



Police Service of Northern Ireland

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

September 2021

Report Date: 27 August 2021

Presented at Policing Board Meeting: 02 September 2021

Version 1.2



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Foreword: *Taking Stock*

In my last Accountability report to the Northern Ireland Policing Board, July 2021, complexities associated with the policing response to upcoming bonfires and parading were acknowledged.

Approximately 535 parades and events were notified for 12 July 2021, with 27 of these events treated as “sensitive”. A total of 186 parades and events took place in August relating to Internment and Apprentice Boys of Derry parades.

The relative stability and absence of disorder over the summer period is hugely positive and welcomed. Dedicated engagement efforts by community representatives and neighbourhood police officers, alongside considered planning and command structures led by Assistant Chief Constable Alan Todd and T/Assistant Chief Constable John Roberts have undoubtedly influenced this outcome.

The last few months have, nonetheless, brought challenges and highlighted the unique complexity of policing in Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to bonfires, community safety and competing human rights considerations. Central to our reflection on this period, is the importance of safeguarding the independence and impartiality of operational police decision-making on emotive and deep-seated issues, inherently linked to identity and tradition. Our decision-making and operational activity on such sensitive community issues, inevitably attracts divergent political commentary and media interest. This, in turn, creates longer term reverberations for public perception of our impartiality, in equal measure across different communities at different times. The consequence is felt on public confidence and engagement in policing. As an organisation, we recognise the critical role of the Board in maintaining this balance through the exercise of its scrutiny and accountability function. We would welcome the continued advocacy of the Board to promote and safeguard the critical importance of operational policing independence. This includes making the case for more concerted efforts by responsible stakeholders, on an ongoing basis throughout 2021, to facilitate community resolutions under a strategy to prevent foreseeable repetition of long standing issues in 2022.

As we enter the Autumn, it is appropriate that, collectively, we take stock of what has been a busy year for policing. We have derived significant organisational learning

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from intense feedback and scrutiny in the Spring. This has been a period which, alongside and inter-connected with the Covid-19 environment, has been all-consuming.

We now look forward to progressing key aspects of work which are at the heart of our focus on increasingly progressive organisational development and a delivery model which embeds our services and people in communities, to prevent harm and enhance community safety. I look forward to continuing to update the Board on the following key areas of development in the coming months:

- Our strategic and local approach to community engagement;
- *Hallmarks* which define expectations and standards of neighbourhood policing;
- Estates and facilities modernisation;
- Business services, to include digital, transport and a review of human resources functions;
- New operational priorities to support the Policing Plan;
- An organisational 'Force Management Statement', creating an evidence base to inform our demand and performance management practice, aligned with HMICFRS Inspection schedules.

We are pleased to support four members of our senior team in their attendance at the Strategic Command Course, run by the College of Policing, over the next number of months. This includes T/Assistant Chief Constable John Roberts, T/Assistant Chief Constable Bobby Singleton, Chief Superintendent Emma Bond and Chief Superintendent Andy Freeburn. To provide resilience and leadership reassurance to important areas of business, Chief Superintendent Sam Donaldson and Chief Superintendent Melanie Jones have been promoted into Acting Assistant Chief Constable portfolios in Operational Support Department and Community Safety Department. I look forward to the value they will add to their respective Departments over the next number of months.

Recent UK Government legacy proposals have generated significant political interest and public debate since the time of our last Accountability meeting in July 2021. The particular sensitivities of legacy-related issues and their potential divisiveness for police-community relations are acknowledged. Our longstanding organisational position remains the same, that legacy-related investigations are most appropriately

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managed independently to the Police Service, thereby ensuring public confidence in the process and minimising the impact on contemporary police-community relationships. Owing to the political nature of this debate, our role is limited to supporting the practical implementation of any approach which is determined in the future and to support any required transition arrangements. We do not propose to say much more until the Government's final proposals are clear.

The September 2021 Accountability Report provides an update to the Northern Ireland Policing Board on the following topics:

- Key Investigations of Note
- Financial Outlook and Resourcing
- Promoting Operational Support Department
- Engagement

I would like to take this opportunity to signpost members to our new quarterly Serious and Organised Crime report, which was submitted at the end of August 2021. This provides an overview of Serious and Organised Crime performance in April – June 2021, aligned to quarterly reporting by our colleagues in the National Crime Agency.

