



Police Service of Northern Ireland

Chief Constable's Accountability Report to the Northern Ireland Policing Board

December 2021

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we listen
we act**

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Foreword

The 2021 recruitment campaign closed on 19 November 2021. The campaign approach was underpinned by our ethos of visibility, accessibility and responsiveness with proactive outreach by Human Resources, Community Safety Department, Minority Staff Associations, the Police College and local neighbourhood police officers. I look forward to updating the Board on the progress of the recruitment process and outcomes in the coming months but would like to take this opportunity to thank officers and staff for their efforts on this campaign.

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to create pressures across the wider public sector. High infections rates, increasing demands on the Health Service and rising Covid-related deaths make for a challenging winter season.

Whilst a legitimate health protection tactic, the introduction of the Covid-19 passport certification and a call for face-covering enforcement may affect the Police Service in the weeks and months ahead, with foreseeable risks related to the night time economy.

Therefore, the continued emphasis on the enforcement of Health Protection Regulations by the Police Service alone is of concern. We have always done our best, often in difficult circumstances, to support the strategic intent of the Executive to protect public health throughout the pandemic. Learning from the past year has shown that the enforcement of Public Health Regulations is both complex and, at times, divisive for police-community relations in Northern Ireland.

Owing to the rapid pace of change to the Health Protection Regulations, practical issues arise in implementing supporting enforcement mechanisms. Demand for policing services is rising and has surpassed pre-Covid-19 levels. In this context, we particularly welcome the response from the Justice Minister in calling for a collaborative cross-sector approach to the enforcement of Public Health Regulations.

We continue to engage with the various departments within the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure we continue to fulfil our role alongside partners.

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Our dedicated Covid-19 planning, command and control structures remain in place to manage continuing demands, ensure safe working practices for our officers and staff and to provide necessary guidance for a proportionate and considered police response.

Whilst we understand the need to protect public health, and have indeed already made a significant contribution, the impact on public confidence should not be underestimated. We would, therefore, seek the support and advocacy of the Board in reinforcing the importance of working to realistic timescales in legislative change and also ensuring that other agencies are provided with relevant powers to contribute to the enforcement of Health Protection Regulations and that they use these powers when necessary.

Contents

The December 2021 Accountability Report provides an update to the Northern Ireland Policing Board on the following topics:

- Financial Outlook
- Operation Season's Greetings
- Violence and Intimidation against Women and Girls
- Serious and Organised Crime

Financial Outlook

The January Monitoring Exercise presents the last opportunity to adjust the police budget in year. A number of pressures remain unresolved from the October Monitoring Round and these have been resubmitted, including £3.4m representing the shortfall in EU Exit funding and £3.2m for depreciation charges. In addition, a bid has been included to cover new legacy related costs. Given the sums involved, the outcome of our January Monitoring bid will be critical in determining the likely year-end financial outturn.

The budget outlook for next year and beyond remains uncertain and worrying. Discussions are ongoing within the Executive and we look forward to the publication of the Draft Budget so that we can consider the implications of any proposed settlement.

We continue to make the case for improved baseline funding and investment in policing.

Operation Season's Greetings

Operation Season's Greetings, the public safety policing operation over the Christmas and New Year period, commenced on Friday 26 November. The visible policing operation will be supported by an extensive communications campaign which will promote police activity to keep people safe during this period and provide crime prevention and safety advice.

The campaign focuses on the core themes of:

- Safer streets for shopping and socialising
- Safer roads and public transport
- Safer homes for those at risk of domestic abuse
- Safer businesses
- Violence against women and children

A range of communications mediums will be used to maximise the reach of these messages including posters, display boards, leaflets, Belfast City Centre pulse hub content and social media graphics.

A bespoke webpage has been created and can be accessed at www.psnl.police.uk/seasonsgreetings. This contains a wide range of safety and prevention advice, to include topics such as online safety, shopping safely, domestic abuse, road safety, drink spiking, child sexual exploitation, sexual consent and socialising safely. Some examples are included below for information.



This Christmas remember to think safe!



