

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Policing and security in Northern Ireland, HC 1341

Wednesday 25 March 2026

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Members present: Tonia Antoniazzi (Chair); Chris Bloore; Sorchá Eastwood; Claire Hanna; Simon Hoare; Adam Jogee; Mike Kane; Mr Paul Kohler; Katrina Murray; Gavin Robinson; David Smith; Robin Swann.

Questions 255 - 292

Witnesses

I: Jon Boutcher QPM, Chief Constable, Police Service of Northern Ireland; Davy Beck, Assistant Chief Constable, Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– Police Service of Northern Ireland [\[PSNI0022\]](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jon Boutcher and Davy Beck.

Q255 **Chair:** Welcome to the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee session on policing and security in Northern Ireland. Welcome to Jon Boutcher, Chief Constable at the PSNI, and Assistant Chief Constable Davy Beck. Good morning.

Last week we took evidence from the Safeguarding Minister, Jess Phillips, and we spoke about male violence against women and girls. Thirty women have died violently in Northern Ireland since 2020, and statistics show that it is worse in Northern Ireland. Most recently, there was the case in Derry/Londonderry on the weekend, which is quite shocking. How do you, Chief Constable, deal with the fact that it is worse in Northern Ireland and how does your force address male violence against women and girls?

Jon Boutcher: I think I would share the Committee's position in sending out my condolences to Amy's family for what has happened. Very recently I met with Chloe Mitchell's family. Chloe was murdered in 2023.



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There is an ongoing prosecution for that case. It is unimaginably difficult. We saw earlier this week the conviction of the individual, who I will not name, for the murder of Natalie McNally as well. Both Davy and I spoke to the lead investigating officer last night.

I want to assure this Committee and everybody—I have done this repeatedly and we are taking a number of steps—that violence against women and girls is a significant priority for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I want to make one point though. Often it is mentioned that violence against women and girls is more significant in Northern Ireland than elsewhere. That is possibly because in 2019 the BBC published an article using figures from Eurostat, highlighting the number of homicides in Northern Ireland as being comparable to Romania and at the very high end of femicides in Europe.

The data given was 0.43 per 100,000 population would be victims of femicide, which is the same as Romania. It quoted eight murders and the data was a single year, 2017. The data was wrong. There were four domestic murders that year, three against women and one against a male. The rate for Northern Ireland on that data would have put us just below England and Wales, just above Switzerland and in the middle of the table of European countries.

I look further at the data. Over a period from 2012 to 2023, for Northern Ireland the mean rate would have been 0.6 per 100,000, which puts us right in the middle of the dataset for Europe.

I say that not defensively, because, having arrived as the Chief Constable in Northern Ireland, I was confronted with the Katie Simpson case. That is another case that a number of members of this Committee will be aware of. I do not know whether this is Northern Ireland-specific or because of what is happening online and the vile nature of things such as Andrew Tate and what he seems to do with young men and boys, and trying to groom them as to how they behave, which is abhorrent. There seems to be an acceptance around misogyny, the like of which I have not seen. We have to draw a line and say that this is unacceptable.

Lots is happening through the PSNI. We have a scheme called Fair Game, which I would recommend the Committee to look at, which we do with the Irish FA and Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland. We are working with a group of football clubs to make sure that young boys are educated and helped around those early relationships. I heard a radio interview of two young guys, both aged 15 or 16, both called Daniel. It was inspirational to listen to these two young boys talking about what had happened through that scheme.

I think the Committee is aware, because of your visits to Northern Ireland, that we commissioned Rachel Langdale KC to have a look at how we, as an organisation, are responding to violence against women and girls. By the way, we had a plan around violence against women and girls in advance of the Executive's ending violence against women and girls



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strategy. We had introduced a tactical plan, following a strategic priority to deal with this some years ago.

Rachel's report, which we recently received and we are actually socialising this week with the Policing Board, sets out a number of things that we need to do to improve how we are working with agencies to deal with this. It also looks at—and I am not blind to this—how we deal internally with misogyny and allegations of misogyny. To reassure you around that, we have done a cultural audit in the last 12 months, specifically looking at behaviours within the organisation. We are focusing on ensuring that we are doing everything we possibly can to deal with any abhorrent behaviours, whether that is misogyny or any sort of hatefulness within the organisation towards colleagues.

Chair: On that point, you brought up the issue of data and data being wrong. Jess Phillips, every year, on International Women's Day, reads out the names of the women who have died in the United Kingdom. I want to flag with you that that femicide census is very good data. If you have not seen it, Chief Constable, I would recommend that you do because it is very accurate. That data showed about the issue in Northern Ireland.

Q256 **Claire Hanna:** I do not think that people want to quibble on numbers, but Ellie Flanagan and Amy Doherty became the 29th and 30th women killed since 2020. The comparable figures for England, for example, show that we have a femicide rate that is almost twice that of the island next door and certainly of the south. I think that we are all in agreement that we need to use all possible tools.

You raised the issue of online hate and misogyny. It is very hard not to see a link between the constant and banal abuse of women online and the offline violence that we are dealing with. Do you believe, in general, that you have what you need in the justice system to bring perpetrators to justice and the tools available? Would you support, in the hate crime legislation, specific offences around incitement to hatred against women and around threats of sexual violence online?

Jon Boucher: First, let me make the point around the data and the femicide information. I am aware of that, but we keep getting taken back to that Eurostat thing, so it is important we set that out. For me, violence against women and girls is one of my biggest concerns with regards to my role as the Chief Constable in Northern Ireland, and this organisation knows it and I have spoken publicly about it. I want to be very clear around that. That is why we are prioritising it. I am hoping that this morning, speaking to this Committee, my concerns will become abundantly clear.

With regards to our ability to deal with these sorts of cases where there is such life-changing harm to individuals, I am significantly concerned about our capacity. I can simply take you to the Alexander McCartney case. Alexander McCartney is often known or described as the catfishing case. This individual operated on an industrial scale online, abusing,



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manipulating and coercing young people to do unspeakable things. I am incredibly impressed with Jess Phillips and follow very closely what she does, because she has done the most impressive work in this sector. I have spoken to Jess about that particular case. We referred our response to that case to the police ombudsman. The police ombudsman in its report said that we did not have the sufficient resources that we need to tackle those sorts of cases. It even went further to say that our ability to manage people such as McCartney on bail is a real challenge because of the resources that we have.

There have been a number of reports, not just by the ombudsman but by HMICFRS, the Independent Reporting Commission and actually by this Committee, about our resourcing. Since 2010, our resourcing has effectively stood still. It is important that I do this, so give me one minute to set this out. Policing was devolved in 2010. Two things happened that were a perfect storm against us. The oversight commissioner for the Patten report stood down in 2007, which made sure that the recommendations were being implemented. In 2010, policing was devolved. We then see our share of the block grant go from 3.8% when that budget was £21 billion to 2.4% when that budget is now £36 billion.

Health has an incredibly difficult challenge in Northern Ireland and I have great respect for people who work in health in Northern Ireland. Its budget went from £3.3 billion to £8.4 billion. We do a huge amount of work in the health sector now as the frontline of mental health, which I think a lot of people in this Committee realise from your visits to Northern Ireland. Education's budget has gone up 25%.

We also, through the devolved nature of policing, have to manage legacy, without any support for it. We have circa 163 people dealing with legacy at the moment. We are going to have to go to 200 because of different public inquiries and this huge requirement that is about to come to us. We have people dealing with legacy, which is funded from the money that comes for contemporary policing to deal with violence against women and girls, online cases, public protection issues, domestic violence and hate crime. They are working on legacy. Those officers and detectives who should be working in Davy's part of the organisation to deal with these incredibly life-changing, harmful offences are dealing with disclosure. There was no plan to deal with that when policing was devolved.

If I go to the Secretary of State, he will say, "Jon, policing is devolved. That is a matter for the Executive". If I go to the Executive, understandably and fairly, they will say, "Jon, that was during direct rule. That is troubles-related. You need to go to the Secretary of State". We need to have the right people in the room and have a grown-up conversation about how this organisation is funded.

That is why I very much welcome this inquiry into the PSNI, so that we look at where we are, what progress we have made since 2001 and what



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more we need to do. We need to do a lot more in this space, if I may say, including online, although, because of my concerns when I arrived, we have built capability online significantly—I do not want to go into details—in the last 18 months. We need to look at how we secure funding for the future, so we can deal with these cases in a way that we do not get reports like that from HMICFRS. Can I ask Davy to come in on some of the investigative elements of this?

