maintenance requirements as in E&W, and exclude this from the analysis. Servicing for the air support is contracted out and not quantified in this estimation. 	0	0	11	16
Station guarding for secure estates*	240 staff*	All 70 active PSNI estates are secured with full time guards due to elevated security risks.	Resource required to secure PSNI sites on a full-time basis estimated at 240 individuals (~618k hours contracted in). PSNI capacity of 3.4 security staff per site benchmarked against reasonable assumption of 0.5-1.5 security staff for sites in E&W (many E&W sites are unmanned). 	0	0	135	205
Facilities management/ stores	4 officers, 37 staff	Higher requirements related to armouries to store and maintain weapons, provide technical support, weapons control, movement of firearms inventory, as well as stores "general" non-	PSNI additional capacity calculated and benchmarked against E&W with assumption of ROCU and force level armoury 24/7 monitoring in E&W by 1 individual for upper limit, and 10% of capacity for lower limit.	4	4	33	36



		weapons related facility and “exhibits” store with larger capacity requirement due to legacy records, and internal postal team due to security concerns around mail received by PSNI.	★★★★☆				
Total				4	4	179	257

5.5 Legal/justice risk

PSNI officers and staff regularly conduct legal and judicial functions which are not required in forces in England and Wales due to differential arrangements across the criminal justice system. The PSNI legal/justice environment creates additional assurance/ time requirements, and below we estimate some of the functions that are provided by local policing as well as legal services.

During interviews, we heard strong anecdotal evidence that high levels of Judicial Review/ other scrutiny drove significant workload relating to file preparation. While these may dwarf that of these specific additional functions, they are difficult to quantify and have not been included in this analysis.

Area/ function	Department/ team size	Rationale for PSNI additional capacity requirement	Method	Officer		Staff	
				Min	Max	Min	Max
Operational legal advice to officers	6 staff	In NI there is a greater degree of separation and independence of PPS (vs in GB where CPS work more closely with police), so internal PSNI lawyers provide advice on prosecution decisions to support officers.	Considered a stand-alone unit distinct to the NI context. We have considered the establishment capacity requirement of 6 staff (lower estimate) and current capacity of 4 staff (lower estimate). ★★★★☆	0	0	4	6
Execution of fines enforcement warrants	3314 officers	Execution of fine enforcement warrants is done by PSNI police officers in NI. In GB, this is done by fine enforcement officers from the courts.	PSNI execute ~1050 warrants per month. Reasonable estimate of 30 mins to 1 hour of single officer time spent on execution of each warrant to calculate FTE abstraction for execution of fine enforcement warrants. ★★★★☆	3	7	0	0
Delivery of summons	3314 officers	In NI, PPS attempt postal serve summons on 2 occasions, but PSNI local/ neighbourhood policing officers deliver if unsuccessful. Certain offences require personal delivery.	PSNI execute ~1000 summons per month. Reasonable estimate of 30 mins to 1 hour of single officer time spent on delivering each summons to calculate total FTE abstraction.	3	7	0	0



			★★★★☆				
Total				6	14	4	6

5.6 Other

Various other context-specific factors impact on the additionality of capacity requirements for PSNI. While many of these are difficult to quantify and compare across forces, here we estimate the additional capacity requirements emerging from significantly higher sickness levels in PSNI vs E&W forces.

Area/function	Department/team size	Rationale for PSNI additional capacity requirement	Method	Officers		Staff	
				Min	Max	Min	Max
Excess absence due to high long-term sickness levels	220-372 officers - total abstractions	PSNI has higher sickness levels than most GB forces, in large part owing to NI-specific challenges related to (i) Stress/mental health challenges including due to Troubles-related MH challenges; (ii) Psychological safety; (iii) Musculo-skeletal issues from regular requirement to wear heavy protective equipment (with greater exposure given reduced capacity and higher utilisation rates).	We model average number of days lost to long term sickness in PSNI (>28 days) vs in E&W. We are unable to benchmark staff (ie non-officer) long-term absence vs England & Wales due to the lack of a relevant E&W benchmark indicator. ★★★★☆	220	372	0	0 ²⁷

5.7 Notes on financial resource requirement

This analysis has focused on the workforce requirements for PSNI, but we also note the difference in financial requirements in PSNI compared to other forces in the UK:

- Higher cost of fleet, and replacing vehicles: While this analysis has considered staff capacity to maintain the armoured vehicles and fleet, PSNI also has additional direct financial costs associated with the armoured fleet. PSNI run 500 armoured cars and 300 armoured land rovers, with capital costs for replacement of c.£170k per armoured car and c.£150-300k per land rovers (depending on refurb/buy options).
- Higher capital costs of buildings: We have again noted the additional security staffing requirements relating to the need for a more secure estate, but build costs and space requirements are also affected.

²⁷ We were not able to find comparative data on staff (rather than officer) sickness absence in England and Wales, so do not assume excess structural ill health in the staff workforce. The drivers of excess absence for officers are a) troubles-related trauma b) a lack of psychological safety and c) muscular-skeletal issues relating to firearms and equipment. The first two issues are likely to affect staff to a significant degree, but we are unclear on the proportion of PSNI's excess officer long-term sickness that is driven by each factor.



- Allowances paid to PSNI officers and staff: The NI Transitional Allowance for officers (c. £3,666 per year) and staff environmental allowances (c. £580 per year) are paid as a recognition that working in policing in Northern Ireland is significantly different from in the rest of the UK relating to the daily hazards, stresses, strains and dangers faced, and the continued attacks targeting police officers in Northern Ireland. These allowances collectively amount to c.£24.9m annual spend for the current workforce – which is the equivalent of the pay for 350–469 officers (assuming c.£53k–71k p.a. annual officer cost, including on-costs). These higher unit costs need to be considered as an additional area of distinction in PSNI compared to other forces that impact the overall resource requirements.



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