



Northern
Ireland
Office

The Rt Hon Chris
Heaton-Harris MP

Secretary of State for
Northern Ireland

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Simon Hoare MP

Chair - Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

By email: NORTHIRCOM@parliament.uk

19 September 2023
Our reference: MC/23/421

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your letter dated 5 September regarding security measures for PSNI officers and staff.

I can assure the Committee that we remain committed to keeping people safe and secure across the UK and this includes the officers and other members of staff of the PSNI.

The Key Persons Protection Scheme (KPPS) is a historic scheme that was superseded in 2007; the current programme is the Home Protection Scheme (HPS). Unlike as was reported in the media during August 2023, I can confirm that the HPS is not paused, individuals are able to apply to it, and they are being provided with appropriate measures.

HPS is a threat-led scheme with established admission criteria and it is just one of a broad range of mitigations that may be appropriate, and any application is carefully considered.

Unlike with the KPPS, whilst security partners' views and assessments are used when considering HPS applications, there is no requirement for the Chief Constable to advise. As such, the absence of a Chief Constable is not an impediment to the scheme.

I acknowledge that as a result of the Covid lockdowns and subsequent supply issues, HPS has not been able to deliver as quickly as we would have liked. This includes in the case of the individual regarding whom I believe Ms Godfrey was

referring to. However, after admission, that individual did have CCTV, lights and sensors fitted under HPS within 3 weeks, which is the most important part of any security package as it can offer an early warning of any potential threat to the householder and provides a deterrent. We prioritise the installation of these measures for that reason and they can be installed at pace once an individual has been admitted to the Scheme.

The department does all it can to prioritise those individuals under greatest threat, and the HPS provides appropriate protection as quickly as possible. This does mean that individuals at lesser threat, such as those with maintenance issues, may experience some regrettable delays whilst the backlog of work is eliminated. By its nature, this is specialist work, and my officials work closely with our contractor to ensure it progresses as quickly as possible.

With regards to Successful Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings (SPED) applications, whilst this is of course a matter for PSNI, it might be helpful if I explain the current position. Under Section 34 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, the Deputy Chief Constable may exercise all the functions of the Chief Constable. However the responsibility for signing off successful applications under the SPED scheme is devolved from the Chief Constable to the ACC Operational Support Department as normal practice, or another ACC if ACC Operational Support Department is on leave or otherwise unavailable. As such, PSNI do not expect SPED applications to be affected by the current absence of a Chief Constable.

The cost implications of the response to the data breach are rightly being discussed between PSNI and the Department of Justice. It is important these discussions take place to ensure the most appropriate measures are being put into place and that all options for funding them have been fully scrutinised.

Any additional funding required by the PSNI would be submitted by the Department of Finance through existing, well established processes. While it would not be right to pre-empt that, the government is clear that security is paramount. Our focus presently remains on providing specialist support and expertise in response to the latest assessments. To this end a number of partners across government, including cyber capabilities, are already working with the PSNI and providing support.

I appreciate and am grateful for the attention that you and the Committee are giving to these critical issues. I am in no doubt that we all recognise the importance of the UK Government continuing to support the excellent work that the PSNI does to keep people in Northern Ireland safe, often in exceptionally challenging circumstances.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**THE RT HON CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**