

**Statement of Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to
Northern Ireland Policing Board regarding the Future of the Full Time Reserve
9th September 2004**

Introduction

This decision has been one of the most challenging and difficult I have had to make over the past two years. It is made against a backdrop of decreasing crime and in improving security situation. It is made against a background of substantial reform and implementation of the Patten Report, and it is made with the knowledge that all police officers, support staff and the wider police family will be affected in one way or another by my decision. It has not been an easy task but I am clear that we now have a decision that I can stand over.

I am well aware that the decision which I and my Senior Management Team have made together and which I am here to communicate to the Board will give rise to much comment and debate.

I know that all political parties have a view on this issue – and I have had meetings with most of them. I know that this decision will play in the political world. However, I want to say strongly, that this is not a political decision. It is a policing decision. It is a decision based on an assessment of how we can deliver an effective frontline service in the environment in which we have to police that also acknowledges the strategic vision described in the Patten Report. It is an operational decision that takes the current security situation fully into account and I accept responsibility for it.

Background

I want just briefly to sketch the background to our meeting today. In late 2002, and in the context of the overall Human Resource Planning Strategy, the Board agreed to recommend to the Secretary of State that Full Time Reserve Contracts be retained

until at least 31 March 2005. It was agreed that the future of the Full Time Reserve beyond that date would be reviewed in light of the prevailing security environment and the success of our recruitment competition. I undertook to return to the Board in September 2004 to outline my assessment of the security situation and my decision regarding the Full Time Reserve is based on that assessment. Our recruitment process, as you know, is working extremely well and we have no difficulty in meeting our annual target figures.

With regard to the Full Time Reserve, the starting point for this decision is the Patten Report. The position of the Full Time Reserve was determined by Patten Recommendation 103 which said that the future police service should not include a Full Time Reserve.

In line with the undertaking which I gave the board in 2002 I have carried out a substantial security review together with an assessment of the roles and functions of the Full Time Reserve officers. It is worth noting that in October 2002 the strength of the Full Time Reserve was 1,895. That has now reduced by 308 to 1,487 currently serving Full Time Reserve officers (627 static security duties, 751 security and other duties, 109 TSGs).

Decision Making Process

As you are all aware, I met with my Senior Management Team all day on Tuesday, 7 September and we held further meetings yesterday and this morning. It may be useful to say something around the structure of that meeting.

At the start of the day we considered the security review which was supported by a presentation from Crime Operations. My Legal Adviser then dealt with a number of legal issues ranging from obligations under both Human Rights and Health and Safety legislation to employment and contractual arrangements. The Director of Finance and Support Services presented the costs and financial implications arising from different

alternatives. While it was important that we heard this latter information, it was not our primary consideration and did not influence our decision.

Following on from that, the Senior Management Team considered the submissions from both the Superintendents Association and the Police Federation of Northern Ireland. Let me say that I am very grateful to the staff associations for those submissions.

As a team we then turned to addressing the main roles and functions of the Reserve. We broke this down into three main tasks.

The first task was to consider the static security commitments faced by the organisation and the need, in the context of the security review, to continue with these functions – involving a decision around 627 Full Time Reserve officers. Secondly, we looked at the 751 or so FTR officers who are currently delivering a wide range of policing services alongside their Regular colleagues. Lastly, we considered the role of the Full Time Reserve (109) who currently serve in Tactical Support Groups, or TSGs as they are commonly known, and the security commitments which the TSGs fulfil.

As a Senior Management Team we debated all the issues at considerable length with our clear focus at all times being on the security situation, our duty to protect communities, and our duty of care towards our own officers and staff.

The security review

I mentioned earlier the security review on which we drew heavily in reaching our conclusions around the Full Time Reserve. At the outset we were mindful that no other policing organisation of which I am aware has to deal with the potential threat from seven armed and capable paramilitary groups. [PIRA, RIRA, CIRA, UDA, UVF, LVF, INLA]

The security review focused on:

1. The threat posed by individual terrorist groups
2. Attitudes towards policing
3. Terrorist activity – community control
4. Organised crime and racketeering
5. Terrorist Groups – future intentions

Under each of those headings the key findings were as follows:

The threat posed by individual terrorist groups

Terrorist activity is still ongoing albeit the general level of activity shows a downward trend over the period 2000-2004. Dissident republican groups remain the most significant threat to policing. There is every indication that they will maintain attacks on police patrols and stations. The threat is not, however, evenly distributed – some areas face ongoing daily security challenges to policing while other districts face a more normal security environment. Due to the efforts of security forces North and South of the border, these groups have been seriously disrupted and many are in prison.