Davy Beck: I offer my condolences to the family of Amy Doherty. I was the duty officer over the weekend and I got the call just after 10 am on Saturday with the horrendous news. Your heart sinks when you are faced with another terrible situation. To reassure you as a Committee, and indeed the community of Northern Ireland, within minutes officers were at the scene. Officers were working hard to preserve life. Unfortunately, we were not able to do that and achieve that. An investigation was initiated straightaway and that investigation continues at pace.

As the Chief Constable has said, the reality is that, when I look at my detectives across PSNI, we are probably just under 300 short of where we should be. There is an impact in terms of our ability to investigate, safeguard and manage the longer-term aspects, such as offender management. In a situation such as Saturday, I am having to pull detectives from other areas of the business to respond dynamically to the needs of that particular situation. We will do that and continue to do that, but there is a tail behind that in terms of the other parts of the business and the other parts of crime and criminality that we are not in a position to prioritise at that moment in time.

As the chief said, the example and the outcome of the Natalie McNally case emphasise the skill and dedication of the detectives and teams that put their shoulder to the wheel in respect of investigating those offences. We are now into year four of our violence against women and girls action plan in PSNI, which is an action plan that was developed in advance of the Executive's action plan. We continue to challenge ourselves, and indeed society as well, in terms of what we can do to make Northern Ireland safer for women and girls.

Q257 **Gavin Robinson:** Good morning to you both, gentlemen. Chief Constable, you have had success in this Committee in building support around some of the financial constraints that you face. You have had some success recently, but I would say that it is piecemeal and does not give you long-term sustainability. You had an uplift two years ago in the security fund. You have gained the support of the Executive for a recovery plan. You got support from the Executive on the data breach, though none of that gives you long-term surety of funds. Those were for specific things. What is your perspective not only on this year's budget but on the proposed budget that you have seen in draft form for the next three years?

Jon Boucher: Thanks for the question. One thing, which I think you allude to in the question, is that we face a situation where we get single-



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year budgets, which makes it incredibly hard to plan for what we need to do to address violence against women and girls in the long term. We need multi-year budgets. We calculate that we will be effectively starting with a £65 million gap next year. The year after that the gap is £96 million and the year after that it is £118 million.

I mentioned legacy. You will all know that I have a particular passion and background in trying to make sure that we address the legacy of the past, because I see it as fundamental to trust and competence in the Police Service of Northern Ireland. We are still a community emerging from conflict. We have had two pieces of legacy legislation: the Legacy Act and the Troubles Bill.

I know that there is a new bid gone in to Treasury for hundreds of millions of pounds to deal with legacy. Legacy is really challenging to deal with, as many of the people around this table know. A fundamental success factor to legacy is the PSNI's ability to provide the information that is required. We currently have the Omagh inquiry. That is really challenging for us to provide the information that is required at the pace that they require it. I know that, when I return from this Committee, I have a letter with regards to some of the concerns about our ability to resource that. We then have the Pat Finucane inquiry starting this year.

Omagh, we think, is going to cost us about £20 million. We are not funded for it. These are moneys that should be paying for resources to deal with the issues that this Committee will be concerned about for today's policing. We think the Finucane inquiry for Pat Finucane will probably cost us around £25 million. The new legacy commission, if it succeeds—and I desperately want it to succeed and have the confidence of families—will put a huge burden on our organisation. The Bill requires that we examine every document that we give to that commission as to its security classification and as regards to any prejudice to that document. I have never seen anything like that in any legislation previously, whether for the Serious Fraud Office or the Financial Conduct Authority. It is a Northern Ireland-specific requirement. Where it comes from, I do not know, but that will require us to have far more resources and, again, we are not funded for it.

Those gaps that I have given you will get worse. As a very cautious estimate, it is going to cost us between £1.75 million and £2 million a year extra to have the people who we need to deal with legacy. I do not have that extra money. I have to take them from the resources in our neighbourhoods, the resources in our detective capabilities and our resources in trying to tackle online crime. The projection is really challenging, and uniquely so within the United Kingdom of policing.

There is an interesting point here, because funding is relevant. In the last election in Ireland, in the south, the main three political parties set out in each of their manifestos what they would do to increase the numbers in An Garda Síochána, in unprecedented levels. It was almost a bidding war.



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Oh, for that support for policing in Northern Ireland, where we are dealing with, as you know, unique challenges around the threats to the organisation and the infrastructure that we require, which comes at extra cost, which still is a requirement.

On the financial future of the PSNI, I think that we are at a crossroads in our 25th anniversary year. I want to use this year, with events during the summer at various universities—and we have an event in November, which is the specific date of the anniversary—to have a proper informed public debate around how this organisation is funded.

Q258 Gavin Robinson: You have told me before when we met that there is a legacy liability. Before you get into staffing requirements, there are legacy liability costs sitting there of circa £200 million. At that time, you were saying that there were eight inquests and about 150 to 160 legacy cases. If the legacy commission gets going, there are 1,158 cases, I think, potentially falling at your feet.

I do not know whether you heard the Justice Minister yesterday on “Good Morning Ulster”, when she was debating the merits of the Criminal Bar Association strike. She said that, following a review, if she was given the evidence, she would fight for a business case and provide the resource. Do you feel you have had similar support for policing? I know that you have been evidencing the need, but do you see a response that provides a business case and a fight for resource that policing desperately needs?

Jon Boucher: I will be frank here. I think that any reasonable layperson’s assessment of the fact that policing was devolved in 2010 would be that that devolved position has not been to the advantage of the PSNI. I am delighted that the Executive have supported our recovery business case, which takes us to 7,000 police officers and 2,572 police staff. By the way, that means we need an extra £26 million next year and £48 million the year after to get back to those 7,000, but the block grant does not sustain public services in Northern Ireland, even though it is now £36 billion.

We are in a position—and this is collective—of being, I think, £400 million overdrawn. That is not through policing. We come in on budget; we have to. It is through education and health, which have huge challenges, and I am in no way criticising them. That means we get a loan from Treasury that has to be paid back. The PSNI is starting from a position where we have good will from all the parties to now help us recover, but the money is not there. I cannot countenance and properly explain to you the consequences of us not having the resources that we need.

Q259 Gavin Robinson: I can understand why you do not want to get dragged into a scrap. If I heard my Minister on the radio saying that they would pursue a business case and find the resources if the evidence was there—do you think there has been a challenge in providing the evidence for policing?

Jon Boucher: No, the evidence is irrefutable.



Q260 **Gavin Robinson:** So what is the problem?

Jon Butcher: I do not know and I did not hear the comments. You mentioned legacy. Data is very important. I think that I have explained this to people in this Committee before. This is because, when policing was devolved, I do not think people realised that legacy would still be such a challenge, taking resources away from these incredibly important cases.

We have to do more with regards to education and prevention around violence against women and girls and a number of other public protection-related offences. Nothing was wired in, either to the Chris Patten report that was produced in September 1999 or to the devolved position for policing in 2010, about legacy for the PSNI. It was a real, significant structural and strategic failing towards the organisation.

In 2014, there were 150 civil cases—this is the data you provided—against the PSNI for legacy. In 2018, that went to 850 cases. It is now over 1,150. No more cases can be brought because of the closing of that position with the Legacy Act from the previous Administration. That is about to change. I can tell you that I have done some estimates.

In trying to deal with legacy, we should all just sit down together and come up with a plan, because at the moment we just tread water, and that is so disingenuous towards these victims. I spoke to a family yesterday. An incredible lady, a widow, is end of life and has had a remarkable life, notwithstanding what happened to her many years ago, but we have let her down and we have let her family down, because there is no funding and no plan to deal with legacy.

That directly affects the trust and confidence in this organisation. That affects our recruitment. With regards to recruitment, this is where I would say to you, Gavin, that all political parties need to help us far more than they have. Patten said, in paragraph 15.2 of his report, that “all community leaders, including political...leaders and local councillors, bishops and priests, schoolteachers and sports authorities” need to support the PSNI and stop any discouragements to people joining the PSNI. They should actively encourage young people to join the PSNI. None of that has happened.

Q261 **Gavin Robinson:** That is not right. We are going to come back to this question later in this session, but that is not right. It is right in part, but I am not going to take any criticism of our support for policing, because you know exactly where we stand.