Key Investigations of Note

A dedicated policing operation has been implemented to manage our investigative response to Northern Ireland Protocol-related protest, following public disorder which was encountered in April 2021.

A total of 66 incidents have been investigated or remain under investigation, with potential offending ranging from serious disorder, public processions offences and breaches of the Public Health Regulations.

Investigations into all reported incidents of serious disorder are now complete. In total, 35 arrests have been made and 20 adults have been charged to court with various offences including riot, riotous behaviour and possession of petrol bombs. Seven young people were charged to appear at Youth Court in relation to riot offences and a further four young people were referred to the Youth Engagement Clinic in relation to riotous behaviour. Investigative case file preparation remains ongoing for consideration by the Public Prosecution Service.

The involvement of children and young people in recent public disorder is of concern, indicating the continued exploitation of children and young people in our communities by paramilitary groups/organised criminals. We remain committed to supporting and protecting children. I am pleased that the Police Service received positive acknowledgement by the Children's Commissioner in our work to support and protect children, alongside community and statutory partners. We support the Children's Commissioner's appeal for an improved framework for safeguarding children and young people from harm caused by paramilitary groups and criminal gangs, as the basis for sustained activity to reduce community vulnerability to violence and exploitation. This is best achieved in partnership, by triggering child safeguarding procedures, alongside pursuing those who seek to harm, abuse and exploit children through effective identification, disruption, investigation and prosecution of offenders.

We continue to facilitate peaceful protest, in accordance with Human Rights obligations, alongside legislative requirements under the Public Processions (NI) Act 1998 and the remaining Health Protection Regulations. To ensure we strike an

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appropriate balance between these competing considerations, pre-prosecutorial advice has been sought from the Public Prosecution Service in fourteen cases.

To date, approximately 44 protocol-related incidents are under investigation with identification, evidence gathering and interview processes ongoing, at different stages. Five investigative files have been submitted to the Public Prosecution Service for consideration of offences under public processions legislation and potential breaches of the Health Protection Regulations.

The use of firearms at recent commemorative events in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry are of concern. They are entirely unacceptable and an unhelpful and unwelcome echo of our troubled past, perpetuated by a small minority of people. Structured command-led operations were in place at both events and they were resourced predominantly by Neighbourhood Policing Teams and Tactical Support Group colleagues. Investigations are now underway to identify and bring offenders to justice. The police operational response to such events is complex due to inherent public safety, officer safety, public order, human rights, community impact risks and wider considerations given the overriding doctrine that governs the police use of firearms. Our primary focus is to keep people safe and uphold the rule of law and we will continue to work alongside local representatives, partner agencies and the community to address criminal activity and to bring those who break the law before the courts.

On other matters, we continue to support the coronial investigation into the disappearance and subsequent death of Noah Donahoe, led by Coroner Joe McCrisken with an Inquest due in early 2022.

Financial Outlook and Resourcing

The Northern Ireland Audit Office has completed the external audit of our Main and Pension Accounts for 2020/21. Final Accounts were laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly by the Department of Justice in July 2021. Both Accounts were prepared on time, received an unqualified Audit opinion from the Controller and Auditor General and no significant issues were reported.

Following the June Monitoring Round, budget allocations have now been secured for Fresh Start/Tackling Paramilitarism (£5.9m) and partially for EU Exit activity (£2m).

The year to date position at the end of July reported small underspends in both resource and capital budgets. However, a full year pressure of £8m is projected in the resource budget. This largely reflects the remaining shortfall in EU Exit funding (now £3.7m) and costs associated with depreciation (£4.1m). Both of these pressures have been included in our October Monitoring Round bid, submitted in August.

Although a full year break even position continues to be reported in the capital budget, it is also worth noting that significant funding has now been set aside for the acquisition of a new site for the Police College. Before this budget can be committed, approvals will be required from the Board and Departments of Justice and Finance, resulting in any capital spend being late in the financial year.

In the coming months, planning for the forthcoming budgetary cycle will begin again. We will work closely with the Policing Board and Department of Justice in developing an argument for adequate and sustainable funding. There has been much public commentary already about the extent of the funding envelope in the coming years. Any reduction in funding will have inevitable consequences for the achievement of police officer resource commitments under the New Decade New Approach Agreement and, indeed, the sustainability of current officer and staff resourcing levels.