Dissident republicans have been responsible for a total of 114 terrorist incidents since January 2003 – including bombings, shootings, assaults, hijackings and other violent crime. During this period there were some 24 attacks planned/carried out against the military and police while intelligence would indicate more than 200 general security threats against security forces.

Since January 2003, PIRA has been involved in over 70 violent incidents and the INLA has been responsible for at least 20 violent incidents in the last 18 months.

All the loyalist groups – UDA, UVF, LVF - have been responsible for in excess of 160 violent incidents since January 2003. The regular feuding between loyalists has implications for police resources, especially TSGs. For example, during the loyalist

feud in May 2004, within the space of 13 days, the following incidents occurred: one murder; two shooting incidents; seven Improvised Explosive Device attacks and one attempted abduction. During the period a number of 'death threats' were issued and police recovered a quantity of explosives and firearms.

Attitudes towards policing

Dissident Republican Groups reject the current policing arrangements. In addition to political opposition, they are engaged in an active campaign of intimidation, violence and threats. More than 50 attacks against DPPs/PB have occurred since January 2003.

Since 2002, 176 police officers have had to move house under the SPED arrangements as a result of the terrorist threats so we have by no means yet reached a world where police can live in confidence of not being targeted by paramilitary groups.

Terrorist activity – community control

All paramilitary groups engage in assaults and shootings against those alleged to be involved in 'anti-social' behaviour or other activity that attracts 'disapproval'. Republican groups carried out 471 attacks between January 2000 and July 2004. Loyalist groups carried out 896 attacks during the same period. Of the total 1,368 attacks, 723 were shootings.

In the period January – July 2004 there have been almost 2,500 'public order' incidents (these include contentious parades, petrol bombings, hijackings and general street disorder).

Historically, loyalist and republican groups have been involved in major disturbances, often involving considerable violence directed towards police and members of the public – particularly in interface areas. Since October 2002, there has been less civil disorder.

Prisons remain a major issue for all paramilitary groups. In the period 2000-2004 there were a total of 37 attacks on prison officers and prison establishments. Dissident republican groups carried out five attacks – all directed against prison establishments. Loyalist groups carried out no attacks on prison property – but were responsible for 32 attacks against the homes and vehicles of serving, or retired, prison officers. At least half of these attacks involved bombs and/or the discharge of a firearm.

Organised Crime and Racketeering

All paramilitary groups are engaged in serious and organised crime. It is not known how much of this activity is for ‘personal gain’ and how much funds the various terrorist infrastructures – but it is clear that overall criminal profits run into millions of pounds per annum. The Organised Crime Task Force 2004 Threat Assessment has identified the key role played by paramilitary organisations in serious and organised crime. The assessment highlighted that:

- Paramilitary groups are very heavily involved in organised Intellectual Property Crime – valued at around £152 million per annum in lost business to the legitimate trade.
- Republican groups are heavily involved in oils fraud.
- 70% of reported incidents of extortion in 2003 were attributable to loyalist paramilitaries.
- 70% of republican groups and 60% of loyalist groups are involved in the illegal tobacco trade.

Terrorist Groups – future intentions

CIRA and RIRA continue to pursue policies that include the prosecution of a violent terrorist campaign. The Provisional movement has adopted a strategy of political engagement in recent years and this approach is likely to continue. PIRA has maintained its command and control structure and capability.

All loyalist groups remain in place. Currently there are no indications that any of the major loyalist groups plan to disband or stand down. All groups are expected to continue to engage in feuding, paramilitary attacks and criminal fundraising – some of which is likely to be ‘unsanctioned’. This has implications for the resourcing of specialist units within Crime Operations and TSGs.

The Tasks

I mentioned above that having heard the security review the team then went through three tasks. I want to deal with each of those in turn.

