



House of Commons
Northern Ireland Affairs
Committee

**The effect of
paramilitary activity
and organised crime
on society in Northern
Ireland: Government
Response to the
Committee's Second
Report**

**Second Special Report of Session
2023–24**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 22 May 2024*

HC 809
Published on 23 May 2024
by authority of the House of Commons

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Northern Ireland Office (but excluding individual cases and advice given by the Crown Solicitor); and other matters within the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (but excluding the expenditure, administration and policy of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Northern Ireland and the drafting of legislation by the Office of the Legislative Counsel).

Current membership

[Sir Robert Buckland KC MP](#) (*Conservative, South Swindon*) (Chair)

[Damian Collins MP](#) (*Conservative, Folkestone and Hythe*)

[Stephen Farry MP](#) (*Alliance, North Down*)

[Mary Kelly Foy MP](#) (*Labour, City of Durham*)

[Sir Robert Goodwill MP](#) (*Conservative, Scarborough and Whitby*)

[Claire Hanna MP](#) (*Social Democratic & Labour Party, Belfast South*)

[Carla Lockhart MP](#) (*Democratic Unionist Party, Upper Bann*)

[Jim Shannon MP](#) (*Democratic Unionist Party, Strangford*)

[Bob Stewart MP](#) (*Independent, Beckenham*)

[Kelly Tolhurst MP](#) (*Conservative, Rochester and Strood*)

The following were also members of the Committee during this inquiry: Simon Hoare MP (Chair), Sir Tony Lloyd MP, and Mr Robin Walker MP

Powers

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2024. This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/copyright.

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/niacom and in print by Order of the House.

Committee staff

Sanjana Balakrishnan (Second Clerk), Stephen Habberley (Clerk), Karen Kidby (Committee Operations Manager), Claire Milliken (Committee Specialist), Chloe Smith (Committee Specialist), and Tim West (Media Officer),

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3672; the Committee's email address is northircom@parliament.uk.

You can follow the Committee on X (formerly Twitter) using [@CommonsNIAC](https://twitter.com/CommonsNIAC).

Second Special Report

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee published its Second Report of Session 2023–24, *The effect of paramilitary activity and organised crime on society in Northern Ireland* (HC 43), on 1 February 2024. A letter from Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Government's response were received on 17 May 2024 and are appended below.

Appendix 1: Letter from Rt Hon. Chris Heaton-Harris MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

I am grateful for the work of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in producing its report on “The effect of paramilitary activity and organised crime on society in Northern Ireland”.

This Government is committed to keeping people safe and secure across the United Kingdom. We want to see a safer Northern Ireland, where terrorist and paramilitary groups are no longer able to cause harm to communities and so I welcome the attention the Committee has given to the ongoing challenge of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland.

Paramilitarism was never justified in the past, and cannot be justified today. As you have seen over the course of your inquiry, paramilitary groups and the individuals involved in them cause harm to their communities. We see this through physical violence against members of the community and those who work tirelessly to protect communities. Indeed, in recent weeks we have seen visible demonstrations of those involved in paramilitary activity exploiting young people to incite their involvement in violence.

We also know that those involved in paramilitary activity exploit and harm individuals and communities in ways that are much less obvious, including through intimidation and fear to exert influence and control. They hold their own communities back, deterring investment and jobs and preventing people from moving forward with their lives. Where paramilitary harm endures, so must our effort to tackle it and create a safer society for everyone.

The Committee has heard over the course of its inquiry that threat and harm from Northern Ireland-related terrorism is inextricably linked to the enduring problem of paramilitarism in a wider context of organised crime and that the lines are often blurred between those involved in terrorist activity and in other forms of paramilitary activity and organised crime.

Under the devolution arrangements, the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive hold differentiated responsibilities for investigating, disrupting and responding to the harms caused by individuals and groups operating across these threat types, as well as in investing in measures that reduce the potential for harm in the future.

The majority of the levers available to tackle the problem lie with the Northern Ireland Executive and the work under way through the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism

and Organised Crime has tested and demonstrated the value of a wide range of interventions which tackle harm in the here and now, and prevent future harm. A critical factor in the long term success of efforts to tackle paramilitarism will be the mainstreaming of many of these measures into business as usual delivery across services in Northern Ireland.

