

Written evidence submitted by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, related to the effect of paramilitaries on society in Northern Ireland inquiry (PNI0023)

Executive Summary

- The Police Service of Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's inquiry into the effect of paramilitaries on society in Northern Ireland.
- Recent security incidents have shown that whilst significant progress has been made, there are groups and individuals who remain intent on bringing fear and harm to their local communities, and society as a whole.
- The existing response structures are complex and interdependent, with separate processes for dealing with national security and matters devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive.
- In order to assess the effectiveness of measures to date, it is important to understand the 'whole system' approach, of which policing is one aspect. This is broadly predicated on a multi-faceted approach of law enforcement, prevention, early intervention and resilience building within local communities.
- The Police Service warmly welcomes the significant progress that has been made to date, including the lowering of the Northern Ireland-related Terrorism (NIRT) threat level for the first time in 12 years, and acknowledges the existing measures to facilitate 'whole system' responses as appropriate and generally working well. In addition, recent surveys undertaken by the Northern Ireland Policing Board show continued improvements in public trust and confidence and broader views on community safety. The findings from the 2021-22 Policing Plan Telephone Survey Report showed that 92% of respondents said they felt safe in their local communities.

- Since the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) became operational in November 2017: 795 searches have been conducted; £3.1 million of controlled drugs have been recovered; 183 weapons have been seized; 351 arrests have been made; 287 people have been charged/reported for prosecution; £512,475 cash has been seized and £2.3 million worth of property; £1.5m in property Recovery Orders have been issued; and over £5,154,666 million in revenue loss has been prevented.
- In term of areas where improvements can continue to be made, the Police Service welcomes the opportunity to work with partners to: deepen the 'whole system' approach with health, education and communities; agree more sustainable funding models; renew emphasis on locality-based approaches; explore opportunities for further innovation in public health approaches; add further strategic focus to the policing response by adopting models similar to the Scottish Crime Campus; more carefully commission, monitor and assess publicly funded projects; and, refocus on a government-led process of transition.
- The Police Service faces a profoundly challenging budgetary scenario which could mean the loss of nearly 1,000 police officers over three years. Whilst separate funding streams are in place, we are concerned about the impact of reduced capacity on our ability to undertake additional non-law enforcement work which is critical to further progress and long-term, sustainable and community-based outcomes.

1.0 Introduction and Strategic Context

The Police Service of Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to support its Inquiry, *'The effect of paramilitaries on society in Northern Ireland.'*

Our mission is to deliver a visible, accessible, responsive, community-focused police service to every community across Northern Ireland.

As an impartial public service provider, we recognise that it is the role of elected representatives to make decisions about policy and legislative direction and provision. In providing comment on these matters through consultation responses and other forms of government and Parliamentary engagement, our primary aim is to ensure the existing/emerging policy and legislation is effective from a policing perspective, and delivers the best possible outcomes for victims of crime.

As such, our remarks and analysis on the question posed through this Inquiry, should be considered in that context.

Recent high-profile security incidents in North Belfast have reinforced the threat posed by those groups who remain intent on inflicting terror and harm on their local communities, and to society as a whole.

The Police Service is a committed partner in the collective societal effort to rid local communities of the profound harm and hurt caused by terrorism and organised crime. Generally speaking, the Police Service acknowledges and supports the importance and value of the existing multi-agency structures currently in place and notes the wide-ranging positive outcomes achieved so far.

Whilst significant progress has been made through a whole system approach, combining the efforts of the police, government, the Security Service and other partners, through the multi-faceted approach of law enforcement and prevention, early intervention and resilience building, we acknowledge there is more to do.

As such, as well as setting out the current processes and structures, and the role of policing within that, our response seeks to identify the areas that are working well and where we can work together to improve and build more sustainable, long-term outcomes.

In this respect, as the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime (the Executive Programme) moves into Phase 2, the Police Service welcomes the opportunity to work with partners to:

- Deepen the 'whole system' approach by more systematically involving partners in health, education and communities;
- Agree more sustainable funding models which are conducive to long-term planning and delivery;
- Push towards a more locality-based approaches for delivery that utilises available tried and tested problem-solving models, recognising from a police perspective the need for sustained investment in Neighbourhood Policing;
- Continue to explore opportunities for further innovation such as Multi-Agency Support Hubs and explore the potential for the Violence Reduction Units used in England and Wales;
- Add further strategic focus to the policing response by adopting models similar to the Scottish Crime Campus;
- More carefully commission, monitor and assess publicly funded projects to ensure the deliver meaningful outcomes; and,
- Refocus on a government-led process of transition as a key driver for further progress.

Through our submission to the Committee, the Police Service also wishes to acknowledge some of the challenges to progress. In addition to the current political instability which can impact on community tensions and inhibit progress, the Police Service faces a profoundly challenging budgetary position in the coming years.

On current trajectory, the Police Service is likely to experience a shortfall of approximately £226 million over three years; this equates to a reduction of nearly 1,000 officers and 200 police staff.

Whilst the Chief Constable and the Service Executive Team are working closely with the Northern Ireland Policing Board to agree resource priorities, the impact of this shortfall will be significant and will undoubtedly hinder the Police Service's ability to undertake the important and additional non-law enforcement activity that is crucial to realising long-term sustainable outcomes in tackling paramilitarism.

2.0 Whether the UK Government, NI Executive and Irish Government are working effectively together to achieve a society free of paramilitarism.

2.1 The current approach

In order to provide analysis and assessment of the effectiveness of collective efforts to tackle paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland, it is important to understand the current architecture and the role of policing.

Whilst the overall responsibility for national security remains with the UK Government, the response to wider paramilitary activity and organised crime is the responsibility of the devolved Northern Ireland Executive Office. Both are integral to bringing about an end to the threat and harm posed to local communities, but for the purposes of delivery, separate mechanisms and structures are in place.

Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime

In addition to the Statement of Principles, the Fresh Start/Stormont Agreement 2015 included the following specific commitments to:

- work collectively to achieve a society free of paramilitarism;
- support the rule of law unequivocally in word and deed and support all efforts to uphold it;

- challenge all paramilitary activity and associated criminality;
- call for, and work together to achieve, the disbandment of all paramilitary organisations and their structures;
- challenge paramilitary attempts to control communities;
- support those who are determined to make the transition away from paramilitarism; and
- accept no authority, direction or control on our political activities other than our democratic mandate alongside our own personal and party judgment.

The Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme (now entitled the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime) was established in 2016 to deliver 38 commitments from the Northern Ireland Executive aimed at tackling paramilitarism, criminality and organised crime.

