



*Oversight Commissioner
Al Hutchinson*

This is my third report since being appointed Oversight Commissioner in January of 2004, and the twelfth in a series of independent oversight reports that commenced in January of 2001. The Report of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland, also known as the Patten Commission, and the 175 recommendations for policing change upon which our oversight work is based, along with our results-based method of determining progress and our previous oversight reports, can be found on our website at: www.oversightcommissioner.org

Typically, the reports we release in December of each year provide a summary approach in dealing with both progress and accomplishments and areas of concern. These are detailed for each of the 14 Chapters contained in the Independent Commission's report. This current report adopts a similar format, while also including an appended thematic report on progress in the crucial area of policing with the community. Our next report, scheduled for release in May of 2005, will also contain a thematic report on human rights and accountability. In addition, the report scheduled for May of 2005 will mark the end of this particular phase of independent oversight.

In my last oversight report, released in September of 2004, I noted that the political process in Northern Ireland was once again moving toward some kind of resolution, one which might ultimately lead to a restored and functioning Assembly. This remains the case as I write this introduction in late November of 2004, and certainly serves to highlight the challenging environment in which the policing reforms are taking place. The Independent Commission noted similar circumstances when it published its report in 1999, but also that its recommendations touched overwhelmingly on the efficiency, acceptability and accountability of the police service. These goals remain both commendable and achievable, regardless of the pace of progress in a wider political context.

The question is often asked as to whether or not the goals of the Independent Commission's report are in fact being achieved. My answer is that in large measure they are being achieved. The degree of change already accomplished over a relatively short period, from the Autumn of 2001 to the Autumn of 2004, is both remarkable and unparalleled in the history of democratic policing reform. It must be remembered that over this difficult and challenging period, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) was still required to provide an effective policing service and had to ensure community safety against a backdrop of security, crime and other concerns.

Aside from the dedicated men and women of the Police Service who continue to effect this change, credit is due to those individuals who demanded a fundamental shift in policing, and who have raised the standard against which success in policing in Northern Ireland will be measured. Credit is also due to the many young people of Northern Ireland, both Catholic and non-Catholic, who continue to demonstrate their ability to move toward peace and stability by applying to join the Police Service, with over 38,000 applications having been received by the Police Service since 2001. Other primary policing institutions, including the Policing Board, Police Ombudsman and the District Policing Partnerships (DPPs), also serve to build trust and confidence in policing. In



performing their crucial governance and accountability functions these bodies prove their effectiveness daily through action and results, thereby increasing the community's degree of participation, understanding and support. Time and again our oversight evaluations are able to highlight levels of engagement and commitment on the part of those individuals involved in policing. It leaves me with no doubt that the desired fundamental transformation of policing is taking place.

Does this mean that all the news is good, or that little remains to be done? Unfortunately the answer to this question must be an unequivocal no. As we note in this report, concerns remain and there are areas where the full effects of change have yet to be felt. At a societal level, the absence of full political and community support continues to act as a barrier to progress and to achieving the "new beginning" to policing envisioned by both the Belfast Agreement and the Independent Commission. This affects all areas and levels of policing, from the effectiveness of neighbourhood beat teams to the full engagement of DPPs.

In addition, threats against and attacks on individuals involved in policing only impedes further change, and ultimately serves only to divert policing resources away from other important functions. Attacks on other emergency services, a particularly shameful and incomprehensible practice, also continue along with attacks on society's most vulnerable: the elderly, visible minorities and youth. It is my firm view that these mindless criminal acts will not succeed in derailing the policing changes and may in fact encourage people to come forward and work even more closely with police, in a joint effort to make their communities safer from these criminal elements.

Although the Police Service has made considerable progress, there are areas where the pace of progress has not been as rapid. For example, the Police Service's IT structure remains an area which must continue to be monitored closely, as does the Police Service's management of its estate. The pace of civilianisation has also not been as rapid as expected, nor has the rate of increase in the representativeness of the civilian component of the Police Service. Questions remain around the implementation of the phase out of the Full Time Reserve and the concomitant increase of the Part Time Reserve. It is disappointing to note that the Police Service's registration of notifiable interests initiative has stalled once again, with increasing questions around the ability or willingness to ultimately complete a registration process at all.

Most importantly though, there are many areas in which the impacts and outcomes of changes made, particularly as those influence behaviour and police culture, have yet to be fully demonstrated. These include the impacts of increased human rights training, structural and organisational changes, a shift to a policing with the community philosophy, and others. Policing with the community is a particularly important endeavour, and will be covered in greater detail in a thematic report appended to the end of this oversight report.

Despite these concerns I retain a sense of optimism and confidence that most if not all of the Independent Commission's recommendations will be implemented as envisioned in its report. Nonetheless, fundamental change of this nature cannot be achieved by the Police Service alone. In order for the new beginning to policing to become permanent, it must be assisted by all members of society.

H. Alan Hutchinson
Oversight Commissioner



▶▶ abbreviations

▶▶ commissioner's overview

ACC	Assistant Chief Constable
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
AEP	Attenuating Energy Projectile
ALR	Armoured Landrover
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CS	O-Chlorobenzylidene Malononitrile
DCU	District Command Unit
DIP	Discriminating Irritant Projectile
DPP	District Policing Partnership
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FTR	Full Time Reserve
GB	Great Britain
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
ICS	Information and Communications Services
ICT	Information, Communication, Technology
ILEF	International Law Enforcement Forum
IMC	International Monitoring Commission
IT	Information Technology
LAC	Learning Advisory Council
LICTE	Leadership in the Counter Terrorism Environment
NIHRC	Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
NIM	National Intelligence Model
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
PACE	Police and Criminal Evidence
PBR	Plastic Baton Round
PITO	Police Information Technology Organisation
PLS	Police Leadership Skills
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PTR	Part Time Reserve
SEA	Station Enquiry Assistant
SLA	Service Level Agreement
TED	Training, Education and Development
TNA	Training Needs Analysis
TSG	Tactical Support Group
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
VSSU	Voluntary Severance Support Unit



The Independent Commission published its 175 recommendations in September of 1999. This was followed by the release of the Government's Updated Implementation Plan in August of 2001, which detailed accountability and time lines for the implementation of all 175 recommendations. In September of 2001 we specified 772 performance indicators, through which the process of implementation could be objectively measured. The measurement of change therefore actually began in September of 2001, two years after the release of the Independent Commission's report.

The oversight methodology involves an incremental, three-stage evaluation process for each of the 772 performance indicators. The first stage to be achieved is Administrative Compliance, whereby appropriate policies, procedures or formal guidance documents are expected to be in place as a foundation for the recommended change. The second stage involves an Evaluation of the policy or document by the oversight team, and an assessment of its appropriateness and degree of relevance to contemporary law enforcement practice. The final stage of review involves Verification, through on-site reviews and field visits; this determines whether new policy or practice is actually being applied, and whether the recommended change is taking place. Once we are satisfied that change is occurring, we indicate that compliance with a recommendation has been achieved. This remains subject to ongoing monitoring throughout the remainder of the oversight term to guarantee that an observed change is not 'undone', whether deliberately or unwittingly.

Oversight reports begin with a Commissioner's Overview. This reflects a general summary of the oversight team's principal findings from a previous evaluation visit. The summary is divided into two sections: Progress and Accomplishments, and Areas of Concern. I have also appended a special thematic report on Policing with the Community to the end of this report, which represents the cumulative progress or lack of progress on implementing recommendations related to community policing. The thematic report looks holistically at the many aspects of community policing that flow from the Independent Commission's recommendations, and the impact of changes to the Police Service's core function and philosophy on achieving the new beginning to policing envisioned by the Independent Commission. The many achievements made in this area, as well as the concerns that remain, are spelled out in greater detail in the thematic report. I will also apply a thematic approach in one further oversight report, where the topics that will be dealt with are human rights and accountability. This thematic report will be published in May of 2005.

Progress and Accomplishments

The Police Service's Human Rights Plan was published in May of 2004, and followed in September of 2004 by its Human Rights Programme of Action. Additionally, the PSNI's Code of Ethics became its official conduct regulations in March of 2004, allowing the Police Service to undertake discipline proceedings against employees who have contravened the Code of Ethics. We believe that the cumulative actions taken by the Police Service now constitute a model of best practice that other police services might emulate.

As noted in previous reports, all of the accountability institutions called for by the Independent Commission are now in place and functioning as intended. The Ombudsman's office continues to perform its critical accountability role in a professional and capable manner. The DPPs, although not yet benefiting from a full range of political and community representation, are evolving into an important local link to policing performance and accountability. The Policing Board also performs its governance and accountability functions well, often under difficult circumstances. The Board

continues to show the leadership that sustained it in its formative years, a recent example being the launching of a consultative "review and renew" process undertaken in order to make DPPs more effective.

Policing with the Community has generally been a success in many areas of Northern Ireland. A variety of initiatives in a number of DCUs have attracted both national and international attention and awards, indicating both actual results and the potential for future success. More detail can be found in the Policing with the Community Chapter, as well as the special thematic report on policing with the community appended to this report. As we note, the challenge will be to move beyond the current level of policing with the community, to a point where the entire Police Service is engaged in the core principle of policing with the community.

Efforts aimed at the normalisation of policing in Northern Ireland are generally progressing in a positive manner. The normalisation of liveried police vehicles is an established success; there is a decreasing use and dependence on military assistance to police; and there is some progress on making police stations appear more normal. Three new police stations in Moira, Coleraine and Magherafelt have been built to an impact-resistant design standard with additional, similar builds planned for Ballymoney, Cookstown, Omagh and Downpatrick. Mobile police stations and storefront concepts are also being explored, and the consultative process on station closures is proceeding (see also Areas of Concern below).

With respect to policing public order situations, it is indeed noteworthy that no plastic baton rounds (PBRs) have been fired in Northern Ireland since September of 2002. This is a credit not only to the police, their training and rigorous policies, but to the citizens of Northern Ireland as well, who have demonstrated increasing restraint during situations of public protest. In addition, other legal avenues, including the Police Ombudsman, are increasingly being used to air grievances against the police. While there have been issues surrounding some parades and public order events, it is encouraging that community leaders and individuals are able to employ a number of legal remedies to voice their concerns.

Although an effective alternative for the Plastic Baton Round (PBR) has not yet been found, an increasing number of other devices are available to avoid the use of lethal force. A reportedly safer round, the Attenuating Energy Projectile (AEP), has been identified and is undergoing testing. Evaluation also continues on another device called the Discriminating Irritant Projectile (DIP). Additionally, six water cannon have been purchased and deployed. Personal CS spray has been issued, although for personal protection rather than for use in public order duties. Complaints about the use of CS spray on a number of occasions have been lodged with the Ombudsman, who is in the process of investigating them. Once again it is encouraging to note that there are a number of effective legal alternatives that people are using to redress complaints against the police.

The change management programme and devolution processes are now well embedded in the Police Service. The General Order on devolution finalised in June of 2004 describes the principles of empowering DCU Commanders, the move from a hierarchical system, and the lowering of decision making to the lowest level possible, in conjunction with permitting an appropriate degree of managerial autonomy. The Deputy Chief Constable is responsible for ensuring that devolution is working through a number of systematic checks. Systems of internal accountability are well



established, with sound evidence that they are having the desired effect. The oversight team is impressed with the Regional ACC management review and accountability sessions, as well as efforts on the part of Finance Department to be supportive of the devolution process. Internal accountability with respect to the conduct of police officers continues to make progress, with an active programme of integrity checks and a unique programme called "Safecall" for use by employees to report alleged wrongdoing on the part of fellow officers or civilian staff.

With respect to Information Technology (IT), there is acknowledged progress, with the increasing availability of technology to front line police officers, albeit not to the same degree as other police services enjoy. While the Independent Commission's projection that the Police Service might be at the forefront of law enforcement IT in three to five years will not be achieved, it does appear that the IT programme is back on track. The Policing Board has appropriately focused on supporting and improving results in this area, and a revised IT Strategy, and independent validation process is now in place. However, this remains an area of high risk for the Police Service.

The structure of the Police Service was significantly altered with the adoption of the National Intelligence Model and the supporting reorganisation of Crime Operations. Among other things, this reorganisation moved detectives from DCUs to Crime Operations, and structural changes are now completed. This is in itself a significant accomplishment in such a short period of time. While there are a number of off-setting issues in this area, particularly regarding the move of detectives to Crime Operations, the principle of reorganising to meet the needs of the National Intelligence Model is sound. The Policing Board and HMIC will be able to monitor increased performance against targets over the next few years, to determine the overall effectiveness of these changes. The issue of Special Branch is always of particular interest to the public, and we continue to note positive progress in achieving all of the changes recommended by the Independent Commission and other reviews. We will continue to monitor this area to ensure that changes are having the desired effect.

As noted in our last report, a decision on the Full Time Reserve (FTR) was made and announced in September of 2004. This is viewed as a considered operational decision that I support as advancing the Independent Commission's vision of policing in Northern Ireland. Of the approximately 1,487 current members of the FTR, 680 will be retained for another three years, with the balance of members being phased out over an 18 month period beginning in April of 2005. My concerns revolve around the welfare of FTR members affected by this decision and the concomitant enlargement of the Part Time Reserve, as well as filling the 'experience gap' left by the departure of FTR officers in such areas as policing with the community. These are addressed in greater detail in the Areas of Concern below.

The recommendations on the future size of the Police Service continue to show progress. Although the Police Service still has approximately 8,800 police officers when FTR members are included, the goal of achieving 7,500 full time officers within 10 years will be achieved. By June of 2004 the complement of regular police officers stood at 7,392; this figure includes 178 student officers. The severance programme is currently allowing a managed outflow of police officers who choose early retirement, thereby permitting greater success on the 50:50 recruitment process. This process, managed jointly by the Consensia Partnership and the Police Service, has been a notable success. Over 38,000 applications have been received since 2001, with almost 36% of applications coming from Catholics and 37% from females.

While there remain capacity concerns with respect to training's ability to meet operational needs, the oversight team is confident that the Policing Board is actively involved in the monitoring of the Police Service's training area. The recruit training programme continues to produce the skilled new police officers necessary to provide an effective policing service, and also to drive the present change programme forward. Plans to build a new police training college in Cookstown continue to advance, and the Learning Advisory Council is a positive attempt on the part of Training Branch to involve the community in developing the Police Service's training and development curriculum.

Finally, cooperation between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána, as well as between the PSNI and other police services, continues as intended. Formal and systematic means of ensuring cross-border exchanges, international training links and operational cooperation all show progress (see also Areas of Concern). Further examples of good North-South cooperation initiatives include cross-border forums on crime, annual conferences, joint training ventures and several successful, joint law enforcement operations.

Areas of Concern

Our focus in the area of human rights is now on the impacts and effects of the changes to human rights training and development structures already in place. It is not yet clear whether or not behavioural changes and outcomes are being achieved. Issues such as the selection and training of instructors able to integrate human rights into police and civilian training have been raised as a concern and will be examined. However, it is important to note that the Police Service has made significant overall progress with human rights and that the Policing Board has set in place an extremely good monitoring framework that should demonstrate positive results over time.