The re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive provides a significant opportunity to drive the necessary change across the whole system that ensures that efforts to address the issue of paramilitarism are seen as core business, are coherent and coordinated, and sustainable. The reformed Executive's commitment to these efforts is vital for ensuring safer communities, and long term peace and security in Northern Ireland. The UK Government remains committed to working with our partners in the Northern Ireland Executive and beyond to support efforts to tackle these enduring threats and harms and to deliver a safer Northern Ireland.

Please find below the Government's response to the recommendations made in the report. I would be grateful if you could share this letter with members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.

Appendix 2: Government Response

Recommendations on societal effects of paramilitary activity and organised crime

Recommendation 1 (paragraph 25)

“Memorials, commemorative artefacts and flags glorifying paramilitary groups serve as a visual signifier of the coercive control that such groups attempt to have over communities and can retraumatise the victims and survivors of paramilitary violence. The PSNI does not always have sufficient political support to remove paramilitary flags. We urge the Executive, when fully restored, to support communities to address the continued presence of paramilitary murals, as per the recommendation in the 2021 Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT) Report, whilst cognisant of the need to ensure any fresh obligations placed on the police and public authorities are reasonable.”

Response to recommendation 1

- The UK Government acknowledges that the display of memorials, flags and emblems is often a source of contention and controversy, and in addition to the role this can play in reinforcing paramilitary influence within communities it is often deliberately used to cause offence and hurt to members of other communities.
- The UK Government notes that recommendations on this issue have been set out in the report of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, and by others. These are issues which require local political leadership, and an approach which involves local communities in developing and delivering a different vision for the future. The UK Government hopes to see progress on these issues being made in the context of a restored Executive.
- Committee members may wish to note that the NI Justice Minister advised the NI Assembly on 14 March 2024 of her intention to take forward conversations with Executive colleagues on these matters, in particular in the context of making progress on implementation of Judge Murrin’s Independent Review of Hate Crime legislation in Northern Ireland, which makes a number of related recommendations.
- In some communities, through efforts supported by the NI Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime’s Communities in Transition project and other projects, there are good examples of local participatory processes which have successfully led to re-imaging, which may provide good models for other work towards addressing some of the challenging issues around memorialisation and commemoration.

Recommendation 2 (paragraph 32)

“The high cost of living in Northern Ireland has contributed to a ‘cruel storm’ which paramilitary groups are exploiting to target vulnerable individuals. Single mothers in precarious financial situations are being targeted by paramilitary groups engaging in illegal money lending practices. The structure of universal credit, the lack of a childcare strategy, and expense of childcare in Northern Ireland all contribute to the precarious financial

situation in which some families find themselves. The Northern Ireland Office must engage in discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions as soon as possible to improve access to universal credit in Northern Ireland, as well as developing schemes to better connect people to existing credit services. The Government should also engage with a re-established Executive to share best practice towards the development of a childcare strategy for Northern Ireland.”

Response to recommendation 2

- The UK Government is deeply concerned by the exploitation of vulnerable individuals and the harm caused by illegal money lending. We welcome the focused work undertaken by the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC) through its ‘Ending the Harm’ public awareness campaign to expose the devastating impact that criminal gangs have on individuals, their families and communities, and wider society in Northern Ireland through the practice of illegal money lending. The campaign has played a vital role in raising awareness of how illegal gangs coerce and control through illegal money lending and has helped to signpost support for victims.
- The Northern Ireland Office will continue its regular engagement with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on a range of issues, including discussing the important issues raised by the Committee’s report and will ensure any actions agreed are shared with the Department for Communities. The Department for Communities (DfC) leads on social security policy in Northern Ireland and regularly engages with the Department for Work and Pensions on matters like policy development, planned legislative changes, alignment of computer systems and anything else affecting the social security, child maintenance and pensions landscape in Great Britain. DfC can then make decisions on whether they wish to maintain parity. The Committee may wish to note that in relation to connecting people to existing credit services, the NI Direct website offers a focused section on cost of living, providing information and advice on credit service options and childcare support available.
- On the issue of a child care strategy for Northern Ireland, the development of an Early Learning and Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland has been identified as a priority by the restored Executive. Work to develop this is ongoing and will be informed by consideration of the childcare support available in other jurisdictions. The UK Government stands ready to support the Northern Ireland Civil Service by sharing knowledge, expertise and examples of good practice elsewhere in the UK.