Whilst the extent of financial pressure across public services in the post-Covid period is recognised, we would seek continued visible Board support in highlighting the importance of adequate and sustainable funding in the interests of organisational resilience and community safety in Northern Ireland. We would welcome reform of the

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financial constraints in which we operate, notably multi in-year settlements, our ability to borrow, carry reserves and set our own contracts.

It is important, however, to reaffirm that our financial focus is not just about budgets, but on the criticality of prudent use of resources, value for money and workforce productivity and we continue to focus on better outcomes in this regard.

Promoting our Operational Support Department

Operational Support Department's Public Order, Public Safety and Protective Services functions provide specialist capability in areas of public order, search and armed policing. Officers and staff work to enhance community safety and prevent harm, by supporting and adding value to work led by their colleagues in Local and Neighbourhood Policing Teams and specialist departments.

Social Media Campaign

During June 2021, Operational Support Department released a social media campaign to showcase the work of key frontline teams, aiming to increase their visibility and accessibility to the public. The roles of our 364 officers in Tactical Support Group, 28 officers and 48 dogs in Dog Unit and 72 officers in Armed Support Unit were promoted with a view to increasing public understanding of their work.

Messages reached over one million people across Facebook, Instagram and Twitter platforms, generating a significant amount of positive comments from people in communities. The reach of messaging was assisted by a number of our partner agencies who shared and engaged with the content.

A Question and Answer session on Instagram provided the opportunity to engage directly with members of the public and address specific queries about this unique part of police work. Particular interest was received about training requirements and career pathways into roles in Operational Support Department.

An audio clip from body worn video footage captured by a Tactical Support Group officer of him talking with a vulnerable adult in a high risk situation was one of the top performing posts across all three social media platforms, generating a large amount of positive feedback from the public.

The campaign was designed to reflect the professionalism and passion of our officers, to showcase what they are proud of and connect with people on a human level. Some examples of posts are included below.



“As soon as you join the Tactical Support Group you notice the great sense of camaraderie.

You’re always working as a team and supporting each other in a very varied and diverse working environment.”

- Constable Bowden, Tactical Support Group



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Published by Hootsuite · June 17 at 11:01 AM · 🌐



The bond between a Police Dog and their handler is very special. They must be able to trust and rely upon each other, regardless of the situation. Both are committed to working together as a team to keep our communities safe.

[#KeepingPeopleSafe](#)







"I enjoy being a dog handler because I get to be with my dogs every day.

Jess and Ziva love their work and get very excited when they find what they are looking for. It's amazing to be able to make a real difference in our community while spending time with my dogs!"

- Constable R, Dog Section



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21,243
People Reached

378
Engagements

[Boost Post](#)

  213

2 Comments 4 Shares



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Published by Hootsuite · June 7 at 7:01 PM ·

Being part of Tactical Support Group means different things to each and every officer but the common purpose of keeping people safe shines through.

#WeCareWeListenWeAct



“As a woman I enjoy the role because there is no disparity in the way I am treated within the unit.

The job can be very dynamic and you don’t know which department will require your assistance next, but what you do know is the unit will be able to adapt at ease, complete the task to the highest standard and always be there to support one another.”

- Constable Young, Tactical Support Group



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8,773
People Reached

209
Engagements

Boost Post

33

1 Comment 1 Share



“Working in Armed Response provides the opportunity for a diverse range of deployments, from helping people at their lowest ebb to providing specialist support to departments dealing with organised crime gangs.”