The Executive Action Plan was the Executive's response to the Report published by the independent Three Person Panel in 2016, which was established through the Fresh Start Agreement to provide recommendations for a strategy to lead to the disbandment of paramilitary groups. The Panel's work concluded that a strategy was required, championed and led by the Executive, to achieve the following broad objectives:

- Promoting lawfulness
- Support for transition
- Tackling criminal activity
- Addressing systemic issues

Delivery involves government departments, law enforcement agencies, local councils and community and voluntary sector partners working together using a multi-faceted approach of early intervention, prevention and resilience-building and law enforcement. A range of governance structures are in place to ensure oversight of the programme, including a cross-Executive Programme Board, a Political Advisory Group and The Independent Reporting Commission.

The adoption of the benefits realisation approach by the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime has seen the new governance structures and relationships that push decision-making and accountability downwards and outwards to delivery experts. Benefits are the positive and measurable changes we want to achieve. The programme is working towards an overall outcome of:

- Safer communities, resilient to paramilitarism, criminality and coercive control.

This approach allows us to better understand the collective impact of the programmes projects, if they are delivered well, focused on the right issues and based on robust data. This is overseen by the four Benefits Realisation Groups and the new Programme Board.

The Police Service leads on the 'Keeping People Safe' Benefit Realisation Group and is represented on the other three. Good progress has been made regarding benefits, but we recognise that significant work is required to further embed this approach within the Police Service. A series of workshops are planned in the coming weeks to support this effort. Early impacts of this approach have seen many new relationships and collaboration between organisations who have not previously collaborated. An exciting development has been data development by the programme team, who have been able to improve understanding and pose questions by drawing data from across the programme.¹

Northern Ireland-related Terrorism

The overall responsibility for national security and Northern Ireland-related Terrorism (NIRT) remains with the UK Government and the Police Service of Northern Ireland works collaboratively with the Government, intelligence agencies and other statutory partners. The governance and joint-working structures are broadly similar to that in place in the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime with a twin-track focus on law enforcement, early intervention and prevention approaches.

¹ See Annex 2.

Joint Agency Task Force

The Fresh Start/Stormont Agreement also mandated the creation of a Cross-Border Policing Strategy and establishment of the Joint Agency Task Force (JATF) as part of a concerted and enhanced effort to improve effectiveness at tackling organised and cross-jurisdictional crime. The JATF provides a framework that enables joint working and collaboration between the Police Service of Northern Ireland, An Garda Síochána and other law enforcement partners in Northern Ireland and Ireland. The current themes that the JATF are focused on are:

- Rural Crime
- Drugs
- Financial Crime
- Human Trafficking
- Excise Fraud
- Organised Immigration Crime

It is important to understand and assess the approach to tackling paramilitary activity and organised crime in Northern Ireland in a whole system context, with the Police Service as a partner in that eco-system.

2.2 The role of policing

As one of a wide range of partners, the Police Service plays an important role in law enforcement, guardianship, prevention, early intervention and resilience building approaches.

The Police Service's Terrorism Investigation Unit (TIU) leads on investigations into activities that are deemed national security, with the Paramilitary Crime Task Force leading on matters devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive and delivered through the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime.

The Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF) is a key initiative within the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime. PCTF is a co-located law enforcement task force that consists of personnel from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, National Crime Agency (NCA) and Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC). It has been fully operational since 2017 and is currently based in Belfast and Limavady. The partnership between the Police Service, National Crime Agency and Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs allows each agency to share capacity and capability with the singular aim of frustrating, disrupting and dismantling paramilitary organised crime groups through robust law enforcement action.

PCTF currently investigates 6 paramilitary groups, assessed as causing the highest levels of community harm, and currently not assessed to be presenting a risk to national security. The PCTF priority groupings are kept under review by regular strategic assessments.

The Police Service acknowledges the opportunity to develop a better understanding of the impact of enforcement measures via the PCTF review.

Paramilitary activity and criminality predominantly take the form of extortion, intimidation, drug supply, money laundering, threats, serious assaults and murders. This is addressed through the exploitation of investigative opportunities and a series of activities delivered through targeted proactive operations to frustrate, disrupt and or dismantle these paramilitary groups.

In addition to the PCTF, the Police Service is engaged in a wide range of other projects to build resilience and capacity within local communities. As part of the Community Safety and Engagement strands, our Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Team and Neighbourhood Policing Teams support a range of initiatives to increase engagement and trust between the police and communities in key areas. These projects aim to develop trust and confidence in policing, as well as encouraging partnership approaches to local problems. Access to the additional funding (referenced in section 3) supports evidence-based problem-solving and sustained outcomes to some of our most intractable community safety risks.

Most importantly, we focus on mitigating incidents that might lead to increases in public disorder. Many of the projects funded through this additional stream work to deter young people from becoming embroiled in paramilitarism.

For example, the Wave Project was developed to break down barriers with young people deemed as vulnerable to paramilitary influence in North Antrim. The programme ran over six outdoor sessions with young people from Coleraine, Dervock, Ballymoney and Bushmills. Three of the sessions included direct police engagement where there was proactive discussions about the negative influences of paramilitaries and other associated activity. Other sessions addressed communication and mindfulness issues. The ultimate aim of the project was to increase confidence in policing and build resilience against paramilitaries. A list of case studies of other example projects is included in Annex A.

2.3 Opportunities for more joint-working

Broadly speaking, the structures in place for the Executive Programme and NIRT provide a suitable forum for collaboration and governance. As with any such structures, agency is required in order fully realise opportunities for progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic and wider political uncertainty has created competing pressures which have inevitably detracted from the collective cross-government and multi-agency effort. In addition, in order to more fully realise the public health approach envisaged in the programme, consistent and systematic involvement across all relevant areas of government, beyond justice, is vital.

The Police Service would welcome the Committee's consideration on how a renewed energy and focus can be applied in Phase 2 of the Executive Programme to further embed collaboration to better understand and address remaining gaps, shared understanding and learning, accountability and problem-solving.

Furthermore, we would welcome consideration on how a more deeply embedded cross-government approach could facilitate a more coherent, joined-up, public health approach. In this respect, we would advocate for the establishment of a multi-agency

community safety board to better coordinate the long-term provision of services to tackle the root cause of paramilitary crime.

Whilst there is an important delineation between the work undertaken by partners working within the Executive Programme and NIRT contexts, given the latter's focus on national security, the experience of the Police Service suggests there are significant areas of overlap, particularly in the prevention, early intervention and resilience building strands.

The Police Service would welcome the Committee's consideration of how there can be more informal joined-up working between partners to avoid duplication, replicate best practice and maintain the trust and confidence of local communities.