- C**yber security
- H**ome security
- R**oad safety
- I** am safe
- S**ocialise safely
- T**heft prevention
- M**obile device security
- A**wareness
- S**hopping safely

Find out everything you
need to know at
www.psni.police.uk/seasonsgreetings

Scan to learn more



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Violence and Intimidation Against Women and Girls

We continue to work with energy and focus on the issue of Violence and Intimidation against Women and Girls. Time and resource has, and will continue to be, invested in this important area of work to ensure both a progressive internal culture and public trust and confidence in our approach.

Supporting the White Ribbon Campaign

During November, we marked White Ribbon Day, which promoted the start of a global campaign to eradicate male violence and intimidation against women and girls. Aligned to this campaign, we will be supporting Women's Aid's 16 days of action against Gender Based Violence as part of our wider strategy for this area of work.



(l-r) Chief Constable Simon Byrne; Detective Chief Inspector Lindsay Fisher;
Detective Chief Superintendent Anthony McNally

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To show our commitment to do all we can to help end male violence against women and girls, all officers and staff have been encouraged to sign the 'White Ribbon Pledge' as a clear signal of our intent both within the Police Service and beyond.

The pledge is: *'I pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about men's violence against women in all its forms.'*

Strategy Development

We remain on track to launch the first Violence and Intimidation against Women and Girls Strategy for policing in Northern Ireland. Initial consultation on the draft strategy is scheduled for December 2021.

A priority area of focus has been the issue of misogyny. The aim is to ensure that our working practices and culture are both professional, ethical and instil trust and confidence across our workplaces and with the public and stakeholders. This will align with the ongoing strategic programme of work on professional conduct, behaviours and ethics led by the Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Chief Constable.

A dedicated Independent Advisory Group has been established to hear and better understand the views of women in respect of male violence and intimidation against women and girls. An extensive series of focus groups and site visits have taken place over the last month with partners and victims.

In support of national campaigns, the Police Service will align with the '#Don't be that guy' social messaging campaign, which has been utilised by Police Scotland. This changes the focus of preventative advice away from women protecting themselves to one of changing male attitudes and behaviours.

Our People Strategy 2020 – 2025 made a commitment to deliver a cultural audit to inform the delivery of a 'professional and inclusive' working environment. This is being progressed through the People Action Plan to gain a better understanding of the culture that exists within the organisation and deliver a cultural plan that will support modernisation in the interests of public confidence. Terms of Reference for this piece of work are under development, based on an independent provider with proven

experience and integrity working alongside an internal police cultural audit team. Engagement with internal and external stakeholders will be central to this piece of work, along with the input of the Board, as our accountability body.

Professional Standards

Terms of Reference have also been developed to review the practices and processes in our Professional Standards Department and the Misconduct Regulatory Framework.

This work will be structured across six key areas:

- **Prevention** – this will focus on developing a sexual misconduct prevention strategy that encompasses education and awareness of victim stereotyping, predatory and misogynistic behaviour, reporting mechanisms and support networks.
- **Performance** – this will focus on the development of a professional standards performance framework that provides transparency, accountability and oversight in relation to misconduct investigation and proceedings.
- **Evidential Standards** – this will review working practices with the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) on police perpetrator criminal offences and develop clear evidential standards for sexual misconduct cases which involve abuse of position by a police officer.
- **Misconduct Regulations** – this will focus on the review and reform of the current misconduct regulations and Department of Justice guidance on misconduct proceedings, to better meet the needs of the police misconduct system.
- **Vetting** - this will examine vetting processes to ensure appropriate and accountable decision making. It will also develop suitable safeguarding measures for in-service vetting failures, with consideration of regulatory provision for service exit in certain circumstances.
- **Previous Case Reviews** – this will involve a review of previous misconduct investigations and intelligence relating to sexual impropriety by serving police officers over the past 10 years to ensure appropriate investigative actions were taken. A risk and mitigation plan will be applied in each case.

Spiking Control Strategy

Responding to public concern, work has progressed on the issue of drink spiking since the time of the last Board meeting.

Reports of spiking incidents peaked in correlation with the mainstream media campaigns and coverage of this issue during October 2021. Nightclubs re-opened at the beginning of November 2021, which again caused a rise in reports of this nature.

During October 2021 and up to 11 November 2021, there were 80 reports of spiking-related incidents. Of these 80 reports:

- 43 relate to the Belfast City Policing District
- 58 relate to a licensed premises
- 12 relate to private dwellings
- No specific venues have been identified as being a 'hotspot' for spiking type incidents

A number of fast time actions were progressed and a control strategy has been implemented which takes a collaborative and preventative approach, as summarised below.