The DPPs represent a critical nexus of police-community interface at the grassroots level, and our visits have surfaced a number of DPP concerns that require attention. They are: 1) the loss of hard-won expertise if a large proportion of independent members are replaced immediately following district elections in 2005; 2) the need to allow a possibility for independent members to become Chairmen and Vice Chairmen; 3) the role of DPPs in planning and implementing crime prevention programmes, especially the division of labour with the Community Safety Councils; and 4) uncertainty about the future of DPPs if the Police Service reduces the number of DCUs. This last point is an issue that I have raised before, not in the context of efficiency, which is the purview of the Chief Constable and the Policing Board, but in the context of a viable interface between the local community as represented by the DPP, and the Police Service as represented by the DCU. It has yet to be demonstrated how the Police Service and the Policing Board are addressing this core imperative, and I am concerned that a rush to efficiency will ignore effectiveness and the intent of the Independent Commission's recommendations.

Concerns regarding policing with the community are addressed in more detail in the chapter on Policing with the Community and the thematic report appended to this oversight report. Generally, while a great deal of positive progress is noted, there is a sense that the policing with the community initiative has lost momentum, and that there is a need to refresh the effort. One clear impediment to progress is the lack of acceptance of and support for the police across Northern Ireland, an issue which a new political agreement may address in part.



It remains disappointing that a comprehensive estate strategy has not yet been delivered. It is not only important that the appearance of police stations is improved to facilitate police interaction with the community, but also to signal a more normal and stable policing environment. It is equally important that the police officers and employees have safe and healthy places in which to work. I do not underestimate the difficulty involved in closing down some existing police stations, and while there has been some progress on new builds and renovations, there has also been a lot of time wasted in achieving the results envisioned by the Independent Commission. However, increased management attention and Policing Board involvement appears to be moving this issue slowly forward, and I look forward to being able to report actual results.

The IT Strategy remains a high-risk area simply because of the complexity inherent in large-scale IT projects, plus the scarcity of skilled IT professionals. In addition, these projects suffer from relatively high acquisition and implementation costs. Nonetheless, a revised IT Strategy and independent monitoring system are now in place. While supporting user needs is evident in the Strategy, the absence of specified support for core principles such as policing with the community and human rights is also noted. This is discussed further in the appended thematic report on policing with community.

The announced reduction of the FTR is a positive step in advancing the recommendations of the Independent Commission, and one which I support in my role as Oversight Commissioner. Nevertheless, I have two concerns: 1) questions around the role of FTR members involved in policing with the community efforts and how they might be replaced, and 2) the welfare of FTR members whose contracts will not be renewed. The Independent Commission was clear on the opportunities that these individuals should receive, and I have not as yet been provided with any information that might allay my concerns.

An issue related to the reduction of the FTR is the planned increase in numbers of Part Time Reserve officers. The Independent Commission recommendations were clear in their intent of having a Part Time Reserve representative of the wider community, and our previous reports have highlighted the concern that this has not taken place. While I am aware that the Policing Board is now actively engaged in this issue, as always it will be results that count ultimately in furthering the Independent Commission's recommendations. It is also fair to point out that support from all political and community groups will assist in achieving a fully representative PTR in an expedited manner.

Civilianisation issues remain a major concern in two regards, each impacting on the other. The first is the representative nature of the civilian work force, which the Independent Commission recognised should change along with the changes in representative numbers of uniformed police officers. A package of measures was adopted to address this situation, however as noted in this and previous reports they are not working as intended, and likely cannot work in the longer term. Our last statistics indicate that the percentage of Catholics among civilian staff had risen from only 12.3% in 1999, to 14.4% in 2004.

The second issue is that the Police Service has not demonstrated proactive engagement on the issue of civilianisation. This highlights the danger of progressing some recommendations at the expense of others. As the Independent Commission warned in 1999, "We advise in the strongest terms against cherry-picking from this report or trying to implement some major elements of it in

isolation from others". In addition, delays in civilianisation generally have also impacted the Police Service's ability to replace some police officers with qualified, and more representative, civilian staff. This simply means that there are fewer police officers on the street today than there might have been. Government's approval of funding for a further 300 civilian positions, combined with a budgetary reduction of 171 existing civilian positions, should provide an opportunity to proactively move on these issues. It is hoped that the revised Human Resources Planning Strategy, which will be reviewed by the Policing Board towards the end of this year, will result in a more proactive approach to civilianisation.

It is extremely disappointing that after five years the issue of registration of interests has not been completed. While a judicial review and legal advice are offered as the reasons for withdrawal from the policy, this recommendation reflects on an issue of openness and transparency. It is a credit that some 4,500 police officers, regardless of personal beliefs, submitted their documents as required. It appears that the process will have to start anew, however for those of us who measure performance based on results, and a public whose expectations had been raised, this is clearly a failure.

Concerns around training still relate at a broad level to capacity and focus, issues noted in our previous thematic report on training. Results are still awaited in the following areas: the appropriate civilianisation of training, recruitment and retention of skilled trainers, meeting operational and management training needs, and completing Service Level Agreements with the DCUs.

The final area of concern relates to the recommendations for structured co-operation on a North-South and international basis. It remains disappointing that after five years authorities have not actually accomplished any results on structured North-South personnel exchanges; this appears to be another example of what the Independent Commission would call cherry-picking. Progress on this issue is important for a number of reasons, not least the symbolic value of increasing cooperation on the island of Ireland, but also in terms of more practical outcomes. It is hoped that the two governments, the two police agencies, their employee representatives and the Policing Board will be more pro-active in achieving the results that meet the Independent Commission's intent.

▶▶ human rights



Background

Quoting the 1998 Belfast Agreement, the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland noted that the fundamental purpose of policing should be the “protection and vindication of the human rights of all”. In order to achieve this goal, the Independent Commission recommended that the Police Service develop a “comprehensive programme of action to focus policing in Northern Ireland on a human rights-based approach”, and that the performance of the Police Service in implementing such a programme be monitored closely by the Policing Board. The Independent Commission recommended several specific actions that the Police Service should take to bring about a greater emphasis on human rights in Northern Ireland policing, including:

- promulgating a new oath for all serving officers;
- developing a code of ethics;
- expanding human rights training for all police officers, recruits, serving officers and civilian staff;
- incorporating human rights awareness and practice in the performance evaluation of individuals; and,
- appointing a lawyer to advise the Police Service about the human rights implications of its activities.

Progress and Accomplishments

In September of 2004 the Police Service published its long-awaited Human Rights Programme of Action, thus responding to the first recommendation of the Independent Commission. The Programme of Action describes what the PSNI has done since 2000 to ensure that human rights penetrate all aspects of policing in Northern Ireland. These accomplishments are considerable, as we have noted in our previous oversight reports, fulfilling most of the Independent Commission’s recommendations. One of our performance indicators was that the Police Service show evidence of having drawn on “best practices” in other police services. It is fair to say that the actions taken by the PSNI now constitute a model of best practices that other police services might emulate.

Publication of the Policing Board’s annual review of the human rights performance of the PSNI, originally scheduled for September of 2004, has been postponed until early 2005. Considerable research has already been completed in support of the review, including a survey of 2,739 police officers and discussions with 44 police focus groups.

Finally, it is worth noting that legislation came into effect in March of 2004 effectively making the PSNI’s Code of Ethics, originally published in 2003, the official conduct regulations. This allows the Police Service to undertake discipline proceedings against police officers who have contravened the Code of Ethics. This is confirmed in legislation under the Police Service of Northern Ireland (Conduct) Regulations 2003. The Northern Ireland Office is in the process of drafting legislation to extend the Code of Ethics to designated civilians.

Areas of Concern

There are no specific areas of concern for this report. Our future evaluation and monitoring efforts will increasingly focus on the impacts and effects of changes to human rights training and development structures already in place. For example, issues such as the selection and training of instructors able to integrate human rights into police and civilian training courses will become

increasingly important; arguably, one day of training on human rights in a five-week training curriculum for instructors is insufficient. In addition, systems for monitoring the delivery of training courses with respect to their human rights content will also become more important, as the Police Service begins to develop its own expertise in the field of human rights in policing. All of these efforts will be materially assisted by the Policing Board’s annual review of the human rights performance of the Police Service. Finally, the oversight team will monitor ongoing efforts to ensure that human rights considerations are integrated into all training courses, for recruits, in-service personnel and civilian staff.

▶▶ **accountability**



Background

The Independent Commission devoted 35 of its 175 recommendations to providing oversight mechanisms designed to ensure the accountability of policing to the public and the law. Its recommendations cover the role of the Police Ombudsman and the creation of a Policing Board, District Policing Partnerships, a Commissioner and complaints tribunal for covert law enforcement operations, and the strengthening of financial accountability.

Progress and Accomplishments

As noted in previous reports, all of the accountability institutions called for by the Independent Commission are now in place and functioning as intended. The more recent additions are the District Policing Partnerships (DPPs). The Policing Board's "Assessment of the Effectiveness of District Policing Partnerships during the Year 2003/2004", published in August of 2004, found them to be performing satisfactorily. DPP members appear to be satisfied for the most part with their contribution to local policing plans. Public meetings, although not well attended, are regularly held throughout the districts. Although DPPs do not as yet benefit from full political and community representation, elected members interviewed report working cooperatively across the divides of religion and political party. In addition, elected and independent members are generally working cooperatively and with mutual respect, and the Police Service has undertaken programmes to familiarise DPPs with police issues, and has been responsive to requests for information from DPPs. Unfortunately DPP members continue to be subjected to threats and intimidation on the part of individuals or groups threatened by a community linked, publicly accountable Police Service.

The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland continues to fulfil her role as intended. The annual inspection of the Police Service, conducted by HMIC noted that the PSNI was the only police service in the UK subject to wholly independent scrutiny and investigation of public complaints made against its officers. The Ombudsman's office is professionally and effectively fulfilling its mandate and is a crucial element of the policing accountability structure.

The Policing Board has created a working group to plan a systematic review of the performance of DPPs, with a view to revising the code of practice. The review will be based in part on a survey of all DPP members and managers, district Chief Executives, and DCU Commanders. The review is expected to be published in January of 2005 and is a positive example of a governing body continually striving to increase its effectiveness. Finally, the Northern Ireland Office has published a "Code of Practice on Reports and Inquiries" for sections 59 to 60 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

As noted in our Report No. 9, released in December of 2003, the systems of accountability relating to Covert Law Enforcement and Financial Accountability are in place. All available evidence indicates that the systems for the Chief Surveillance Commissioner for Covert Law Enforcement and the complaints tribunal, together with the Policing Board's systems for overseeing financial issues, are working as intended.

Areas of Concern

Although the DPPs are functioning well, several concerns were raised by DPP members during interviews. They are: 1) the loss of hard-won expertise if a large proportion of independent members are replaced following district elections in 2005; 2) allowing independent members to become Chairmen and Vice Chairmen; 3) the role of DPPs in planning and implementing crime prevention programmes, especially the division of labour with the Community Safety Councils; and 4) uncertainty about the future of DPPs if the PSNI reduces the number of District Command Units.

Consequently, we will continue to focus attention on the development of the DPPs, not because they are cause for particular concern, but because they represent the critical nexus of police-community relations at the grassroots level. Our thematic report on human rights and accountability, scheduled for publication in May of 2005, will focus further on the operation of DPPs and the Policing Board.

▶▶ **policing with the community**



Background

The Independent Commission recommended that policing with the community be the core function of the Police Service and of every police station. Crucial to the new beginning envisioned by the Independent Commission, the theme of policing with the community has implications for the structure of the Police Service, for its management, culture, recruitment and training. The long term goal was to deliver truly effective, locally-based policing that would not only address some of the current issues unique to Northern Ireland, but put it at the leading edge of policing in the United Kingdom, Ireland and internationally.

Progress and Accomplishments

Policing with the community is a strategic process where results are measured through improved relationships with the public, as well as diminishing rates of crime and disorder. Therefore, recent experience with falling rates of recorded crime may to some extent represent a proxy measure of early success with collaborative community problem solving. Nonetheless, how specific policing initiatives will impact the longer-term views of the public, as expressed in part through opinion surveys, will only be known as surveys are carried out repeatedly and over an extended period. These issues are also discussed in greater detail in the thematic report on policing with the community attached to this oversight report.

The oversight evaluation carried out in September of 2004 provided evidence of useful collaborative problem solving initiatives taking place between local police, social service agencies and businesses, including bars and other places of entertainment and women's aid organisations. Various crime prevention initiatives, including the use of "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design" techniques by neighbourhood policing teams are also notable. Coleraine DCU introduced a novel text messaging system, known as Crime Text, for broadcasting crime alerts and crime prevention messages to the public by cellular telephone, and receiving information from the public in return. Police in Lisburn DCU offer two way exchanges through e-mail, telephone or fax. At least one DCU is offering vacation security checks on vacant homes. Neighbourhood and rural crime watches have been introduced by some rural DCUs, and Crime Stoppers continues to be strongly promoted as a secure and effective crime prevention and detection method throughout Northern Ireland. Police and District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) have been able to access public safety and crime prevention funding made available by the Government, through organisations which include the Community Safety Partnerships.

The Police Service developed and distributed a common electronic folder in April of 2004, for managing local problem solving initiatives. Certain design features proved unsatisfactory to neighbourhood policing teams, however by September of 2004 the Police Service had consulted its user group on possible revisions to the folder, which are now in progress. The Good Practice Guide which was originally distributed in conjunction with the problem solving folder provides links to good practices both within the PSNI and police services in England and Wales. This particular feature attracted 2,610 hits from between 1 May and 13 September 2004.

The Chief Constable's Annual Report for 2003/2004 features many more successful examples of crime prevention and community involvement, with projects that target a wide variety of crime and disorder problems. These range from sensitive issues such as flag displays to more focused efforts such as ongoing attempts to disrupt the trade in stolen sheep. The impressive amount of

successful problem solving initiatives underway is a credit to the creativity, skill and commitment of police command staff, crime analysts and front line police officers across Northern Ireland, as well as a supportive management.

Throughout the introductory and running-in stages of the policing with the community strategy, local Commanders and sector inspectors demonstrated an awareness of and commitment to the objectives outlined in the HMIC Thematic on reassurance strategies, "Open All Hours". This is considered a seminal work with regard to policing with the community in the UK. As reported by the Police Service in October of 2004, there were 120 neighbourhood Policing Teams operating with 875 officers assigned to community beat teams across the 29 DCUs, and 775 consultative forums of all types reported by district commands.

The electronic briefing system, installed earlier this year in DCUs, is now fully operational. The briefing system provides for the sharing of timely information across DCUs. As might be expected, there are variations in adaptation among DCUs, with some districts employing superior technology and introducing accountability mechanisms to ensure that all front line officers are properly informed prior to beginning their duty shifts. However, such differences in approach are to be expected, and are part of the organisation's evolution towards decentralisation and devolved decision making.