Recommendation 3 (paragraph 36)

“We are concerned to hear about the gatekeeping of funding and other activity by paramilitary groups which has increasingly excluded women and the community and voluntary sector since the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. This has implications for the construction of a post-conflict society in Northern Ireland. We are therefore pleased to note that the Government has included Northern Ireland in its latest action plan to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 48 The effect of paramilitary activity and organised crime on society in Northern Ireland (UNSCR) 1325, which recognises women’s

perspectives, rights and role in relation to peace and security. However, the Government must set out how its commitment to co-design a strategy on ending violence against women and girls with stakeholders in NI will receive final approval if the Executive remains, or is once again, suspended.”

Response to recommendation 3

- The UK Government welcomes the restoration of the NI Executive. There is now an important opportunity for the Executive to deliver on its commitments to progress a Northern Ireland Strategy on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Recognising the role of women in this context, EPPOC currently funds projects to provide training and support to women of all ages in areas where paramilitaries have an influence. These projects equip and empower women with the skills, knowledge and confidence to become involved in transformational community development, helping to support communities to move away from paramilitarism.
- We understand that the NI Executive’s work on a strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls is proceeding in close collaboration with EPPOC in order to ensure that learning is shared and delivery is aligned.

Recommendation 4 (paragraph 40)

“There is a correlation between paramilitary activity, deprivation, mental health issues and trauma. We therefore support the trauma-informed and public health approach of the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme. The Government must collaborate with the Executive to introduce forthwith a system-wide and Government wide commitment to trauma-informed practice.”

Response to recommendation 4

- The EPPOC promotes the adoption of a trauma-informed approach across all systems, organisations, policies and services in Northern Ireland. A report on [Implementing trauma informed approaches in NI](#), which was funded by the Programme and commissioned by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, was published in February 2024. The report notes the progress that has been made in implementing trauma informed approaches in NI, highlights the clear benefits of this progress and recommends a Government-level commitment to trauma informed practice in Northern Ireland. Representatives from Sinn Fein, DUP, Alliance, UUP and SDLP issued a collective statement in support of the research findings.
- The UK Government is committed to collaborating with the Executive to support further embedding of trauma-informed approaches in Northern Ireland. We welcome the commitment made by the members of the EPPOC Sponsor Group to support the development of a trauma informed Programme for Government in Northern Ireland.
- The Northern Ireland Office is committed to promoting trauma informed policy making and implementation across UK Government departments operating in

Northern Ireland, including by highlighting the availability of training material developed by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland, and actively encouraging uptake of this important learning.

Recommendations on paramilitary activity as child criminal exploitation and modern slavery

Recommendation 5 (paragraph 48)

“To counter the risk and reality of people romanticising paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, it is crucial that public agencies and wider civic society use language rooted in safeguarding and child protection when describing the activities of these criminal gangs which include the abuse and exploitation, including sexual abuse and exploitation, of children and young people. The Government, or the Executive when it returns, must undertake an audit of the extent to which the Northern Ireland framework for safeguarding children and young people protects those abused by paramilitary or organised crime gangs. This should include an assessment of the extent to which the PSNI and other crime agencies currently utilise the powers contained in the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 with respect to the exploitation of children. The Government must work with the Executive, when it is established, to develop an integrated strategy to protect children and young people from the harm perpetuated by these groups. In particular, the Government must work with the NI Department of Justice as soon as possible to agree a definition for Child Criminal Exploitation which takes account of current Home Office guidance.”

Recommendation 6 (paragraph 53)

“Low prosecution rates for those who commit violent crime can act as a barrier to reporting the crimes of paramilitary groups and serve to perpetuate the impunity with which these groups act. An effective criminal justice system able to identify perpetrators of paramilitary violence and bring them to justice is of paramount importance. The Government must set out how it plans to support the Executive in 2024 to improve clearance rates for paramilitary-style attacks, and work with the NI Department of Justice to embed a safeguarding approach to paramilitary activity to enable its prosecution as coercion, modern slavery and child criminal exploitation.”

Recommendation 7 (paragraph 56)

“We are concerned about the lack of use of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) in NI. The NRM is a tool for public agencies to provide a strategic safeguarding response to paramilitary activity. While we acknowledge that support for modern slavery victims is devolved, we recommend that forthwith the Government share good practice with the Executive on improving awareness and use of the NRM among NI welfare agencies, social services and those in the criminal justice system.”