Jon Butcher: It has not happened as collectively as it needs to happen. We need to be shoulder to shoulder on that.

Q262 **Gavin Robinson:** Yes, but it is not a case of “found wanting”. Finally from me, do you have a sense of comparative figures for England and Wales? Do you know that the Treasury is likely to indicate that, while Northern Ireland is funded at £1.24 for every £1 per head spent in



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England, for policing in Northern Ireland it is £1.60 or 60% above the per-head spend in England, Scotland and Wales?

Jon Butcher: There is that comparable data around police funding in England and Wales and Northern Ireland. It is quite challenging to compare those because we have to do everything ourselves. We do not have any ROCU support. We do not have any national counter-terrorism policing support. We have to do everything as a single entity, so that is comparing apples and pears.

You will be aware that there is a huge piece of reform work in England and Wales at the moment to see a national policing service—which impacts on us because that involves the National Crime Agency—and a reduction in the number of police services. We are trying to lean heavily into that work to make sure that, in our anniversary year—I am very aware that we need to be at the cutting edge of policing for the next two decades—we are more readily compared with policing in England and Wales.

We need—and I think we all want to see this—a normalisation of policing in Northern Ireland. That is the direction of travel. That links to the threat level. That links to whether we are an armed service and have to have armoured vehicles. I am trying to plan for my two, three, four successors as to how we can lay, if you like, the seeds for the trees for the organisation to change in the future.

Q263 **Adam Jogee:** Good morning, both. Thank you for being here and, through you, thank you to all the PSNI officers who work day in and day out to keep the peace. I know that we will all want that message to be passed back. Forgive me, I have to go after my question and the answer because I have to go and raise a casework issue with the Justice Secretary. Chief Constable, you have touched on, in both Mr Robinson's question and your introduction, the financial situation that PSNI faces. You will know that the PSNI cannot borrow or carry funds forward or access reserves. What specific changes would you like to be made to your financial framework?

Jon Butcher: That is something that we need to debate this year. I almost do not want to offer a particular view. We need to come up with something that protects PSNI funding moving forward in a way that it has not been protected since 2010—for example some sort of triple-lock mechanism where we are linked to inflationary increases, which provides us with a level of security.

Policing in the first nine or 10 years post Patten was full of optimism, hopefulness and proactivity. Because of the funding position we now find ourselves in, we have the smallest workforce that there has been. The workforce is predominantly reactive, which worries me around the online activity, but we are, I promise you, sweating our asset online now. We have an exhausted workforce as well.



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We need to come up with a mechanism, and it needs to be a collaboration between the NIO, the Secretary of State, the Executive, the PSNI and the Justice Minister, as to how we get a funding mechanism to protect the PSNI moving forward. My huge concern for the recovery business case to take us to 7,000 officers is that we will not actually see that money because of the reality of the financial situation with the block grant in Northern Ireland. The direction of travel in health and education remains extremely difficult, as in they will continue to have gaps year on year, so the maths does not work. Policing gets no protection and we always have to come in on budget. That means we have some real challenges in reaching that recovery business case, which is essential for society in Northern Ireland.

Q264 Mr Kohler: I would like to return to legacy. You have answered many of the things that I was going to ask you about, but can we get some detail on the costs you think are going to hit the PSNI? You are currently spending about £24 million on legacy investigations. You now have the prospect of the Omagh and the Finucane inquiries. You have many civil actions. The Northern Ireland Office is saying, "Yes, but you will not have to investigate the 1,000-plus cases that go to the legacy commission". What would you say to that? Can you give us details of how you have costed the various costs you are facing?

Jon Butcher: Yes, of course. They are right. The investigation of legacy and troubles-related cases, with regards to a particular time period from the late 1960s—so 1968 and 1969—to 1998, now sits with what is currently the ICIR and will become the legacy commission. We still have 195 cases that we have to investigate that are during that period and are not troubles-related. There is a very important case, Marian Beattie, that we are currently looking at for a family. This is a young girl who went to a dance and never came home. She was murdered. There are some real opportunities in that investigation. We are dealing with that. We have a number of other cases to look at and review that are not troubles-related.

There are 126 of those cases that would be classified as troubles-related but come after April of 1998. They take us to a period of 2004. The reason there is the period of 1998 to 2004 for those 126 cases that would be paramilitary murders is that, in 2004, the organisation set up major investigation teams to deal with murders in a way that would comply with the standards of the College of Policing, of national investigative techniques. In the period before that, because of the volume and the difficulties of policing in Northern Ireland, there are concerns that each of those 126 cases were not investigated as well as the police, and certainly the families, would have wanted them to be. We still have to examine those 195 cases, which are still ours across the piece.

With regards to the civil cases, they are ours. They are not taken or consumed by the legacy legislation that has been introduced. On 4 November 2001, when the PSNI came into existence, we inherited the actions and liabilities of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Work was done by



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Chris Patten, who I speak to today, and who was exemplary. We really still use that report as a template for our tone, community approach and human rights approach, but, possibly understandably, it did not in any way deal with legacy, because that was really challenging. Neither was legacy then addressed with the devolution of policing in 2010.

On those civil cases, by way of an exercise to look at the comparison of what we are likely to face with those 1,100 cases, between 2018 and 2024 we resolved 30 civil actions. I have given this data to the Committee before. That costs the PSNI £25 million to the plaintiff's side. We are not funded for this from the contemporary grant to deal with policing today. Some £17.7 million went to the lawyers. By the way, I do not criticise the lawyers because we have not been giving them the information they should have as quickly as they should have it. We have not been funded to do that, so we do not have the mechanisms in place that we need. Only £7.3 million of that £25 million went to the actual families.

We have done a calculation that, on the basis of using that as the template and the example, to resolve all of those 1,100-plus civil cases—some of them, by the way, will be without merit, they will not be paid and they will be fought—we are probably looking at around about £800 million over the next 10 years. With the landscape that I have given you about the budgetary challenges in Northern Ireland, that just does not work, and yet—this is not criticism but an observation—the British Government have a business case for several hundred million pounds to try to ensure the legacy commission is properly resourced to deal with those legacy investigations during the troubles period.

There is no assistance for us around any IT or staff to deal with this. They simply say, "That has to come out of your block grant for contemporary policing". I will say this: when the PSNI came into being, there were 13,000 police officers, including part-time and full-time reserve, and a scheme was introduced to shrink the organisation. Chris Patten said that there should be 7,500 police officers and 2,500 reserve officers. You know that we went down to 6,100. If we had not recruited—when we do not have the money to recruit—we would have continued down towards 5,500. We are now on a very slight trajectory up.

The Government invested £500 million for a scheme to exit officers out of policing. Around 5,000 police officers took that, which I support. It was necessary. It was a sensible investment from the Treasury and Government to help address the challenges in Northern Ireland and shrink the police service. Why do we not get that support for legacy and for these families that have been victims of this? Why is it so narrowly focused on this commission? They are the arguments that I am trying to make. It would assist us and probably future-proof the PSNI moving forward if we could get that financial support for legacy.

Q265 **Mr Kohler:** You have given those figures to the Committee. We have that



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and that is something we can put into the report. Can I ask you a broader question? With that £25 million, as you said, two thirds of it went to lawyers' fees. A third went to the plaintiffs in compensation. Do you think the whole issue of legacy has been mediated through a lawyer's view of justice, where there is compensation, or there are criminal charges perhaps, but no wider sense of restorative justice? Is there a role for restorative justice that is currently missing within the whole approach to legacy?

Jon Butcher: I would agree with that. I built Operation Kenova. I know that the current ICRIR has a number of lawyers. The existing position, I think, is that there are 16 lawyers in there. There may be lawyers around this table. We need lawyers.

Gavin Robinson: The person asking you questions is one.

Jon Butcher: We had no lawyers on Operation Kenova. When we needed legal advice, we would go and get legal advice. It was a far more pragmatic, victim-focused approach. On many occasions—I will not go into details because of the sensitivities of individual cases—we did that restorative element through practical policing of bringing people together. Nothing is in the media. It has helped people move on in ways that they did not expect they would be able to. That is not involving money. It is not involving civil court cases. In fact, I would say that most of the Kenova families did not have court cases. They just wanted to know the truth.