The first task which we set ourselves was examination of our security commitments. My Senior Management Team and I concluded against the backdrop of the security review that there is not yet an enabling environment that is conducive to securing the police estate in any way other than through the presence of armed security guards with full police powers working alongside civilian guards. Up until now the assessed need to carry out this function was a cadre of 627 Full Time Reserve Officers. We asked ourselves whether we could do this differently. There followed a thorough discussion around these considerations and following clear input from my operational ACCs, who have personally reviewed every post, it was decided that, in going forward, we could discharge this function with 430 Full Time Reserve officers, working alongside civilian guards, to be retained for a further period of three years from 1 April 2005. This decision reduces the Full Time Reserve static security requirement by 197 officers.

The second task which we set ourselves was to address the 751 Full Time Reserve Officers who are currently delivering a range of policing services alongside their Regular colleagues. This was a very difficult discussion not least because of the excellent job being done by the officers who are delivering these services. We knew that whatever decision we made would pose great challenges for our organisation in the months ahead. Having considered the roles and responsibilities of these officers,

we decided that there are alternative means of providing some of these functions and others can be subsumed into and provided by the Regular service.

In the course of this discussion my operational ACCs pointed out that a number of these officers deliver a security support function to patrols. The assessment of regional ACCs is that in order to provide security in the external policing environment there is a need to retain 141 of these Full Time Reserve officers to fulfil this broad security function. It would be intended that they would operate under the centralised command of the regional ACCs to provide flexibility around response, based on an intelligence led threat assessment, and in support of the reduced static security commitment. The net result of our deliberation in this area will see the release of 610 Full Time Reserve Officers.

The third and final task was to consider the role of the Full Time Reserve officers (currently 109) who serve in Tactical Support Groups. In light of the particular job that TSGs do in terms of supporting the drive against the existing paramilitary groups and their organised criminal activities, together with their public order skills, we do not feel there can be any reduction in TSG strength at this stage. In particular the role of TSGs in relation to public order management is of concern to us. As you will be aware we draw upon districts at times of high public order commitments to form PSUs. Around 30% of the officers who make up these units would be drawn from Full Time Reserve officers. With the release of the identified number of Full Time Reserve officers, the reliance on PSUs will be less – we believe this is manageable provided we can retain the current level of TSGs. We therefore considered two options for maintaining that level – the first was to draw more regular officers from DCUs and the second was to retain the current strength of Full Time Reserve posts in TSGs. We have decided on the latter. I do not intend to reduce the number of regular officers in districts in order to maintain the current level of TSG strength.

The Role and Contribution of the Full Time Reserve

Since 1972, some 7,400 men and women here have made the deliberate choice to serve their fellow citizens as Full Time Reserve officers in order to make Northern Ireland a safer place for everyone.

They have done that with determination ... with dedication ...and with professionalism.

It has not been an easy task for them. They have been in the front line of policing and have faced threats, intimidation and physical danger alongside their regular colleagues.

49 serving Full Time Reserve officers were murdered by terrorists with a further five being murdered after they had left the service. Others have died on duty in the service of their local communities.

Many hundreds have been injured. Some of those injuries have been horrific, leaving a legacy of pain and permanent disability.

Throughout all of this, they have been steadfast in their courage and their commitment.

Northern Ireland simply could not have been policed over the past three decades without the Full Time Reserve. They have helped to protect property, preserve the peace and save lives. And, with regular officers, they have been involved closely in the ongoing development of policing with the community.

Their service cannot, nor should not, ever be forgotten.

At present, we have 1,487 Full Time Reservists, down from a high of 3,202 in 1990s and from a figure of 1,895 at the time of the original HR strategy.

The fact that in light of current security assessments I will be releasing just over 800 of these officers from policing is in no way a reflection on their contribution to policing, to the community and to the enormous steps forward that have been made towards a more peaceful and normal society.

I honour that contribution and so should all of the people of Northern Ireland.

Method of Release

In summary, out of the existing 1,487 Full Time Reserve Officers, I need to retain 680 officers on the basis of a three year contract to be issued from 1 April 2005. The remaining officers will be released in a phased manner across an 18 month period from the termination of their contracts. A managed release process is important to ensure levels of service delivery across the relevant time period.

The proposed basis of selection for severance has to be the subject of negotiation between the Police Service and the Police Federation for Northern Ireland. I have asked the Director of Human Resources to take this forward. While it would be inappropriate to pre-empt those discussions, it would be our desire in the interests of certainty to complete them as soon as possible. In the interests of clarity the Command team has a preference to proceed by way of volunteers for severance in the first instance and thereafter to seek to retain those who are most motivated and committed to their role. Flexibility of deployment will also feature heavily in any future consideration. We will endeavour to keep everyone properly advised as matters progress.