- Guidance has been issued to officers and staff on how to deal with reports of this nature, aligned to guidance provided by National Police Chiefs' Council.
- Accelerated forensic analysis to progress investigative opportunities fast-time and to respond to the needs of victims.
- An awareness poster is also being prepared for use by external venues and for local officers to hand out.
- Direct engagement with hospitality and night-time economy venues including sharing of public safety information through partner distribution networks (Hospitality Ulster) with focus on the role of security and event supervisors.
- Joint working by Community Safety, Communications and District Policing Departments to incorporate this work with Season's Greetings.
- Planned inclusion of this issue in the December broadcast of the Crime NI programme.
- A bespoke engagement event will take place with all local pub and club owners to raise awareness in Derry City and Strabane Policing District.

Feeling unwell after just a small amount of alcohol?

How you can help someone who thinks they have been spiked:

- Stay with them
- Alert staff or security
- Seek medical help
- Report to the Police as soon as you can



Report online. Call 101. In an emergency call 999


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Award for Safeguarding Victims of Domestic Abuse

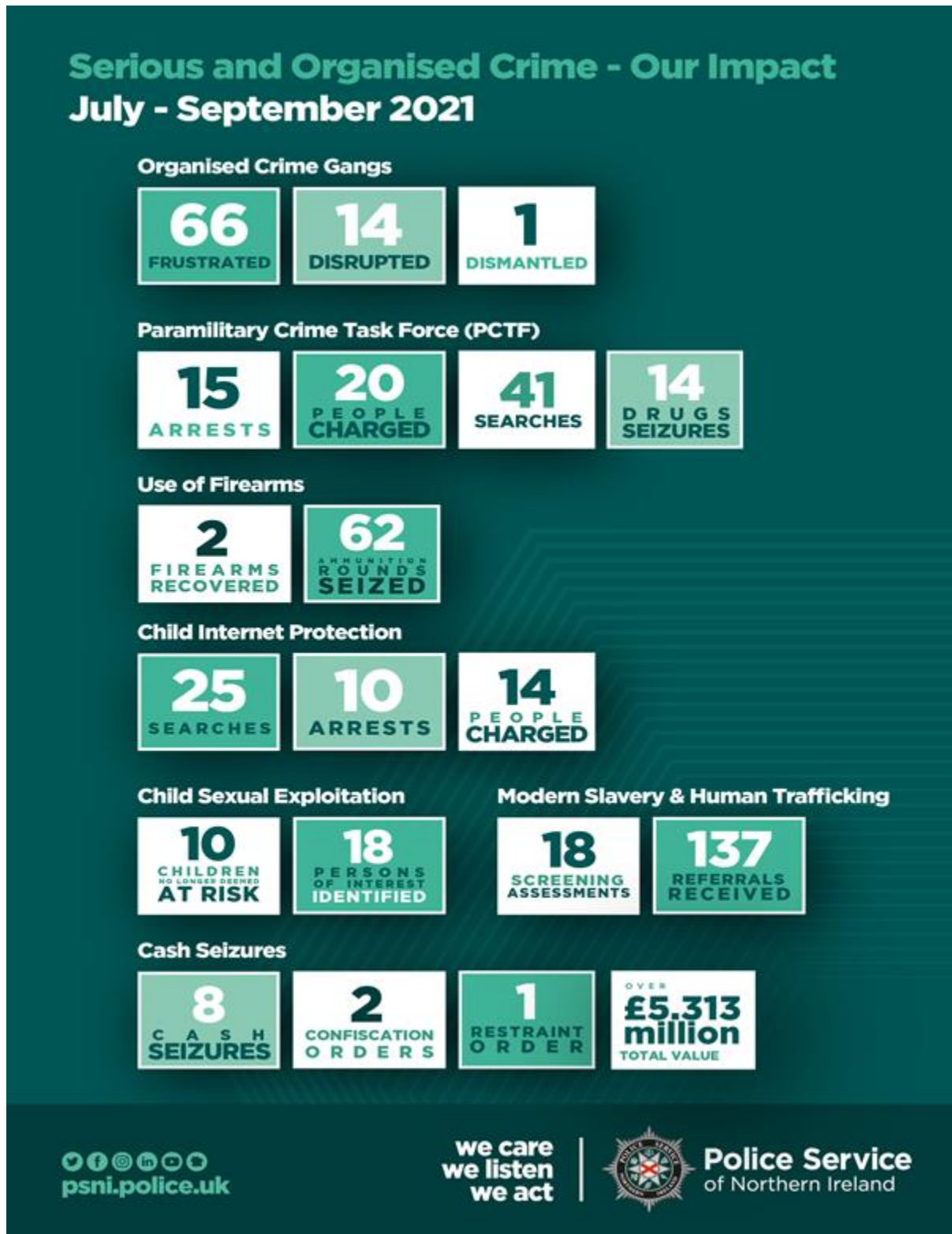
During November, we were pleased to have our work in safeguarding victims of domestic abuse recognised with a Platinum Award at the Onus Annual Awards of the Workplace Charter on Domestic Violence. The Police Service has been involved with the ONUS Workplace Charter since its launch in 2010 and has been an ONUS Safe Place partner since 2014. This is the eighth year that our commitment to stopping domestic abuse in all its forms has been recognised.