Davy Beck: This is just to pick up on that point and perhaps give you a contemporary commentary again of the impact of that, which may be useful to the Committee. I suppose the chief mentioned major investigation teams—MITs. There is national guidance around how many cases it is recommended that a MIT should hold at any one time, and that is six cases. Currently, our MITs within PSNI hold in the region of 20 cases. That has an impact in terms of our ability to revisit those more contemporary cold cases, if I can call them that. We are not getting back to those cases as quickly as I or the families would want. That has an impact on families and the officers. It also has an impact on trust and confidence here and now.

Q266 **Katrina Murray:** Thank you for coming, both. I want to concentrate more on the current workforce and what it looks like. I really valued the morning that we were able to spend at the team PSNI event, and thought that its focus on being one workforce, with no differential between police staff and police officer, was really important. At the moment, in the current PSNI workforce, the police officers are deemed to be 67% Protestant and 33% Catholic or other. Even more stark, probably, is the police staff statistic, where 78% would be deemed to be coming from a Protestant background. Are you clear about the reasons for lower application rates among non-Protestant communities?



Jon Boucher: It is a really challenging question to answer. I have been in this role now two and a half years. The first thing I need to concede is that I generally do not think we, as an organisation, have done enough in telling our story. At the end of April, unless scheduling changes, I hope you will all watch a fly-on-the-wall programme around response policing in Northern Ireland that we have done with the BBC's Stephen Nolan. Mr Nolan obviously is quite a figure in broadcasting in Northern Ireland and often talks about policing. We invited him to come along and have a look at what it is like in a car that goes to these emergency calls. That has ultimately resulted in two six-programme series, starting at the end of April. The second six programmes will be in the autumn, when I want to do another recruitment campaign.

I am currently, literally every week, going into different schools and talking about policing. This is planting seeds for the future. We are doing a huge amount through our local policing programme. We have had lots of recruitment events, which have been very well supported by a number of political parties. This probably goes to your colleague Gavin's point. Not all political parties have come in to support policing in the way that I think the Patten commission envisaged, if you read paragraph 15.2, in a way that is literally shoulder to shoulder. We together, collectively, understand the importance of policing.

Interestingly—and I say this because there are so many complexities to your question—we had a team PSNI event yesterday. I looked at my emails this morning. An officer with 23 years' service was extremely positive about it and said, "This is something that has regaled me". We talked about violence against women and girls and the Natalie McNally case, because constantly we are talking about issues of the day, as well as the structural issues of the organisation, so people understand the journey we are on. Her daughter applied for the police last September, but, because of local threats to police officers, her daughter has deferred taking the position while she thinks about it.

When joining the PSNI, those officers and staff still have to very much make a conscious decision about the threat that exists against them. That is especially so for those people from a nationalist background. I know that Peadar Heffron, who was attacked by dissident republicans and left with life-changing injuries, will not mind me saying this. Peadar told me that, when he told his GAA teammates he was going to join the police, a number of them did not speak to him. He said to me, "I am not sure it will have changed today, Jon". That is not the progress that any of us want.

There are a number of reasons, particularly for the nationalist community. There is that reality of the dissident republican threat. Remember, John Caldwell was shot in February 2023 nine times in front of his young son at football training. Many people who join the PSNI from a nationalist background fear that some of the community will not speak



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to them again. As a police officer who joined the Metropolitan police in 1983, I find it hard to understand how that can be, but it is the case.

The third point—and we need to do more on this—is that some people from a different background worry whether they will be looked after in the PSNI. Will they be able to progress? If you read some of the media—and I am taking on some of the media around these issues—everything about the PSNI is terrible, but it is not. It is the most incredible police service organisation that I have ever seen. We need to tell that story better. There is a collective responsibility with us and with wider society to make sure that people understand the values of policing and feel confident to apply for policing. That is from our new and emerging communities as well, not just from the nationalist community and the loyalist community.

Q267 Katrina Murray: I am glad that you picked up the emerging communities as well. I want to go back to police staff and making sure that we have a level of protection there for officers, particularly if you are looking at analysts or even payroll staff or office cleaners. It is making sure that, across the board, policing and PSNI is looked at as a good employer, but also somewhere that people would see themselves being.

Jon Butcher: On that point, I want to reassure you. NIPSA is the biggest staff association representing police staff. We have an incredibly positive relationship with it. There have been some real challenges. You will know that 2023 was the annus horribilis for the PSNI. It started with the attempted murder—the murderous assault—on John Caldwell.

You make, rightly, the comments about the importance of police staff in the PSNI. They have been trying to get their danger money—it is called the revised environmental allowance—raised for something like 15 years. It had not been changed for 30 years. We got that increased, bearing in mind the financial climate, from £580 to £1,386. That is not a huge amount of money, but they felt the importance of the value of it actually finally being done. It is now linked to the Northern Ireland transition allowance. That is the allowance that police officers get, which is looked at and reviewed annually, so there is an equality of arms with police staff and police officers.

Q268 Katrina Murray: We have had quite a bit of evidence to this inquiry around policing. I particularly want to go back to the statement that Deputy Chief Constable Singleton made that a return to 50-50 recruitment would not necessarily be effective in increasing Catholic representation. Can you explain the rationale behind that?

Jon Butcher: I think that Bobby's point there is that the number of applicants for the PSNI since 2001—and I will bring Davy in here because of his history in policing in Northern Ireland—has broadly been either just above or just below 30%. Statistically, it has not significantly changed. In recent campaigns, there has been a downward trend. We have to arrest that. That is a challenge.



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Between 2001 and 2011, for the first 10 years, there was the 50-50 that the Patten commission required. For every Protestant recruit, there would be a Catholic recruit. Once we got over a threshold of 30% representation, I think the academic evidence is that over 30% representation of a particular cohort means that that cohort has sufficient influence in an organisation.

There are calls to go back to 50-50. I always say that nothing is off the table, because I will consider anything. If we did what Chris Patten and the Patten commission promoted that we should do, in his report in 1999, and we deal with some of these societal issues around attitudes towards policing, I hope that we would see the number of applicants from the nationalist Catholic community increase to 35% or 40%, proportional to the representation that they have in society. That is what we need to do.

In a recruitment process, it has always been my position in policing that we have the best candidates for the job. I think that we can achieve the proportions that we need in the organisation, but we have to do the work to do it. I hope that this is not clumsy, but 50-50 feels to me a lazy way to do it. We need to do the work to get the support from society that was envisaged by the people who did the blueprint for the PSNI.

Davy Beck: To add to the chief's comments, we also have an issue around working-class communities across the board.

Q269 **Katrina Murray:** That was going to be my next question, so expand on that now, please.

Davy Beck: We absolutely recognise that, and we are not attracting from those communities. That is why it is important to have that visibility and reactivity in those communities. That is about neighbourhood policing. That is those communities being able to connect to and see what they aspire to be in terms of policing. That is the result of the financial and resourcing position, and our lack of consistent presence in those communities. That would be my view around that.

Also, we know that there are problems in certain council areas that we would say are statistically lower than what we would expect across the board, primarily Newry, Mourne and Down, Derry City and Strabane and Mid-Ulster, where we are not attracting. There is specific work to be done in working-class communities, both loyalists and nationalist, and there is certainly work to be done in those council areas where we are not attracting.

We have run bespoke recruitment processes for staff in areas such as Derry City and Strabane. When we were opening the new custody suite in the Waterside, we ran a specific bespoke recruitment process to try to attract from that local area. That enhances the representativeness in that area, but also ensures that we get people local to that area who will potentially stay with the organisation for a longer period of time.



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Q270 Sorcha Eastwood: Thank you, Chief Constable and Assistant Chief Constable. This is an issue that is very close to my heart and very close to my family, in terms of policing recruitment and people from a Catholic background. I am very proud of my family's service—I say this every single time—in both the RUC and the PSNI. I have to tell you that this is no longer about any sort of grief or abuse that I would get for standing up for those who served honourably. This is now a wider issue, where it is stopping others from a Catholic background who are considering a future in policing from joining.

Pre-1998, in the Catholic primary school that I went to, we had the RUC come in and do a session with the children about neighbourhood policing and all that sort of stuff. Pre-1998 neighbourhood policing was very difficult, but they came in and they were given a fair wind and every opportunity, like any other organisation coming in to talk to young people. I am not sure that that would be replicated right across Northern Ireland at the minute, and that is in 2026. Something has changed and something has gone backwards.

