

Keeping People Safe



**Police Service of Northern Ireland**

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# **Chief Constable's Accountability Report to the Northern Ireland Policing Board**

May 2021

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## Foreword

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Northern Ireland Policing Board on the following topics:

- Finance and Resourcing
- Public Disorder
- Covid-19 Public Health Pandemic
- Serious and Organised Crime
- Vulnerability

On 19 April 2021, an attempt was made by the dissident republican group, the New IRA, to murder a police staff member who also serves as a part-time police officer by placing a viable explosive device in close proximity to her home.

The circumstances of this incident are particularly disturbing due to the complete disregard that was shown for the life of this woman's young child, a toddler, and other members of the local community.

On behalf of the Police Service, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to all those people and organisations, from across the political spectrum and wider community, who have expressed their disgust at what happened and their heartfelt support to the victim and her family.

A dedicated serious crime investigation is ongoing to bring those responsible to justice. We are working to provide necessary support to our colleague at this very difficult time.

## Finance and Resourcing

### Budget Allocation 2021/22

Recent events have reinforced the criticality of adequate and sustainable police funding, a point which has been reinforced recently by the Justice Minister.

The statement by the Finance Minister that an additional £12.3m will be allocated to the police budget for 2021/22 is a positive development. An updated Resource Plan is being finalised, reflecting this anticipated uplift to the previous 'flat cash' draft budget allocation and on the assumption that a final budget will be confirmed via the June Monitoring Round. The Policing Board's Resourcing Committee will continue to be kept apprised of progress on an ongoing basis by our Chief Operating Officer.

The majority of this funding (£9.8m) will enable the Police Service to retain headcount at 7,000 police officers and 2,580 police staff, rather than the necessary reduction to 6,700 police officers in line with the draft budget. The residual £2.5m will fund the recruitment of a further 100 police officers during 2021/22, taking total headcount to 7,100 by March 2022. This is a welcome step closer to the commitment of 7,500 in the New Decade New Approach document.

The additional £12.3m funding will be targeted directly on officer and staff recruitment, however, we are mindful of the need for these numbers to be funded in future baselines. The full year cost of maintaining officer numbers at 7,100 and staff numbers at 2,580 will be closer to £25m and it will be important that this is recognised and reflected in an uplifted police funding baseline to ensure numbers can be maintained.

The annual budgetary allocation process and disparate funding streams do not enable a strategic, flexible or sustainable approach to facilitate the modernisation of the Service. The support of the Board in tackling these systemic issues and securing a more sustainable approach would be welcomed.

## Attendance and Resilience

Police officer and staff attendance levels are resilient, with 92.26% of officers and 92.31% of staff available for work on 26 April 2021. In fact, annual working days lost due to sickness absence in March 2021 has recorded a 14% improvement for officers and 17% improvement for staff when compared with the same period last year. This improvement can be attributed to an amalgamation of factors associated with the unintended consequences of lockdown, improved hygiene, social distancing and the use of special leave. It also reflects concerted efforts by Human Resources Department to streamline processes and support line managers in managing attendance and supporting return to work. It is also testament to the public service resolve of our officers and staff, who have recognised the importance of their role in the ongoing public health effort, stepping forward to put themselves between the public and the virus.

## Public Disorder

### Overview

Between Monday 29 March 2021 and Friday 9 April 2021, localised disorder broke out across Policing Districts, including Derry City and Strabane, Belfast City, Antrim and Newtownabbey, Mid and East Antrim, Mid Ulster and Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon.



T/Assistant Chief Constable Jonathan Roberts led on the police public order response. Strategic and tactical command structures were implemented in response to the public order situation from Tuesday 30 March 2021 and remain in place.

We are grateful to those community leaders, youth workers and others with influence who have worked with us in affected areas to restore and maintain calm. Partnership intervention at grassroots community level has been invaluable.

