

OVERSEEING CHANGE

- 19.1** The Agreement described policing as a central issue in any society and, as we noted in the first paragraphs of this report, the role of Northern Ireland's police service, and general questions of policing policy and practice, are central to the principles of the Agreement itself and to its implementation. We have been very conscious of this during our work and the recommendations in this report are our unanimous conclusions, reached after exhaustive consultations over the past year and much careful thought. We believe they reflect not just what people want for policing in Northern Ireland, but also what they want for Northern Ireland society – a new beginning based on reconciliation and tolerance, respect for human rights and human dignity, partnership, peace and democracy. One of our focus group members said that “the police should not reflect our society, but what we want for our society; society should always attempt to get better”. We agree. The transformation of policing proposed in this report is, we believe, an integral part of the process of transforming Northern Ireland in the way that the great majority of people want it to be transformed.
- 19.2** We therefore consider it vital that the recommendations in this report should be implemented comprehensively and faithfully. No individual and no commission can claim omniscience and we do not contend that every recommendation in our report is correct in every particular (indeed we have deliberately avoided being too prescriptive of matters of detail for this reason), but we do firmly believe that the essentials of our recommendations represent a package which must be implemented comprehensively if Northern Ireland is to have the policing arrangements it needs. The separate chapters of this report represent different aspects of an integral whole; they are all inter-related. 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.
- 19.3** Implementation of the recommendations in this report requires changes not only within the police service itself but also in other bodies that have responsibility for policing. We have proposed an entirely new Policing Board, and a network of District Policing Partnership Boards. The Police Ombudsman, although the outcome of an earlier report, is an institution coming into being only now as this report issues, and several of our recommendations concern the role of the Ombudsman. We believe that a mechanism is needed to oversee the changes required of all those involved in the development of the new policing arrangements, and to assure the community that all aspects of our report are being implemented and being seen to be implemented.
- 19.4** We have considered carefully how best to meet this objective. We have been impressed by the success achieved in difficult circumstances in the past in Northern Ireland by eminent people from outside, with support from both the unionist and nationalist communities, an obvious recent example being the role played by American Senator George Mitchell in the negotiation of the Agreement. *We recommend that an eminent person, from a country other than the United Kingdom or Ireland, should be appointed as soon as possible as an oversight commissioner with responsibility for supervising the implementation of our recommendations.* We envisage that the commissioner should have perhaps two colleagues, and a small staff in Northern Ireland. The Commissioner and his/her colleagues might review progress with the police command team, the Policing Board

(and DPPBs), the Police Ombudsman and the government three or four times a year. The commissioner would, we believe, be a useful validator of the implementation process, not least in the context of the discussions about the process between governments and parties provided for in the Agreement (paragraphs 6 and 7 of the section on Policing and Justice).

19.5 The oversight commissioner would provide more than a stocktaking function. The review process would provide an important impetus to the process of transformation. *We recommend that the government, the police service, and the Policing Board (and DPPBs) should provide the oversight commissioner with objectives (with timetables) covering their own responsibilities, and that they should report on the progress achieved at the periodic review meetings, and account for any failures to achieve objectives.* All will need to demonstrate to the commissioner their commitment to the objectives of transforming policing, and the commitment of their members and staff. *We recommend that the commissioner should in turn report publicly after each review meeting on the progress achieved, together with his or her observations on the extent to which any failures or delays are the responsibility of the policing institutions themselves or due to matters beyond their control.* If, for example, some changes are judged to be impossible to implement within a certain time frame because of continuing security threats, this should be reported to the oversight commissioner and covered in the commissioner's report.

19.6 *We recommend that the oversight commissioner should be appointed for a term of five years.* Whether there is a need for a further appointment beyond that time will depend on the progress made. We hope that, at that point or soon after, it will be possible to have responsibility for policing in Northern Ireland vested entirely with the people of Northern Ireland, where it belongs.