I am going to be honest and say something brave. I think all political parties initially did sign up for full-throated support of policing, but something has changed and something has gone wrong. I do not know what we do about that. Is it right to say that that lack of political support is putting young people, and anyone, off joining the PSNI today, in 2026?

Jon Boucher: I might bring Davy in first on that. Davy, before he took on his role now, spent almost his entire policing career in local policing in south Armagh, which is a really difficult area, so can I bring Davy in first on some of that?

Davy Beck: You are right. We have lost some of the drive and enthusiasm around that attractiveness and the willingness for people to step outside their comfort zone. Perhaps we have taken policing for granted in many respects. I look at some of the schools and some of the principals in areas such as south Armagh who invited me and my colleagues into schools. That was courageous. We need to think about that courage that is needed. We need to praise that and call it out, but also call out those who do not step up to the mark. You are right. There are still schools that say, "No, the time is not right". Twenty-five years on, when will the time ever be right if we accept that? From a society perspective, we need to challenge that.

You are absolutely right. If those young children do not see police officers, that ability to aspire to be a police officer and the value of police officers in their local community, it makes it really hard when you then try to recruit in those areas. There are elements of our recruitment that we need to champion more. There is the fact that you can join from a working-class community and, through our training programme, get a degree-level qualification at the end of that, without student debt, for an example. There is more we can do on that.



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As a service, as the chief said, we need to do more and challenge ourselves in terms of ensuring that we are not doing the same things with the same people in the same schools, and that we identify those who perhaps we are not working with and challenge ourselves and knock on those doors. Through working with you and representatives, and particularly in that 25th year, there is an opportunity to try to reignite some of that importance of policing, drive and enthusiasm to try to re-energise that process.

Jon Boucher: Ryan Henderson is the ACC now for local policing, and we are coming up with a programme linked to some of the sophisticated data that Davy referred to. We know where our applicants live, not necessarily where they are originally from but where they currently live. We are mapping to look at those areas where we have gaps around applications. One thing we are looking at doing with the schools is to focus on those schools. This is, again, planting those trees for the future.

Very recently, in the last handful of months, I have been down to Derry City and Strabane. I went to an integrated college, which hosted a number of other academies. I went with Drew Harris. Drew was the ex-Deputy Chief Constable of the PSNI. He joined the RUC. His parents were both attacked by the IRA. His father was murdered. He became the commissioner of An Garda Síochána. We did a presentation to 16 and 17-year-olds. It was fabulous. It was great to see the different uniforms in front of us from the different academies. That morning, there was quite a huge police presence and I had not been told, so obviously I asked, "What is going on here?" There had been a dissident republican threat because they knew I was going into this academy. When those schoolchildren were going in to listen to us, they saw this very visible policing presence, which obviously is disconcerting. Psychologically, that just is not where we want to be.

Very recently, we were doing part of a careers fair in a school in west Belfast. There was a bomb threat simply because the PSNI was part of the careers fair. This is not normal. I spoke to the headmaster—what an amazing head. We are in dialogue with other schools—Catholic schools—for me to go and speak to those schools. Very recently, I went to see a number of political and sociology students at a Catholic school in Belfast. It was incredible. It was like being in a Select Committee. The questions were very well thought through. It was two and a half hours. At the end, a number of them came to me and said—

Gavin Robinson: How long were the answers?

Jon Boucher: They were longer! They said that they were considering joining the police, but I said, "Not yet. Go to university, even start another career, but please come to the police at some point and at least support what we are doing". We took a couple of very senior officers from a nationalist Catholic background to talk to them. One, in fact, was an ex-student at the school. We are doing a lot around the schools to map



them, but we should have done some of this and reinvigorated it more recently.

Davy Beck: The other element, of course, is the fact that we still need to continue to suppress the dissident republican threat, and indeed serious and organised crime. That is an important part of the overall picture and creating the environment where people can feel that there is a degree of safety in terms of joining the police.

I want to reassure the Committee that my officers continue to work day and night to suppress the dissident republican threat that still exists. They still retain that lethal intent, material, munitions and resources. They are capable of mounting lethal and reckless attacks across Northern Ireland, but we continue to suppress that. We continue to work day and night, as I said, to address those issues, and in terms of serious and organised criminality.

For me, it is the virtuous circle, if you like, in terms of our efforts around suppression and degradation of that threat, but also, at the same time, increasing that community rejection of that narrative around dissident republican threats, and indeed paramilitarism. One cannot be achieved without the other. Both are mutually supportive. The more we continue to suppress the threat, that gives the community more opportunity to stand up and be resilient and empowered to withstand that. Ultimately, that feeds back into the support for our officers as well, as they see that community support develop. The two are interconnected and as important as each other.

Q271 **Gavin Robinson:** This is an important thread. One of the reasons for pushing back earlier is that it is important that we identify where the problems lie. My support for policing is almost unconscious. For people from my community, for Ulster Unionist people and Alliance too, it is unconscious. The SDLP, in many ways, has shown extraordinary bravery from the creation of the PSNI to the joining of the Policing Board. In the civic nationalist community, they have stepped up to the plate. There were people, particularly in the Newry areas—you will remember, Davy—who joined the Policing Board at a very early stage in a gritty community. They were prepared to step up for policing. They have not resiled from that. I do not like this notion that it is a collective problem. The consequence is collective. We all suffer the consequence, but there is not a collective problem.

I am glad you mentioned some of those school events because we have spoken about it in the last number of weeks. In the last six weeks, I can think of three schools in north and west Belfast, all of which have been targeted by the mouthpieces of dissident republicans, dissident units, who want to threaten children and frustrate children's life chances and opportunities.

There are things that I can say and do that do not help in those situations. From a practical perspective, I rejoice that 1,000 members of



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the Roman Catholic community applied for 400 vacancies. Sometimes we lose the positive in this. I rejoice that that is the case. If I were to stand and welcome police into those Catholic primary schools in north and west Belfast, I know that would be counterproductive. I expect republican political representatives to do that, and they do not.

A Sinn Féin member of the Policing Board was asked about this three weeks ago on "Good Morning Ulster". When asked, "Would you encourage a member of your own community to join the police?", all they could say was that they would understand and that it was their choice. There was no support. There was no encouragement. Collectively, I do not think you will have any resistance from the majority of political leaders or indeed the majority of people within our community—there were 1,000 applicants for 400 vacancies—but we need to be clear about where the problem lies.

My question to you is about how we address it. If I stand outside the school gate, it is not going to help policing. It will make it a controversial political situation. How can we directly challenge and encourage those who have yet to step up to the plate? One attendance at an attestation ceremony in 25 years is a disgrace. How do we encourage that participation from the community?

Jon Butcher: So you will be aware—I know you are aware, Gavin—that I reflected on where we were over the Christmas and new year period and what we need to do in the next 12 months. I asked to see all the political leaders. That is because of some of the things that we are discussing in this forum. I wanted to socialise my concerns around the additional work that we all needed to do.

I have Ulster University organising an event. It is going to be in June, and a number of people are going to be invited. We have to have a debate publicly. We have to have quiet, discreet conversations to encourage people to come to a position where we are all on the same page and in the same place, and to come out and support policing in a way that collectively has not been done before.

That does not happen overnight, but I want it to happen within the anniversary year of the PSNI. I want it to happen in advance or at the time of the next recruitment campaign, which I hope to be in the autumn of this year. We are doing a number of things. A number of our officers and staff who have gone into specialisms have been promoted or do a job where they are providing incredible public service and are heroes to the communities in Northern Ireland, are doing podcasts and going out there to talk about why they joined.

I mentioned the TV programme, the fly-on-the-wall documentary. I will do a health check on that because I have seen five of the first six. They are challenging to watch because this is the real "Blue Lights". This is real stuff. It is sad to see how we are leaving a lot of society behind because there are not grassroots organisations to look after them.



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This is a wider debate possibly than even just policing, but I am trying to do everything I can this year—we are in the shop window for the anniversary year—to get all the political parties, even those that have been hesitant to come out as strongly as I want them to, to support what we are doing in policing. I know you have advocated to me that you have supported policing; I know you have personally done it at various events. We need that to be the norm. We need that normalisation.