Recognising the importance of DPPs with respect to the overall policing with the community initiative, the Policing Board conducted an assessment of DPP effectiveness during the 2003/2004 year, and developed recommendations for improving performance. The Board is also preparing for the provision of training to those DPP members scheduled to be appointed in 2005. DPP members are invited to attend the Police Service's Leadership Grid Programme in November and December of 2004. The Board will also provide assistance to DPPs and DCUs in terms of their evolving relationship, to ensure mutual understanding, support and appropriate challenge as both DPPs and the Police Service address issues of common interest and concern.

Consultations between the Policing Board and the Police Service also resulted in the development of a revised format for the Chief Constable's monthly statistical briefings to the Board. The revised briefing format includes more detailed and current information on patterns of recorded crime, as well as indications of progress made towards the quantitative policing targets agreed with the Board in the Policing Plan.

The Police Service's Media and Public Information Department supported DCUs in the editing and timing of their local media releases, which are usually intended for neighbourhood or regional news media. Pamphlets and copies of local Policing Plans are readily available in hard copy or on the PSNI's website. The Policing Board is monitoring publication of notices of DPP meetings and related announcements, to ensure that members of the public are adequately informed.

Visits to DCUs confirmed a growing awareness among DCU Commanders and front line officers of the prevalence of domestic violence, reflected also by an increase in reported incidents and prosecutions. The attention devoted to this problem is consistent with the priorities of the Policing Plan. Of particular note, neighbourhood Police Teams in East Belfast DCU working with divided communities and under-privileged youth displayed notable initiative and skill applying crime prevention through social development strategies.



▶▶ policing in a peaceful society

Finally, General Order 13/2003, PSNI Uniform - Wearing of Name Badges, provides guidance on the wearing of name badges in a variety of duty circumstances. During the oversight evaluation carried out in September of 2004 the majority of front line police officers encountered by the oversight team were wearing name badges. There was also a marked tendency on the part of neighbourhood policing team officers to speak confidently of their sense of responsibility for or “ownership” of a given neighbourhood, and a noteworthy pride in their achievements. This was most evident in districts where the commander encouraged leadership at all levels, and the empowerment of both police supervisors and front line officers.

Areas of Concern

The technical and structural components of the Police Service’s policing with the community strategy are now largely in place. Planning and implementing new structures and methods for supporting policing with the community may be considered complete, and supporting systems are in the final stages of design. Despite these notable achievements, and the encouraging reports produced by the Police Service, uncertainties remain regarding the actual achievement of the overarching goal of the Independent Commission’s recommendation in this area. This states that “policing with the community should be the core function of the Police Service, and the core function of every police station”. This issue is discussed further in the thematic report attached to this oversight report.

The continuing incidence of attacks and threats against police officers in several District Command Units has predictably inhibited the willingness of some front line police to place themselves in danger, either through foot patrols or in liveried, soft skinned vehicles. Two immediate results are variances in patrol tactics across the PSNI, and lower levels of police visibility. In a number of contested neighbourhoods the police patrol only in pairs or with supporting “shadow” vehicles. In many DCUs the experience level of response officers is less than five years, including many probationers. This results in a lower levels of familiarity with local conditions and also confidence on the part of individual officers. However, evidence was also provided of successful public DPP meetings held in places where even one year ago such events would have been unlikely or impossible. Much of this is due to the unrelenting efforts of experienced Neighbourhood Policing Teams which consistently challenge and extend the perceived boundaries of policing in difficult areas.

Finally, Training Branch piloted Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with three chosen DCUs. Among other things, these specified the delivery of policing with the community training. There are concerns with the long delay in implementing SLAs and the impact this has on community policing training (see also Training Areas of concerns). Continuity of community policing training is important for sustaining early successes in community engagement and problem solving. It is also important to ensure that crucial community policing skills are successfully transferred from experienced police officers to those with less experience.



Background

The Independent Commission made several recommendations covering the appearance of police stations, appropriate types of patrol vehicles and the need to increase devolved authority to District Commanders. In addition, recommendations included those on Army support, the use of emergency powers, administration of detention facilities and other issues affecting the ability of the Police Service to deliver the kind of law enforcement service a 'normalised' and peaceful society would require.

Progress and Accomplishments

Three new police stations in Moira, Coleraine and Magherafelt have been built using impact resistant design standards. Additional new builds at Ballymoney, Cookstown, Omagh and Downpatrick have been proposed which are in accordance with the impact-resistant design, but which will have the appearance of ordinary buildings. Progress has been made on renovating several enquiry offices, making these areas more welcoming to members of the public.

DCU Commanders have been tasked to conduct a "bottom-up audit" concerning the future needs of the police estate and submit their recommendations to the Chief Officers Forum. This audit will include the status of police stations, location, purpose of the station and other operational factors. Progress has also been demonstrated by the increased interest among the senior commanders in adopting the "mobile police station" or "store front" concept in areas where police stations will be closed, or have limited opening hours, or where policing areas have been consolidated. This approach goes toward providing a clearer notion of minimum service levels to individual communities, particularly in those communities where police stations are closed or are only open for very limited hours.

As reported by the Police Service, the Estate Services Unit is currently reviewing and updating its plans with respect to the police estate. Initially laid down in 2002, the revised approach includes the results of individual estate audits conducted by DCU Commanders, and the implications of the proposed clustering of DCUs. It is anticipated that an updated approach will be completed by 31 October 2004, and subsequently submitted to the Chief Officers Forum in November of 2004 for consideration and endorsement. In addition, the Policing Board is expected to review the updated approach in December of 2004.

There has been some recent progress on the sale of police stations that have been closed operationally for some time, with several other stations under consideration for future sale and disposal. Although a new police station closure list has been prepared based on input from the DCU Commanders, a copy has not yet been provided to the oversight team for review. As reported in our Report No. 11, released in September of 2004, input and concurrence from the NIO, Policing Board and the respective communities will be required to ensure successful implementation of a much-needed programme for closing non-operational police stations.

An estate conference held by the Police Service in September of 2004 focused on the closure programme, plus the defortification of police stations. Preliminary reports released to the press, but not part of a comprehensive police estate strategy, indicate that funds have been secured for the defortification of 17 stations. Ten additional stations have been identified and await approval and funding. Although at a preliminary stage, this effort represents progress in the full implementation of recommendations to make police stations less forbidding in appearance and

more accessible to public callers, which in turn will enhance policing with the community objectives. The recent official opening of Moyle DCU headquarters, represents a 'new look' refurbishment which is inviting community interaction and is evidence of a beginning in fulfilling the intent of the Independent Commission. Revamped and defortified police stations will also improve police officer morale. It should be noted that ten of the 27 stations identified for defortification are rural police stations with limited opening hours. As communicated in a press release by the PSNI, the security situation continues to improve, which supports the defortification of police stations. Based on the oversight team's visits to police stations, as well as interviews with police supervisors and officers, it is apparent that threat levels are not the same throughout Northern Ireland, meaning that police stations in specific areas could progressively take on a less forbidding appearance without necessarily becoming 'soft targets'.

During the oversight evaluation in September of 2004 the oversight team visited police stations in Forkhill, Crossmaglen and Newtownhamilton, among others. Although police officers and supervisors assigned to these stations are far removed from the centre of PSNI activity, they were found to be a well informed and dedicated group who supported the defortification of police stations, and who showed a willingness to adopt policing with the community initiatives in their respective areas by changing the image of police stations from that of old "barracks" to more contemporary structures.

As noted in previous reports, Grafton Recruitment was successful in identifying 52 outside candidates for station enquiry assistant (SEA) positions. In addition, 34 candidates were selected through an internal trawl process, for a total of 86 SEAs by September of 2004. The merit list provided by Grafton permitted the Police Service to employ an equal number of Catholic and other than Catholic candidates. The training programme for new SEAs has been established and is underway.

Following approval of a second business case for additional civilians over a three-year period, Grafton Recruitment is scheduled to initiate a second recruiting campaign for SEAs starting in January of 2005. The Treasury has approved funding to employ an additional 96 SEAs for a total of 182 positions. Working with the Police Service, Grafton will examine the difference between actual job tasks performed by SEAs and the duties described in the previous recruiting brochures, and make the necessary adjustments. A timetable for the staffing the 182 SEA positions has not been provided, however the Police Service did provide documents describing how 60 to 94 SEAs would be distributed across the various DCUs. A policy statement has been sent to DCU Commanders directing that police officers replaced by SEAs be transferred to patrol or investigative duties. The Police Service will use periodic business improvement reviews to inspect the use of the SEAs, and that they have replaced rather than augment those police officers previously assigned to reception duties.



The Police Service has successfully implemented the Independent Commission's recommendation regarding armoured Landrovers (ALRs). The word "Police" has been painted on the sides of all the ALRs, and the number of ALRs assigned to strategic reserve status continues to increase. In addition, ALRs continue to be replaced by regular patrol vehicles. With 260 out of a total of 450 ALRs assigned to strategic reserve by September of 2004, the Police Service has accomplished its target of having 50% of ALRs in reserve. In April of 2003 the Police Service reported that 113 ALRs were assigned to DCUs for regular patrol duties. By September of 2004 this number has been reduced to 60 ALRs available for such duties, or a decrease of 47%. During the same period a similar reduction in ALRs assigned to the Tactical Support Groups has also occurred.

Considerable progress has been made in reducing the role of the Army in supporting the PSNI. The Police Service is now able to patrol most parts of Northern Ireland without military support. A review of the reports from the Police Service and Army, as well as observations by the oversight team, indicates a continued reduction in security support on the part of the Army. In its Policing Plan for 2003-2004, the Policing Board reported on the security situation and noted that the number of shooting incidents had decreased from 348 to 207, while bombing incidents had decreased from 178 to 71. The number of deaths as a result of the security situation decreased from 15 to 7, and the number of casualties arising from paramilitary attacks decreased from 309 to 298. A report by the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) released in July of 2004 noted significant progress in the normalisation of the security situation, and verified the reduced role of the Army in supporting the Police Service. Specifically, the IMC reported that since December of 1999:

- 8 out of 32 Army bases, or 25%, have been closed;
- troop numbers based in Northern Ireland have declined from 14,892 in 1999 to 12,078 by May of 2004, a decrease of 19%;
- 10 out of 19 Army watch towers and observation posts, or 53%, have been demolished;
- 9 out of 22 joint Police Service/Army bases, or 43%, have been closed; and,
- the use of Army helicopters has declined by 33%.

Although reductions have occurred during the past five years, the Army has retained its capability to support the Police Service if needed, and the General Officer Commanding continues to advise the Chief Constable on change to Army support levels. The issue of 'demilitarisation' is also very much a part of ongoing political discussions with the goal of achieving further reductions as situations normalise.

Areas of Concern

Overall, the Police Service's civilianisation initiatives have not had the desired impact, nor have they met the Police Service's own targets. Although the current system for identifying and recruiting civilian SEAs through a private sector recruitment agency is working well, as do systems for supporting the objectives of hiring on a 50:50 Catholic/other than Catholic basis, the Police Service does not use the agency to fill many of the other vacant civilian positions available, preferring instead to fill these positions through internal trawl processes. The Police Service has also not completed the process of replacing police officers that perform police station receptionist duties with civilian staff.

In November of 2003 the Chief Constable directed that a full and fundamental review of the police estate take place. In April of 2004 the Police Service advised that it was preparing a revised estate plan, which would be provided to the oversight team for review during the September 2004 visit. As of 30 September 2004 neither the updated plan, highlighting the results of this review, in essence a comprehensive, revised police estate strategy, had been provided. The Baseline Assessment of the Police Service, conducted by HMIC in April of 2004, also identified the police estate strategy as an area of concern, reporting that the "estate strategy appears slow and aspects of the programme seem ad hoc and ineffective". The Assessment did note an integrated planning process, but found a perceived weakness in a lack of coordination across the Police Service, as well as a lack of structural linkages between the different parts of the PSNI affected, including Human Resources, Estates and Finance. It has now been five years since the Independent Commission made its recommendations on the police estate.

The Police Service reports that, due to a determination that Recommendation 53 does not relate to non-public areas, it has not received any funding to renovate the interiors of several police stations. The oversight team does not concur with this determination, as Recommendation 53 specifically states that "existing police stations should...be...more accessible to public callers and *more congenial for those working in them* (emphasis added)". The vast majority of police stations visited by the oversight team have interiors and working areas that require serious renovation, and which are not at all congenial for the employees required to work there every day. This observation is supported by the Police Service's own internal surveys. This research also uncovered areas that prevent probationary police officers from experiencing a more positive learning environment, which includes a poor physical working environment as a major factor, with 52% reporting that they regard the physical working environment as very poor. This appears to be an issue for the Policing Board and Government to proactively resolve.

Recent discussions by the Chief Constable and others concerning a preferred number of DCUs, through the consolidation of some smaller DCUs, exacerbates the existing challenges of revising the existing police estate strategy. As reported above, the Police Service is starting to develop a comprehensive estate strategy, however the potential consolidation of DCUs means that any strategy would have to be resolved quickly, as the future number and location of DCUs will influence many areas, including the location and size of custody suites, CCTV, SEA assignments and the location and number of police substations, among others.

▶▶ public order policing



Background

The Independent Commission recognised that the public order policing experience of Northern Ireland's Police Service differed significantly from that of any other police force. It therefore saw the need for research into other tactical and strategic ways with which to address recurring public order situations. In addition, the Independent Commission made several recommendations that covered the role of the Army, the establishment of a parade partnership and marshal training, and for identifying equipment that might be utilised by the Police Service to better deal with public order situations and other emergencies.

Progress and Accomplishments

No plastic baton rounds (PBRs) have been fired in Northern Ireland since September of 2002. This marks a significant accomplishment and is a credit to both the community and the Police Service. During the same period the NIO and the Police Service continued to demonstrate progress in completing research to identify an acceptable alternative(s) to the PBR. As a result of this research the Police Service has expanded the range of public order equipment. Six vehicle-mounted water cannon have been placed in operational service and assigned to the two Regional ACCs following the completion of medical testing and training for operators. On 12 July 2004 one of the water cannon was used during a public order situation. Two vehicle-mounted water cannon were successfully loaned to the Garda Síochána, demonstrating cooperation among police services as recommended by the Independent Commission. ACPO guidance and a Police Service General Order have been issued for the deployment and use of the water cannon during public order situations. These two directives are comprehensive and include deployment considerations, authorisation procedures, record keeping requirements, and a review of the law relating to the use of force.

The Police Ombudsman will review or investigate each incident where the water cannon is utilised in public order incidents, with the investigation identifying any patterns and trends arising from the complaints. Also, hand held CS spray will be issued to each police officer over a three-year roll out period. CS spray has not been adopted as an alternative to the PBR, but as a piece of personal protection equipment to be carried by all officers during regular police activity. Although there has been some recent controversy concerning the use of CS spray, all cases of use are referred to the Ombudsman, who will examine individual and systemic use, as well as organisational policy.