3.0 Whether the approach of the UK Government and NI Executive to tackling paramilitarism is sufficiently sustained, resourced and joined-up.

During Phase 1, a total of £50 million was pledged over the initial five year period to support delivery of the Action Plan. Over five years, £3.4 – £5.7 million from that funding has enabled the resourcing of the Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF), critical in delivering outcomes aligned to Objective 3 (Tackling criminal activity) and Recommendation C4 (Investment in investigative capacity to tackle criminality linked to paramilitary groups). Without the existence of these additional funding streams, the Police Service would be unable to commit the current resource levels.

In April 2021, the Programme moved to Phase 2, which has extended the programme for a further 3 years to 31 March 2024.

However, the financial year 2022/23 has a one year financial settlement of £13 million. The importance of multi-year funding is vital to ensure a sustainable architecture and strategic planning approach. The continued awarding of one year settlements will present challenges for long-term planning and effective delivery.

This issue was endorsed by the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC, 2021 p. 6) that states 'the challenges being addressed require a sustained, joined-up and

well-resourced approach with a long term commitment of resources and we urge the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure that work to tackle paramilitarism is given high priority in the current challenging fiscal climate.’

Whilst funding for the Police Service is provided separately to the main core grant provided by the Department for Justice, significant areas of additional activity, such as neighbourhood police participation in community-based projects, are provided ‘in kind.’

The overall budgetary situation in policing is profoundly challenging, with the Police Service expected to face a £226 million shortfall in the next three years. This equates to a drop in officer headcount by nearly 1,000 officers and 200 police staff. In this context, participation in important, additional initiatives which are not currently accounted for may not be possible if resources are required for prioritisation elsewhere.

The Police Service would welcome the Committee’s consideration of the suitability, sustainability and effectiveness of the current funding arrangements and the potential impacts of the wider budgetary difficulties facing policing.

4.0 How effective measures under the Fresh Start Agreement have been in combining police and justice measures and tackling socio-economic issues to eradicate paramilitarism in Northern Ireland.

In assessing progress in tackling paramilitary activity from a criminal justice perspective, it is worth considering the latest overall official statistics pertaining to crime of this nature.

Between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022:

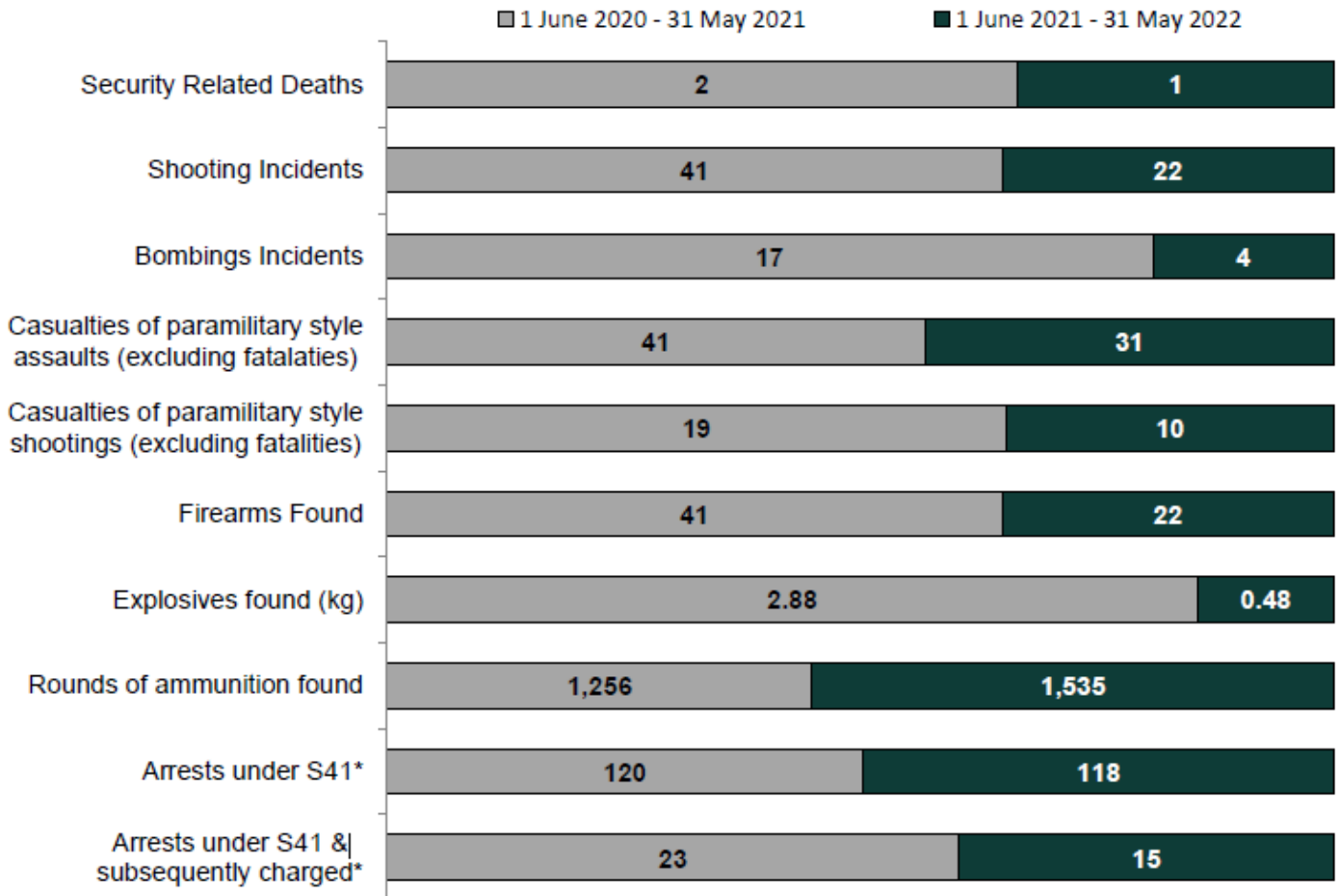
- There were fewer security related deaths and a marked decrease in the number of shootings, bombings and paramilitary style attacks compared to the previous year.

- There was one security related death, compared to three in the previous year.
- There were 20 shooting incidents, approximately half the number that occurred during the previous year (41) and the lowest number of shootings since records began in 1969.
- There were five bombing incidents, a third of the number that occurred during the previous year (15) and the lowest number of bombings since 1995/96.
- There were 12 casualties of paramilitary style shootings, two-thirds of the number that occurred during the previous year (18) and the lowest number since 2007/08. The majority of paramilitary style shootings (7) were attributed to Loyalists in 2021/22, the first time this has been the case since 2006/07. All 12 casualties were aged 18 years or older.
- There were 33 casualties of paramilitary style assaults during 2021/22, 6 fewer than during the previous year (39) and the lowest number since 1985/86. Loyalists were responsible for 30 of the 33 assaults. All 33 casualties were aged 18 years or older.

