



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

Chief Constable's Accountability Report

to Northern Ireland
Policing Board

Report Date:

Covering Period 24 April 2024
to 30 May 2024

Presented at Policing Board Meeting:
6 June 2024



we care
we listen
we act

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Unless otherwise stated the statistics in this report are unvalidated management information sources from administrative systems and are subject to change.

Foreword

Following on from my update to the Policing Board during May's Accountability session, there has been continued discourse on the current and historic use of surveillance powers in respect of their use involving journalists and lawyers. I understand the interest that the media and civic society groups continue to show. Unquestionably, it is in the public interest that the Police Service provide assurance these powers are only used when necessary and proportionate, and when they are, that we act lawfully, fairly and effectively. I reiterate here my commitment to co-operate fully with the Investigatory Powers Tribunal (IPT) and will continue to work with the Board to provide the necessary reassurance on how we conduct surveillance.

To provide further reassurance to the public and the Policing Board I have implemented the *McCullough* review. Angus McCullough KC, recognised as a leading Special Advocate in the United Kingdom, has been engaged as an independent special reviewer to consider recent publicly expressed concerns by a number of stakeholders with respect to possible covert surveillance of individuals or groups that have special status. It is intended the Terms of Reference for the scope of the McCullough review will be endorsed by myself following agreement between Mr McCullough and a group consisting of a number of stakeholders and experts representative of those individuals and groups. Mr McCullough will provide a public-facing report of his findings and will be available to address the Policing Board directly on any particular issues. The review will not cover ongoing matters before the IPT.

The Information Commissioner has completed his investigation into the circumstances surrounding last August's data loss. I accept his findings and acknowledge the learning that has been highlighted. Some of the recommendations reflect those made as a result of the Independent Review, jointly commissioned with the Board last year, and are already being progressed. I recognise and welcome the discretion the Commissioner has shown in arriving at a fine totaling £750k. That said, as we face into the year ahead with resource pressures of circa £80m, it is my intention to make representations regarding the level of the fine before the Information Commissioner's Office take their final decision. This is not to underestimate or seek to diminish the impact the data loss has had on officers and staff, but rather, it is in recognition that any money used to pay a fine will be put to better use in supporting the delivery of our policing services. I can reassure all officers and staff, and the Board, that we will learn the lessons and take the necessary steps to mitigate any risk of such a loss occurring in the future. It is important that I reiterate my recognition of the significance of the data loss on our police officers and staff. Our workforce is remarkable, and the impact of last August's data breach shook the confidence of our police family. We will do everything possible to prevent any such event occurring again and will continue to work tirelessly to reassure our staff and pursue anyone who seeks to intimidate or threaten members of our organisation or their families.

During May, we published our latest annual recorded statistics. I am delighted to report that there was a significant reduction in crime across all Districts in Northern Ireland, with 7,067 fewer crimes recorded than the previous year.

Anti-social behaviour is also at a record low. In the face of our significant resourcing pressures, this level of performance is all the more remarkable. Northern Ireland remains one of the safest places to live in the United Kingdom, which is testament to the professionalism and dedication of officers and staff across the Service. This is an outstanding achievement but will not continue next year in light of our shrinking workforce and unacceptably low budget.

While the overall decrease in crime is welcome, we are not complacent. There is always work to do and we will always strive to do better. Since taking up post, I have been clear that unless we are able to find a more effective and sustainable way to fund policing in Northern Ireland we will be unable to maintain this strong level of performance. No one should be in any doubt that our ability to support victims and investigate crime has already been stretched to breaking point, and our officers and staff are now feeling the burden. In the event that our budget is not increased, Northern Ireland will be a less safe place to live.

For evidence of the precipice upon which our capacity sits, you need look no further than the additional burden faced when something as everyday as an improvement in the weather occurs. Saturday 11 May saw such a period of improved weather conditions, and with it, an increase of almost 25% in both 999 and 101 calls when compared to the previous Saturday. These additional pressures have firstly to be absorbed within our Contact Management Centres and risks assessment made for each call. 47 of the calls related to Mental Ill Health matters, with 17 calls transferred from partners in the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. Officers also responded to 63 Road Traffic collisions, 135 concern for safety incidents, 69 reports of Assault, 42 instances of Domestic Abuse, 169 Anti-Social Behaviour incidents and 15 incidents relating to Missing/Found Persons or

Absconders. Tragically, one of these calls involved officers having to respond to the death of an individual who had jumped into water at a quarry.