On the default to 50-50, I say we should not go there because we have not done all this stuff first. We have not done the hard work that we need to do. That is my position on this. We need to make sure that we get all those political parties. I am very supportive of what you said about the SDLP and the support that we have had with regard to recruitment campaigns and policing. We need to have that broad church of political parties on that.

Q272 **Gavin Robinson:** Has every leader met you since you asked to see them at the start of the year?

Jon Butcher: I have one to meet.

Q273 **Gavin Robinson:** Is it scheduled?

Jon Butcher: Yes, I am sure it is scheduled. Please do not forget the different operating environment in Ireland. Policing in Ireland cannot be supported across a line in the sand, metaphorically speaking, between the north and the south. Why is that? In a manifesto, they say, "This is what we will do for An Garda Síochána. These are the amounts that we will increase the numbers of police by". It is a completely different position with regard to Northern Ireland. We all want to achieve that same support.

Q274 **Simon Hoare:** Chief Constable, Sir George Hamilton described the allocation of additional security funding when he gave evidence to us as being both "untidy" and "disjointed". It requires regular business cases being made back to Treasury to ensure funding is continued. The Committee would be interested to hear about your experience of negotiating the allocation with the UK Government.

Jon Butcher: There is an interesting history to this. I think this is accurate; I spoke to Drew Harris. When policing was devolved, additional security funding came into being. Drew was one of those who negotiated it because national security is retained by Westminster and mainstream policing is devolved to the Executive in Northern Ireland.

It has been interesting. It is a battle with regard to the justification of the additional security funding. It is actually Davy's bread and butter, his area of policing. It provides us with—certainly at the moment because of our position financially—critical support around overtime for patrols, security patrols and security at some of our stations. We still have to have armed guarding at some of our stations. It provides us with our terrorist investigation unit funding. It provides us with close protection



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support because we currently have—it varies between 70 and 80—about 75 protected people.

We are constantly having to make sure that we are justifying our position with regard to that money. It is a challenge. I have to be very clear: it also is not for legacy. It is for some of the elements that we have because of the uniqueness of the troubles, the conflict. It is not for legacy funding. It is not part of the considerations around dealing with legacy. Davy has to deal with this daily so he probably has some quite insightful comments.

Davy Beck: First, it is absolutely essential. We talked about the need to continue to suppress the threat and indeed address criminality and paramilitary criminality. Without ASF, that would be really difficult. To put that again into context, I have 192 posts across the organisation that are funded directly by additional security funding. It is absolutely crucial in terms of our day-to-day business.

I welcome the increased flexibility in this year's settlement. Previously, it was very much directed towards Northern Ireland-related terrorism. That is not fit for purpose in the here and now because, with the suppression of the threat, Northern Ireland-related terrorism threat is going down and the trajectory is in the right direction, but we are seeing new and emerging threats around the extreme right wing and so on.

Simon Hoare: I will come on to that directly.

Davy Beck: Your description is correct around the piecemeal way that it is allocated and the requirement for further work to secure and account for that funding.

Q275 **Simon Hoare:** Just pausing there, walk us through this. In our report we will be making recommendations to Government. Is the rubric by which a request for ASF is made by you broadly the same? Notwithstanding inflation pressures and so on, are the sums requested virtually the same for virtually the same sort of things, year on year?

Davy Beck: Virtually they are.

Q276 **Simon Hoare:** Are you able to tell us what sort of timeframe that has been going on for?

Davy Beck: Certainly, we have been receiving that additional funding for a number of years. I cannot recall the exact year it started, but it is certainly some years. At the minute we receive £37 million from the Treasury directly in terms of additional security funding. We then supplement that with a further £39 million of in-year main grant funding. We dedicate a total of over £70 million to addressing that threat. That is what we utilise the additional security funding for.

That provides us with that operational capability in terms of intelligence gathering, terrorist investigation, search requirements and close



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protection. Again, we have around 74 protected persons in Northern Ireland. It provides us with site security. Again, there is a requirement for armed security at certain police sites. It allows us to advance our covert policing, which is absolutely crucial and essential, and our specialist capabilities. Lots of that has stayed fairly static in terms of the requirements.

Q277 Simon Hoare: Although it is a tick-box exercise in many respects, can you give us a handle on how long it takes you to prepare the business case? How long does it take the Treasury to analyse it before they pick up the telephone and go, "Ka-ching, you have got X"?

Davy Beck: What I can say is that there is an ongoing process. I chair, with one of our chief officers, the governance mechanisms around additional security funding. That is on a quarterly basis. We complete an end-of-year review. That is ongoing at the minute. We do an end-of-financial-year review of what we have done, how we have utilised that funding and how we have provided for that funding. We then continue to bid into the Northern Ireland Office and to the Treasury. There is considerable work. I would not be in a position to give you the overall hours, but there is considerable work in that.

Q278 Simon Hoare: Maybe a note on that would be helpful, Chair.

You will probably see where I am trying to land my question. This is an annual thing; it is not an extraordinary once-in-a-decade event. Surely, there has to be a better way of doing it to release your time, your colleagues' time and indeed the time of those at Treasury from analysing something that is broadly a roll-over application for broadly roll-over reasons.

Davy Beck: Yes, very much so. I would liken it to the grants that counter-terrorism policing or indeed ROCU policing get in England and Wales. It is similar. In my view, it is not that different from those areas of policing that are funded through those grants in England and Wales. The case is there.

The case that we have made this year was very much around, "This is not just about the NIRT threat; this is about the new and emerging threats; this is about us being sure that we can continue to address everything in a threat-agnostic way." Certainly, we have now that flexibility to utilise it more widely, which is really welcome.

That feeds into your point. If there is an acceptance now that for us to maintain our capabilities and continue to suppress all those areas of threats and indeed areas such as violence against women and girls, it is critical that we embed that more collectively into the main block grant.

Q279 Simon Hoare: In trying to deliver what, laudably, the chief was saying just a moment ago about the need for greater stability to plan, what kind of uncertainty and disruption does it provide to the planning of policing, recruitment and indeed investment in kit and everything else, when there



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is this very ad hoc, "Put in a bid and see whether your number comes out of the lottery machine", type of thing? Does it destabilise the medium to long-term planning of the PSNI?

Davy Beck: Absolutely, yes. It does not allow us any real long-term planning, particularly as we now look at our technical and our data capabilities, which we need to now look at investing in over the longer term. That is where we see the real opportunities to address criminality moving forward. There are real difficulties in single-year or short-term settlements. They do not allow you to plan for that.

Q280 **Simon Hoare:** Just in the interests of time, I just want to explore this point. Has there been a time when an application for ASF has been made and 100% of the request has not been awarded? You may need to write to us on this.

Davy Beck: It probably would be better for us to write.

Jon Boucher: We can. I am confident that we have made representations for funding that have not been met. I am sorry, Chair; I am aware of the time. In the same way as legacy was not properly considered originally with the 1999 Patten report and again in 2010, I worry about this, Simon. Can I just say why?

Simon Hoare: Yes, please.

Jon Boucher: The threat level is currently at "substantial", so an attack is likely. This money has helped us, with our partners in MI5 and other partners, to suppress that threat. The data with regard to paramilitary attacks and shootings is in the report that we sent to you, and I am happy to talk to that.

We want to get to a position where the threat level goes down to "moderate". That is the aspiration. We have talked about getting to "moderate" by 2030. The threat level is reviewed twice a year, in the spring and the autumn, by JTAC. My view is that we are at the low end of "substantial" because of the way that we have managed to suppress this threat, but the threat exists. A lot of these people are currently in prison. We are constantly having successes against them. A lot of that is directly because of the additional security funding and those assets, electronic countermeasures and all the stuff we can do.

If the threat goes down to "moderate", there will be discussions from the Treasury about, "Why are we paying this money?" What I am worried about is that we are suddenly left in a sword of Damocles position, where suddenly funding gets stopped and the thoughtfulness that is required around the continuance of those capabilities—

Q281 **Simon Hoare:** "Moderate" goes up because the vigilance is not there to keep it at "moderate". "Moderate" does not happen by accident.



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Jon Boucher: "Moderate" happens because of the work that has gone into making sure that the threat level comes down.

Simon Hoare: Yes, I take your point.

Jon Boucher: For instance, the threat level in the UK for international terrorism is at "substantial" too, but it is at the high end of "substantial" because of events at the moment.

