

13

SIZE OF THE POLICE SERVICE

- 13.1** As we noted in Chapter 12, the RUC currently has close to 13,000 officers – a regular force of 8,500, a Full Time Reserve of 2,900 and a Part Time Reserve of 1,300 – and some 3,000 (full time equivalent) civilians. For a population of 1.675 million this is a large police service. A comparable geographical area with a comparable population elsewhere in the United Kingdom would, according to the Home Office model, have a police service of about 4,300 officers and 1,700 civilians. Before the present Troubles began, the RUC was even smaller than that.
- 13.2** We found virtually no dissent from the view that, if the Agreement holds and Northern Ireland becomes a more peaceful society, police numbers should be substantially reduced. This view is held across the political spectrum, across the communities and among the police and experts in policing. There are differences as to how far numbers should be reduced, and how soon it would be wise or safe to reduce them, but nearly everyone expects the police service of the future to be significantly smaller than it is now.
- 13.3** It is difficult if not impossible to be scientifically precise about the size of the police establishment that will be required. But we believe it is possible to reach an objective estimate based on the security situation in Northern Ireland as we have observed it over the past 17 months since the Agreement, on the level of crime, and on the role of the police, style of policing and structure of the police service that we have recommended in this report.
- 13.4** The security situation since the Agreement, although greatly improved in comparison with the situation before the ceasefires, has by no means yet come to resemble the situation faced by other police services in the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland or most of the other countries we have visited during our work. Box 8 shows the paramilitary activities in the fourteen months from 1 June 1998. The worst single atrocity since the Troubles began occurred in Omagh in August 1998, when a bomb in a crowded shopping street killed 29 people. All the main paramilitary groups remain in being, with their weapons still not decommissioned, and while this is so the threat of a return to the levels of terrorist violence seen in the past cannot be confidently ruled out. Meanwhile paramilitary assaults (sometimes known as punishment beatings) continue unabated, often resulting in serious injuries or deaths.

8 – PARAMILITARY ACTIVITIES		
1 JUNE 1998 – 31 JULY 1999		
	ATTRIBUTABLE TO LOYALIST GROUPS	ATTRIBUTABLE TO REPUBLICAN GROUPS
Shooting Incidents	96	64
Bombing Incidents	122	14
Deaths	9	34
Injuries from Shootings	48	39
Injuries from Other Assaults	114	70

Source: RUC statistics, August 1999.

- 13.5** Public order policing remains a large demand on police resources. As we have noted in Chapter 9, Drumcree alone has required numbers of officers ranging from a few hundred to 2,500 at a time since July 1998, and one officer has lost his life during that operation. We are unable to predict with any confidence when problems of this sort will be consigned to history, and they must therefore be included in planning policing commitments for the time being. As we argued in Chapter 9, we believe that the capacity to deal with these commitments must exist within the Northern Ireland police, so as to avoid too much reliance on the army and in the absence of available help from other police services.
- 13.6** Non-terrorist crime in Northern Ireland is at relatively low levels compared with the rest of the United Kingdom. Many people have expressed to us the fear that crime levels may increase in the future – a perverse sort of “peace dividend”. The latest statistics bear this out; total recorded crime in 1998/99 was up 28% on the previous year, with crimes against the person up by 33%¹. Terrorism is thought in some respects to have suppressed ordinary criminality, because it has involved some people who might otherwise have turned to crime, and because it has resulted in higher levels of security alert which deter the ordinary criminal. A more normal security environment might therefore lead to more “normal” criminality. The growth of the drug problem in Northern Ireland – still small by the standards of Dublin or Edinburgh but growing fast – was mentioned to us time and again in our consultations of public opinion. There are also concerns that some terrorist groups, or members of groups, may turn from terrorism to drugs or other forms of organized criminal activity. These are speculations, but we take them seriously enough not to base our calculations of future policing commitments on an assumption that Northern Ireland’s level of crime will remain as low as it is now.
- 13.7** We have recommended a new style of policing which involves much more active partnerships with the community, and a more visible and regular police presence on the streets. Community-based policing demands manpower. We have been told several times over the past year that some police services in England and Wales find it difficult to meet the demands of community policing because they have cut numbers by too much. It is beyond our remit to make a judgment about that, but we note that in the United States a national commitment to community policing entailed the recruitment of substantial numbers of additional police officers. So we must be wary of setting too much store by policing levels in other countries, and not only because of the differences in the security situations and in public order requirements. We also need to take account of the need – explained in detail in Chapter 16 – for extensive training and retraining of all officers in the new style of policing described in Chapters 7 to 11. This will involve several hundred officers being in training at any given time.
- 13.8** These considerations lead us to the view that it would be wrong in the foreseeable future to reduce police numbers in Northern Ireland to a level comparable with the rest of the United Kingdom. We believe that the full-time officer strength should be substantially above the 4,300 suggested by the Home Office model for England and Wales (one officer per 390 head of population). But we also believe that it should be substantially below the present level of 11,500 (one officer per 140 head of population). We believe that the changes already seen in the security situation are sufficient to permit some downsizing; and our observations suggest to us that many police officers are now routinely under-employed. The more streamlined structure for the police service that we