Delivery of Policing in Northern Ireland

Patten [Recommendation 105] said that the approximate size of the police service should be 7,500 regular officers. In two month's time that target should be reached. (This number includes an average of 270 officers in training). A breakdown of that total number would include 4,342 serving in District Command Units with a further

1,282 officers actively involved in the investigation of serious crime (following implementation of Blakely, Crompton, & Stevens.) and 943 officers in Operational Command Units at regional level.

Since late 2002 we have seen a significant reduction in sickness absence amongst regular officers and, while there is more to be done, this, in effect, means that there are now considerably more officers per day available for duty.

It needs to be borne in mind that there has been an extensive programme of civilianisation which has resulted in the deployment of 350 more civilians in the support of policing and District Command Units. Additionally, I have just been granted approval by the Northern Ireland Office to employ a further 200 civilians all of whom will be directly engaged in activities formerly conducted by police officers. All in all, my Command Team and I believe the time is now right to start releasing the Full Time Reserve.

We see this as moving on in terms of Patten and the policing commitments that have been given. We acknowledge that we can do things better; we acknowledge that we can do things smarter. We acknowledge that we need to draw greater efficiencies from our uniformed officers in terms of visibility on the streets, through reduction in bureaucracy and through improved efficiencies in technology.

HMIC Baseline assessment

I have noticed that in the past few days some people have referred to the HMIC Baseline assessment. There are a number of myths around this report and I would like to deal with them now.

In addition to policing 3,000 marches on an annual basis, the Police Service of Northern Ireland reduced crime by 10.2 per cent last year (that is 14,000 fewer victims of crime in Northern Ireland) and increased clear up rates.

It is also worth highlighting the extremely positive points of the assessment because I don't believe they have received the attention they merit. The report lists more performance strengths than areas for improvements in its findings. Volume crime performance over the last 12 months has been impressive in comparison to the national average and the service is on course to achieve its five-year crime reduction target. There is ample evidence of operational success against level-two crime, for example drugs, cash in transit robberies and terrorism, and an impressive performance is noted in the report.

The report acknowledges the commitment of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to – and progress on – reassurance issues and policing with the community.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude my statement with some reference to the next steps.

Firstly, we will now move quickly to commence discussions with the Police Federation on how we move forward into a process which gives effect to this decision. This is important because we wish to achieve certainty for individual officers and their families as soon as is feasible.

Secondly, an obvious point is that our decision will lead to a reduction in PSNI salary requirements of a sum in excess of £35 million per year. I stated clearly earlier – and it is important to say it again - that financial issues did not influence our decision. However, I now argue strongly that a percentage of that money should be re-invested in the current policing infrastructure to allow us to continue to deliver a service that everyone can be proud of because it provides policing at its best.

Thirdly, I want to emphasise that that is exactly what we do – we are determined to provide policing at its best. We are a professional, proactive, and dynamic police service that is fit for purpose, and will, in the environment which I have outlined, continue to deliver frontline services to all of the community in Northern Ireland. We

are not content to deliver just enough. We strive for high standards and maintain a strong commitment to the communities we serve. We are constantly seeking ways in which we can do what we do quicker, more efficiently and more effectively.

Finally, it is absolutely vital that, in view of my team's conclusions, those individual members of the Full Time Reserve who will be leaving the service can do so with the pride and dignity and respect for their contribution which they deserve.

The members of the Full Time Reserve in the Police Service of Northern Ireland and their families will receive this announcement in a very individual and personal way. I and my command team colleagues who have had the privilege of working with them are very well aware of this fact.

Each member will have different aspirations. Some towards the end of their service may be looking forward to retirement. I understand that others with shorter service may view this decision with considerable foreboding.

We are very alert and alive to this fact and we will do our best to deal with their anxieties and concerns.

As I am sure members will appreciate, this has been an extremely difficult decision. I believe that we have reached the right conclusion based on the current security assessment.

I fully acknowledge that we are yet to benefit from a normal policing environment. That is why I have 7500 regular officers under my command, thousands more than my colleagues in England with populations of a similar size. This decision provides additional resources to counter the current threat and support my officers as they carry out their duties.

Let me finish where I began by stating again that this is a policing decision based on our assessment of policing needs on foot of a comprehensive security review.

ENDS