I hope we get that threat level down because that goes more towards normalisation, which we have talked about, but we need to make sure that the thinking is done, which it was not in 2010 about legacy, about the transition into that period for PSNI funding. The reason that we have got to "moderate" should not be taken away without careful consideration.

Q282 **Simon Hoare:** I have one final question—ACC Beck has referenced this—about the inclusion of extreme right-wing and Islamist terrorism. A "yes", "no" or "unsure" answer might suffice. Is the increased funding in the present spending review period sufficient to cover this new and evolving remit?

Davy Beck: It is a new and emerging area. We are seeing increased concerns around extreme right-wing and indeed other areas of threat. It is much wider than Northern Ireland-related terrorism. We need to sustain that funding.

Q283 **Simon Hoare:** I appreciate the need to sustain it, but, in your assessment, is it sufficient?

Jon Boucher: Can I come in? What we are seeing in Northern Ireland is disproportionately higher elements of this than in the wider UK.

Q284 **Simon Hoare:** Is that a no?

Jon Boucher: It is a real concern about that funding. When I arrived, we had very little capability online. We have changed that, but I have had to make difficult decisions in the funding envelope that we have. This is an area that that funding should specifically address. Currently, it does not.

Simon Hoare: It is a no.

Jon Boucher: It is a no. We are still trying to understand how big the threat from that is, but it is higher in Northern Ireland than we see in the wider UK.

Simon Hoare: I take that point, but it is a no.

Q285 **David Smith:** Good morning, gents. It is good to have you back with us. I want to turn our attention to something that you mentioned in your answers: normalisation. I lived in Belfast between 2001 and 2008, first off the Donegall Road and then just off the Cregagh Road.



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Every time I would go back to see friends or family in the west of Scotland or the north-east of England, when I would come back in through the port or the airport and get back to east Belfast or south Belfast, it was always a shock, even if I had just been away for the weekend, to see armoured Land Rovers, all the police having weapons, the reinforcement of the police stations and so on. Now, blessed as I am to be on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, I get to go to Belfast and around Northern Ireland on a regular basis and I sometimes go and see friends. Maybe to a slightly lesser degree than it used to be, but it is still a shock to go back and see many of those things still in place.

Patten made many recommendations, but there was a strong theme about normalisation. We are talking about 25 years ago. I will just read recommendation 52. It is worth reading. "Police stations built from now on should have, so far as possible, the appearance of ordinary buildings; they should have low perimeter walls, and be clearly visible from the street; but they should have security features, which may be activated or reinforced as necessary".

The first of my two questions is why, over 25 years on, has the normalisation of the police environment as envisaged not yet been achieved?

Jon Butcher: I will bring Davy in on this, but the threat level, which as we just referenced is now at "substantial", for almost the entire period has been at "severe". That means an attack is highly likely. The only threat level above that is "critical".

The success factors that needed to be in place have not been there, but we are now in a position where I can see a future where those success factors will be there. That will then require, by the way—it becomes very monotonous to talk about this—a capital investment plan to assist us with that. For our capital investment over the next 12 months we need just over £70 million. The allocation that we have is £50 million.

We have purchased a site called Kinnegar to have a new policing college. It is one of the Patten recommendations; it has never been delivered. That is probably an eight-year project because there are wider issues than the police college. We want to put a crime academy there. We want to have the type of infrastructure that a world-class police service should have. At the moment, we do not have that. Some of that is linked to the discussions that we have already had.

That will require funding. There are other questions that come from that normalisation. This is a challenging one for the organisation. Should it be an armed force, if we go to "moderate"? If we stay at "moderate" for a period of time, we need to have those conversations. We need to have conversations about whether there is a need for armoured Land Rovers or the fortifications that we see.

As we get away from the conflict, those arguments will be more and more persuasive. We have talked about this as a senior team. We need to start



having some of those conversations on benchmarking. When the threat level changes at the moment, there is no real change to our police footprint. We do not change anything particular in what we do. If we go to “moderate”, there will likely be a conversation about whether the lead for Northern Ireland republican terrorism should come to the PSNI and not sit with MI5. That is a move to normalisation. We need to start getting those conversations, which have not taken place, factored into our strategic planning. What does tip those things over?

In fairness to all of my predecessors, the environmental factors that we have needed to satisfy that particular recommendation have not been in place. I want to bring Davy in on that.

Davy Beck: Yes, you have covered a lot of it. Primarily, it is threat-driven, but it is also investment-driven. The other element is around public disorder. Over recent years, 2024 and 2025, we have seen really significant public disorder and a need to protect our officers. Unfortunately, it has been necessary.

Patten also talks, in that same area of business, about enabling the correct security environment. Unfortunately, 25 years on, we have not perhaps achieved the security environment that Patten envisaged at that stage, but we have made progress. There has been significant progress in terms of the normalisation of patrol vehicles and some of the estate.

As the chief said, there is a big piece around the investment and having the finances available to do some of that work, quite frankly. We are continuing to have to divert that finance and funding into day-to-day activity. That is a great frustration for us. We would have liked to have been further along that journey, but we also have to be realistic in terms of the threat and the position that we encounter.

For me, the first part of this is about good, effective community policing. It starts with the confidence of our officers. When we send them out to do a day’s duty, they have to have confidence that they have the proper equipment, training and resources and that they are supported financially to do that. That is what the chief has talked a lot about this morning: creating the environment in which officers feel confident to do their job. When they feel confident, they can focus on the highest quality of service delivery for and with communities. When our communities see that really high level of service delivery, community policing impacts on the confidence in policing across communities in Northern Ireland.

We still have work to do. Yes, there are still many stations that do not look very appealing to the eye. We are as frustrated as you are in terms of our ability to address some of those issues.

Q286 **David Smith:** If I may, I have one final question, which is a bit of a proposition. It is about normalisation. I am really interested in your view on it. This is slightly wider, taking one step back from the job that you do and what you are responsible for. We have talked about legacy and the



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costs of legacy cases. My proposition is that those costs of legacy remain higher at least in part because we have not normalised Northern Irish society. We have not normalised Northern Irish society because we have not reconciled with our past. There have been a limited and narrow range of routes to move towards normalisation for Northern Irish society. The individuals and communities affected by the trauma of the troubles have not been able to process that and establish the truth. That plays through into your work.

In acknowledging that this is wider than your remit, I am interested in your answer. My final question is this: is it time for Northern Irish society, with the support of GB and the Republic of Ireland, to undertake a truth and reconciliation process as an alternative to criminal justice, as an alternative to inquest and maybe even the legacy commission itself?

Jon Butcher: That is a big question.

David Smith: Yes or no is fine.

Jon Butcher: Families deserve options. Families deserve to have options. Within families, people want different things. Having done Kenova, we have hundreds of families. I speak to a legacy family probably every day. Every other day, I speak to somebody who is a victim, from across all the victim profiles, of the troubles.

Some of them do not want the sophisticated investigation. They just want their story to be told. They want to talk to somebody in authority, from the establishment—they have never had the opportunity to do that—to tell them what it felt like to go through what they went through. There is a myriad of things that need to be available. The choice should be with those victims and those families as to which route they go down, but they need to have all the choices.

I would add one thing to your last question about fortified stations on violence against women and girls. Imagine trying to see a position where some of those victims feel like they can walk into a police station. This is so connected to the issues of trust and confidence in so many ways. It is not just the legacy of the victims of the past, but the consequence of the infrastructure that we have today. We need to try to normalise policing for the victims who face these awful coercive and controlling experiences, and who come and see us.

Chair: I have a few questions left. I am mindful of time, as we have Northern Ireland questions this morning.

Q287 **Mike Kane:** Last time I questioned the Chief Constable, we strayed into the area of the duty of candour for MI5 and MI6. The Government postponed the legislation a day or two later. That could have been a win for parliamentary democracy. We will see what comes back.

Davy talked about police stations being not easy on the eye. We had the great honour, after we left you in Belfast, to visit Derry/Londonderry



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station and speak with your brilliant district commander Gillian Kearney, and have in-depth conversations with the community support officers. First and foremost, Chief Constable, I want to thank you for that and commend them for the great work that they do. Like a lot of community support officers around the UK, they are tired and they have a lot on. There had been a particular disruption the night before as well that had become a major press incident. I wanted to just put that on the record.

The point that I made at that meeting was that, as a British parliamentarian, that morning I had got up early and decided to go for a walk down the city walls, through the Bogside, into the Creggan and then back. If you talk about normalisation, which Davy talked about, what were the chances of me, as a British parliamentarian, doing that 25 years ago?