Minor disorder and further protests, including un-notified parades continue to be experienced, most recently on the weekend of 24 April 2021 when disorder was encountered during protest at Moygashel, Mid Ulster. The ongoing presence of political posters and banners asserting the constitutional position of Northern Ireland and expressing discontent with the Police Service and political leaders serves to highlight continued underlying tensions.

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Follow up investigative processes are continuing to identify those involved in criminal offending, with oversight by a suitably experienced Senior Investigating Officer. Since 2 April 2021, a total of 22 arrests have been made. Outcomes from arrests include fifteen people charged to court, three of whom have been remanded into custody, four people have been released on investigative bail and a further three people have been reported to the Public Prosecution Service. Youth engagement has been pursued where possible.

Evidence of un-notified processions, alongside potential breaches of the Health Protection regulations are being collated and will be reviewed.

Alongside the public order policing effort, neighbourhood officers have continued to engage at a local community level. Problem solving in partnership with those living and working in affected communities is at the core of our approach.

We continue to ensure maintenance of a high level of readiness in terms of mutual aid, public order deployments, training requirements and equipment availability. Engagement with partner agencies at both a strategic and operational level is ongoing to ensure information sharing, reassurance and planning processes are in place.



## Officer Injuries



A total of 120 police officers and one police dog were injured in the course of public order incidents between 29 March and 25 April 2021. Whilst this has not adversely affected our capacity to respond to business as usual, this is a worrying development. Police will always step forward to protect communities from harm and keep people safe, however, this is not reflective of what policing should look like in 2021. The issue of violence towards police personnel is one which featured in the last two Accountability Reports to the Board and is of increasing concern. Costs are not limited to the depletion of already strained finances and overtime budgets. There is also a human cost in terms of the wellbeing impact to the officers and staff on the frontline who will have worked long hours, been physically injured and experienced trauma. The impact is further felt in communities, who inevitably experience a reduced policing capacity and focus, even if only in the short term.



## Wellbeing Hubs

In order to mitigate the impacts on our people, Post Incident Peer Support and Wellbeing Volunteer Teams worked together at short notice to co-ordinate a welfare response. This was a collaborative effort between officers and staff from District Policing, Operational Support Department and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. A range of support arrangements were made available including physical, mental health and social wellbeing measures to ensure that frontline personnel were afforded much needed comfort and respite facilities at Wellbeing Hubs across the country. Wellbeing Hubs provided psychological defusing and debriefing services to anyone availing of the open facilities at Musgrave, Antrim Road, Maydown and Newtownabbey Police Stations.

## Covid-19 Public Health Pandemic

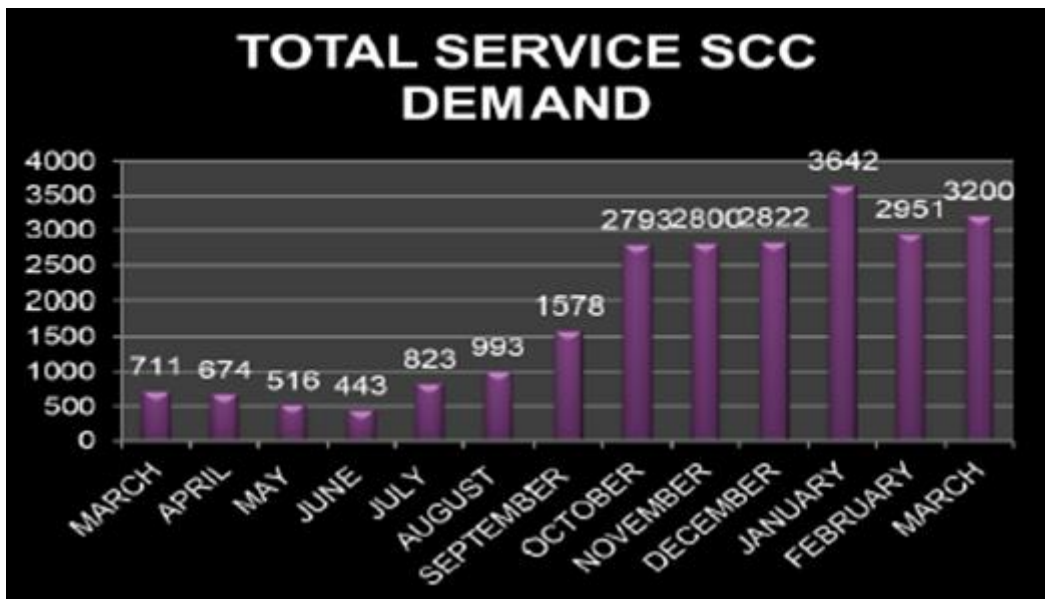
On 2 March 2021, the Northern Ireland Executive announced a ‘hopeful’ yet ‘cautious’ exit strategy from lockdown.