Figure 1 summarises the number of security related incidents during the past 12 months compared to the previous 12 months.²

² Police Recorded Security Situation Statistics (June 2022), <https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/security-situation-statistics/2022/may/security-situation-statistics-to-may-2022.pdf>

Figure 1: Comparison of security incidents between 1 June 2020 – 31 May 2021 and 1 June 2021 – 31 May 2022.



* Figures in this publication include only those arrests that are linked to the security situation in Northern Ireland; persons who have been arrested under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act for other reasons are excluded.

In addition to progress made in the last year, Security Situation Statistics show sustained improvements over the last ten years. Figures 2-6 outline trends between 2012/13-2021/2022.³

Figure 2: Number of deaths due to the security situation 2012/13 – 2021/22

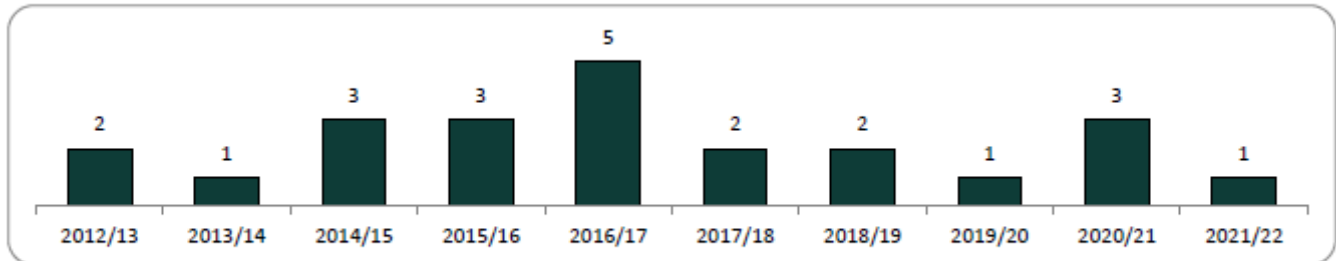


Figure 3: Number of shooting and bombing incidents 2012/13 – 2021/22

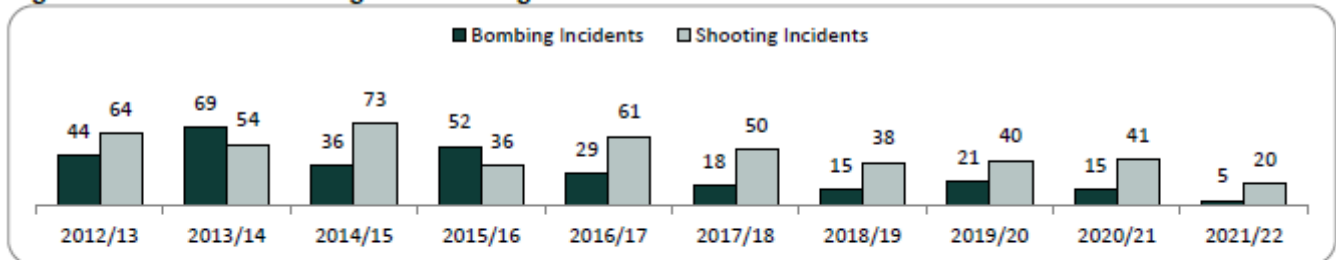


Figure 4: Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings^(1,2) 2012/13 – 2021/22

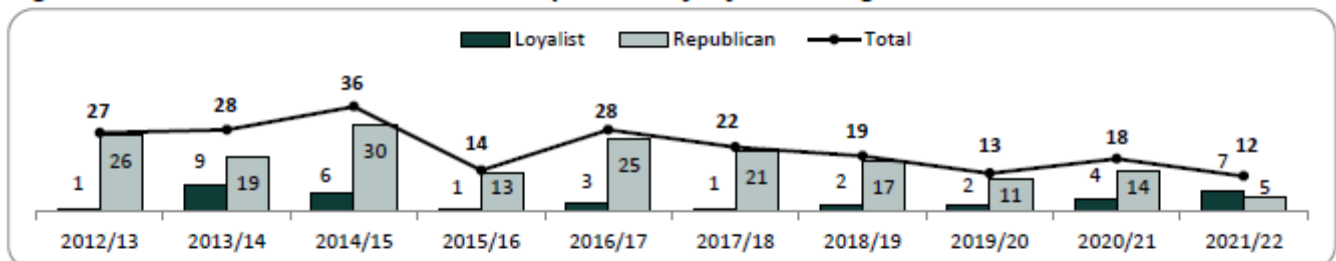


Figure 5: Number of casualties as a result of paramilitary-style assaults^(1,2) 2012/13 – 2021/22

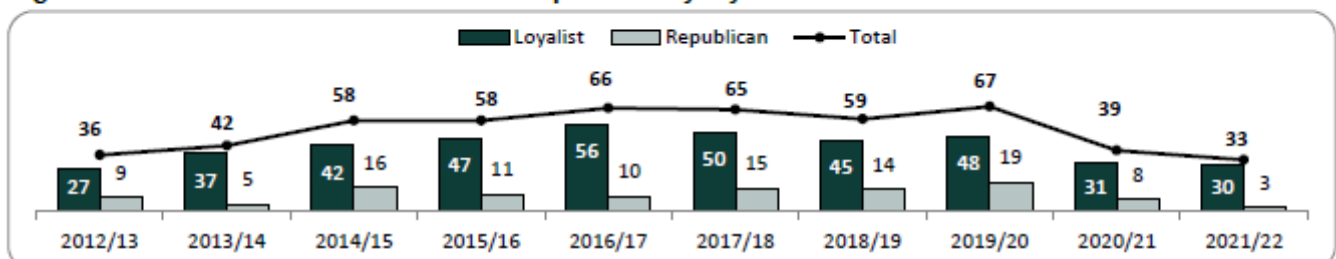
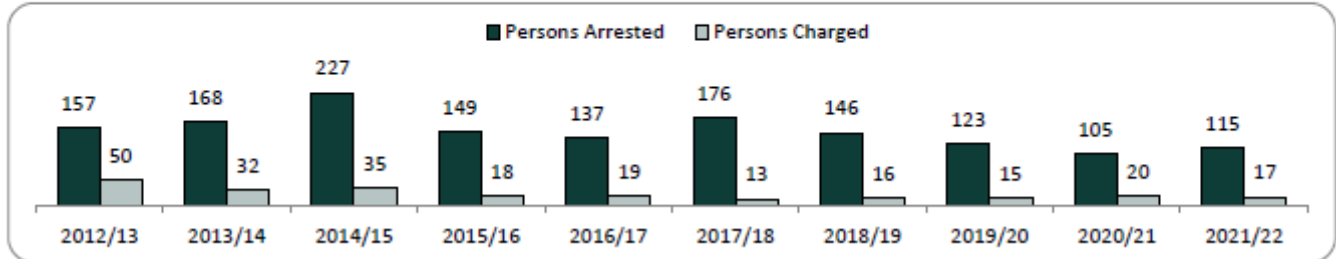


Figure 6: Number of persons arrested under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act & subsequently charged with any offence 2012/13 – 2021/22



³ Ibid

On 22 March 2022, the Northern Ireland-related Terrorism (NIRT) threat level in Northern Ireland was lowered for the first time in 12 years from SEVERE: an attack is highly likely, to SUBSTANTIAL: an attack is likely.