The Phase 4 research report, entitled "A Research Programme into Alternative Policing Approaches Towards the Management of Conflict", was prepared by the Steering Group in January of 2004. This report includes an in-depth discussion and assessment of several less lethal technologies, specifically the Attenuating Energy Projectile (AEP) and the Discriminating Irritant Projectile (DIP). The NIO reports that these two projectiles represent the best opportunity to replace the L21A1 Plastic Baton Round (PBR) into service for public order situations, probably in the Summer of 2005. Although the oversight team considers these to be more effective replacements as opposed to alternatives, it does reflect positive progress.

Once the AEP is deployed the L21A1 round would be taken out of service. If testing and evaluations are successful, the DIP will not be available until the Summer of 2006 and will serve as a complement to the AEP. A fifth research report is anticipated to further present the research

conducted by the Steering Group seeking less lethal technologies to replace the current PBR. As a result of extensive research conducted by the Steering Group under the leadership of the NIO, Northern Ireland has become the leading research authority on less lethal technologies.

Areas of Concern

In 2000 the Police Service issued PBR guidance as General Order 46/2000, Deployment and Use of Plastic Baton Rounds in Situations of Serious Public Disorder. Since the General Order was issued it has been fully complied with by police officers using the PBR during situations of public disorder. However, the Police has not as yet made any progress on releasing a copy of the guidance to the public. The oversight team was informed that the Police Service is awaiting a corporate decision to make the PBR policy or General Order available via the PSNI's website.

▶▶ management and personnel



Background

The Independent Commission called for extensive change to the management style of the Police Service, including devolving authority to district levels, enhancing the internal accountability structure, reducing lengths of tenure in specialised positions such as public order and security duties and a more comprehensive sickness absence programme. Further recommendations proposed a rigorous programme of civilianisation to release uniformed police officers for patrol duties, as well as various other efficiency measures.

Progress and Accomplishments

Change Management as a corporate function is being steadily subsumed into the standard organisational and managerial practices of the Police Service and the Board. On 11 October 2004 the Police Service merged five Headquarters branches into the Operational Support Department, with the incumbent ACC of Corporate Development as the new departmental head. This new Department is now comprised of Operations, Corporate Development, Central Statistics, Information Management, and Telecommunications Branches. Primary responsibility for change management process remains with the ACC Operational Support, with officers responsible for individual change initiatives also reporting regularly to the Policing Board.

On 23 June 2004 the Police Service issued a General Order 35/2004, 'Policy On Devolution'. This described in principle the empowerment of DCU Commanders with a view to making devolution work better in practice. Outlining the Chief Constable's vision, the General Order directs a move away from hierarchical structures, while driving decision making down to the lowest possible level and providing for greater autonomy for DCU Commanders and their staff. Assessing the progress of devolution is now the responsibility of the Deputy Chief Constable, acting for the Chief Constable, through twice-yearly reviews of the business plans of Regional ACCs and Headquarters departments. Finance Department conducts continuous consultation and seeks feedback to identify problems and possible solutions. Service Level Agreements between Crime Operations and DCU Commanders are in process of being finalised.

Internal Investigations Branch (IIB) conducts an active programme of integrity checks, and by September of 2004 had 16 open cases. The head of IIB is a member of both the ACPO Advisory Group and the Northeast Advisory Police Group on Internal Investigations. Police Service policy on receiving gifts and gratuities, substance abuse and participation in political activities is in the process of being developed. The Police Service engaged an outside consulting firm to conduct an audit of IIB, to include core functions, policies and procedures. Also, the Police Service operates an independent reporting line called 'Safecall' which is available to report potential wrongdoing by police officers or civilian staff. PSNI is the first police service in the UK to provide this facility. Responsibility for quality assurance resides with Corporate Services, within the scope of the PSNI Best Value and Continuous Improvement model.

Quarterly activity and trend reports on sickness absence are provided to the Chief Constable, Policing Board and the Independent Observer monitoring progress on human resources issues on behalf of the Board. The established target for the reduction of sickness absence for 2004/2005 was 17 days per police officer per year, including reserve members. By August of 2004 the Police Service was on track for reducing its sickness absence figures to 14.3 days for all police officers, including reserve members, by the end of December of 2004. When looked at separately

however, averages for regular police officers surpassed the target, at 12 days per year, while averages for members of the Full Time Reserve were closer to 25 days per year. As reported in August of 2004, 37% of sickness absence of the Full Time Reserve is due to absence in excess of 90 days.

Trending for civilian support staff is pointing towards a year end total of 15 days per employee, against a target of 13 days. Internal analyses of these figures point to specific problem areas including short term absence by civilian staff, and the incidence of psychological illness across all categories. Seasonal variations in absenteeism, which are common to most police organisations, are also beginning to emerge. This may well be a sign of increasing stability within the Police Service, and also that the pattern of heavy sickness absence experienced in past years is being successfully managed down. However, despite significant advances in sickness absence policy and supporting mechanisms, DCU Commanders interviewed, continue to express concerns regarding the means and sanctions available to challenge some of the more dubious claims of sickness or disability, particularly where this concerns longer term absence.

The Government approved the Police Service's Business Case for funding an additional 300 civilian posts over three years (see also the Composition of the Police Service below). By September of 2004 the number of police posts converted to civilian positions, since 2001/2002, stood at 335. The Police Service is now revising the Human Resources Planning Strategy as requested by the Policing Board, and the new strategy is expected in December of 2004. The revised Planning Strategy must now take a number of other factors into account including the Chief Constable's decision on the Full Time Reserve, the ongoing Criminal Justice Review and its related "Causeway" project, the Gershon Report on efficiency in the public service, and new legislation protecting persons with disabilities. All these matters influence the costs of administration, supervision and command, as well as rank ratios for front line officers and supervisors, and the impact of changes to incentives and rewards. The Police Service conducted activity surveys of police officers serving in DCUs, and the returns are intended to permit a more accurate assessment of overall resource needs and resource allocations.

The Police Service issued a General Order 38/2004, Trending And Tracking Of Complaints Against Police in June of 2004 that fulfils the criteria that DCU Commanders be properly directed and empowered to manage tracking and trending information, provided by the Ombudsman, on complaints against police officers. The General Order includes direction for identifying suspected disparities in the performance of individual officers, and prescribes preventive strategies which represent the desirable attributes of an 'early warning system.' While for reasons of legality and confidentiality it is not possible for the Ombudsman to provide a level of detail that DCU Commanders might wish for, the Ombudsman is amending procedures in order to screen out incidents that do not contribute materially to the objective of tracking and trending. DCU Commanders interviewed expressed satisfaction with the new approach and future intentions. There were suggestions, however, that some Commanders persist in regarding complaint information exclusively as a disciplinary trigger. Continuing guidance from Police Service management and staff advisory assistance will be needed before the system realizes its full potential as a preventative strategy and a management quality assurance tool.



Finally, following allegations of financial irregularities within the Northern Ireland Police Fund, the Government directed a review. Completed in October of 2004, the review recommended that the work of the Police Fund continue for the foreseeable future and that it be resourced by Government. Other recommendations include a reiteration of relevant proposals from the Steele Report, published in October of 2000, improvements to administration and communication, and more effective means of recognising the sacrifices of widows and disabled officers through an ongoing process. The Government accepted the recommendations in principle and will work with the Police Fund on their implementation.

Areas of Concern

Finance Department maintains a detailed budget manual for the assistance of DCU managers, however evidence from DCUs indicates that while devolution of financial responsibility has been accomplished administratively, there remains a long way to go before Commanders can achieve financial efficiencies through local decisions; in some respects the situation might be described as the “bookkeeping” rather than the decision making having been devolved. Other areas mentioned as appropriate for the delegation of further decision making included minor building repairs, staff travel costs, fuel for police vehicles, the determination of vehicle specifications, the purchasing of office supplies locally, and greater discretion on funding district-level policing initiatives. For example, purchasing from local suppliers is considered an excellent means of strengthening relations with the business community, while representing the Police Service as a full partner in the economic prosperity of communities across Northern Ireland. The time lag in receiving financial reports, at four to five weeks, is also seen as impeding better performance, however it must be acknowledged that financial devolution is at an early stage and that the associated structures and systems were installed with remarkable speed.

The Police Service initiated the second cycle of the personnel appraisal system introduced in 2003. The return rate on the first cycle was roughly 80%, with deficiencies attributed to extended sickness absence or similar circumstances. The new system was specifically designed to focus on personal development, however this objective is still not fully appreciated by users, and further education may be required. A continuing source of confusion is that there appears to be no connection between the appraisal system and the compensation system, raising the question of the ability of the appraisal system to impact behaviour and ultimately, organisational culture. However, it is now accepted that good performance is the primary criterion in the promotions process. A formal review of the appraisal system promised by the Police Service has not yet been completed, making it difficult for the Police Service to gauge the real value and impact of the system at this point in time.

Finally, a copy of HMIC's Best Value Inspection Report, dated March of 2004, was provided to the oversight team. The report concluded that the initial approach adopted by the Policing Board and the PSNI for assessing Best Value did not meet the rigorous standards applied by HMIC to all UK police forces. The report made ten recommendations specifying the actions required to comply with national standards. Despite this setback the report found that the Board and the Police Service recognised their responsibilities, and that management in both organisations understood the need to improve the way Best Value is undertaken and delivered. Since the report was delivered PSNI has taken action to make the necessary changes based on HMIC's findings. However, the proposal for employee “buy outs” incorporated under Best Value by the Independent Commission, and agreed in principle in the Government's August of 2001 Implementation Plan, has not been significantly progressed.



Background

The Independent Commission recommended an urgent, independent and in-depth strategic review of the use of information technology in policing. Ambitious and far-reaching objectives were proposed to devise a properly resourced plan that would place the Police Service at the forefront of law enforcement technology within 3 to 5 years.

Progress and Accomplishments

In June of 2004 the Policing Board commissioned HMIC to carry out a review and submit a status report on progress with implementing this critical recommendation. A review of information technology is a standard function of HMIC annual inspections, assuring continuity of external audit. The Board's concerns related to conflicting reports on compliance. The seventeen recommendations made in the initial status report confirmed that while there were serious delays in implementing the original Information Technology Strategy, and highlighted a number of areas which could still cause problems, the report also showed that progress had been made nonetheless. HMIC delivered a second report to the Policing Board on 15 October 2004. While HMIC expressed continuing concerns relating to delays in staffing and the preparation of business cases for funding, the report concluded that the measures now in place were sufficiently well balanced to allow PSNI to deliver against the recommendations, and take the Police Service forward to full implementation as envisaged by the Independent Commission. Concerns around delays in appointing a permanent Head of Information Services were recently allayed by appointment of an in-house candidate.

The design of a technical architecture consistent with the original objective of fully integrated technology systems is critical to this project, and the Independent Commission recommended that progress be validated by independent assessment. At the invitation of PSNI the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO), a government agency, has now assumed the role of Independent Validator under an agreement formally entered into by the Policing Board, the Police Service and PITO. The validation process developed by PITO is comprehensive, thorough and searching. The revised Strategic Plan with an implementation schedule and time lines was provisionally accepted by PITO, with 38 issues of detail to be resolved. The Strategy is in the final stage of revision and will be presented to the Policing Board in December of 2004.

Implementation will entail major changes to Police Service business processes. Consequently, a joined-up decision-making method is fundamental to resuming meaningful consultation with user groups. An Information Management Steering Group (IMSG) assumed ownership for the IT programme in October of 2003. In the framework of the revised strategy, the IMSG is chaired by the DCC and includes ACCs and the heads of Finance, Human Resources and Communications and Information Management. IMSG will now meet monthly for three months until the project attains stability and momentum. A Programme Board and Project Board will be accountable for driving forward individual components of the plan. PITO employs a rigorous template for user consultation, in which users are responsible for developing the business case. There is currently no Service Level Agreement with Training Branch, and Information Management is providing introductory user training through contracted trainers. PITO prescribes standards for user training that will be applied throughout the process of validation.

Areas of Concern

Risk management factors in the revised strategy places the highest priority on the need to recruit additional Information Management staff, particularly for critical implementation tasks. Other crucial requirements include:

- timely and adequate funding;
- provision for user involvement;
- availability of short term contractors;
- re-structuring the information management organisation;
- sufficiency of third party suppliers;
- the capacity of staff to adapt to new technologies;
- limiting the development of non-aligned IS projects; and,
- success in evaluating and coordinating procurement contracts.

While the revised Strategic Plan includes numerous references to user needs and the requirement to support district commands and front line officers, there is no specific mention of Policing with the Community, the acknowledged core philosophy of the Police Service (see also attached thematic report on Policing with the Community). Additionally, there is no acknowledged intent for supporting commitments to human rights and transparency across the organisation. These operating principles may be inferred because the Strategy does provide the means for achievement of these commitments, but it would be reassuring if they were explicitly recognised as the principle ends to the systemic means.

The revised plan estimates the total cost of implementation at just under £65M over five years, including capital costs, the cost of client-side external resources and additional human resources costs. Since it is highly unlikely that this level of funding can be met from within the Main Police Grant, the plan also suggests a range of alternative funding sources that should be explored. If other funding sources prove inadequate or unavailable, it is unlikely that all of the projects and changes required to support the introduction of new methods of policing can be implemented. The Police Service presented the revised strategy to the Government and awaits approval of a number of related business cases. The oversight team will continue to monitor progress in liaison with both PITO and HMIC.

▶▶ **structure of the police service**



Background

The Independent Commission recommended restructuring to encourage and facilitate policing with the community, including de-layering of the operational command organisation and a slimmer structure for Headquarters. Recommendations also called for the significant delegation of authority to District Commanders, including control over a devolved budget and all police resources within their district. Particularly important was the proposal of an amalgamated command for Special Branch and Crime Branch, in order to improve the organisation's ability to deal with rising levels of violent and organised crime. Also recommended was a substantial reduction in the number of officers engaged in security work. Other recommendations proposed the phasing out of the Full Time Reserve and the concomitant enlargement of the Part Time Reserve.

Progress and Accomplishments

The Chief Constable's Annual Report 2003-2004, released in June of 2004, featured a current accounting of successful collaborative community problem solving projects by DCU. The principal theme of the report is policing with the community. Crime statistics for 2003-2004 reflect a reduction in the incidence of reported crime in key crime categories including burglary, theft and robbery, while increases were recorded for sexual offences and domestic violence. An increase to crime reporting for offences that occur away from public view often reflects improved public confidence in the police. The Policing Board's Community Involvement Committee is actively seeking methods to assist District Policing Partnerships to become more relevant to their constituencies, and to strengthen all aspects of community involvement in policing.

The management review and evaluation meetings conducted twice annually by the Regional Assistant Chief Constables at each DCU are effective and drive performance improvement in the districts. The amalgamation of Corporate Development and Operations Support Departments on 11 October 2004 represented another step towards rationalisation of PSNI Headquarters. The Independent Commission also recommended that the number of Assistant Chief Officers be reduced from twelve to six. The current complement of ACCs, including civilian equivalents, stands at seven.