¹ Report of the Chief Constable 1998/99, June 1999

recommend in Chapter 12, with fewer layers of management and fewer district commands, should result in substantial savings of personnel. In Chapter 10 we have recommended the civilianisation of as many as 1,000 jobs now being done by police officers.

13.9 *We recommend that, provided the peace process does not collapse and the security situation does not deteriorate significantly from the situation pertaining at present, the approximate size of the police service over the next ten years should be 7,500 full-time officers.* We stress that this is approximate. This cannot be a precise science, and it is an important proposition of this report that the Chief Constable should have some discretion as to the precise numbers and ranks of officers and civilians who should be employed within the budget at his/her disposal; so the figure of 7,500 is a notional one, which we believe should form the basis of the budget given to the Chief Constable. We would find it difficult to justify a figure much higher than that, and we would consider it rash to go for one much lower unless and until Northern Ireland can be judged with confidence to have become a permanently peaceful society. The figure we propose (at one officer per 220 head of population) is high compared with the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland, but it is comparable with that in New York, where the NYPD has overall about one officer per 200. The numbers should be reviewed in due course, but our judgment at this stage is that a consolidation period of ten years would be sensible. It would be both dangerous and expensive to cut the police service by more than we propose only to find that this was a mistake.

13.10 We have worked with a team of consultants on a possible model for the establishment of the police over the ten year period. The model covers the downsizing of the police service over an initial three year period, and a change in the composition of the service by means of a new recruitment strategy over the course of the full ten years (the composition and recruitment aspects are covered in Chapters 14 and 15).

13.11 As far as the size of the service is concerned our model assumes that:

- all early retirements from the regulars will be on a voluntary basis, as they must be in law
- the normal early retirement age for regular police officers will be 50 years
- management will be able to decline to allow an officer to take early retirement if his/her skills need to be retained
- an estimated 80% of regular officers aged 50 and above will take up the early retirement offer
- the Full Time Reserve will be phased out over three years, after a reasonable notice period, as officers' contracts expire
- an early retirement package will also be offered to officers under 50 years of age who have more than five years service and some 800 of them might opt to take it
- recruitment will be increased to 370 new officers per year (see Chapters 14 and 15).

