

THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON POLICING FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

2.1 The Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland began work shortly after its establishment on 3 June 1998. The membership of the Commission was as follows:

The Right Honourable Christopher Patten, CH, formerly Governor of Hong Kong and a Cabinet Minister;

Dr Maurice Hayes, a Member of the Irish Senate and previously Northern Ireland Ombudsman and Permanent Secretary in the Northern Ireland Department of Health and Social Services;

Dr Gerald Lynch, President of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York;

Kathleen O'Toole, a career police officer, previously Massachusetts Secretary for Public Safety, currently an administrator at Boston College.

Professor Clifford Shearing, Professor of Criminology and Sociology at the University of Toronto and a Professor within the School of Government at the University of the Western Cape.

Sir John Smith, former Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and a former Inspector of Constabulary;

Mr Peter Smith QC, a barrister practising in Northern Ireland;

Mrs Lucy Woods, former Chief Executive of British Telecom in Northern Ireland and BT Ireland.

2.2 The Secretary of the Commission was Mr Robert Peirce of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; he was assisted by Mr Alan Tipping of the Northern Ireland Office, Chief Superintendent David Griffin of the Humberside Police, Dr Michael Boyle of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, Mrs Gwen Mawhinney of the Department of Finance and Personnel and other secretariat staff. Liaison with the police was facilitated by Superintendent Sheamus Hamill.

2.3 The Commission held its first meeting on 11-12 June 1998. It held some sixty days of plenary meetings. The Commission began its work by briefing itself, through meetings, research and reading, on the background to the Agreement and the establishment of the Commission, on the present policing arrangements in Northern Ireland, on previous reports on policing in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, and on developments and debates concerning police worldwide. In a press conference on 12 June 1998 the Chairman called for views from members of the public and over the next three weeks advertisements were placed in Northern Ireland's main newspapers and in every public library inviting the public to write to Commissioners with their opinions on policing. Additionally, 130 letters were sent to political parties, churches, non-governmental organisations and others known to have a particular interest in policing. From the beginning the Commission collectively, and Commissioners individually, had numerous private meetings with a range of people – clerics, politicians, civil liberties groups, community and youth workers, editors, academics, and others – as well as visiting every police sub-division, other police stations, headquarters departments and meeting individual police officers. In October the Commission entered into a more public phase of its work, beginning with taking oral submissions in public

meetings with political parties, business and trades union groups, and others (a list of those who gave such submissions is in Annex 2). A series of open meetings was then held in every District Council area in Northern Ireland. The main programme of meetings was conducted in November and December 1998 and further meetings were held during the course of this year (list at Annex 3). A number of meetings, public and private, were held with youth groups. In all more than 10,000 people attended the public meetings, with over 1,000 speaking. In addition about 450 further written submissions were handed in at these meetings, most of them on forms distributed by the Commission for this purpose, so that the total number of individual written submissions received was approximately 2,500. We also received a number of petitions, signed by several thousand people, and several standardised letters. All submissions and petitions were read by Commissioners. During this public phase of their work the Commissioners also continued to have numerous private meetings with groups and individuals. Consultants were engaged to conduct a focus group study, involving eight focus groups selected from different traditions and backgrounds; other consultants, with the cooperation of the RUC, undertook a cultural audit of the police. In May/June 1999 we carried out a survey of public attitudes to policing. The Commission visited the Garda Síochána in the Republic of Ireland, as well as a number of police services in Great Britain, Canada, South Africa, Spain and the United States (a list of all the police services we consulted or visited is contained in Annex 4). We also visited the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and attended a number of policing conferences, and conferences concerned with human rights.

2.4 In the next chapter of our report we analyse the main findings from the surveys undertaken on our behalf, from our public meetings and from the oral and written submissions to us. We try to put them in the context of the many previous surveys of opinion on policing. Few police services in the world can have been examined more frequently than the RUC. The time has come to try to draw some conclusions from all those surveys and then to ensure that the police service get on with the job of forging a comprehensive and constructive partnership for peace within the community.

2.5 After our review of attitude surveys, our report addresses the main issues of policing. First, in Chapter 4, we consider the purpose of policing, which we define as the protection of human rights, and we make proposals to reorient policing in Northern Ireland onto an approach based on upholding human rights and respecting human dignity. This approach underlies the whole of our report, from the relationship between police and public, through the way in which policing services are delivered, to the organisation, recruitment and training of the police. In Chapters 5 and 6 we look at the question of police accountability to the community, and we make proposals for greater accountability, communication and transparency at all levels. We go on to propose, in Chapters 7 to 11, a different style of policing, with the police working more directly in the community and in partnership with the community to solve public safety problems together; and with the neighbourhood police officers given the latitude and the management and technical support they require to deliver the services that their neighbourhoods need. In Chapters 12 to 14 we consider how the police service should be structured and composed in order to operate effectively and efficiently in this new style. In Chapters 15–17 we consider the recruitment, training and development of police officers, and the culture and ethos of the police service, all of which are critical to the achievement of the aims in the chapters that go before. Chapter 18 deals with the relationship with other police services. Chapter 19 proposes arrangements for overseeing the entire programme of change in the policing arrangements for Northern Ireland. Finally, in Chapter 20 we provide a list of all the recommendations in this report.

2.6 The recommendations in the following chapters are interlinked. Together they amount to a transformed police service in Northern Ireland, to the new beginning called for in the Agreement and to the sort of police service which we believe most people want – open, accessible, responsive to local needs, effective and efficient. But, as we said in Chapter 1 and as we say again throughout the report, although several of our recommendations may be possible to implement in any event, the full transformation of policing envisaged in this report will be possible only with active community support and with a continuing commitment to peace.