As recommended by the Independent Commission, Special Branch and Crime Branch were formally brought together under the command of one Assistant Chief Constable on 1 April 2001. In June of 2004 a single unified command with several sub-branches was established, using the UK-wide National Intelligence Model, and became Crime Operations Department. The former Special Branch is now part of Crime Operations and is designated as C-3 Intelligence. As directed by the new Crime Operations Department, approximately 70 detective supervisors were required to complete a four-day training course designed to prepare officers for the new organisation and change in mission. The course included a block of instruction on the National Intelligence Model, the new policy on the dissemination of intelligence information and human rights. Crime Operations personnel have received training designed to provide a better understanding of their duties in the new department, and to strengthen their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the various sub-branches. For example, detective supervisors and detectives from C-3 Intelligence received training to prepare them for the new organisation and their expanded role, while surveillance teams received training on the provision of evidence for use in

judicial proceedings. Training Branch has also developed a 3-week basic criminal investigator's course for all detectives assigned to C-3 to attend over the next three years. With the exception of finalising Service Level Agreements (SLAs) between the new Crime Operations Department and each of the DCUs, the intent of Recommendation 98 has been largely accomplished. However, these SLAs have been completed and provided to the oversight team, and will be assessed during the upcoming oversight evaluation. SLAs serve to clarify the role and support responsibilities between Crime Operations Department and DCUs, particularly where new investigative support relationships are concerned.

Other recommendations required a substantial reduction in the number of officers engaged in security work in the new, amalgamated command. In 1999, prior to implementing this recommendation, 583 police officers were performing security work in the old Special Branch. By September of 2004 the establishment of C-3 Intelligence was reduced to 439 police officers and supervisors, a reduction of 25%. The restructuring of Special Branch and Crime Branch and the intelligence needs of officers investigating serious and organised crime, as well as changing national security needs, will all have an impact on the staffing needs of the new Crime Operations Department for the foreseeable future. With the blending of roles, this will have to be monitored over time until a clear picture emerges as to how many officers in the new structure are assigned solely to security-related intelligence work.

The recommendation that DCU Commanders should be well briefed on security activities in their districts and consulted on security operations within their respective districts has also been implemented. A directive adopted in November of 2003 specifically requires C-3 Intelligence briefings for DCU Commanders, and that Commanders be fully consulted before security operations are undertaken in their districts. In July of 2004 the ACC Crime Operations issued a comprehensive and straightforward set of procedures for the dissemination of intelligence to serious crime investigators. These covered specific requirements for murder investigations and the management of sensitive information. To ensure intelligence is properly distributed, a copy of these procedures was distributed to each detective inspector assigned to C-3 Intelligence. During the past five oversight evaluations to various DCUs, police stations, and regional ACCs, a vast majority of Commanders and supervisors reported favourably on the implementation of recommendation 100. In addition, examples of specific serious crime investigations were provided to verify that local Commanders are receiving intelligence information from C-3 Intelligence reference serious crime in their districts.

The support units of the former Special Branch have been amalgamated into the wider Police Service. Formerly under the control of Special Branch only, C-4 Crime Support is now under the direct control of the ACC Crime Operations, which establishes priorities for the tasking of technical and other support resources to the wider Police Service. As noted in our Report No. 11, released in September of 2004, approximately 80% of support work done by C-4 is now devoted to serious and organised crime at DCU level. The remaining 20% are in support of national security or criminal intelligence. The Police Service has not provided the percentage of C-3 Intelligence resources devoted to serious and organised crime.

In 1999 the Independent Commission recommended that the future Police Service should phase out the existing Full Time Reserve (FTR), and the human resources strategy adopted by the Police



Service in October of 2002 supported the phasing out of the FTR over the period of several years. At the time the phasing out period was scheduled to commence in April of 2005 and run over the next 18 months, meaning that the FTR would have been fully phased out by the Autumn of 2006.

On 9 September 2004 the Chief Constable amended the planned phase out by notifying the Policing Board that 680 members of the FTR, out of an establishment of 1,487 members, would be retained based on 3-year contracts starting in April of 2005. This operational decision was based on the prevailing but improved security situation and the success of the recruiting programme for regular police officers. Of the 680 FTR members retained, 430 will continue in their static security assignments and 109 will remain assigned to the Tactical Support Groups. The Chief Constable reports that the remaining 141 FTR members will handle support functions for regular police officers while on patrol duties. This group of 141 members will operate under the command of the two Regional ACCs to provide flexibility of assignment. The remaining 807 FTR members will be phased out over an 18-month period from the termination of their existing employment contracts in April of 2005.

On 7 September 2004 the Secretary of State advised the Police Federation for Northern Ireland and the Police Service of the final terms of the FTR severance package. The severance package is based on age and years of service, and includes a comprehensive, paid retraining programme which could last up to 9 months for FTR member who have been made redundant. The final terms of the severance package indicate that those FTR members who are made redundant could receive up to £100,000 in severance pay, depending on length of service. This will cost the Government approximately £100M. The NIO advises that at the end of three years, or by 2008, the future of the FTR programme will be assessed again based on the security situation then prevailing. We also note that over the past three years, 196 members of the FTR have completed training and have accepted appointment as regular police officers.

Areas of Concern

Many of the initiatives covered in this chapter are addressed in the Police Service's Human Resources Planning Strategy, originally finalised in 2002. A revised Planning Strategy has yet to be completed and the anticipated completion date has now been reported as December of 2004. Without a finalised strategy it is difficult to gauge the pace of progress the Police Service is making on a variety of critical human resources-related initiatives. General Order 35/2004 concerning the Police Service's policy on devolution was issued 23 June 2004. However, Service Level Agreements with Headquarters departments, particularly Human Resources, have yet to be finalised.

In addition, as of 30 September 2004 no transitional plan had been provided to indicate that the Police Service is addressing the potential shortfalls in resources (see also attached thematic report on Policing with the Community). Because the revised plan to reduce the size of the FTR programme will not begin until April of 2005, members of the FTR will continue to be assigned to static security, regular patrol, and neighbourhood policing duties for some time. At the end of the phase out period some DCUs could experience a reduction of up to 31% in the number of FTR members assigned to static security, with a complete elimination of regular patrols and neighbourhood policing assignments by FTR members. Interviews within the Police Service identified that the loss of FTR members to patrol and neighbourhood policing duties, coupled with

the recent reassignment of 213 regular police officers who were transferred to the new Crime Operations Department, will have a significant impact on district-level policing resources. For example, one DCU advised the oversight team that the loss of both FTR members and regular police officers would cause the current neighbourhood policing teams to be disbanded. While these are early reactions, it does point to the number of implementation issues flowing from the FTR decision.

As noted in previous oversight reports, the Government accepted the recommendation that new Part Time Reserve (PTR) members be locally recruited from every neighbourhood, and that appointments come from those areas where there are very few PTR members or none at all. This was due to the fact that the existing PTR suffered low recruitment from Catholic and nationalist areas, and was overwhelmingly Protestant in composition. Our concern is that some five years after the Independent Commission's recommendations, no substantial progress in this area has been made. As of 30 September 2004, 45 PTR members had completed the full time, four-week training programme and been deployed, with the remaining 62 continuing to participate in evening training classes. The Policing Board has evaluated the pilot recruitment project and offered recommendations to improve the process prior to rolling out the next phase. A copy of this evaluation has not been provided to the oversight team. Police Service documents show that the specific job title of PTR members will be changed from "Part Time Reservist" to "Police Officer (Part Time)".

Since April of 2004 no updated progress reports have been provided to the oversight team concerning the initiation of phase two of the PTR recruiting programme, or the selection of additional DCUs from which to recruit. A working group comprising the NIO, Policing Board and the Police Service has been formed to discuss issues concerning the next PTR recruitment phase. As of 30 September 2004 the Police Service had not submitted a business plan to the NIO regarding the funding of phase two of the PTR recruiting programme.

Finally, documents provided by the Police Service show that existing PTR members from the four pilot DCUs, Banbridge, Coleraine, Lisburn and Newtownabbey, who were in service prior to the new recruiting programme, will be trained so as to have the same status as the 107 PTR members recruited more recently, including 95 Protestants, 11 Catholics and one undetermined. This kind of hiring pattern will not address the Independent Commission's intent to represent or reflect the whole community of Northern Ireland nor its intent to have the PTR recruited specifically from areas currently under-represented. In addition, this raises another challenge, in that absorbing existing members of the PTR into the new training regime makes achieving the goal of establishing a representative PTR programme that reflects the makeup of the whole community more difficult.

▶▶ size of the police service



Background

The Independent Commission compared the strength of Northern Ireland's Police Service with those in the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland, and recommended that if the security situation did not significantly deteriorate the Police Service be reduced in size over the next 10 years. The model proposed included an initial downsizing over three years through an early retirement or severance programme, and a phasing out of the Full Time Reserve.

Progress and Accomplishments

The Independent Commission recommended that the Police Service achieve a complement of 7,500 regular police officers within a 10-year period. The Policing Board adopted the original Human Resources Planning Strategy to achieve this goal by 2005, five years early. The Independent Commission also recommended a phase out of the Full Time Reserve (FTR). The Police Service is making excellent progress in achieving both goals. By June of 2004, the total complement of the PSNI was 8,841. This figure included regular, FTR and student officers. While the Police Service has failed to provide updated staffing figures beyond June, it is clear that the Police Service essentially reached the goal of 7,500 regular police officers ahead of both the five and ten-year goals, however the FTR remains a significant operational component.

The Police Service initially extended FTR employment contracts to allow for a review of the security situation. This review has been completed, and in September of 2004 the Chief Constable announced a plan to reduce the FTR from its current strength of 1,487 members to 680. The phase out will commence in April of 2005, and extend over a three-year period. This operational decision was based on the prevailing, improved security situation and the success of the recruiting programme for regular police officers. At the same time the NIO and the Police Federation reached agreement on improved severance terms and benefits for FTR members leaving the Police Service.

A key component of achieving and maintaining the 7,500 regular police officers level is the recruitment programme administered by Consensia Recruitment. The oversight team finds continued good progress with the recruitment of police officers on a 50:50 basis. This was also recognised as a success by the Policing Board's independent observer. The recommended regular police officer strength of 7,500 puts the PSNI at a significantly higher police to population ratio than other UK police services. Police operations will also be augmented by enlarging the Part Time Reserve to 2,500 officers (see also Areas of Concern in 'Structure of the Police Service' above). The NIO and the Police Service successfully implemented an early retirement or severance programme for regular and FTR officers. One result of this programme has been the generation of a large number of vacancies, which in turn allows an influx of new police recruits hired on a 50:50 basis.

The Police Service found it necessary to suspend the severance programme for 2003/2004 due to the high number of applications for severance, with over 1,900 submitted. When combined with the separation of nearly 1,300 regular and FTR officers, one result was a critical but relatively temporary 'experience gap'. The programme resumed in April of 2004 with a severance target of 330 officers. The Police Service is carefully managing the sequencing of departures by "red circling" positions for a fixed period of time, in order to prevent the loss of critical skills. In addition, the NIO has agreed to extend the severance programme until 2010, with stipulations

relating to the meeting of policing objectives. As previously reported, during the first three years of the external training programme, 670 police officers were approved for participation. Of this number 146 actually attended training courses. The Police Service has indicated that it plans to increase the role and usage of the Police Retraining and Rehabilitation Trust, however this expressed interest is not supported by any evidence provided to date.

Areas of Concern

The Police Service acknowledges that the original Human Resource Planning Strategy, finalised in October of 2002, has been out of date for some time and is in need of updating. However, as of 30 September 2004 the revised Planning Strategy had not been completed. Among the issues that require further attention, and which would be contained in a revised Strategy, are the correct distribution of regular police officers, members of the FTR and civilian staff across the Police Service. The revised Human Resources Planning Strategy, which will also specify revised time lines and target dates for these initiatives, is scheduled to be finalised in December of 2004.

In addition, exploring possible opportunities for FTR members with other UK police services, or with the UN, has not progressed to any significant degree. This is due in part to the Chief Constable's decision to retain 680 FTR members and not yet disband the FTR entirely as the Independent Commission had recommended. Now that the decision to retain some of the FTR has been made, responsible parties will be able to move ahead with exploring such opportunities in other UK forces or abroad as exist, for the benefit of those FTR members who will leave the PSNI.

▶▶ **composition and recruitment**



Background

The Independent Commission envisaged a Police Service that is representative of and supported by the community it serves. A key component of achieving a representative Police Service is a sound and successful recruitment programme that reaches, attracts and is supported by all segments of the population, especially those segments that are under-represented. Several recommendations address the various components of a sound recruitment programme that will attract, fairly test, objectively vet and select applicants in a way that results in a diversified Police Service that is representative of, and can be supported by the community.

Progress and Accomplishments

The Police Service contracted the Consensia Partnership in January of 2001 to recruit police officers. Consensia, working in cooperation with the Police Service, developed a sophisticated selection process that meets and exceeds contemporary standards. This process includes lay participation and observation, with trained assessors participating on panels during the actual selection process. The recruiting process also includes an extensive internal evaluation to ensure continued adherence to and improvement of the established protocols and procedures. Results from police applicant surveys indicate a high degree of satisfaction with Consensia and its conduct of the recruitment and selection process.

Consensia began the eighth recruitment competition in September of 2004. Preliminary data indicates that approximately 5,000 inquiries for information have been received. Data also indicates that the first seven competitions attracted 68,386 requests for applicant information packs, which resulted in 38,275 actual applications being received. Almost 36% of applications have been from Catholics, and 37% from females.

The actual merit pools of qualified recruits resulting from competitions six and seven numbered 905 and 716 respectively, 25% of which are Catholic. This allows for the appointment of 804 recruits to training on a 50:50 basis. At the present rate, the recruitment and selection programme is providing the Police Service with a greater number of qualified recruits than it can accept into training. This enhances the ability of the Police Service to appoint only the most highly qualified recruits, which is an enviable position for any police organisation in today's competitive labour markets.

The excellent results produced by the police recruitment programme are due to the professional capabilities of Consensia Partnership and to the high level of professional support provided by the Police Service. Consensia's advertising programme for the recruitment of police officers is extensive, covering Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. The advertising campaign encompasses the press, television, billboard and cinema, as well as on-line advertising designed to reach groups currently under-represented in the Police Service. Beginning with competition seven, Consensia added an on-line capability which resulted in 2,100 applications being received in that manner. Because the police officer recruitment programme has exceeded expectations, and in an effort to adapt the volume of applicants to the number of recruits that can actually be appointed to training, Consensia recently eliminated television advertising and reduced the number of press insertions.

The Police Service contracted with Grafton Recruitment in late 2002 to conduct a similar programme for the recruitment of civilian staff. Grafton has completed eight 50:50 competitions for civilian support staff, in addition to those initially conducted by the Police Service itself. Grafton provided the Police Service with sufficient merit pools of qualified applicants for each position from which appointments could be made consistent with the 50:50 requirement. The most significant competition was for 60 of the anticipated 260 Station Enquiry Assistants, envisaged by the Independent Commission to replace police officers at enquiry desks. This competition resulted in a merit pool of 227 qualified applicants, of which 92 could be appointed on a 50:50 basis. Grafton has conducted over 30 additional competitions for positions where 50:50 is not applicable. Approximately 24% of the civilian applicants in the merit pools were Catholic.