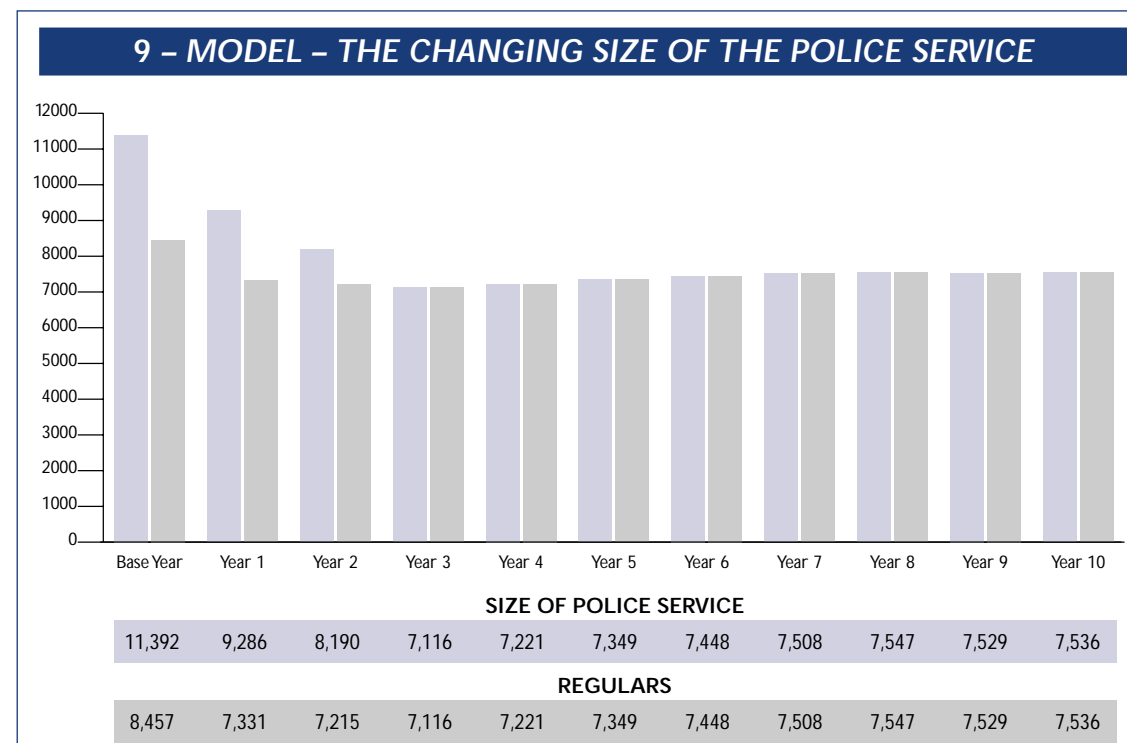
13.12 *We recommend that the early retirement or severance package offered to regular officers and full time reservists aged 50 or above should include a generous lump sum payment according to the length of service, pension enhancement of up to five years, early payment of pension commutation entitlement and payment in lieu of pension until pensionable age is reached. We also recommend that full time reservists should be treated as far as possible in the same way as regular officers.* Although full time

reservists serve on three year contracts, many of them have served for much longer. They have shared the dangers faced by regular colleagues. As we have said in Chapter 12, our recommendation that a full time reserve will no longer be necessary as part of the new policing arrangements is in no way a reflection on the individuals who serve in the reserve. Some of these officers may choose to apply for regular service and will have valuable skills and experience to contribute.

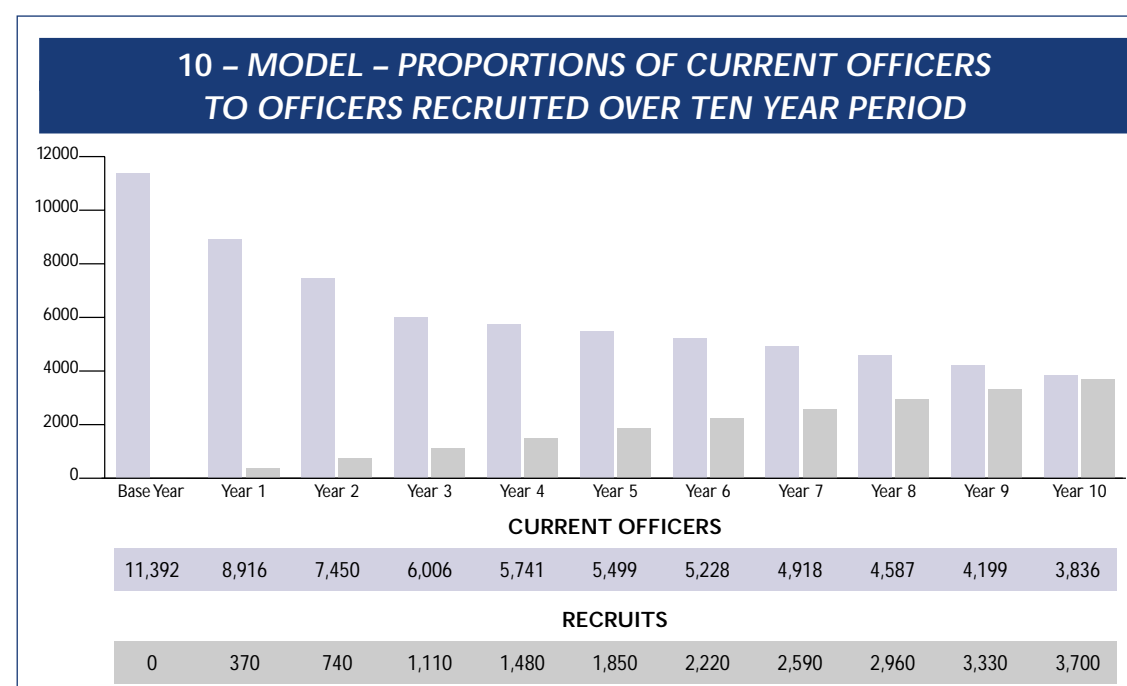
13.13 We also recommend a substantial lump sum payment for regular officers with more than five years service and all full time reservists, leaving the police service before the age of 50. In their case their pensions would be preserved and would come into payment at the normal retirement age.