Response to recommendations 5, 6 and 7

- The UK Government acknowledges the importance of work to ensure that the Northern Ireland framework for safeguarding children and young people protects those abused by paramilitary or organised crime gangs. This is a

policy area for which responsibility has been devolved to the NI Executive. The restoration of the NI Executive provides an important opportunity to make progress on this issue.

- Following advice from the NI Children's Commissioner, a Child Criminal Exploitation Task and Finish Group was established by the cross departmental Child Protection Senior Officials Group (CPSOG) to make recommendations on an improved system wide response to child criminal exploitation, drawing on lessons learned from the EPPOC. The Northern Ireland Department of Justice, working jointly with the Department of Health, led on the work of the Task and Finish group and its recommendations were subsequently approved by CPSOG. The CCE action plan that has been developed is monitored through the CPSOG sub-group with an implementation timescale of 24 months. Funding has also been secured from EPPOC for a dedicated CCE Professional Officer employed by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) and work on a number of key CCE actions will be coordinated through the SBNI Child Exploitation Committee.
- Across the departments and partner agencies involved in the Task and Finish group, a definition for child criminal exploitation has now been agreed for NI, informed by research with young people on their perceptions and experiences of child criminal exploitation in NI. The definition takes account of Home Office guidance. Work is ongoing to include the new definition in relevant policies and procedures. It is intended that policies will be updated before the end of the year. In turn the implementation of these policies should strengthen the criminal justice system's ability to prosecute offenders and improve prosecution rates.
- Other actions in the CCE action plan include, in line with the draft three-year Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking (MSHT) Strategy 2024–27, increasing awareness of offences as they relate to children in the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act NI 2015 ("the 2015 Act") and consideration of whether it is in the child's best interests to make a referral into the National Referral Mechanism. The draft MSHT Strategy 2024–27 also includes a number of actions to improve support for child victims and to increase awareness of the NRM across a range of agencies in Northern Ireland.

Recommendations on coordination to tackle paramilitary and terrorist activity

Recommendation 9 (paragraph 64)

"Tackling paramilitarism in Northern Ireland requires a whole of Government approach. While we are mindful that it is ultimately a matter for any newly formed Executive to decide its priorities for government, we urge the next administration in Northern Ireland to ensure that the commitment set out in New Decade, New Approach to ending the harm done by paramilitarism is a strategic priority in an agreed Programme for Government."

Recommendation 10 (paragraph 68)

"There is a live debate as to whether the current scope of national security, as it relates to Northern Ireland, should be revised to include threats other than those to democracy and the state, such as paramilitary activity like drug dealing, extortion and murder, to enable

greater joint working between law enforcement agencies in Northern Ireland and security and intelligence services where appropriate. Some think it should be expanded; others believe that the current scope is sufficient to enable collaboration. We recommend that the Government undertake an updated analysis of paramilitary activity and organised crime in Northern Ireland when determining the scope of national security for its next national security strategy to ensure that all relevant groups and activities are caught within its ambit.”

Response to recommendations 9 and 10

- The UK Government acknowledges and agrees with the Committee’s assessment that tackling paramilitarism in Northern Ireland requires a whole of government approach. The restoration of the Executive provides an opportunity to ensure that work to tackle paramilitarism remains a priority, and to drive change across the whole system to ensure that efforts to address the issue of paramilitarism are adopted as core business, are coherent and coordinated, and sustainable.
- On the issue of the scope of national security, the UK Government is committed to keeping under ongoing review the effectiveness of mechanisms for coordinating the responses to the range of threats and harms from terrorism, paramilitarism and organised crime. Our assessment is that roles and responsibilities are well understood and partners are joined up and effectively working together across the ecosystem that underpins paramilitarism, organised crime and terrorism. There are good working relationships and cooperation between the UK Government, NI Executive departments, law enforcement and security partners in tackling this shared ecosystem. Developments in the threat environment are kept under review, to ensure the appropriate capabilities are deployed in line with the respective powers and responsibilities of those involved in the response.
- PSNI have a wide range of powers available to them to tackle the threat from paramilitarism. We are not aware of any appetite for additional powers from PSNI that would require Westminster legislation. The UK Government sponsors the Independent Reviewer of the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 which ensures that some of the Northern Ireland-specific powers available to police, for example in relation to stop and search, are kept under constant review. We also keep under review wider UK legislation to ensure it remains effective in supporting NI Executive-led efforts to tackle paramilitarism.