The unremitting pressure that officers and staff face and our performance in doing so are contained within these statistics. However, I am fortunate to see the work carried out behind these figures and have the opportunity to speak with the officers and staff involved. Examples of some excellent police work that I have noted recently include the prevention of an 'in action' kidnapping in South Belfast and the arrest of three armed suspects by two Local Policing Sergeants. In Derry/Londonderry officers swiftly responded to a serious assault in the City Centre, one which attracted significant social and local media interest, and have placed four individuals before the Court. Elsewhere in the City, officers from Waterside Neighbourhood Policing Team made three arrests and seized drugs with an estimated street value of £17,000.

Officers from Roads Policing Unit, working with colleagues from HM Revenue and Customs stopped and searched a lorry and seized 9,299,200 suspected counterfeit cigarettes. The total excise duty that could have been evaded by these cigarettes is approximately £5m, with the street value in the region of £2.3m.

Tactical Support Group officers operating in the Newry area stopped an individual and following checks identified that he was wanted in relation to an ongoing theft investigation. Enquiries at the scene identified that he was in possession on a large number of Amazon parcels addressed to different persons across Northern Ireland. Officers made an arrest for further theft and handling stolen goods offences and were able to ensure that one of the parcels, which was found to contain party supplies for a five-year old's birthday party, was able to be delivered to the family, just in time to prevent the boy's father from spending a further £150 purchasing replacement supplies.



Even more significantly, officers recovered an automatic weapon following the stop and search of a vehicle in Derry/Londonderry. A quantity of ammunition and other items were also seized and a male arrested and subsequently charged.

Finally, I would like to thank the Board and the Justice Minister for their support with securing the pay awards for officers and staff. This was the right thing to do for these marvellous people. In a similar vein, I call for support in securing the long overdue Revised Environmental Allowance for police staff. This is also the right thing to do and I am committed to having this finalised once and for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Boutcher', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jon Boutcher QPM
Chief Constable
Police Service of Northern Ireland

Finance and Resource Update

After some delay, the Police Service of Northern Ireland was issued with an opening budget allocation by the Department of Justice on 21 May 2024. Unfortunately, this repeats a seemingly endless cycle of short term settlements only notified after entering the financial year. This has a damaging impact on planning for the delivery of policing services and only adds to our challenges. The recent report by the Northern Ireland Fiscal Council on the NI Executive's 2024-25 Budget makes this very same point and reflects that 'it is far from ideal'. Another key point from this report is the 'potential for continued over spend' and this is extremely relevant to the Police Budget context again this year.

As a result of the NI Executive's Budget, the Department of Justice was allocated a £95m uplift, of which PSNI has now been allocated £60m. I have already reported that the anticipated Resource pressure for policing this year is some £130m just to standstill or £140m if we provide for some marginal growth in officer and staff numbers. This excludes provision for some major legal liabilities including those associated with Holiday Pay and the Data Leak. As a result of the recent budget allocation, we therefore now face a shortfall of circa £80m which presents an acute challenge over a short time frame. Some difficult decisions lie ahead.

It is worth noting that over 75% of costs associated with the Police Service are pay related and cannot be significantly controlled in the short term. The residual 25% of costs cover necessary non-pay infrastructure (such as fleet, accommodation and IT) and have been subject

to year on year cuts. In addition, much of these non-pay costs are delivered under contract, with any changes requiring a reasonable lead in time. This helps explain why it would take some time to deliver the scale of cost reductions that may now be required and why there is a very real potential of recording an over spend this year.

In recent months, I believe we have made a strong case for increasing investment in policing to recover past losses but this ambition seems likely to be thwarted by a very difficult budget outcome. Inevitably, I will be under pressure to reduce costs and services in consultation with the Board, at a time when there is good evidence to suggest an alternative strategy.

Nevertheless, a draft Resource Plan will be considered by the Service Executive Team in June, with the intention of submitting to the Resources Committee for initial consideration as usual.

Our Performance

Official Statistics

The information in this section is extracted from our Official Statistics published reports. The full reports can all be accessed from the following link:

<https://www.psni.police.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official-statistics>.

Recorded Crime

In the 12 months from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024:

- There were **104,344** crimes recorded in Northern Ireland, a **decrease of 7,067** (-6.3%).
- The level recorded in the latest 12 months is the lowest since 2020/21 (when lockdown restrictions were in place).
- There were 55 police recorded crimes per 1,000 population¹ compared with 58 crimes in the previous 12 month period.
- All policing districts experienced a lower level of crime.
- While **shoplifting** has increased by 1,468 (19.5%), the majority of crime classifications have recorded lower levels.

Stalking and harassment shows the largest fall of 3,553 offences (-6%) however, there have been a series of changes in the recording of these 'behavioural offences' since April 2017 with the latest change from May 2023 requiring fewer such offences to be recorded².