- Constable Allen, Armed Response Unit

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Road Safety

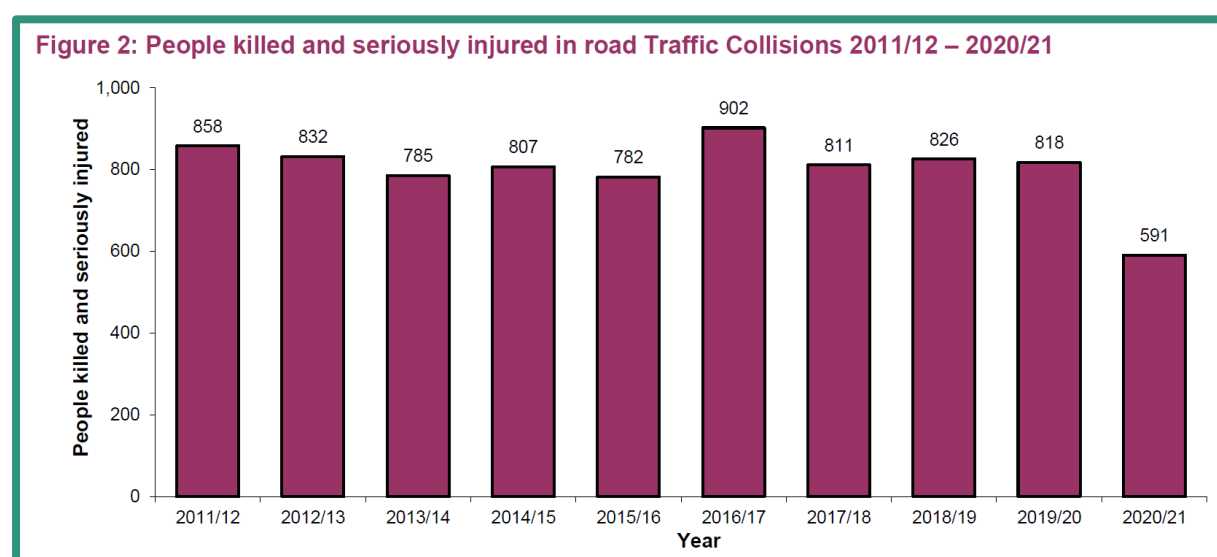
Road Policing Unit works together with statutory and voluntary partners to achieve safe and secure roads which are free from harm. Another key focus to ensure the road network efficiently facilitates the movement of people and goods, thereby supporting the Northern Ireland economy.



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Tragically, 53 people were killed and 538 people were seriously injured on our roads in 2020/21. A further 27 people have died on the roads, this Financial Year to Date (01/04/21 – 16/08/21). Whilst 2020/21 levels are almost 27.8% lower than those recorded in 2019/20 and fatalities this year also represent a *reduction* on the 39 people who lost their lives in the same period last year, the statistic is nonetheless regrettable.

The below table provides comparative information on the number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions over the past ten year period.



The following table provides a breakdown of principal causation factors for road traffic collisions which occurred between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.

Table 3: Most Common Principal Causation Factors in Road Traffic Collisions - 2020/21

Principal Factor	Number of Injury Collisions	Casualties		
		Total KSI ¹	Slightly Injured	Total Casualties
Inattention or attention diverted	625	60	854	914
Driving too close	393	12	645	657
Emerging from minor road without care	252	27	356	383
Impaired by Alcohol/Drugs - Driver/rider	228	40	312	352
Turning right without care	205	28	330	358
Crossing or entering road junction without care	191	33	250	283
Wrong course/position	180	59	250	309
Excessive speed having regard to conditions	171	50	241	291
Overtaking on offside without care	128	42	158	200
Emerging from private road/entrance without care	116	19	161	180

¹ Killed or seriously injured

Collision Investigation Unit

Recognising the importance of this area of our work, a restructure of Collision Investigation Unit took place during July 2021. This enhanced dedicated team will lead on the investigation of fatal road traffic collisions, providing an increased level of specialism to these tragic events.

Investigations involving death on the roads are both complex and often protracted. This change, therefore, reduces the investigative demand on Local Policing Team officers who will now focus on the initial response, i.e. saving life, mitigating immediate road safety risks, scene preservation and evidence gathering for the subsequent investigation by Collision Investigation Unit.

These are emotive and sensitive investigations with much at stake for those involved, particularly grieving families. On this basis, officer development will be enhanced with all team members completing the College of Policing National Investigators Examination and dedicated investigative training, accredited to Professionalising Investigations Programme (PIP) Level 2. A bespoke coaching and mentoring programme will also be implemented for new officers in the team to ensure appropriate levels of support and development are in place in this important role.