From a national security perspective, this is a significant milestone and the result of considerable effort and dedication, in challenging circumstances, from police officers and staff, security partners and wider society in driving down tackling and challenging the harm from those groups involved in terrorism.

At a devolved level, some groups that continue to use violence to pursue their objectives have been significantly disrupted, and in some cases dismantled through strong inter-agency working and a combination of criminal justice strategies. Others have indicated their intention to transition away from violence. The Police Service is of the view that now is the time for increased focus on establishing a government-led process to facilitate that transition.

This patient progress has made local communities across Northern Ireland safer. As previously stated, recent Northern Ireland Policing Board surveys demonstrate this view is shared by local communities. In the most recent Policing Plan Survey, 92% of respondents said they felt safe in their local communities.⁴ In this respect, the Police Service recognises the key role Police and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) play in community safety and tackling paramilitarism is an identified strategic priority which PCSP's are required to deliver on.

However, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and our partners know there is more to do and that threats and harm to local communities still exist.

In parallel, the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime has demonstrated that a combination of targeted multi-agency law enforcement interventions and prevention, early intervention and resilience/capacity building is an effective multi-faceted strategy. An example of this is the Executive Programme's 'Ending the Harm' campaigns that have sought to raise public awareness on how

⁴ 2021-2022 Northern Ireland Policing Plan Telephone Survey Report, https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2022-05/policing-plan-survey-tagged_1.pdf

paramilitary activity harms vulnerable people and communities. These campaigns have included raising awareness on illegal money lending, paramilitary attacks and how the purchase of fake or illegal goods funds organised crime.

In terms of criminal justice measures, Recommendation C4 of The Executive Action Plan led to the establishment of the PCTF to provide a dedicated investigative capacity to tackle paramilitarism. Since the PCTF became operational in November 2017, they have conducted:

- 795 searches
- Recovery of £3.1 million of controlled drugs
- 183 weapons have been seized, including firearms and ammunition
- 351 arrests
- 287 people charged/reported for prosecution, with a further 12 people receiving a non-judicial sanction
- £512,475 cash seized
- £2.3 million worth of property
- £1.5m in property Recovery Orders have been issued
- Over £5,154,666 million in revenue loss has been prevented.

Each of these actions have eroded the capability of paramilitaries to cause harm and demonstrated the commitment of law enforcement to promote a culture of lawfulness.

Whilst the IRC assert that the link between poverty/deprivation/disadvantage/lack of aspiration/vulnerability is well established, they also identify that efforts to evidence the link between vulnerability/paramilitary activity/deprivation using the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures (NIMDM) cannot be substantiated as the updated data is not yet available. It is therefore difficult to assess the effectiveness of current measures on tackling the socio-economic issues that either contribute to, or result from paramilitary activity given the lack of research and evidence to identify a direct causation.

4.1 Opportunities for improvement

Further honing PCTF objectives and the strategic policing approach

Phase 2 of the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime which has been extended until March 2024. Following consultation with partner agencies (NCA and HMRC), the agreed approach is to proactively target key leadership figures within each of the Organised Crime Gangs (OCGs) linked to paramilitarism.

It is assessed that by targeting leadership figures within these paramilitary groups the Police Service, together with wider programme partners (HMRC and NCA), will be more effective in tackling paramilitary activity and criminality. In the longer term, this will ensure a more sustained impact in terms of degrading these groups.

The Chief Constable has noted the potential for the replication of the other successful models, such as the Scottish Crime Campus at Gartcosh in Lanarkshire. Such a model, if deployed in Northern Ireland, could improve joined-up working and cohesiveness by bringing together the relevant key agencies into one campus.

To realise such a model would require significant financial investment in the Police Estate, which in the current financial position is incredibly challenging. However, a proposal for a planned campus development at the Police Service Headquarters has been developed and could be realised if the capital resources were made available.

As previously stated, we note the potential of the forthcoming review of the PCTF and wider law enforcement measures to consider these issues and other opportunities for continuous improvement.

Renewing cross-departmental delivery and the opportunity of neighbourhood policing

Paramilitary activity is not a universal phenomenon: it requires a locality focus. In the view of the Police Service, this is a more effective approach and will result in better, more sustainable long-term outcomes.

However, as Phase 2 of the Executive Programme gets underway, we would welcome the opportunity to work with partners to renew the emphasis on a cross-departmental approach to planning and delivery.

In addition, the Police Service identifies a key opportunity through the continued development of neighbourhood policing in Northern Ireland – a key priority for the Chief Constable.

Innovative public health approaches

The Police Service supports the public health approach embedded within the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime, and we support efforts to develop and deepen this approach during Phase 2.

Support Hubs are an excellent example of how a collaborative approach can produce successful outcomes that cannot necessarily be achieved through one public service body. Employing a multi-agency, trauma informed approach with a harm and vulnerability reduction focus is the ultimate aim. The primary objective and the measurement by which success can be demonstrated, is to achieve better outcomes for the vulnerable members of our communities.

Each district now has its own Multi-agency Support Hub with the Steering Group overseeing consistency and future planning. Support Hubs are committed to identifying and ensuring that repeat victims are being actively engaged with, and where required, problem-solving is undertaken.

The Police Service would welcome the opportunity to work with partners to explore the further potential for Multi-Agency Support Hubs and other innovative public health models such as Safeguarding Hubs and Violence Reduction Units.

Deepening the whole system approach

The importance of a whole system approach to tackling paramilitarism is widely recognised, well established, and has resulted in a wide range of positive outcomes in our collective effort to achieve a society free from this harmful criminality. The Police Service would welcome a further deepening of this approach in the future.