¹ Crime per 1,000 population based on mid-year population estimate of 1,910,543 for 2022, the latest mid-year estimate available at time of compilation.

² full details are available in points to note on page 3 of the [police recorded crime monthly update, period ending 31st March 2024](#)

Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

In the 12 months from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024:

- There were 45,358 ASB incidents in Northern Ireland, a decrease of 1,943 (-4.1%).
- Eight policing Districts experienced lower levels of anti-social behaviour.

Domestic Abuse

In the 12 months from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024:

- There were 32,763 domestic abuse incidents recorded, showing a decrease of 113 (-0.3%).
- The number of domestic abuse crimes recorded fell to 19,954, a decrease of 2,358 (-10.6%) on the previous 12 months.
- There were 17 domestic abuse incidents and 10 domestic abuse crimes per 1,000 population³, compared with 17 domestic abuse incidents and 12 domestic abuse crimes recorded during the previous 12 months.
- Levels fell across all major offence classifications.

Domestic abuse homicide:

- In the 12 months from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 there were three homicides with a domestic abuse motivation recorded, compared with eight homicides with a domestic abuse motivation recorded in the previous 12 months³. One of the victims was female and two were male, compared with five female and three male victims during the previous 12 months.

³ Homicide consists of the offences of murder, manslaughter, infanticide and corporate manslaughter.



Hate Motivation

In the 12 months from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024:

- With the exception of race and faith/religion incidents, there were fewer hate incidents recorded across each hate motivation strand when compared with the previous twelve months.
- There were small increases in the number of faith/religion and transgender identity crimes, and larger decreases in the number of race, sexual orientation, sectarian, and disability crimes, when compared with the previous twelve months.
- There were 132 more race incidents and 41 fewer race crime recorded. The 1,353 race incidents in 2023/24 is the highest financial year level recorded since the data series began in 2004/05.
- Incidents with a race motivation and crimes with a faith/religion motivation showed the largest increases (132 more race incidents and 15 more faith/religion crimes).
- Incidents and crimes with a sectarian motivation showed the largest decrease, with 147 fewer incidents and 191 fewer crimes.

Overall summary of hate motivated incidents and crimes

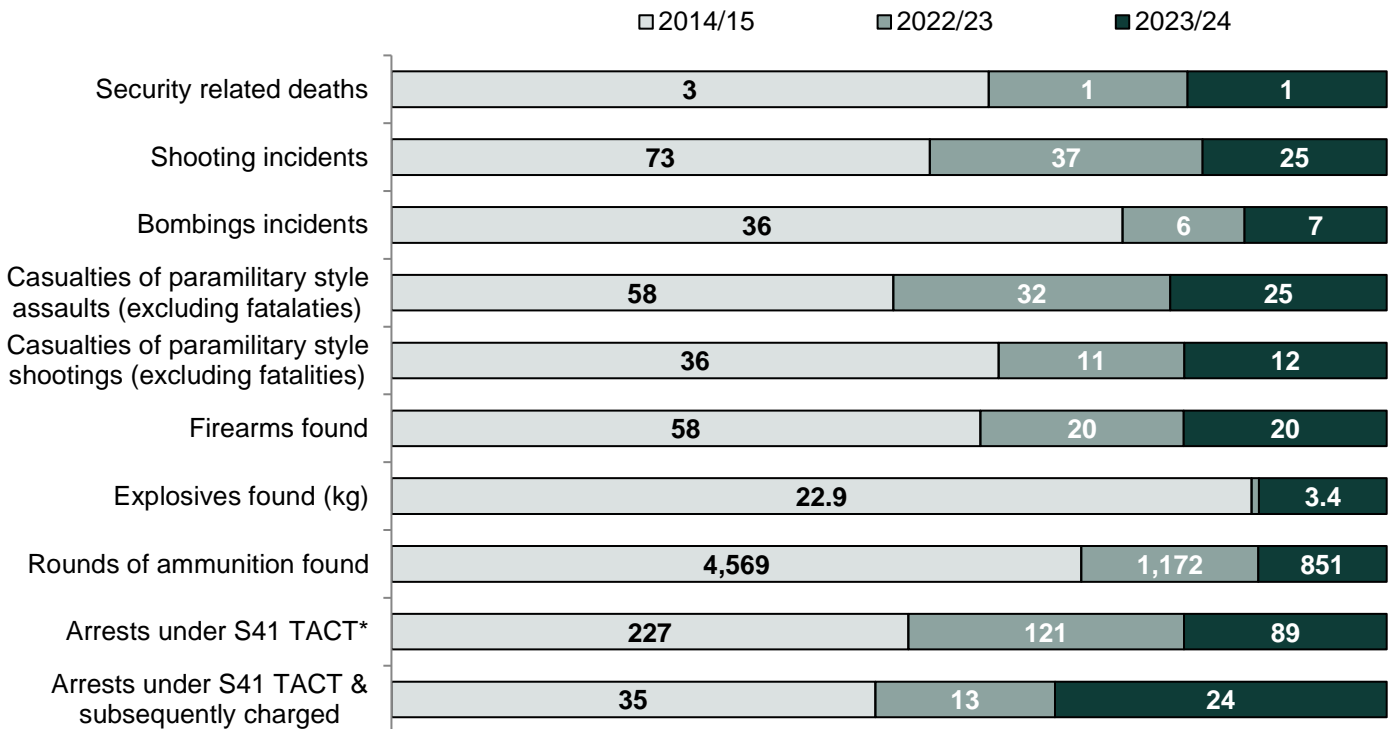
	Incidents Apr'22-Mar'23	Incidents Apr'23-Mar'24	Incidents Change	Crimes Apr'22-Mar'23	Crimes Apr'23-Mar'24	Crimes Change
Race	1,221	1,353	132	880	839	-41
Sexual Orientation	435	384	-51	289	241	-48
Sectarian	1,238	1,091	-147	921	730	-191
Disability	139	97	-42	102	58	-44
Faith/Religion	46	77	31	33	48	15
Transgender Identity	72	68	-4	39	41	2