Prevention

Prevention is a key focus for Road Policing Unit. Some examples of this work include:

- The national 'Bikesafe' initiative which offers skills enhancement workshops to new and returning motorcyclists. Content is delivered both in a theoretical classroom setting and by 'on road' practical assessment in which experienced Road Policing advanced motorcyclists offer advice and guidance on safer driving practices. Despite Covid-19 related limitations, 64 assessments have been conducted this year to date and another 30 are scheduled.
- Road Education Officers work with schools, community groups and youth organisations to inform children, young people and other vulnerable road users about road safety. A total of 28 such visits took place in June 2021. The flagship 'Roadsafe Roadshows' have not been feasible for the past 18 months, in line with Covid-19 restrictions, however, we have continued to provide school access to digital road safety material. A phased return to the school environment has been possible in recent months, for example, in support of the cycling proficiency programme.
- The initial thrust of the Close Pass Scheme is to educate motorists and try to encourage greater tolerance for each other and the equal right of all users on our roads. It involves the use of plain clothes officer on a bicycle using a small camera supported by a police motorcyclist. If a motorist passes with an inadequate safety margin the officer can radio to his motorcyclist colleague who can stop the motorist and speak to them about their driving. A margin of at least 1.5m is required.



ANPR Interceptor Team

The ANPR Interceptor Team was established last year to enhance visible police capacity and capability to intercept vehicles and prevent criminal exploitation of the road network. Officers in the team are trained in advanced driving, tactical pursuit and containment to minimise risks and ensure safe and effective command of such incidents. In-car technology provides live time information which can be used to identify and intercept offenders and prevent offending. So far this year, the team has secured nearly 70 arrests including 14 arrests for disqualified driving, 10 arrests for drug offences and 45 arrests for offences including theft, burglary and robbery. In April, a successful collaborative operation with our colleagues in An Garda Síochána resulted in the arrest of a prolific cross-border offender and later, in May, three stolen vehicles from England were recovered. The have seized 64 vehicles since inception.

The Interceptor Team is now permanently established, operating from two bases at Omagh and Mahon Road Police Stations.



Gender Action Plan

Operational Support Department launched a bespoke Gender Action Plan in March 2021. This aims to proactively increase the number of women and other underrepresented groups within specialist operational functions, particularly Armed Response, Close Protection, Road Policing, Tactical Support and Firearms Training.

This work embraces the concept that responsive policing is best achieved by a diverse workforce. An enabling and inclusive environment is promoted, by careful consideration of working arrangements, estate, facilities and enhanced wellbeing provision and support for all.

An integral part of the Gender Action Plan is a mentoring scheme which aims to better support and develop female officers to undertake roles in which they are currently under-represented. The scheme provides dedicated support and encouragement prior to and during application processes. Upon successful appointment, the scheme will continue throughout the initial two year period of transition into new roles. Benefits to scheme participants include support to identify appropriate career pathways, reflective practice and improved confidence and resilience. Positive professional development is also experienced by mentors, who make a valuable contribution to workforce diversity and inclusion.

Project Synergise

Project Synergise is a review of the arrangements for briefing, tasking and coordination of Operational Support Department's specialist resources. This work has been informed by benchmarking studies in Merseyside Police Service, which demonstrate the benefits of simplified tasking processes. A number of recommendations for improvement have resulted from the Project's analysis and findings. These are being implemented as part of continuous improvement processes led by an Operational Support Department Delivery Group.

Initiatives currently being coordinated under Project Synergise include:

- The allocation of specific crime related issues to Tactical Support Groups, encouraging problem solving and creativity in preventative problem solving.
- A Road Policing pilot in Belfast City Policing District is providing an evidence based assessment of tasking and resource allocation for road safety issues.

Engagement

Strategic Community Engagement Team

A 'Community Relations Taskforce' was established earlier this year, acknowledging the need to reinvigorate our organisational approach to engagement.

Early work was directed towards relationship building with representatives from Black and Ethnic Minority Community, following concerns which emerged from the policing of 'Black Lives Matter' protests. Its remit has now broadened mindful as we are of the criticisms about two tier policing from some loyalist and unionist communities.