Rightly, a lot of focus has been placed on the law enforcement and justice aspects of this work. With good progress already made, the Police Service would welcome the opportunity to more systematically involve other important partners across government, such as education, health and communities, who have significant value to add in the prevention and early intervention spheres.

The Police Service notes the model currently deployed by the Community Safety Strategic Delivery Board as a flexible mechanism for collaboration which allows the design of a response model to centre on themes and interdependencies such as place, a category of persons etc. We would welcome consideration of what role this Board, or a similar model, could play in advancing the whole system approach in the future.

Funding

We note the successes of a wide-range of community-based projects, many of which include police as delivery partners, and which receive public funding. However, the Police Service would welcome further scrutiny and monitoring of funding allocations to ensure they are genuinely contributing to meaningful outcomes.

In this respect, the Police Service would urge caution on the use of funded projects as a means to directly or indirectly facilitate the transition of individuals or groups involved in criminality. In our experience, such an approach risks cementing the grip said organisations and individuals have on their local communities.

Moving towards transition

The Police Service recognises that transition is a highly sensitive issue. However, the IRC notes that a process of transition is an important component of achieving a society free from terrorism and organised crime. In our assessment, moving towards transition will be a critical addition to the current law enforcement and prevention, early intervention and resilience building approaches already in underway.

In this respect, whilst the Police Service acknowledges that previous efforts have not come to fruition, a renewed focus and effort in this area, led by government, will be important for further progress.

4.2 Challenges to progress

Delays in the criminal justice system

Despite the significant progress that has been achieved through the efforts of policing, security partners and local communities working together, a number of challenges to further progress exist.

To complement a pro-active and robust law enforcement approach, requires an effective criminal justice system. Confidence in policing has a number of key dependencies and speeding up justice really matters. Perceptions or experience that there is an ineffective or slow criminal justice system are exploited by paramilitaries who can be perceived to act more swiftly and effectively

Delays in the criminal justice process undermine the impact that wider activity can have on paramilitarism in communities; research by Queens University Belfast⁵

⁵ [Experiencing Paramilitarism Understanding the Impact of Paramilitaries on Young People in NI.pdf \(qub.ac.uk\)](#)

identifies that 'communities perceived the criminal justice system to be ineffective or inefficient'.

Whilst the data cannot be differentiated with any ease of offences specific to paramilitarism, data from the Department of Justice⁶ identifies that:

- In 2020/21, the median time taken for a charge case to be dealt with at adult Magistrates' Courts from the date the offence was reported was 122 days, an increase of 69.4% from 2019/20 and the highest figure recorded in the last five years.
- In 2020/21, the median time taken for a summons case to be dealt with at adult Magistrates' Courts was 212 days, an increase of 19.1% from 2019/20 and the highest median time recorded for this type of case in the last five years
- In 2020/21, the median time taken for a charge case to be dealt with at Crown Court was 470 days, an increase of 14.6% from 2019/20 (410 days) but still 1.3% lower than the figure recorded in 2016/17 (476 days), the highest in the recent series.

This perception of ineffectiveness contributes to young people feeling that paramilitaries are 'treated with impunity', which influences lower confidence in policing and the wider criminal justice system (McAlister, 2018 p. 8). The IRC endorse this issue, proposing that 'the speed of justice is critically linked to trust and confidence in policing the criminal justice system. It is vital that this is improved as part of the transformation required in Northern Ireland to end paramilitarism' (IRC, 2021 para 2.36).

The Police Service recognises the impact that delays in the criminal justice system can have on community confidence and support measures to speed up justice.

⁶ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/case%20processing%20times%20202021.pdf>

In addition, it is important that legislation keeps pace with the changing nature of crime to ensure that law enforcement have the capabilities to tackle the harms posed. The Police Service welcomes work by the Department of Justice that has led to changes in criminal finance legislation and the active consideration on the issue of bespoke legislation for organised crime.

Budgetary situation

As already noted, the short-term funding commitments for Phase 2 of the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime presents challenge for strategic planning and the realisation of long-term sustainable outcomes based on building community resilience. However, wider systemic challenges to police funding have the potential to have further impacts.

Despite the successes of the PCTF, it remains the view of policing that enforcement activity alone is unlikely to result in the dismantlement of paramilitary organisation. To support the enhancement of community resilience, the Police Service fulfilled on the Chief Constable's commitment to increase the number of officers dedicated to Neighbourhood Policing by 400 officers.

These Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPTs) provide visible, accessible policing and target paramilitary groups by promoting lawfulness and increasing confidence in policing and the justice system to reduce the attractiveness of paramilitarism. In addition, NPTs provide additional support to a wide range of the community-based prevention and early intervention initiatives are that critical to the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime.

However, as previously stated, the current budgetary situation facing policing is stark. Whilst every effort will be made to protect neighbourhood policing, a £226 million shortfall will necessitate difficult decisions about non-core police work with almost 1,000 fewer officers over with next three years. Figure 7 below, taken from the Police Service's Resource Plan 2022-2025, demonstrates this funding gap. Figures 8 and 9 demonstrate the impact of this funding gap on police officer and police staff respectively.

Figure 7: Revised Funding Gap, Resource Plan 2022-2025

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£m	£m	£m
Opening funding gap	73	99	121
No growth in police numbers	(14)	(24)	(29)
Revised funding gap	59	75	92

Figure 8: Projected Police Officer numbers, Resource Plan 2022-2025

Funding Stream	Officer Numbers FTE end of 2022-23	Officer Numbers FTE end of 2023-24	Officer Numbers FTE end of 2024-25	Total Reduction over 3 years
Main Grant	6,073	5,829	5,582	731
Additional Security Funding	342	342	342	0
EU Exit	295	295	295	0
Fresh Start Criminality	55	55	55	0
Externally Funded	8	8	8	0
Total	6,773	6,529	6,282	731
Part Time Reserve	200	180	160	69

FTE – Full Time Equivalent

Figure 9: Project Police Staff number, Resource Plan 2022-2025

Funding Stream	Staff Numbers FTE end of 2022-23	Staff Numbers FTE end of 2023-24	Staff Numbers FTE end of 2024-25	Total Reduction over 3 years
Main Grant	2,391	2,327	2,261	186
Additional Security Funding	40	40	40	0
EU Exit	13	13	13	0
Fresh Start Criminality	3	3	3	0
Externally Funded	93	93	93	0
Total	2,540	2,476	2,410	186

Like other statutory agencies, the Police Service has statutory obligations that must be delivered by law, particularly under Section 32 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. In the context of a challenging budgetary situation, the Police Service is concerned this could mean core law enforcement initiatives will have to be prioritised over other important prevention and early intervention work which is crucial for longer-term sustainable outcomes in this area.