Recommendations on funding to tackle paramilitarism

Recommendation 11 (paragraph 77)

“We welcome the announcement in the 2023 Budget of an additional £3 million for 2024/25 to extend the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme in Northern Ireland. The Programme is carrying out vital work to develop strategies to tackle paramilitarism systematically. Paramilitarism is a long-term problem which requires sustained funding. As part of discussions to extend the Programme, the Government must extend the multi-year funding period for Phase Three to five years rather than the three years for which each phase is currently funded. A longer period for Phase Three would provide a more sustainable base for investment in, and development of, projects to tackle paramilitary activity. Should it not be possible for Executive officials to allocate funding for the 2024–25 financial year, due

to limitations on their remit, the Government must ensure that the money allocated to the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme for 2024–25 is at least maintained in real terms at its current level of £8 million from the Government and £8 million from the Executive.”

Response to recommendation 11

- The current phase of the EPPOC is being reviewed in order to shape considerations of the Programme moving beyond the current phase. Recommendations are to be brought to the Programme Sponsor Group later this year. The UK Government will engage with the NI Executive on the assessment of need and the business case for a future phase of the Programme, including on any proposals for multi-year funding.

Recommendation 12 (paragraph 83)

“The Government’s contribution to additional security funding for counter-terrorism has recently stagnated despite the continuing terrorist threat, and the justice budget in Northern Ireland has risen by just 3% compared to respective increases of 70% and 45% for health and education over the last 12 years. We consider this level of funding to be unsustainable and propose that improved funding arrangements are put in place as soon as possible.”

Response to recommendation 12

- Policing in Northern Ireland, and police funding, are devolved matters. It is for the NI Executive to determine the allocation of funding to the Police Service of Northern Ireland from the NI Executive block grant. The prioritisation of police resourcing is the responsibility of the Department of Justice, working with the wider Executive. It is an operational matter for the Chief Constable to determine how to deploy the funding allocated to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in consultation with the Northern Ireland Policing Board.
- The UK Government fully supports the excellent work that the Police Service of Northern Ireland undertakes to keep people in Northern Ireland safe, often in exceptionally challenging circumstances. Recognising the unique security situation in Northern Ireland, the UK Government makes additional contributions to PSNI through Additional Security Funding. The UK Government contribution has provided a set budget each year since 2015/16. This current level of Additional Security Funding for the PSNI from the UK Government has been confirmed through to 2024/25 at £32m per year. While the threat posed by NIRT remains, the number of security incidents, bombings and shootings have significantly reduced since 2015.
- Additional Security Funding is solely to support PSNI’s counter terrorism work which has led to the recent reduction in threat level. Additional Security Funding is not an alternative funding mechanism to support the delivery of day to day policing which remains the responsibility of the Executive. It remains the responsibility of the Department of Justice and the Chief Constable to make spending decisions allowing the PSNI to fulfil its statutory duties and to keep communities in NI safe.

Recommendation 13 (paragraph 86)

“We are concerned at the budgetary shortfall that the PSNI is facing, not least in the context of recent security incidents evidencing starkly the ongoing threat from terrorist and paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. The financial liabilities that the Service may now incur as a result of the significant data breach in August 2023 will only serve to make this situation worse. Fewer resources for the PSNI will inevitably lead to a reduction in its ability to tackle paramilitary activity. A slowing of investigations, reduction of intelligence gathering capabilities and smaller neighbour policing presence means a less secure Northern Ireland. One of the Executive’s priorities under the New Decade, New Approach agreement was to increase police numbers to 7,500. This is the same figure recommended by the Patten Report and is, at best, a minimum requirement for contemporary policing given that Northern Ireland’s population has risen by almost 300,000. As part of its commitments under New Decade, New Approach, the Government pledged to ensure that the PSNI and others are appropriately resourced to deal with terrorism and paramilitary activity. Yet police numbers are falling and funding is inadequate. We recommend that the Government ensure that NI receives funding in 2024, and on a recurrent basis thereafter, which enables the PSNI to provide fair pay awards to officers and staff and increase, recommence officer recruitment and increase headcount to at least 7,500 officers.”