Security Situation

In 12 months from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024:

- There was one security related death, the same number as in each of the previous two years.
- There was a decrease in the number of shooting incidents and the number of casualties of paramilitary style assaults compared to the previous year, while the number of bombing incidents and the number of casualties of paramilitary style shootings were similar to the previous 2 years.
- There were 25 shooting incidents, approximately a third fewer than the previous year (37) and the second lowest number of shootings since records began in 1969.
- There were 7 bombing incidents, one more than occurred during the previous year (6).
- There were 12 casualties of paramilitary style shootings, one more than occurred during the previous year (11). The majority of paramilitary style shootings (9) were attributed to republicans. All 12 casualties were aged 18 years or older.
- There were 25 casualties of paramilitary style assaults, 7 fewer than during the previous year (32) and the lowest number recorded since 1983/84. Loyalists were responsible for 22 of the 25 assaults. All 25 casualties were aged 18 years or older.
- There were 89 security related arrests under section 41 of the terrorism act 2000, compared to 121 during the previous year. The number of persons subsequently charged was 24 compared to 13 in the previous year.

Comparison of security incidents between 2023/24, 2022/23 and 2014/15.

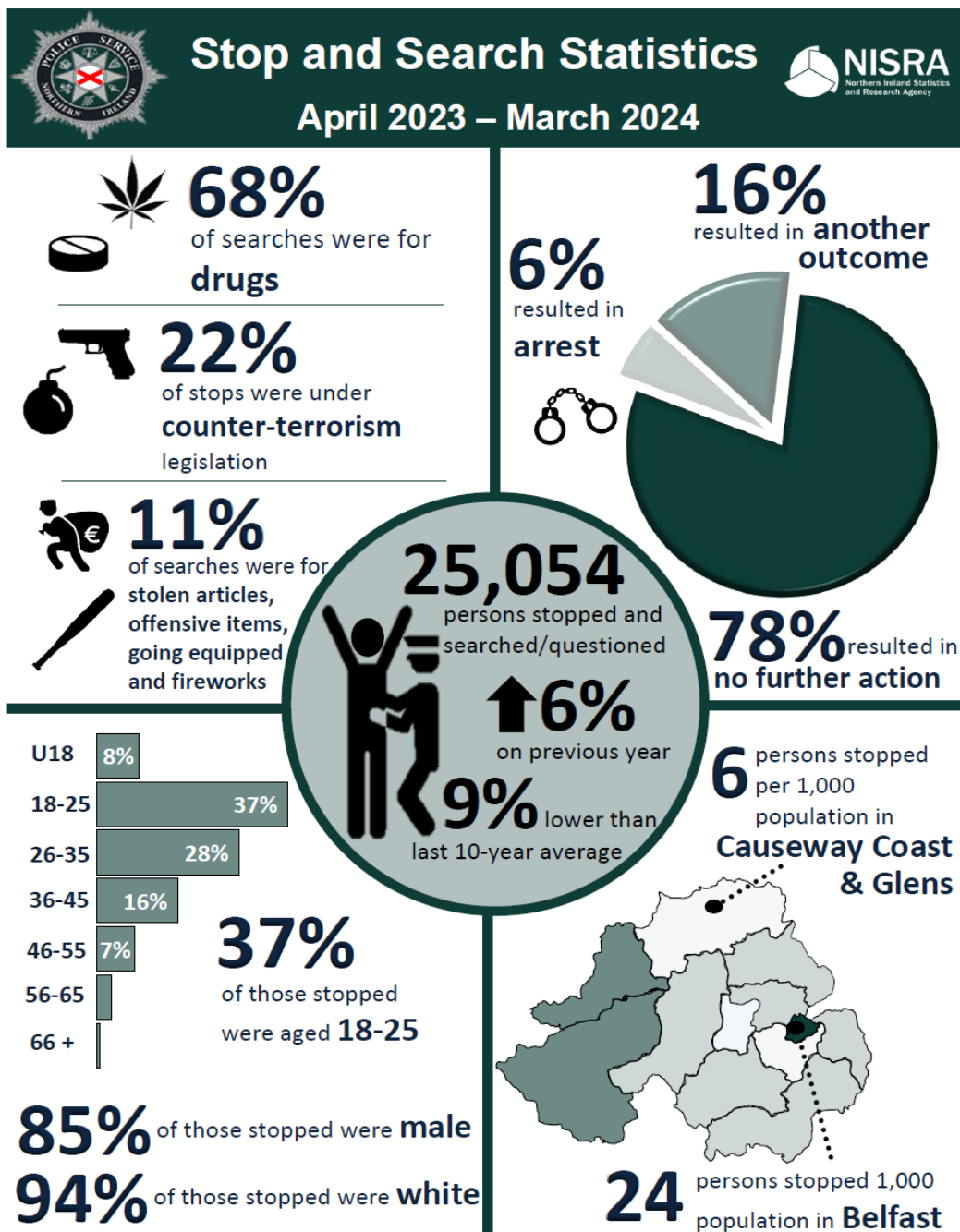


* Figures include only those arrests that are linked to the security situation in Northern Ireland; persons who have been arrested under Section 41 of the Terrorism Act for other reasons are excluded.

Stop and Search

In the 12 months between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:

- 25,054 persons were stopped and searched/questioned, 6% more than the previous year.
- The past 2 years have seen a year-on-year increase in number of stops, however the overall trend during the past 10 years has been a downward one.
- 68% of stops were conducted under the misuse of drugs act and 11% of stops were conducted under the police and criminal evidence order.
- 17% of stops were conducted under the Justice and Security Act section 24 and 3% under the justice and security act section 21.