Grafton has developed an innovative and imaginative advertising strategy designed to reach groups currently under-represented in the Police Service. The strategy includes on-line and press advertising in specifically designated professional publications related to the positions being advertised. The strategy primarily covers Northern Ireland, but also extends to the Republic of Ireland. In addition, Grafton has developed a comprehensive selection process which includes a thorough review and where appropriate, a revision of the position description and job-related testing requiring civilian applicants to meet an established set of related competencies. Results from applicant surveys indicate a high degree of satisfaction with Grafton and its conduct of the recruitment and selection processes.

Areas of Concern

The Independent Commission and the Government recognised that the key to making the Police Service more representative of the communities it serves is the broad-based and balanced recruitment of police officers and civilians from all communities. Leading religious and public officials have publicly expressed support and encouragement for young people to join the Police Service, which has contributed significantly to the success of the police officer recruitment programme. However, direct and individual discouragements remain. Therefore, while the recruitment programmes to attract police officer and civilian applicants representative of the community continue to be successful, improving upon this success depends in large part on developing a broader base of community support. This is an area where political leaders in particular could have a significant impact.

In 1999 the Independent Commission noted that the Catholic representation within the civilian workforce stood at approximately 12%. It commented that it was illogical to suggest diversity for police officers while leaving the civilian staff unchanged. It therefore recommended the facilitation of transfers of civilian staff to other Northern Ireland departments, in order to assist with the achievement of a balanced and representative civilian workforce. Although the Government found it impractical to transfer civilian staff to other Northern Ireland departments, it committed in its August of 2001 Implementation Plan to the development of a "package of measures" to bring about a more representative and integrated workforce. This package of measures, which has been largely ineffectual in terms of changing representation figures, included the direct recruitment of police support staff (i.e. Direct Recruits) through a new recruitment agency; the requirement that



members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service accepting promotion within the PSNI give up their civil service status and become Direct Recruits; the requirement that an equal number of Catholic and other than Catholic applicants be appointed where recruitment is for six or more civilian positions at the same level; and the development of a management-led programme to enhance the integration of police officers, support staff and traffic wardens.

The Police Service took a number of steps to implement the package of measures. It engaged Grafton Recruitment, an independent human resource firm, to recruit civilian staff. The Police Service also promoted civilian staff to direct recruit positions, which increased the number of direct recruits from 791 in 1999 to 1,764 by April of 2004, and it filled personnel and financial officer positions, formerly held by police officers, with civilians. Even without updated figures it is clear that the implementation of the package of measures, to bring about a more representative and integrated civilian workforce, has not been successful. As reported previously, the actual change in Catholic representation among civilian staff has been minimal, increasing from 12.3% in 1999 to 14.4% by April of 2004; these are the most recent data provided by the Police Service.

It is acknowledged that the Police Service faced several obstacles in progressing the diversification initiative, including the lack of full community support, the perceived inability of the Police Service to protect civilians from possible community backlash, the lower pay levels offered to civilians and lack of "headroom" because of the failure to re-integrate Northern Ireland Civil Servants back into other civil service posts as recommended. Nonetheless, as noted in previous reports, the PSNI has not seized the opportunities to address the imbalance or to the extend possibilities when presented with opportunities to do so. For example, the number of recruitment drives identified for more than six positions has been limited, with many civilian positions continuing to be filled by internal trawl. While this provides advancement opportunities for serving civilian staff, the use of internal trawls does little to change the overall representativeness of the Police Service's civilian workforce.

In August of 2004, the Police Service received funding approval to establish an additional 300 civilian posts over three years. At the same time budget restrictions from the Treasury required the Police Service to abolish 171 civilian posts. These developments provide the Police Service with a significant opportunity to address diversification in the workforce.

As previously reported, the oversight team continues to be concerned that the registration of notifiable interests, intended to encourage openness and transparency within the PSNI, has still not been completed some five years after the Independent Commission's recommendation. The Government agreed with the recommendation, and the authority to implement it is contained in section 51 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. The Police Service subsequently prepared guidance books, and in April of 2004 it issued General Order 17/2004, Registration of Notifiable Interests. The Police Service began implementing the Order requiring police officers to register their membership in seven specified organisations, as well as in any other organisation proclaiming or holding views on race, ethnicity or national identity which could be perceived to be in conflict with section 32 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, and section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Order also prohibited the disclosure of registration information except for specific official reasons. Officers began returning completed forms in sealed envelopes in April of 2004. However, by June of 2004 the registration process was suspended pending a judicial review of the process. By November of 2004 the Police Service had determined that its registration process would not withstand a legal challenge, and terminated the process until such time as it could be reviewed. Documents already submitted by over 4,500 police officers, who regardless of any personal views on the matter seem to have understood their obligations quite clearly, will now be destroyed. The legal arguments as to the Police Service's position notwithstanding, the end result is that some five years after the Independent Commission's recommendation, and three years after this recommendation was accepted by Government and the Police Service, the registration process is once again suspended until further notice. This is a disappointing outcome.

▶▶ **training, education and development**



Background

The Independent Commission addressed the subject of training, education and development and focussed on the restructuring of this critical area as being pivotal for a successful transformation of the Police Service. The Independent Commission recommended the development of a Training, Education and Development (TED) Strategy for both the recruit and in-service training programs. The TED Strategy was to clearly demonstrate the inter-connection between the overall aims of the recommendations, and the objectives and priorities set out in the future policing plans of the Police Service and the Policing Board. The Independent Commission also emphasised the importance of a new state of the art Police College as critical to the long term success of the training programme and the transformation of Northern Ireland's Police Service. The new Police College was seen as the cornerstone to providing the recruit officer as well as seasoned police and civilian personnel with the environment conducive to modern learning and development techniques.

Progress and Accomplishments

The Learning Advisory Council (LAC) is evolving into an integral body of the PSNI's overall training strategy, and provides a critical input from a broad community base which includes the business and academic sectors among others. Although membership does not encompass all levels of community representation, the LAC initiative continues to raise general awareness of the PSNI and its training objectives. Participants interviewed showed an increasing awareness of the need for independence in their approach, as the role of the LAC might in future play a more effective and proactive role in determining the development of training policy. There is a strong commitment among participants to continue their efforts on the LAC, on behalf of their fellow citizens.

The Police College Registrar's Office continues to develop and is expected to be fully operational within the next six months. The Registrar function will incorporate a number of key management tools, including a workload timetable and formula to make more efficient use of instructors, as well as provide an overview of the number of courses and programmes running at any given time. The integration of major core themes including human rights, equality and diversity in all training and learning courses offered by the Police College, is progressing. Integration at the district level remains at the discretion and initiative of DCU trainers rather than being a structured programme. The development of the training programme for the Part Time Reserve (PTR) remains ongoing, with certain aspects already outsourced to community colleges and universities. If successful, this approach may allow for the greater use of outsourcing and public facilities in the future.

To date over 1,200 police recruits have completed their foundation training, and are presently either probationary or full constables. A PSNI occupational psychologist has included many among this large group of developing police officers in a longitudinal study to determine their views on: diversity, the learning climate at the Police College, levels of organisational commitment to change, and feelings of job satisfaction, among others. The study includes evolving views over different intervals of the first three years of recruit/probationer life. By providing empirical and anecdotal data that feeds back into the management of the Foundation Programme, this represents a good example of an evaluative mechanism for reviewing and developing training policy. Collaboration

efforts between the PSNI and other police training facilities in the UK, USA and Canada are continuing, with the course on the Leadership in the Counter Terrorism Environment (LICTE) offering a recent illustration.

Another example of collaboration and the potential benefits of dividing training needs between the Police Service and outside organisations is the work of Mediation Northern Ireland. This is an independent, voluntary organisation established in 1991 which has been engaged with policing since 2001. Among Mediation Northern Ireland's work with the Police Service is a course on diversity and community relations, first delivered to police recruits in late 2003. Since then every group of recruits has taken the course. Members of Centrex, the national police training body of the UK, and of the oversight team attended this course, and both have remarked favourably on its content and usefulness, as have course participants themselves.

The Policing Board continues to enhance its ability to monitor the Police Service's TED Strategy and continues to assess progress using a monitoring framework of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The monitoring framework also serves to measure the PSNI's progress in meeting the objectives of the Policing Plan for 2004-2007.

A Memorandum of Understanding is being developed between the PSNI's Director of Training and his counterpart at the Garda Siochanna College. This is expected to formalise links and exchanges between the two training institutions, and also the development of joint training opportunities. Joint training in the policing of diversity, announced in November of 2004, is a good example of the cooperation that can benefit both organisations. A working committee of six members has been agreed, to ensure continuity of effort and a more structured approach to exchanges.

The Oversight Commissioner and evaluator visited the site of the proposed Police College at Cookstown, Co. Tyrone, and were impressed with the site and current draft plans. The expected completion date remains 2007, however as of 30 September 2004 there had been no announcement on the securing of funding for construction.

Areas of Concern

The training needs analysis completed for Training Branch identified that over 80% of training is obligatory or mandated. Aside from other effects, such a large mandatory training burden diminishes the organisation's ability to adapt rapidly to evolving training needs, such as the more recent need to train police officers and civilian staff in human rights, policing with the community and legislative changes. Moreover, as policing in Northern Ireland evolves, currently unforeseen training needs will also have to be addressed. An example of a burdensome rote training regime is a firearms training standard that requires general duty police officers in Northern Ireland to meet re-qualification standards developed for Special Weapons Units in other UK police forces. As noted in our September thematic report on training, the training capacity issue relating to satisfying both current operational and emerging training needs is the single largest strategic issue to address, by both the Police Service and the Policing Board.

The issue of developing and finalising Service Level Agreements (SLAs) between Training Branch and DCU Commanders remains unresolved some five years after being recommended by the Independent Commission; as we have reported previously the piloting of SLAs is ongoing in three



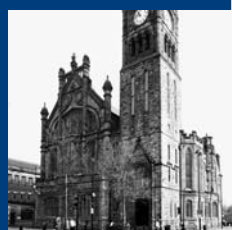
▶▶ culture, ethos and symbols

DCUs. The lack of clarity on the role of district trainer, and whether these represent an operational or a training resource, is only one issue that SLAs might serve to resolve.

The appropriate civilianisation of training positions also remains a long way from being resolved. The intent was to introduce competent professionals with appropriate skill sets who have a different understanding of society compared to their police counterparts, however the civilian recruitment process has not shown much evidence of progress. In addition, it leaves many police officers in positions that could be filled by skilled civilians, while prohibiting the benefits of greater civilian integration already manifested in other areas of the Police Service. Appropriate civilianisation would also help to address the difficulties noted in attracting trainers from the Police's Service's pool of operational police officers. PSNI demographics project a growing number of retirements over the next two to three years, along with redeployment requests from current training staff. These all work to stretch the existing cadre of instructors, and the challenge will be to ensure that the training programme benefits from the best and most experienced instructors. It has been reported that an incentive programme, to entice and retain skilled instructors, is being recommended by Training Branch. This should be addressed in the coming management planning cycle and may assist the retention issue.

The PSNI's tutor constable programme has the potential to be considered a best practice in policing, and has been noted by the oversight team in past reports. Since its inception the tutor constable programme has proven its value, particularly to new police officers, while also being popular with the experienced officers which are at its core. However, growing numbers of probationers have resulted in an increasing workload for the relatively limited number of tutors; tutors interviewed were fearful that work overload could jeopardise the undoubted success of the programme, while also discouraging more experienced officers from participating in the programme and passing on their wealth of experience and information. A training programme developed by the Police College is designed to address some of these concerns, nevertheless the Police Service and the Policing Board will need to monitor this as an area of potential risk, particularly given the critical impact on future police officers.

Finally, there are a number of recommendations from the Independent Commission that deal with the concept of the PSNI's openness and transparency. In the training area they include the issues of publication of training curricula, public attendance at police training sessions and the development of a pilot citizen's course, to name but a few. The PSNI has reported progress on some of these issues, however actual results are few. Among other benefits, increased transparency underpins the organisation's adoption of policing with the community as its core policing philosophy. This issue, including training's contribution, will be examined in greater detail with a thematic report on human rights and accountability, and the related recommendations on openness and transparency, in our oversight report scheduled for release in May of 2005.



Background

Lead responsibility for the critical issues of name and symbols was assumed by the Northern Ireland Office, while the Police Service managed the detailed research and consultation challenges of designing and procuring new uniforms. The Police Service has responsibility for defining a neutral working environment. The Policing Board has a critical role to play in interpreting community values and their expression in the change process.

Progress and Accomplishments

The oversight team will continue to monitor the Police Service's compliance with its policy on maintaining a neutral working environment. Funding for the construction of a police museum remains under consideration.

Areas of Concern

There are no specific areas of concern for this report.

▶▶ co-operation with other police services



Background

The Independent Commission was asked to make proposals concerning the scope for structured cooperation with An Garda Síochána and other police forces. The Independent Commission's discussion in this area recognised the excellent operational cooperation between the (then) Royal Ulster Constabulary and other police agencies around the world. However, it noted that cooperation could be improved. The Independent Commission also noted that the globalisation of crime required police services around the world to collaborate with each other more effectively, and that the exchange of best practice ideas between police services would help the effectiveness of domestic policing.

Progress and Accomplishments

Overall, the current level of cooperation between the Police Service and An Garda Síochána, both at the leadership and operational level, is excellent and is not a concern. The legal protocols and agreements dealing with North-South exchanges of police officers are finally in place. Three annual PSNI/Garda conferences have taken place, along with North-South crime conferences and disaster planning, as well as an extensive cross-border disaster exercise. It is noteworthy that cooperation in the longer term will also be enhanced by such simple things as 19 residents of the Republic of Ireland being successfully appointed as new PSNI police recruits. This represents an entirely different level of cooperation, and indicates that real or perceived barriers are being removed, and that the Independent Commission's intentions are gradually being achieved in ways it did not anticipate.

The Independent Commission's recommendation for the development of a joint PSNI-Garda data base has since been overtaken by a European Union policing solution based on the Schengen Information System. This will provide more effective long-term data access on an EU-wide basis. Planned work continues on improved North-South radio and IT links, with successful radio system results reported in one DCU. It is unlikely that this recommendation will be realised quickly on an organisational level. Progress has also been made on a number of ad hoc training contacts and short term exchanges on a North-South, UK and international basis. The announcement on 24 November 2004, by the Chief Constable and the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána, of a joint training initiative in the area of diversity, is a good example of continuing North-South cooperation.

Cooperation and exchanges appear more active with respect to topical issues of research and analysis. For example, using European Union funding, the Assistant Director of the Crime Analysis Unit will consult with and deliver training to the Estonian police during two visits over the next fifteen months. The Crime Analysis Unit has also been working closely with the police of Victoria State, Australia, during 2003-2004. In the last four years thirteen analysts have made study trips to Canada and the United States. With respect to police exchanges, there are currently 21 police officers on exchange to other UK forces, or to Centrex, however none are reported as seconded into the PSNI.

The PSNI continues to support international police missions, with police officers deployed to Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Estonia and Mongolia over the past year. However, following the Chief Constable's announced policy, international commitments have been reduced. The number of PSNI officers deployed to international police missions is approximately eight or nine officers per quarter, as the PSNI focuses on the policing needs of Northern Ireland.