Jon Boucher: Yes, it would have been really challenging. I will give you a similar story. The lady who created “Blue Lights” is Louise Gallagher, who is incredible. I met her recently and I was probably being a bit over-critical about the progress we are making. On the anniversary of the travesty in January with regard to Derry and the attacks against those innocent civilians, the Bloody Sunday event, she rang me. The anniversary was on the Saturday and she saw four police officers in a coffee shop chatting and laughing with members of the public. She said, “Jon, you criticise progress. There is huge progress all around us that is going on. We just sometimes do not see it because we are focused on the issues and the problems that we do not think have yet been fixed. Do not beat yourself up too much”.

The fact that you can do that, again, is a recognition of all the hard work done by so many people, so many community leaders and other people who have gone on an incredibly brave journey to make sure that there is—we are using the word—normalisation in many elements of society in Northern Ireland. We still do have—as we all know and have spoken about in this meeting—significant divides that we need to address. Yes, that is fantastic.

Davy Beck: Could I come in there? I recall many years ago leading the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee—I do not think any of the current membership were present at that stage—on to a bus and taking them on a tour of south Armagh. We did a tour around Forkhill and Crossmaglen. We met colleagues from An Garda Síochána at the border and had a conversation with them. We called in at Crossmaglen police station. By that stage I got a phone call and was told to get them out rather quickly because there was some concern as to what was happening in the background. I was glad to get the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee out safe and sound from south Armagh.

Things have progressed significantly. That visit would be much easier to do now and perhaps we could take much more time to enjoy both the community and the scenery in south Armagh than we did at that stage. Things have progressed significantly from then.



Q288 **Robin Swann:** Thanks, gentlemen, for your honesty and frankness in your answers so far. It is always refreshing for this Committee to hear that.

Can I ask about the relationship that the PSNI has with this Committee, the Executive, the Policing Board and NIO? You are looking to a lot of people with regard to your engagements. There has to be an antagonism at some stage between what you want to achieve and what those other actors that have influence on your programmes have to achieve. I am looking around the Executive programme for tackling paramilitarism and organised crime. In what way does the uncertainty of even that Executive programme affect your planning?

Davy Beck: It is that single-year budget allocation piece. As an organisation, we have a recovery plan. Within the crime department, I have a recovery plan in terms of rebuilding the detective cadre across crime. That is not to put people back to where they were a number of years ago. It is to put them where I believe they need to go now in terms of cyber-crime, public protection, major investigation teams and so on, so they can respond better to the needs now and into the future. That includes things such as extreme right-wing violence, which we talked about earlier.

We have a plan. It is just about the ability to stabilise and deliver that plan over a number of years. As the chief has talked about, we are recruiting at risk at the minute. We still need to have that confidence to move forward in order to invest in significant infrastructure. Specifically, lots of our special services, ICT and technical services are end-of-life and will require significant investment. Those are the areas that I would like to move additional security funding into. At the minute, it is very much about the people and that overt presence in communities. Perhaps over time we can invest for the longer term. It is really about the challenges for longer-term investment. I feel like I do not have the ability to look ahead.

Jon Boucher: Can I just come in with one comment? I have mentioned this. I am grateful for the question. The one overriding collective issue for the Executive, the Policing Board, the Minister for Justice, this Committee, the NIO and the Secretary of State is to get in a room to come up with a plan around legacy. It is the anchor that is holding a lot of society back.

I really welcome the focus on the legacy commissioners—I will now call it—under the new Troubles Act, but there are so many other component parts and critical success factors to that. The obvious one, the overwhelming elephant in the room, is the ability of the PSNI to provide the material for legacy, both to these public inquiries and the commission. We will be seen as the pantomime villain if we have to examine every document, which I do not understand the legal rationale for, and decide whether it is prejudicial, which I do not think we are in a



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position to do. All of that needs to be thought through in a more pragmatic and investigative way.

I am almost happy to cede the funding, design and implementation of any IT structures to support us in delivering legacy. In the current business case that the NIO has, there is a reliance that the PSNI will be fully digitised to deliver legacy disclosure by 2027-28. I am interested to know how the PSNI is going to be fully digitised to deliver legacy disclosure by 2027-28, because I am the Chief Constable and I have no idea. That would cost us about £10 million. The business case is into the hundreds of millions for the commission. For £10 million, you are opening the valve to give the information to that commission for those families. We need to get together.

Q289 Robin Swann: Just on that point, are you now saying to this Committee that the PSNI will not be in a position to release that information in a timely manner in the way that will be required?

Jon Butcher: I am very clear that we will not. I have said it in letters; I have said it in meetings with officials. We will not have the resources. It means diverting resources from violence against women and girls, which we have been talking about, and from online crime.

We have around 163 resources currently that cannot manage legacy. We are then going to have a considerably additional demand through both the Finucane inquiry and the legacy commission. If all goes to plan, if it is built as they intend to build it and it gets the support of families, we will effectively be a point of failure in providing the material with the timeliness with which they want it.

We all need to get together and agree an approach where we have an IT solution that is compatible and works with the commission. I am not asking for any control over this. I am saying, "Here are all the archives with regard to legacy. How best can we make sure that you get all the information that you need with unfettered access?" None of that conversation has happened. There is this siloed approach, because policing is devolved, of the PSNI having to go to the Executive to get the support for legacy.

There is a transformation fund. We went for a bid to the transformation fund. On the basis of the grounds for the bid, it was approved, but it was not one of the bids that was approved as a priority. It has gone forward to the Minister of Finance as approved by the transformation board. I have explained the financial position. There is not the money, in fairness to the Finance Minister, to fund the project. It feels like we just need to get the adults in a room.

Q290 Robin Swann: Just as a final point, then, was the devolution of policing in 2010 detrimental to the PSNI?

Jon Butcher: Evidence shows it has been detrimental to the PSNI with regards to funding. That is irrefutable, in my view.



Q291 **Chris Bloore:** Thank you both for your evidence this morning. It has been really interesting. I want to talk through a couple of quick questions about the McCullough review and, specifically, the progress you have made on the recommendations that were put forward by Mr McCullough. Can you confirm that the cross-checking of journalist contact details against PSNI records no longer takes place? In the cover letter to the report that he sent back to you, he did talk about wanting to do a follow-up report. Could you answer the first question and then say whether you have plans to commission a second report to follow?

Jon Boucher: First, we have accepted all the recommendations. It is important that I just give the context. It was commissioned because of significant concerns coming from authorities with regard to two journalists, Mr Birney and Mr McCaffrey, that led to further parties—journalists and solicitors—believing that they had been inappropriately surveilled or monitored by the PSNI. We tried to give as much information as we possibly could to the Policing Board to allay any concerns, but this clearly needed a rigorous, full and independent examination. That is why we brought in Mr McCullough to look at that.

We have accepted his report in its entirety. Davy is responsible for ensuring that all the recommendations are implemented. My biggest concern is recommendation 7, which involves an IT fix, because of funding. That is about making sure that, when we have tribunals such as investigatory powers tribunals—judge-led tribunals that look at allegations made by members of the public about potential wrongdoing around covert investigations—and we are asked for information, we can absolutely be assured that we are giving every bit of information that the tribunal asks for. At the moment, everything has to be done manually. There is a software solution to that, but it is expensive, and that is something that Mr McCullough has recommended. I think it is recommendation 7.

There are currently a number of IPT cases, because of the concerns that citizens had about inappropriate surveillance, that are going through the IPT. Once those cases have completed, Angus McCullough, who could not comment on them because of due process, will come back and do a further review of where we are on the recommendations, and do a further report with regard to what we have done to ensure and reassure that we have delivered on our commitments.

On the “washing-through”—that is how it has been described publicly—of journalists’ and other people’s numbers with regard to PSNI databases, that has stopped. There is no opportunity for that to happen again. My intention was to destroy that material, but I have been told that legally I cannot do that yet in case any of the ongoing IPT inquiries require that material. When we have reached a position when those IPT cases have finished, I will then ensure that all that material is destroyed.

Q292 **Chris Bloore:** How many IPT cases are still ongoing?



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Jon Boucher: I cannot tell you offhand. There are not many. It is a handful now. In fact, there might be only a couple left, but I can get you that information.

Chair: Thank you very much.