Response to recommendation 13

- The increase to 7,500 PSNI officers as outlined in the NDNA is not a UK Government commitment: it is listed under the NI Executive priorities. Policing in Northern Ireland is a devolved matter and the prioritisation of police resourcing is firstly a matter for an Executive in setting a budget for all NI departments from the block grant, and then the responsibility of the Department of Justice. How that funding is used is an operational matter for the PSNI and Chief Constable.

Recommendation 14 (paragraph 92)

“We are concerned to hear claims that paramilitary organisations act as gatekeepers within some communities and masquerade as community organisations to receive public money. The Government must embed a standard code of practice and behaviour that all community-level organisations availing of Government funding have to sign up to as part of efforts to tackle the issue of gatekeeping of funds by paramilitary groups. The Government, Northern Ireland Executive (when it is established), and the Irish Government must agree as soon as possible a common approach to engagement with, and funding of community organisations that claim to tackle paramilitarism. Any agreement on a set of principles or protocol governing engagement with individuals who are current or former members of paramilitary organisations, or their advocates, must be reflective of the need to maintain contact for a clear and legitimate policing purpose and not indirectly fetter the PSNI in exercising their statutory duty to protect life and property. Moreover, the Committee contends that any due diligence test for those in receipt of public funding must be compliant with equality legislation.”

Response to recommendation 14

- The UK Government acknowledges the importance of addressing the risk of paramilitary gatekeeping in communities, and of ensuring that public funding aimed at supporting community organisations does not fall into the control of paramilitary groups. As a condition of EPPOC funding, all recipients must

state their agreement that it will be used in a manner that is consistent with and upholds a set of Programme values. If deemed necessary following investigation, investment can be withdrawn if the recipient is deemed to have contradicted these values. In addition, a behaviours framework has been developed and implemented by the Communities in Transition project which provides for remedial action if expected behaviours are not met. The UK Government strongly supports the sharing of this behaviours framework and its adoption as a model for managing risks around funding allocations made across the wider public sector. The UK Government is taking forward wider work to understand how non-Executive funding (for example UK Government, international and philanthropic funding) is being used in areas where there is paramilitary harm, and to consider how a similar framework and more effective coordination can be implemented across these wider funding mechanisms to help to manage this risk.

Recommendations on transition

Recommendation 15 (paragraph 102)

“We have heard evidence both for and against the establishment of formal process of Group Transition. On the one hand, we are concerned that a Group Transition process aimed at the disbandment of paramilitary groups could inadvertently risk reinforcing the status of such groups and fail to displace the coercive control they hold over some communities. On the other hand, we have heard that a strategy to end paramilitarism that does not engage with the continued existence of paramilitary structures ignores the elephant in the room. For any process to have a chance of it must hold the confidence of political parties and receive widespread public support in Northern Ireland. The Government should conduct a scoping exercise to assess public support for such a process which should include dedicated engagement with those who have suffered violence and harm from paramilitary groups.”

Recommendation 16 (paragraph 108)

- “Paramilitary groups do not resemble cohesive units, rather they are composed of sub-groups that vary in location, strength of affiliation and level of criminal activity. We have heard that some sub-groups are readying themselves for transition, whilst others show little appetite to transition away from criminality. We see some merit in the argument that a process facilitating those willing to transition away from paramilitarism would then allow for the better training of law enforcement resources on those sub-groups that remain determined to cause harm. However, the concept of sub-group transition requires fuller development before its risks and opportunities can properly be considered by the Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland.”

Response to recommendation 15 and 16

- The UK Government acknowledges the recommendations that have been made by the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) and others who suggest that, in addition to the existing law enforcement, criminal justice and socio-economic response to paramilitarism, there should be a formal process of engagement aimed at facilitating paramilitary group transition to disbandment. We have engaged widely on these recommendations and it is clear that this is a complex

and sensitive issue. For such a process to have potential to successfully deliver, it is likely to require support from local political leaders and communities across Northern Ireland, including those who have suffered violence and harm from paramilitary groups. The UK Government is committed to taking forward further work, including through independent scoping and engagement, to assess whether there is merit in and support for a formal process that ensures the transition to disbandment of paramilitary groups given the continuing impact of violence and harm on communities.