An internal senior stakeholder group, the 'Strategic Community Engagement Group', has now been established and will meet on a monthly basis to coordinate and ensure greater oversight and consistency in our engagement approach. Current priorities for the Group are the:

- Delivery of a re-invigorated and co-ordinated approach to engagement with the community and partners;
- Delivery of a series of initiatives specifically to enhance transparency, understanding of and confidence in police decision-making and use of powers;
- Examination of opportunities for enhanced local accountability;
- Proactive support to ongoing work to improve attraction, recruitment, representativeness and inclusion.

To further support this work, a small 'Strategic Community Engagement Team' has also been established within Community Safety Department, led by Superintendent Gerry McGrath. This team will develop additional resources and bespoke initiatives to enhance our ability to effectively engage our communities.

Further updates on this work will be provided in due course to the Board's Partnership Committee.

Local Engagement

Alongside strategic structures, important engagement has continued at the local level. By way of example, local officers in Derry City and Strabane Policing District were invited by the North West Migrants' Forum to a family fun day at the end of July 2021 in Brooke Park, Derry/Londonderry.



The Chief Constable and members of the local policing team were delighted to attend and provide support to the event theme, '*Communities uniting against Racism*'.

Superintendent Catherine Magee was invited to give a short welcome and gave support to continuing to build trust and confidence in policing with minority communities in Derry City and Strabane. The local neighbourhood policing team attended on their new electric bikes and engaged with hundreds of participants. The event provided a unique opportunity to listen to the personal experiences of young people in our communities and was an important step in demonstrating our continued commitment to rebuilding relations of trust and understanding. It also provided an opportunity to reach out and encourage those in attendance to explore policing as potential future career. Local officers continue to focus on building on this engagement and developing meaningful connection and trust going forward.

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Meanwhile, Neighbourhood officers in Belfast have provided support to the All Nations Ministries which offers a range of services to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who have newly arrived in Northern Ireland. Assisted by interpreters, local officers have established small walking group clinics to establish relationships and increase accessibility of police officers. This work has been supplemented by local primary school workshops on racism, diversity and inclusion.

A representative from All Nations Ministries provided the following comments on the initiative, “We genuinely appreciated the dedication and hard work of the North Belfast police officers in building confidence and community relations. Those who have attended the walking clinics have been surprised by how respectful and supportive the officers are – they have felt listened to, genuinely cared for and treated as individuals and human beings, with dignity and respect. Conversely, the officers have increased their understanding of people from other cultures and the challenges they face integrating physically and psychologically into our society. Currently, a wide-ranging programme is being planned for young people from diverse backgrounds [using police facilities]. This will give them many opportunities to participate with local people and further build relationships and mutual understanding. We foresee many benefits for their physical and mental health and look forward to seeing how this will be developed, as we promote it within our community and encourage full participation in partnership with the police service...”



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Neighbourhood officers in Northern Belfast have also recently worked to provide assistance to members of Glencairn Day Centre, which provides registered day care places for people aged 65 and over who have physical, sensory or cognitive impairments. Together with Glencairn Youth Initiative, St Andrews Church and local business, the team supported the transformation of an outdoor space into a welcoming social area for service users. Constable Meeke, who led on the initiative stated, “This is an age group that often feels excluded due to limited exposure to digital media and social interaction. The closing of the centre during the pandemic had a profound impact on them, including a heightened sense of loneliness and isolation...This allowed us to continue engaging with, and supporting, the group by providing safety sessions over the summer months.”



By way of another example, officers from Clogher Neighbourhood Team delivered an event for children and young people attending a summer scheme in Fivemiletown. The children were given the opportunity to engage with officers from Dog Unit, Tactical Support Group and Air Support, facilitated by their local neighbourhood team. Constable McMurray organised the event and stated, “I love these events, to me there’s nothing better than engaging with children in a fun and interesting way. You can see their excitement and you know that a positive experience like this will stay with them for the rest of their lives.”

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In May 2021, our men's football team signed the White Ribbon Charter. Detective Chief Inspector Lyndsay Fisher from Public Protection Branch promoted the pledge on social media, with a video which received over 3000 views. Whilst such a commitment is inherent in our organisational ethics and values, it is an important way of promoting this and demonstrating police support to women and girls who experience violence.



These examples provide an indication of the type of engagement activity that our team are involved in day and daily across Northern Ireland. This work ensures that we continue to build diverse local relationships and enhance our visibility, accessibility and responsiveness.

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