The infection rate continued to stabilise during March 2021 with the monthly average infection rate being 63 people infected per 100,000 of the population. Covid-19 related hospital admissions also stabilised with a monthly average of 11 admissions per day.

Due to continued uncertainties, ongoing changes to Regulations and associated timelines are determined at weekly ministerial meetings, with the first phase of regulatory changes announced on 16 March 2021.

The Covid-19 pandemic is still with us and the Police Service, therefore, continues to take an active and visible role in providing reassurance and engaging to explain and encourage compliance during the public health crisis.

During the month of March 2021, the Covid-19 Strategic Coordinating Centre (SCC) managed 3200 incidents across Northern Ireland. Comparative monthly demand, in the period March 2020 – March 2021, is outlined in the below chart. Direct tactical advice was provided by SCC to police responders on 2249 occasions during March 2021. Covid-19 protected resources were deployed on 623 occasions, based on risk assessment.



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The majority of enforcement activity in March centred on gatherings in private dwellings, with a total of 228 prohibition notices issued, compared to only 20 to business owners operating in contravention of the Regulations. The highest level of daily demand in the month of March recorded 144 enforcements, including the issue of 32 COV4 fixed penalty notices at a single house party in Belfast. The below graphic provides an overview of cumulative enforcement activity from March 2020 until 26 April 2021.

Local officers have continued to provide a visible preventative presence with a total of 10,917 visits to transport, retail, licensing and beauty spots in the month of March 2021.



## Tackling Serious and Organised Crime

### South East Antrim UDA Investigation

In March 2021, five people linked to South East Antrim UDA were arrested on suspicion of conspiring to supply Class A controlled drugs. This was part of a National Crime Agency led investigation supported by the Police Service, working together as part of the Paramilitary Crime Task Force. Those arrested are suspected of being high-ranking members of this organised crime group. A coordinated 'day of action' mobilised over eighty officers in the execution of six search warrants at addresses in Northern Ireland. As a result, four people have been charged with the offence of conspiracy to supply class A controlled drugs and have been remanded into custody. One further person was released pending report to the Public Prosecution Service. A quantity of cocaine and an estimated £3,000 in cash was seized during the operation.

### Operation Fusion

The Police Service Organised Crime Unit has recently worked alongside Neighbourhood Policing Teams, Road Policing Unit, Belfast Harbour Police, HMRC and Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to conduct proactive operations at Ports targeting the movement of illegal commodities throughout the Common Travel Area. During March 2021, a stop of a heavy good vehicle at Larne Port resulted in the seizure of an offensive weapon and 34.4kg of Class B controlled drugs with an estimated street value of £510,000. Follow up searches resulted in the seizure of approximately £3,000 and €3,000. A 37 year old man has been charged and remanded into custody. This operation was successful at disrupting the illegal trafficking of drugs for profit and bringing organised criminals to justice and has prevented harm to vulnerable people.

### International Drugs Operation

In March 2021, a proactive operation was initiated in Northern Ireland by officers in Organised Crime Branch, leading to the arrest of two people for a number of drug related offences associated with the importation of cocaine, a Class A controlled drug, into Northern Ireland by members of an Organised Crime Group.