13.14 The purpose of our modelling exercise was not to prescribe early retirement severance packages in detail. That must be a matter for negotiation with the staff associations. But we considered it necessary to examine in general terms the sort of scheme that might be appropriate, given the undertakings already made to the police by government and the need to attract sufficient numbers of officers to opt for early retirement. The order of magnitude we have used in our model for the lump sum payments – which we stress is illustrative not prescriptive – is that officers would receive sums rising to a maximum of the equivalent of three years salary for those with more than twelve years service.

13.15 The assumptions made in paragraph 13.11 about the numbers who will opt for these packages cannot be precise. The figures we have used for the packages are also estimates. But we would not consider that we had fulfilled our terms of reference properly if we did not give some indications of how we expected the establishment of the police service to develop over the next few years, how generously retiring police officers should be rewarded for years of service in very difficult circumstances, and how much the entire process might cost. As the chart in box 9 shows, we would expect the size of the police service to fall rapidly in the first three years, reaching a low of just over 7,100 in year 3, and stabilising after that at about 7,500.



As box 10 shows, at the end of the ten year period nearly 50% of police officers would have been recruited since the new arrangements began, and slightly over 50% would be officers already serving when they began.



13.16 The overall cost of financing the change would also occur in the first three years, with net savings to be made from year 4 onwards, and the entire process being cost neutral over the ten year period. Beyond ten years, the cost of funding a police service of 7,500 or less, will of course be much less than the cost of a service of 11,400 (full time). But the transitional process, as we warned in Chapter 1, will not be cheap (see box 11).

11 – MODEL – INDICATIVE COST IMPLICATIONS OF PROPOSED DOWNSIZING AND RECRUITMENT PROGRAMME OVER TEN YEAR PERIOD

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	TOTAL
Exit Costs £ million	206	135	134	57	56	63	73	82	94	95	995
Savings £ million	58	87	111	110	107	104	102	101	101	101	982
Net Cost £ million	148	48	23	-53	-51	-41	-29	-19	-7	-6	13

13.17 Many officers, particularly Full Time Reservists but also those opting to retire, will wish to find other employment. Some will need help over training to learn new skills, or advice as to how to set up businesses or search for a job. Such help is currently provided by the Police Retraining and Rehabilitation Trust (PRRT), but the PRRT resources will be insufficient to deal with the much larger number of officers who will need assistance as a result of the proposals above. The Training and Employment Agency in Northern Ireland has extensive experience of developing support measures for people looking for new jobs when large employers restructure their organizations. *We recommend that the Training and Employment Agency should develop measures for police officers (and civilians) seeking other employment, in consultation with police management and the*

staff associations. The Police Retraining and Rehabilitation Trust should have a role in this programme, and should have enhanced staffing and funding to enable it to deal with a substantially larger workload.

13.18 We do not wish to be prescriptive about the exact measures that the Training and Employment Agency should put in place. Broadly we believe that there should be a scheme similar to the successful ones offered by organizations such as the Army and by British Telecommunications plc. Typically such schemes include:

- Professional career consultancy and advice with financial assistance
- Specialist assessment of business proposals for those considering self-employment
- Time allowed for job hunting and interviews
- Grant aid for training
- New lifestyle advice for the over 50s
- A career bridge for those wishing to work in the community before starting a new career
- Familiarisation attachments offering a few days work experience with potential new employers.

13.19 Some members of the full time reserve may wish to resume their policing career elsewhere, perhaps in police services in Great Britain such as the Metropolitan Police. *We recommend that police recruiting agencies in Great Britain should take full account of the policing experience of former RUC reservists in considering applications for employment in police services in Great Britain.*

13.20 *We also recommend that the British government should offer former reservists the opportunity to participate in British policing contingents in United Nations peacekeeping operations* (see also paragraph 18.20). Their skills, including firearms knowledge, could well be in demand in such operations.

13.21 We have already recommended, in Chapter 12, an enlarged Part Time Reserve of up to 2,500 officers (compared with the present 1,300), recruiting in particular from those areas where there are currently very few reservists or none at all. The total police officer strength would therefore be 7,500 regulars and 2,500 locally-based part-timers.