Political uncertainty

Whilst it is not for the Police Service to comment on political matters, it is important to acknowledge the impediment that political uncertainty creates in tackling paramilitarism.

At a societal level, Northern Ireland's position as a society still transitioning from conflict, with unresolved and deep community divisions, places a natural barrier on the speed at which work to tackle paramilitary activity can be undertaken.

In addition, to the extent that current and contemporary challenges, such as EU Exit and the Northern Ireland Protocol, are perceived as a threat to the constitution and identity, they have contributed to community tensions in a manner which inhibit progress in this area.

It is also important to note the impact of a lack of government institutions in terms of injecting focus, energy and political will which are important drivers in these processes. In addition, the lack of devolved ministers also creates practical challenges in relation to the advancement of certain projects and initiatives, as well as budgetary certainty.

Other challenges

In addition to a series of specific challenges, a number of other external factors present near term strategic risks.

The ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to provide opportunities for paramilitary groups to exploit individuals and communities, through for money lending for example, and create added demands on policing and other statutory services. Furthermore, the current challenges in relation to the cost of living have similar impacts.

5.0 What the socio-economic effects are of paramilitaries on communities in Northern Ireland.

Paramilitary groups within Northern Ireland continue to seek to control communities through coercive behaviour; tactics used include:

- Use of fear and intimidation on individuals or sections the community to control.
- Financial control through illegal money lending schemes.
- Use of violence against individuals and communities through paramilitary style attacks.

As previously stated, the IRC notes that the evidence pertaining to the causal link between vulnerability/paramilitary activity/deprivation is incomplete. The IRC do make the assertion that the link between poverty, deprivation, disadvantage, lack of aspiration and vulnerability as being well established whilst noting that further research in this area is required.

Whilst it is a matter for elected representatives to make decisions about the allocation of resources, there is clearly an opportunity cost to investing public funds in tackling paramilitary activity at the expense of other public services.

Paramilitary and Organised Crime Groups cause significant harm and distress to the local communities in which they operate. This harm clearly poses a risk to their overall wellbeing in a way not experienced by other communities. In this respect, whilst a research gap exists on the exact socio-economic impacts of this harm specifically, prevention and early intervention is crucial to mitigating their impact or preventing the harm from taking place.

In addition to socio-economic impacts, we also note the far-reaching and damaging influence of paramilitary groups into other areas of life, such as parading and commemorations, bonfires and flags/emoblems. In each of these issues, the influence and active involvement of paramilitary organisations and individuals creates additional potential for public unrest and disorder that would not otherwise exist.

The Police Service has specific and growing concerns about the use, involvement and engagement of children and young people in this activity. Not only does this pose serious safeguarding and wellbeing concerns, but it also risks our collective ambition to ensure paramilitary groups have no inter-generational legacy or influence.

6.0 Whether there should be a dedicated formal process of engagement with paramilitary organisations aimed at their disbandment.

The Police Service notes the IRC's recommendation that a process of engagement needs to be established in addition to the multi-faceted approach of law enforcement and prevention and early intervention.

As previously stated, we recognise that engagement with paramilitaries is a highly sensitive and emotive issue. It is our view that enforcement activity alone is unlikely to result in the dismantlement of paramilitary organisations.

The Police Service acknowledges that previous attempts to engage organisations in a process of transition have not come to fruition and the factors that would contribute to a successful process are complex and fluid. However, as previously stated, it is our view that a renewed focus on the issue of transition, led by The Executive Office, is critical to further progress.

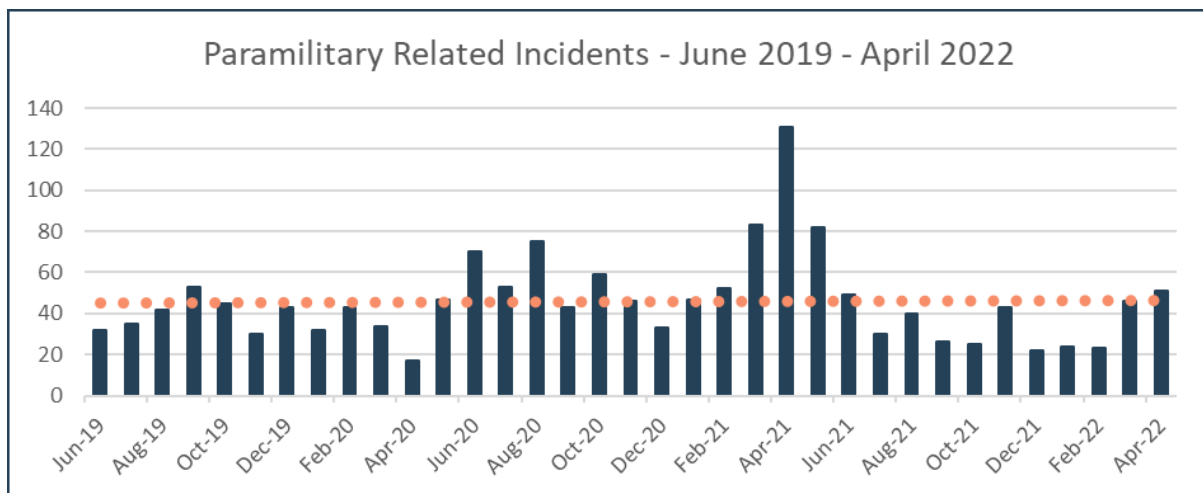
7.0 Concluding Remarks

Recent events have served as a stark reminder that, despite the significant progress that has been made, there are groups and individuals who remain intent in bring terror and profound harm to local communities.

As such, the Police Service of Northern Ireland welcomes the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's consideration of this important issue and the opportunity to provide our assessment on the effectiveness of the current arrangements and opportunities for future improvements.

Paramilitary activity, whilst greatly reduced, continues to be cause significant harm to local communities across Northern Ireland, and the Police Service is committed to continuing to play its part in the cross-societal effort to eradicate this criminality.

Figure 10: Paramilitary Related Incidents (June 2019 – April 2022)



Significant progress, through the hard work and dedication of a wide range of partners, has been made to date through a 'whole system' approach based on the twin-tracks of law enforcement and prevention, early intervention and resilience-building.

However, as this work moves into a new phase, the Police Service holds the view, based on our experience to date, that law enforcement initiatives, which have been effective in the past, will not in themselves be sufficient to realise the next phase of progress.

Through this submission, the Police Service has sought to provide a constructive assessment on the opportunities for further progress, namely in the areas of deepening the whole system approach, addressing the challenge of short-term funding arrangements, and moving towards a government-led process for transition.