This operation was initiated by the Police Service and was planned collaboratively with support from the National Crime Agency and Belgian state authorities. Police in

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Belgium conducted a search of a vehicle, identified by our officers as having been used to import Class A controlled drugs. As a direct result of this search, approximately 35kg of suspected cocaine has been seized and two arrests have been made. Initial assessments indicate that the value of seized drugs amounts to £2.1m.

This was a complex cross border investigation which continues to engage a range of domestic and international partners. It demonstrates our determination to disrupt and dismantle Organised Crime Groups, who are intent on bringing drugs onto the streets of Northern Ireland. A drugs haul of this scale would have gone on to realise much greater illegitimate wealth for those engaged in this crime and would result in significant harm to those who purchase it on the streets of Northern Ireland, their families and the wider community.

### Haulage Drugs Operation

At the end of March 2021, a search of an articulated lorry in Newry, under warrant, recovered approximately 916kg of herbal cannabis with an estimated street value of £13.74m, hidden in a sophisticated purpose-built containers. A 34 year old was arrested and has subsequently been charged and remanded into custody for a number of drug related offences.

### Money Laundering Investigations

In March 2021, a money laundering investigation was launched in Belfast by our Economic Crime Unit following the detection of two people in possession of £10,000 of cannabis and cash. Follow up searches recovered a further £80,000 in cash. A subsequent Restraint Order under Proceeds of Crime legislation has secured assets including bank accounts containing £24,000, £84,000 in case and vehicles valued at £18,000.

At the end of March 2021, a Confiscation Order was made by Belfast Crown Court for the sum of £144,820 following a lengthy investigation by Economic Crime Unit dating from February 2018. The investigation involved an arrest of a man at his business premises for money laundering offences. Searches of two properties resulted in the seizure of £128,030 and €1,850 in cash. Investigators uncovered evidence to support links to the supply of drugs, indicating that the suspect was a major supplier of anabolic

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steroids in the Greater Belfast area and the money found during the search of his home was the proceeds of this illegal activity. In June 2020, the defendant appeared at Belfast Crown Court and was sentenced to sixteen months, suspended for two years for the offences of supplying a Class C controlled drug and possessing criminal property. The recent Confiscation Order is the outcome of several years dedicated investigation by officers.

### Grievous Bodily Harm Investigation

During an incident in January 2020, an elderly man was violently robbed at his home address. During the incident, the victim was punched several times around the head, knocked to the floor and kicked until unconscious. A passer-by who attempted to intervene was also injured during this time. The victim suffered two fractures to his jaw and a facial fracture requiring surgery. He lost two teeth in the assault and suffered severe bruising and swelling to his head, face and torso.

At the end of March 2021, a man who had been identified and investigated by CID Detectives was sentenced to six years imprisonment for this horrific attack for offences of robbery, grievous bodily harm with intent and fraud by false representation.

### Suspect Explosive Devices

During March 2021, four suspicious devices were located in different areas of Northern Ireland. Technical examination confirmed that these were crude viable devices. CID Detectives in the Lurgan area launched an investigation into the devices on 23 March 2021. Following extensive CCTV trawls and vehicle enquiries, a suspect was identified and arrested. On 27 March 2021, this man was charged with fourteen offences, including explosive related offences and was remanded into custody by the court.

## Vulnerability and Harm

### Operation Grandeval

Since January 2020, Economic Crime Unit (ECU) has been investigating a series of over 200 fraud offences targeting older and vulnerable people, with offenders representing themselves as police officers. Victims, who have had money or jewellery stolen, were placed in fear by the offenders who often threatened them with arrest or searches as a method of discouraging them from contacting friends or family.

During April 2021, officers made nine arrests in relation to this crime series with offenders subsequently charged or reported for prosecution. Detectives from Economic Crime Unit worked together with local officers from the District Support Team to arrest offenders for offences including fraud by false representation, theft and impersonating a police officer. Prevention leaflets have been developed and issued to groups that provide services to older and vulnerable people. Preventative messaging has been coordinated to warn and inform potential victims and their families using print, social media and broadcasting platforms. This increased awareness has generated more calls to police where the victim has realised that the offender was not a genuine police officer, thereby preventing the crime. A further weeklong media strategy is planned on television, radio and social media channels to increase awareness and prevent harm.