Areas of Concern

A continuing concern, some five years after the Independent Commission made its recommendations, is that no formal North-South exchange of police officers has actually occurred. The remaining hurdle reportedly relates to issues concerning pay and pension equity raised by staff associations in the Republic of Ireland. As previously noted, these recommendations were not only designed to enhance cooperation, but to allow the Police Service to experience an infusion of different ideas and experience from many areas, not least from its neighbouring police service in the Republic of Ireland.

There has been little progress in developing the formal links between Garnerville, Templemore, Tulliallen, and Bramshill (Centrex) recommended by the Independent Commission. The PSNI has only ad hoc contacts with other police services, however nothing like the systematic cooperation or exchanges with other training institutions that the Independent Commission had intended. There are clearly informal linkages, and many important, formative relationships have been established with training institutions beyond the UK and Ireland. Nonetheless, actual results with respect to these recommendations have been few. As noted in our Report No. 9, released in December of 2003, the longer-term concern relates to the strategic development of the PSNI's ability to benefit from policing experience from around the world, while simultaneously contributing its own policing experiences and expertise to global policing partners. This concern remains. Finally, as noted in our thematic training report released in September of 2004, the issues of the lack of training capacity within Training Branch remains a major strategic concern for the Police Service and Policing Board to address.

▶▶ oversight commissioner



Background

It was the belief of the Independent Commission that an independent and eminent person, from outside the United Kingdom or Ireland, should be selected to oversee the implementation of its recommendations. The Governments agreed and Mr. Tom Constantine was selected, accepted the duty and was appointed in May of 2000 for a three-year term. Statutory backing is found in the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, at sections 67 and 68, and in Schedule 4. Mr Constantine retired on 31 December 2003, at which time he was replaced by Mr. Al Hutchinson.

Progress and Accomplishments

The Oversight Commissioner has established an office and small staff in Northern Ireland, along with a United States and Canadian team of experienced senior law enforcement and academic experts to evaluate and report on the progress of change. This is the third public report of 2004, and the twelfth in a series of reports. Full details can be located on our web site at: www.oversightcommissioner.org

The report scheduled for release in May 2005 will constitute our current mandate's final report, and will detail progress or lack of progress on all of the Independent Commission's 175 recommendations. A table detailing the status of all 772 performance indicators will be appended to the report for May of 2005. As well, the May of 2005 report will include a final thematic report on Human Rights and Accountability. The previous two thematics covered Training and Policing with the Community.

Areas of concern

There are no concerns at the present time. Full co-operation from all agencies and organisations has been provided and is expected to continue. Adequate current resourcing and support have been received from the Government, along with respect for our complete independence.

“Policing with the community...encapsulates what most people want to see: the police participating in the community and responding to the needs of that community, and the community participating in its own policing and supporting the police”¹

**THEMATIC REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE INDEPENDENT
COMMISSION ON POLICING FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND:**

POLICING WITH THE COMMUNITY

OFFICE OF THE OVERSIGHT COMMISSIONER
FOR POLICING REFORM

DECEMBER 2004

¹ Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, “A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland, September 1999, p. 41.



Introduction

This special thematic report on Policing with the Community is the second in a series of three thematic appendices designed to provide a more qualitative review of progress in three of the more important foundation blocks of the Independent Commission's findings. The other two key pieces are Training and Human Rights and Accountability.

The Independent Commission recommended that policing with the community become the core function of the Police Service and every police station. This has implications for the structure of the Police Service, for its management, culture, recruitment and training. To its continuing credit the PSNI eagerly adopted the philosophy recommended by the Independent Commission, and developed a Policing with the Community policy and programme that remains impressive in design and delivery. Organisational and individual leadership has delivered impressive results in many, but not all communities. There are many further examples of local partnerships and problem solving initiatives, and both national and international recognition has been achieved with the recognition of a number of PSNI initiatives.

Nonetheless, despite these notable successes in such a short period, there remains much to be accomplished. The oversight team has a collective sense that further progress at an organisational level cannot be achieved and that the policing with the community effort needs to be reinvigorated. The police are not alone in this partnership: at a societal level, full political and community support is not yet forthcoming in all areas of Northern Ireland.

There appears to be a "split force" concept, both organisationally and culturally, whereby policing with the community has devolved into a specialist task, in other words has become the responsibility of a dedicated few. We see little compelling evidence that the entire Police Service is assisting or focusing its complete attention on supporting the Policing with the Community effort.

Our conclusion is that there needs to be a strategic renewal to refresh the initiative, regain organisational momentum, and build on the tremendous amount of good work accomplished and ongoing. Moreover, the Police Service needs to ensure that the entire organisation is focused on and actually demonstrates commitment to supporting policing with the community efforts.

A. Background

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement presented the best opportunity for a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland, with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole. Flowing from the Good Friday Agreement was the work of the Independent Commission on Policing For Northern Ireland, also known as the Patten Commission, which released its report in September of 1999, entitled: "A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland". The report's recommendations were published in the strong belief that they offered the people of Northern Ireland the opportunity to establish an effective and widely accepted police service for which the whole community would be responsible.

The Independent Commission recommended that policing with the community be a core function of the police service and every police station. This is now a statutory function of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) as spelled out in section 32(5) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, which states that "police officers shall, so far as practicable, carry out their functions in cooperation with, and with the aim of securing the support of, the local community"².

² Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, HM Stationary Office, 2000, p. 17.

Crucial to the new beginning envisioned by the Independent Commission, the theme of policing with the community runs throughout its report, and has implications across the Police Service. For example, policing with the community themes affect the structure of the PSNI, its management, culture, recruitment and training among other things. Altogether there are approximately 40 recommendations that deal either directly or indirectly with policing with the community (see attached list).

The definition of policing with the community adopted by the Independent Commission was: *the police working in partnership with the community; the community thereby participating in its own policing; and the two working together, mobilising resources to solve problems affecting public safety over the longer term rather than the police, alone, reacting short term to incidents as they occur*³.

The Independent Commission's long term goal was the delivery of truly effective, locally-based policing that would not only address some of the current issues unique to Northern Ireland, but put it at the leading edge of policing in the United Kingdom, Ireland and internationally. Partnership between the police and the community goes well beyond formal accountability arrangements such as those listed in the Independent Commission's recommendations. Specifically, partnership with the community, which underlies policing with the community, is more than a matter of policing style. It also encompasses attitudes of mind for both for police officers and the public.

In the Independent Commission's own words, policing with the community "is at least as much a matter of philosophy as it is one of method, and it amounts to a profound shift in police thinking and community thinking"⁴. The Independent Commission acknowledged that policing with the community is hard work, and a very different type of policing compared with the reactive, security-focussed policing which most police officers in Northern Ireland had grown accustomed to. If it can be implemented successfully, community partnerships and problem-solving policing leads to a Police Service that is both more widely accepted by the community and more effective in securing the safety of the community. The fundamental question of this thematic report is ultimately whether or not the vision of the Independent Commission is being achieved?

B. The Environment

Clearly, there are communities throughout the world who have embarked on transforming the police and society into a more collaborative approach without facing the unique, historical challenges that confront the people of Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, other policing with the community transformations were often preceded by either an event or legacy that caused a breach in the fabric of the relationship between the police and the community, and which led to feelings of deep mistrust and suspicion on both sides. In that sense at least, the issues facing the PSNI are not so different from those faced by other policing agencies around the world.

When it published its recommendations in 1999, the Independent Commission hoped for an increasingly stable environment in Northern Ireland, where political, church and community leaders could encourage young Catholic and non-Catholic men and women to join the new Police Service. Church leaders, as well as some of the more progressive community representatives, quickly endorsed this concept. However, at the time there was a lack of full political support and

³ A New Beginning, Op. Cit., p. 40.

⁴ Ibid., p. 41.



endorsement for the policing changes, circumstances that unfortunately exist to this day. As this report is being written in late November of 2004, it is not known how long these uncertain circumstances will remain.

Evidence gathered within Northern Ireland over the course of our evaluations indicates that there is a clear institutional commitment to policing with the community within Northern Ireland. The Government has provided the statutory obligation in the Police (Northern Ireland) Acts of 2000 and 2003. The Chairman of the Policing Board, in releasing the Board's Annual Report in September of 2004, noted that the "PSNI, the Board and the DPPs are convinced that the central thrust of policing in Northern Ireland is policing with the community". The Chief Constable, in his most recent Annual Report stated "Policing with the Community lies at the very heart of the work carried out by PSNI. Community policing is proactive, solution-based and community driven, and is based on the premise that the police and local community can and should work together to identify and solve local problems". In its most recent report released in August of 2004, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary noted, in line with the Patten Commission's recommendation 44, that the "PSNI has made an unequivocal commitment to adopt a community policing-based style of service delivery. The Police Service is striving hard to deliver its stated aim of policing with the community"⁵.

Our overall conclusion with respect to the policing environment in Northern Ireland is that while barriers to full community support for policing continue to exist, tremendous effort and commitment on the part of the Police Service, the Policing Board, DPPs and individual communities across Northern Ireland have ensured substantial progress. The principle at this point in time is less the acceptability of the Police Service across the whole community, which arguably is taking place at its own pace, but ensuring that the emerging police-community relationships that have begun to form bring actual results in terms of addressing communities' policing needs.

C. Governance

Recognising that accountability is essential to the credibility of any public institution, the Independent Commission wrote that "accountability involves creating a real partnership between the police and the community, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, families, citizens; [this is] a partnership based on openness and understanding, a partnership in which policing reflects and responds to the community's needs"⁶. In the policing governance structure of Northern Ireland it is the Policing Board that is charged with the responsibility for overseeing the Police Service of Northern Ireland, on behalf of the community, and for ensuring the delivery of an effective and efficient policing service. Through the Chief Constable the Board holds the PSNI to account both for the delivery of policing in general, and for achieving or surpassing the yearly policing targets that the Board develops in conjunction with the Police Service. The Policing Board's Annual Report, released in September of 2004, provides more detail of the results of its Policing Plan for 2003/2004. Our reports have consistently noted the remarkable results the Policing Board has achieved in its relatively short three-year existence. In addition to the role of the Oversight Commissioner, there are a myriad other statutory bodies that deal either directly or indirectly with elements of police accountability, including the Police Ombudsman, HMIC, District Policing Partnerships (DPP), Community Police Liaison Committees, the courts and ultimately, elected political leaders at varying levels.

The purpose of the DPPs, another critical accountability mechanism, is to establish policing priorities for the local policing plan in conjunction with the DCU Commander, monitor police performance against the policing plan, and develop practical ways of gaining the public's cooperation and work to prevent crime. The Annual District Policing Plans, completed for the current year through cooperation with the DCUs, satisfies the first objective, while six public meetings per year, plus bi-annual performance reports by each DCU Commander satisfies the second. There is less certainty regarding the third objective. As noted above, policing with the community cannot succeed without the active participation of the public. There is evidence of numerous pro-active partnerships involving Community-Police Liaison Committees, however there is less specific evidence of similar activities on the part of DPPs.

In assessing where the Police Service stands today in its policing with the community initiatives, and where it might be in the future, there have been a variety of documents, developments, observations and comments that constitute a reasonable basis for assessment. With respect to the governance of the Police Service, and by extension its policing with the community initiative, it must be concluded that there is a robust system of governance and accountability that will facilitate success.

D. Delivery of Policing with the Community

I. Policy

PSNI policy on policing with the community guidelines state clearly "community policing establishes direct accountability between the community and the police at a local level as a result of the partnership". Therefore, responsibility for accountability and for success is ultimately shared. The policy is detailed and comprehensive and captures both the spirit and intent of community policing, while succinctly spelling out the requirements and expectations of the Police Service in this regard.

The Implementation Plan which accompanies the policy also makes appropriate cross-references to principles articulated in the policy, particularly in terms of implications for staffing, police procedures, training, managerial empowerment, service delivery and accountability. The policy on community policing also notes several principles intended to serve as a guideline to both the Police Service and the public.

Amongst the policy's many declarations, ten are particularly worth highlighting:

- community policing is dependent on acceptance and commitment by police officers throughout the organisation, that this is the core function of all policing activity;
- community policing cannot be properly implemented in an organisation where reactive policing is the underlying style;
- community policing involves the whole organisation at every rank and grade. Police officers, police support staff and traffic wardens all have a role to play in policing with the community;

⁵ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Baseline Assessment of the PSNI, April 2004, p.43

⁶ A New Beginning, Op. Cit., p. 8.



- problem solving will be a core function of Community Beat Officers, however, it is not theirs exclusively and all staff within a District Command Unit and Sector will have a role in supporting and implementing problem solving initiatives;
- all members of the Police Service contribute to policing with the community and problem solving initiatives;
- community policing moves away from the incident-driven style of policing, by following a more problem-oriented approach. This means reported crime, complaints and telephone calls no longer serve as the primary determinants of how police resources should be used;
- for community policing to be institutionalised, changes which take community policing beyond a philosophy and into the heart and soul of the police service are necessary. This includes changes in structure, culture, strategy and management style;
- the police officer becomes a generalist responsible for attending complaints, solving problems, activating the community, preventing crime, and undertaking preliminary crime investigation. The discretionary powers of the police officer are recognised and developed;
- the principles of community policing must underpin all policing activities including public order, criminal investigation and anti-terrorist policing; and,
- community policing requires everyone in the Police Service , senior management, operational and specialist officers and support staff, to explore how they implement the principles of community policing through their actions on the job. All police officers, therefore, become Community Police Officer.

It is our view that the Police Service's Policing with the Community policy addresses all the necessary points, and recognises the inputs required to ensure a successful organisational transition. The challenge ultimately is to translate these excellent principles into actions and results, and to ensure their successful delivery and implementation. The question of course is whether or not the PSNI have met the challenge?

2. Results

The issue of where the Police Service stands in terms of implementing the principles laid out in its Policing with the Community policy raises a number of questions. For instance, what has the organisation actually done to ensure that policing with the community is embraced and practiced by all components of the PSNI? What type or degree of formalised training and development have police officers, civilian staff, traffic wardens and others received to assist the adoption of policing with the community? Are district and sector-level personnel regularly included in community consultative processes? What kinds of internal analyses, public surveys and other indicators is the organisation employing, other than anecdotal ones, to assess the degree to which policing with the community has infused all policing functions, and has impacted service delivery accordingly? Has the Police Service implemented an internal performance appraisal system that appropriately captures and recognises efforts supporting the transition to policing with the community? Further, have these been institutionalised to the point where they begin to affect not only performance appraisals but desired transfers and promotions? Finally, what is the organisation doing to ensure that the transition to community policing is supported in the future, and is not discarded in favour of a different policing philosophy?

We recognise that some of these questions may be somewhat premature, as the organisation continues to undergo its transition. That being said, policing with the community has certainly been an objective for long enough for some of these questions to be answered meaningfully. At the very least, in order for the community to be satisfied that the transition is occurring in deed as well as in word, the Police Service should be in a position to demonstrate that it is on the way to being able to answer them all.