Detective Superintendent Gary McDonald accepting the Platinum Award on behalf of the Police Service

Serious and Organised Crime Overview

The below table summarises the impact of our teams in proactively addressing the harm caused by serious and organised crime over the last quarter, July – September 2021.



Drugs

The November 2021 Accountability Report provided an overview of the positive outcomes generated by Operation DEALBREAKER, with 55 arrests for drug related offences and 317 drug seizures, amounting to a collective street value of £1,348,418.95

The devastation resulting from drug misuse is cross-cutting and impacts the lives of people at every level in Northern Ireland. We continue to take a co-ordinated, consistent and multiagency approach to prevent drug-related harm in local communities.

Alongside enforcement activity, we actively seek to prevent drug misuse and related offending. Some recent examples include:

- In collaboration with UK Borders Agency, we worked at a variety of postal hubs throughout Northern Ireland. This resulted in the interception of 37.69kg of cannabis, 1,200 pregabalin tablets, 400 LSD tabs and 3,235 diazepam tablets. Criminal investigations are being progressed in respect of these seizures.
- Drugs Expert Witnesses (DEW) developed an educational presentation on cannabis by-products to increase awareness of the types of products presently in circulation and the associated dangers.
- We were present at the Balmoral Show providing advice on actions to take in the event of a drugs discovery. In particular, we discussed cannabis edibles and vapes with parents/carers/guardians, given their growing use by young people and the associated health risks.
- A joint policy has been developed with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to define agreed processes in the event of a discovery of illegal drugs in a service user/patient's possession.

Child Protection

Childhood vulnerability is an important, key area of demand in which we take a multi-faceted and proactive approach.

A vulnerability working group has now been established across the Police Service to generate and manage preventative actions regarding children and other vulnerable groups. These actions are focused on offenders with Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWN), Risk of Sexual Harm Orders (ROSHO) and compliance of Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) restrictions.

During November 2021, our Crime Prevention and Early Intervention Branch worked in partnership with Health and Social Care NI to launch an online programme for police officers and staff to enhance understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences and to promote collaborative problem solving approaches.

Our Public Protection Branch is conducting analysis to examine the child's journey through the criminal justice system as a victim and associated attrition rates. Ongoing work with Victim Support seeks to identify opportunities for partnership with Child Independent Sexual Violence Advocates to reduce the attrition rates of sexually exploited children from the criminal justice process.

In the period, July – September 2021, 182 child internet protection referrals were received from the National Crime Agency and National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. In the same period, this resulted in 25 searches and 14 people were charged or reported in relation to indecent images related offences. Additionally, 15 people were convicted in court for indecent images of children-related offences, with 13 Sexual Offence Prevention Orders approved for these cases.

Historical Child abuse referrals increased by 24% in the past quarter, with average monthly referrals increasing to 75 referrals between July and September 2021, compared with 57 per month in the 2020/21 financial year.

Other child abuse referrals have reduced by 9% on pre-Covid levels (equivalent to 119 referrals). 26 children at risk were proactively identified this quarter (July - September 2021). In addition, 18 persons of concern were identified, resulting in two Child Abuse Warning Notices being issued and two newly identified persons of concern.

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