### Investigation into abuse at Muckamore Abbey Hospital

To date, over 1500 incidents requiring safeguarding referral and/or criminal investigation have been generated involving thirty-four victims.

Fifteen suspects were arrested and interviewed in relation to hundreds of offences and two files were submitted to the Public Prosecution Service for decision.

In a major development, a prosecutorial decision regarding the first file submitted has been received from the Public Prosecution Service. This will result in seven suspects prosecuted on indictment in respect of numerous offences of ill-treatment and wilful neglect of patients in the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit ward, contrary to the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 and other related offences.



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A decision in relation to the second file of eight suspects is expected in due course.

A fresh series of suspect interviews began on 26 April 2021 and will continue for some weeks.

### Gillen Review

Sir John Gillen's report into the law and procedures in serious sexual offences contained 253 recommendations across fourteen thematic areas. The thirty recommendations which specifically to the Police Service fall under two thematic areas of, 'Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) processes' and 'Disclosure'.

Since October 2020, two Detective Inspectors and a Detective Constable within the Police Public Protection Branch have worked on a full-time basis to implement Gillen recommendations. We continue to work together with other stakeholders to support the wider implementation of recommendations.

Twenty one recommendations have now been implemented with nine still in progress, governed under the Working Together Partnership Forum with the Public Prosecution Service. The Police Service also provides assurance on progress to the Department of Justice via the Strategic Justice Group for Sexual Harm, represented by Detective Chief Superintendent Anthony McNally.

### Achieving Best Evidence (ABE)

An ABE Strategic Working Group, involving Police, Public Prosecution Service, and Health and Social Care Trust representatives, meet regularly to discuss any issues and influence practice.

A pilot took place between June 2020 and March 2021 to determine the benefits of a cadre of specialist ABE officers. A formal report is due by the end of April 2021, which likely to recommend a full roll out of this approach.

An evaluation of ABE facilities within the police estate is ongoing and is due for completion by end of April 2021. This will involve assessing the furniture, toys and props available for children during interview. Work has already taken place to consolidate and refurbish ABE facilities.

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These aspects of work are anticipated to complete a further five recommendations.

### **Disclosure**

All policing specific recommendations relating to disclosure have been implemented by a Police Disclosure Working Group which has met regularly since November 2019.

This has included:

- ✓ Revision to disclosure training provided to student officers and detectives.
- ✓ Creation of a Central Disclosure Unit with experienced detectives overseeing file quality and disclosure in serious sexual offence cases
- ✓ Provision of bespoke disclosure and file quality training to Public Protection officers, commencing in May 2021
- ✓ A Disclosure Management Document pilot for complaints of rape submitted with a prosecution recommendation
- ✓ Revision of consent forms and guidance in relation to digital and third party material in collaboration with the Public Prosecution Service
- ✓ A Disclosure Review Panel, attended by Police and Public Prosecution Service representatives, has also been established to identify and share learning.

### **Domestic Abuse**

Domestic abuse is a strategic priority. We will continue to work with advocacy groups to ensure that the voice of victims is heard, understood and influences police practice.

We look forward to briefing the Performance Committee on the area of domestic abuse in May 2021.

Over the past three years we have been working closely with the Department of Justice to develop an advocacy scheme for victims of domestic and sexual crime. A procurement process has been completed with the intention to “operationalise” advocates in September 2021. Four lead advocates and twenty other advocates will create a streamlined pathway for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence with enhanced support throughout the criminal justice process.

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This is an important development, as reinforced by the recent Criminal Justice Inspectorate commentary on the thematic inspection of the handling of domestic abuse cases by the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, 2019. Progress has been communicated to Policing and Community Safety Partnerships to ensure there is a consistent approach across Northern Ireland.

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