The Police Service is concerned about the impact of a challenging budgetary situation on our ability to support important non-statutory law enforcement initiatives. Whilst initiatives to tackle paramilitary activity are funded separately, a key aspect of building community resilience is to have a visible, accessible, community-focused police service.

Developing and improving our collective capabilities in the prevention, early intervention and resilience building space, combined with a sustainable, agreed

process for transition, has the potential to build on the significant progress already achieved. The Police Service of Northern Ireland stands ready to work with partners to play its part in this important societal endeavour.

July 2022

ANNEX A – Engagement and Problem-Solving: Examples and case studies

Engagement

The Police Service of Northern Ireland's new Engagement Strategy, '**Here for You**' was launched on 28 June 2022 at Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey. It forms the bedrock of our commitment to engagement across five key themes, ensuring we strive to continually enhance our service to the public. The five themes are Attraction & Recruitment, Engagement, Procedural Fairness, Local Accountability and Effective Neighbourhood Policing. We recognise the importance of engaging with our increasingly diverse communities through meaningful two-way dialogue and finding ways to solve problems in partnership.

The new strategy aims to reflect that engagement with all of our communities sits at the very heart of our ambition for the Police Service to represent a visible, accessible, responsive and community-focused local Police Service. We developed this strategy through informed dialogue with our communities in recent months and our newly formed Strategic Community Engagement Team is focused on building refreshed networks, identifying any gaps and seeking to address these.

This strategy provides the foundation for supporting the adoption of a 'whole organisation' approach to community engagement. At its core is the idea that engagement is the responsibility of everyone working in the Police Service, allowing us to increase trust and confidence in policing.

This launch also saw the introduction of, '**The Hallmarks of Neighbourhood Policing**'. The hallmarks outline a public commitment to modernise local policing delivery so that it is increasingly visible, accessible, responsive, and above all, community focused. The document provides eight hallmarks to define our approach to neighbourhood policing and provide a baseline for expectations of local policing delivery by District Commanders. This enables a consistent approach with the flexibility to understand and then meet the needs and expectations of communities.

Figure 11: Here for You – the Police Service’s Public Engagement Vision

Strategic Community Engagement

5 Key Pillars



we care
we listen
we act



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Figure 12: The Hallmarks of Neighbourhood Policing



Problem Solving

The Police Service of Northern Ireland has launched its Crime Prevention Strategy with one of the key themes being to maximise partnership and evidence based activities. The vision is fewer victims, fewer offences and less demand on policing. This will be achieved by addressing the causes of crime, utilising sophisticated partnership orientated, problem-solving. The Police Service has adopted the SARA Problem-Solving model and seen academic led delivery of training as well as the delivery of partnership workshops on key community safety issues.

We have now trained up 77 Problem Solving Champions across the Police Service. These officers have received enhanced training in problem-solving and will be our ambassadors to drive an ethos of preventative and innovative policing to target local issues affecting the communities they serve. We are committed to spreading this message and our Problem Solving Champions represent the start of this process. They will be vitally important representatives to inform how we evolve our problem-solving processes to continually improve and strive for consistency.

We are committed to working closely with communities across Northern Ireland to address ongoing issues and problems. Examples of positive work is seen on a daily basis. Highlights of such work are as follows:

Football Mentorship Programme is a 12-week programme rolled out in three key districts last year, namely Coleraine, Newtownards and Carrickfergus. This programme sees delivery via partnership working between the Police Service, Rangers Soccer Academies and the local community to deliver diversionary and educational activity for children and young people. This initiative uses football as the hook to deliver a tailored programme to meet the needs of young people within these key areas.

Reclaim Our Space – this project in Derry City/Londonderry saw the community seeking to reclaim an Anti-Social Behaviour Hotspot. Young adults were identified to take part in the project with the aim of supporting them in gaining work placement opportunities. Some of those identified frequented the identified area and were

associated with the incidents of anti-social behaviour and vandalism that occurred at the site. This behaviour historically has brought similar youths to the attention of Violent Dissident Republican based in the Derry City and Strabane area. The local primary school requested Police Service support and assistance to establish an outdoor learning space at this site. The identified young people worked together with local officers to transform this space into a usable space for their community.

Engagement through Boxing – a newly funded project will see officers and a local Boxing club working in partnership to engage young people in sport. Young people involved in anti-social behaviour are at increased risk of attack or influence from local paramilitaries, as well as potentially being recruited by these groups. Local officers have adopted a problem-solving approach with a focus on victim and location to ensure young people are provided with an alternative. Youth workers and police will come together to engage effectively with young people by addressing key issues affecting their lives. Discussions will include topics such as drugs, paramilitary influence, sexting, knife crime and the effect it has on communities. The engagement will in turn help in reducing the level of anti-social behaviour and any potential interactions with paramilitaries.

Local Problem-Solving in Omagh – Every year issues would arise in relation to fireworks / bonfire at a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) pitch. The Neighbourhood Policing Team adopted a problem-solving approach involving a range of partners. This included liaison with Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), local Council and Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP). Agreed responses included the removal of material at the field beside the pitches. There was extensive engagement with the local community to ensure constructive feedback on community sentiment. The officers ensured a flexible and co-ordinated policing response in the area on run up to Halloween. Overall this partnership working had a positive result and also helped increase police engagement with the local community.

Local Problem-Solving in West Belfast – Following a significant number of assaults on Glider staff by young people, as well as an increase in criminal damage offences to the Glider buses, local officers liaised with Translink managers and staff

to work through their Problem-Solving approach. The discussions included the importance of focusing on the right interventions to deter criminal behaviour and not bring young people into unnecessary conflict with the criminal justice system. The relationship continues, and a regular meeting is now in place between Translink, local Police and the Safer Transport Team.

01 EPPOC Benefits at a glance

Benefits are the positive and measurable changes we want to achieve

The diagram on the right shows the Programme's **strategic objective** and the changes that we need to bring about if we are to realise it.

This starts with the **projects**. The Programme's projects all contribute to at least one of the 18 **intermediary benefits** listed here.

The collective impact of the Programme's projects, if they are delivered well, focused on the right issues and based on robust data, should help us realise our intermediary benefits. This work is overseen by the four **Benefits Realisation Groups** and the (new) Programme Board.

The more intermediary benefits we realise, the more we are able to influence change at population level - these are the 6 **End Benefits** identified in the diagram.

Success at population level is not wholly within the gift or control of the Programme. Project outcomes have a role to play but we also need to address wider strategic risks, dependencies and opportunities that extend beyond the Programme.

Throughout 2021, data at project, programme and population level has been gathered and analysed to understand our impact. **This slide pack focuses on End Benefits.** Intermediary Benefits reports have been circulated for reference.