As we have noted above, there are many definitions or ways of looking at policing with the community. One example⁷ describes three inter-related elements, or levels of change, which must be at the heart of any successful policing with the community strategy: organisational, tactical and external. These are reflected in many ways in the PSNI's own policy.

Organisational elements and practices that support policing with the community can be broken down further into:

- adopting policing with the community as the organisational philosophy;
- decentralising decision making;
- basing police or beat team within the community, preferably for extended periods; and,
- employing or adopting tools which enhance an organisation's ability to adopt the new policing philosophy, particularly information technology and analytical tools.

Tactical elements and practices include, but are not limited to:

- educating the public about policing and the respective responsibilities of the police and the public;
- proactive policing initiatives which aim to prevent crime and increase public perceptions of community safety; and,
- developing police officers' understanding of the need for problem solving, and designing or adapting a problem solving model.

External elements include, but are not limited to:

- engaging with and building bridges to the community, particularly "estranged" or marginalised communities;
- establishing meaningful policing partnerships with the public; and,
- developing inter-agency partnerships, with both policing and non-policing bodies.

In an effort to determine where the Police Service of Northern Ireland stands on its chosen road to policing with the community, each set of elements will be addressed in turn.



2.1 Organisational

Without doubt there have been favourable accomplishments as the Police Service has re-oriented its primary mode of operation, and has it made the commensurate structural and technical changes essential to supporting policing with the community. As noted in the main portion of this report, the technical requirements supportive of the goals have essentially been achieved. While planning for new methods of policing are in place and certain structures have been positioned, the matter of whether policing with the community is sustained as the core function for all of the Police Service remains open, and there are indications that the “bedding in” process has not yet occurred in every sector or unit.

The Police Service is at an important crossroads of its evolution. Unless the entire organisation accepts the new core value of policing with the community, other factors including the tendency to see community policing as a specialty, akin to work on criminal intelligence or tactical support squads, could work at cross purposes to establishing the philosophy as the organisation's main method of service delivery. Police organisations are traditionally replete with examples of specialty components that enjoy pride in their important tasks and legacies. This is common to most police organisations and is a healthy part of an organisation's working culture and identity. Among other things, these “identities” serve to engender team spirit while also providing an incentive for individuals to seek new and different assignments and experiences. However, the Police Service's best intentions will be frustrated if response officers think or act on different core principles from community beat officers, or action and reaction is seen to be the real core of the organisation. The inevitable outcome will be organisational confusion and, ultimately, a disillusioned community whose trust and faith in its police are diminished. Our evaluation visits over time have left us with the distinct impression that the dominant culture remains that one of action/reaction, from the work of Tactical Support Groups, security intelligence and response, through to training placing a primacy on these functions.

The organisational model selected by the PSNI as a model for launching policing with the community, with its structural split between neighbourhood policing teams and response units, is a strategy which is common to police services in transition; the theory being that the specialist unit will develop methods and techniques which are later adopted and applied across the organisations.

Typically, such a “split force” model exaggerates the differences between units, creates barriers to communication and marginalises the neighbourhood teams. In the jargon of policing this division is notoriously, if inaccurately, identified as soft versus hard policing. Evidence of the tension already felt in DCUs is the difficulty many are having in trying to finding a suitable numerical balance between response and Neighbourhood Policing Teams. Differences are exacerbated by employing different work schedules for the two as well as the Police Service's 2003 decision to pay Neighbourhood Policing Team members a special performance payment. The next logical step in organisational development would be a migration towards a more integrated model of patrolling, where all police officers participate as members of Neighbourhood Policing Teams.

Most policing with the community advocates agree that organisational structures that are more decentralised, have fewer levels of hierarchy, that avoid excessively restrictive rules and procedures, and that exhibit the least degree of policing “specialty”, are the most conducive to the kind of creative, problem solving policing that policing with the community represents. The degree

of devolution undertaken by the Police Service at present is significant, and it has given an important impetus to the policing with the community initiative as a whole. Most importantly this is manifested in the ways in which local DCU Commanders are empowered to make deployment and other decisions that are uniquely crafted to meet the needs of the local community.

Another test is to examine the structure of the service and consider whether it supports or inhibits police officer initiative, creativity, and risk taking in collaboration and problem solving with citizens. By this evaluation, the decentralised structure of Police Service and the devolution of many aspects of financial management and operational decision making are consistent with the themes espoused by the Independent Commission.

In terms of specifics, by late October of 2004 the PSNI had reported a total of 875 police officers serving on Neighbourhood Policing Teams. Other evidence indicates that the approximate number of police officers assigned to DCUs, for roughly the same period, stood at 4,353. This means in effect that Neighbourhood Policing Teams make up roughly 20% of officers assigned to DCUs. There is ultimately no specific percentage or target that a police service should aspire to, and a thematic report prepared by HMIC, entitled “Open all Hours”, notes that local circumstances will dictate deployment decisions⁸.

It is somewhat of a concern that policing with the community may have become overly vested in a small segment of the organisation's structure. While in excess of 400 officers have completed Module I of the Beat Officer's Course, and perhaps a few hundred more have completed Module II, there is no evidence at present that this kind of structured approach has been developed for the benefit of first line supervisors at the sergeant and inspector level. While it would no doubt benefit the Police Service to have some kind of course on policing with the community for all staff, police and civilian, it is probably more important that first line supervisors are addressed, as these individuals are key to the ultimate success of any change programme. This is particularly the case for a change programme as important as shifting the PSNI away from an emphasis of security and towards one of policing with the community.

The presence of many Full Time Reserve (FTR) members involved in delivering policing with the community has been very positive. This is coming to an end however, with the decision on the future of the FTR announced. We note that some DCU Commanders have had sufficient foresight to staff their Neighbourhood Policing Teams with regular police officers, on the understanding that the FTR may one day cease to exist. Such foresight will ultimately result in a more stable and productive relationship with the community, as existing Neighbourhood Policing Teams build on their experience and knowledge of the community. This also raises the issue of the need for the Police Service to address the ‘experience gap’ that might ensue when members of the Full Time Reserve who are involved in policing with the community leave the PSNI or are redeployed.

Finally, with respect to providing the proper tools with which the transition to policing with the community might be better enabled, we have often noted the strengths of the PSNI's crime analyst programme, as well as the many positive results that this has already achieved. At present this is considered an organisation success, to the point where the Police Service is now providing training to other police services, both domestically and internationally. Another important enabler is information technology (IT), and here results are unfortunately not as marked. Although the



Police Service's IT strategy is back on track, and will benefit from increased levels of outside monitoring, the revised Strategic Plan makes no specific mention of policing with the community. In and of itself this omission is a minor issue, however highlights the degree to which the need to transition the PSNI to policing with the community, the acknowledged core philosophy of the Police Service, needs to be incorporated into all aspects of the organisation's development. The synergy between different parts of the organisation, in supporting the transition to policing with the community, should nowhere be more apparent as between IT and front line police officers. Although support to the idea of policing with the community can be inferred from the revised Strategic Plan, it would be reassuring if this were explicitly recognised as the principle end to technology's means.

2.2 Tactical

The Chief Constable's Annual Report for 2003/2004 confirms several innovative problem solving projects, which testify to the ongoing efforts of both senior police leaders, Neighbourhood Policing Teams and progressive community leaders. Equally important, the PSNI's new performance appraisal system for officers also includes a developmental rating for their ability to work in partnership with the community.

There are many examples of effective local relations with community groups and local partners, some of which were recognised both nationally and internationally. For example, the PSNI's policing with the community initiatives gained the UK National Award for Excellence in Problem Oriented Partnerships, or the Tilley Award, as well as being recognised as a finalist for the International Association of Chiefs of Police's Community Policing Award for 2004. Aside from other benefits, these awards underscore the importance of autonomous, local decision making that, while being in accordance with the broad themes and objectives articulated by the Chief Constable, is also tailored to the unique circumstances and needs of the DCU and the community it serves.

It is a concern that beat officers, and even district trainers, are often reported as being reassigned from their community policing duties in order to fill gaps in other areas, principally in response teams. If the Police Service is to remain true to its commitment that the principles of community policing underpin all policing activities, including public order, criminal investigation and anti-terrorist efforts, it cannot afford to routinely deplete the ranks of front line community policing practitioners; at this stage these officers are the only concrete symbols of the organisation's transformation that the public can readily identify.

In addition, replacements for community policing officers who are drawn from the ranks of the Full Time Reserve have not been clearly identified. This exacerbates an already uncertain situation, and would tend to buttress the public perception that policing with the community is a specialised assignment rather than being an overarching value that defines the entire organisation.

Unfortunately, this perception largely mirrors that found by the Independent Commission in its initial evidence-gathering work. It is clear that what the Police Service will repeatedly face during this period of transition is the belief, however erroneous, that the entire initiative has somehow lost momentum, or was intended as a superficial "overlay" which would not fundamentally affect the Police Service's views of and relationship with the wider community.

It is understood that policing with the community is a strategic process, with results measured through improved relationships with the public and diminishing rates of crime and disorder. There is evidence of low public satisfaction with policing at present, which is perhaps founded on relatively high levels of public expectation, particularly as found in the Community Attitude Study 2003, the Policing Board's Annual Report for 2003/2004, the Report on Police Performance, and the DPP Consultation Survey for 2004. While complete public satisfaction may be a goal always beyond the reach of any public institution, we have also found expressions of public dissatisfaction to be healthy indicators of new communication processes and often evidence of high levels of public hopes for improvement. By contrast, the current experience with falling crime rates may be a proxy for early success with collaborative community problem solving. There are certainly positive indicators as well, including reducing domestic burglaries by almost 12%, while the number of vehicle crimes went down by over 17%.

Oversight evaluations carried out in September of 2004, along with previous evaluations, revealed encouraging signs of collaborative problem solving between the police and assorted business and social service agency partners. Crime prevention through environmental design, community text messaging systems, vacation security checks – all of these and more – are manifestations of an organisation that has begun to place greater value on its relationship with the community. The challenge the Police Service must accept is that programmes alone are not a basis for concluding that policing with the community is an embraced core doctrine, without the commensurate organisational infrastructure necessary to assure its sustainability. There must also be an inculcated value system emanating from both the senior leadership and the Police College.

The PSNI has adopted the National Intelligence Model (NIM) as the basic framework for combining information and analysis in a rigorous approach to law enforcement. The concepts and methods of NIM were adroitly launched and eagerly accepted by members of the Police Service. While this initiative is fully endorsed, enthusiasm for detecting and investigating crime will always be more successful if carried out in cooperation with an informed and supportive community. To this point officers assigned to investigative duties have received only a cursory introduction to the core philosophy of policing with the community. Localised training would encourage investigators to work collaboratively with neighbourhood officers to prevent and solve crimes and apprehend offenders.

There is perhaps no greater mandate for any police agency than police visibility: the need to be seen, and how they are perceived. While much debate on international criminal justice issues remains centred on the deterrent values of police presence, there is little disagreement about the perceived sense of enhanced community security and safety when police are felt to be omnipresent, and where police-community interactions are a normal part of community life. Over the course of our oversight work we have noted the perceptions of both the public and the police as these pertain to issues of police visibility. It is our unqualified view that the relationship between the police and the public has begun to evolve into a more informed and cooperative one than before. As police increase their presence within the community, this relationship can only improve. There are growing examples of increased visibility, including the deployment of walking beat officers in high visibility jackets, bicycle patrols, single vehicle patrols. Unfortunately, this cannot yet occur equally in all parts of Northern Ireland.



2.3 External

Several of the Independent Commission's recommendation revolved around the need to make existing police stations progressively less forbidding in appearance, more accessible to public callers and more congenial for those working in them, including a public reception area inside police stations more welcoming to the public. The limited progress with respect to the defortification of many police stations seems out of context for officers directed to carry out community outreach initiatives, while also attempting to demonstrate a more engaging style in their everyday duties. While these may well be their objectives as they work in their community, police officers must then return to an environment that serves mainly as a stark reminder of a different kind of relationship with the public. The forbidding appearance of many stations also serves to discourage the public from visiting, either to report crime or to make enquiries. If policing with the community is to be pursued as a core philosophy this must impact on every facet of operations, not least the Police Service's physical environment in which to engage the public.

Finally, it seems appropriate at this point to remind readers once again that the Police service's efforts represent only a part of a successful transition to policing with the community. The other part must come from the community itself, and as long as barriers to full political and community support for policing continue to exist, no amount of effort and commitment on the part of the PSNI will make this transition fully successful. Although media and other reports show time and again that the Police Service is able to do things which would have been considered impossible only a few years ago, and that its relationship with the community is much improved, there is still a long way to go before the PSNI can be said to enjoy the support of the whole community. Until that time comes, these communities will continue to be exposed and vulnerable, ironically often from those who have set themselves up as the community's erstwhile "protector". Unfortunately, in many instances these self-proclaimed protectors are no more than simple criminals, who realise the threat to their power base and profit-making posed by improved relations between police and community.

E. Conclusion

Our cumulative oversight reports have found progressive success along with organisational and individual leadership involved in the policing with the community core theme. This has led to both national and international recognition in the form of awards for policing with the community programmes, as well as the important community recognition in the many areas affected.

Our overall conclusion however, is that the effort is in need of reinvigoration, as policing with the community does not yet permeate the entire organisation as its core means of service delivery as envisioned by the Independent Commission, and as agreed by the Police Service itself. While it must be acknowledged that the PSNI does not operate in a completely enabling environment due to the lack of full community support, if the Independent Commission's intent is to be realised it will be necessary to extend organisational efforts to the next level. This would include a "review and renew" effort at the strategic level, with particular emphasis on how every part of the organisation can ensure that policing with the community is the core philosophy and means of service delivery, not just member of Neighbourhood Policing Teams. This is particularly crucial given the "split force" model adopted by the Police Service. If the successes to date can be built upon, and if the challenges of policing with the community can be translated into meaningful objectives across the entire organisation, success in this critical initiative can certainly be achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS WITH EITHER DIRECT OR INDIRECT POLICING WITH THE COMMUNITY IMPLICATIONS

Recommendation	Issue/Area
1	Human Rights Based Policing
27	District Policing Partnerships (DPP)
29, 30	DPP Meetings and Reports
33	Community Consultative Forums
36	Public Meetings of DPPs
37	Openness of the Police Service
44 - 51	Policing with the Community
52, 53	Appearance of Police Stations
54	Authority of DCU Commanders
55, 56, 57	Police Vehicles
65	An Unarmed Police Service
76	Authority of DCU Commanders
78	Accountability of DCU Commanders
92	Appearance of Police Stations
96	Creation of DCUs
97	Change of Headquarters
104	Enlargement of Part Time Reserve
113, 115	Community Leader and School Support
116	Police Cadet Schemes
126	Registration of Interests
129	New Training Strategy
132	Service Level Agreements
138, 139	New Student's Curricula
141	New Policing Arrangements
146	Neighbourhood Beat Training
148	Public Attendance at Training Sessions
149	Pilot Citizen's Course



▶▶ notes



▶▶ notes