- There were 13 persons stopped for every 1,000 people in Northern Ireland.



Outcome 1

We have a Safe Community

Crime Department

Organised Crime Branch

- During May, detectives from Organised Crime Branch donated £3,403.85 to **AWARE NI**, a local charity who specialise in supporting those with mental health concerns.

The money was seized as part of an investigation into large-scale drugs supply and a disposal of cash order was obtained from the court.



*Karen Collins Chief Executive of AWARE NI
with DCI Gail McCormick*

- Over a two day period in May, detectives seized approximately £240,000 in cash and made two arrests following searches carried out in the Belfast and Sprucefield.

During one of the searches at a property in West Belfast, approximately £200,000 in cash was recovered.



A 62 year old woman was arrested on suspicion of possession of criminal property. She was later released on police bail to allow for further enquiries.

- On 9 May 2024, detectives conducted a search in the Creagh Road area of Castledawson and recovered Class A and Class B controlled drugs with an estimated street value of approximately £1.9m. Two men were arrested and charged with a number of drug related offences and have been remanded into custody.



- On 18 May 2024, detectives carried out searches of properties in the Cookstown and Coalisland areas. A significant quantity of suspected cannabis with an estimated street value of £2.1m was recovered, along with two vehicles. Two men have been arrested and charged to Court.



Paramilitary Crime Task Force

The cruel reality of predatory money lending is the focus of a new Crimestoppers campaign, launched in May.



Criminal and predatory money lenders make their living from exploiting and intimidating others, and are taking advantage of current economic times to tighten their grip. Victims with unpaid debts, and indeed their loved ones, are exploited and often forced to repay by other means, for example, by storing or selling drugs.

Victims may be too frightened or ashamed to speak up, with some perhaps accepting their punishment is in some way 'normal' or 'acceptable' and currently because of fear or stigma, we are relying upon anecdotes and hearsay, rather than actual reports.

In an attempt to address this, over a four-week period, Crimestoppers, ourselves and partners are reaching out to communities to encourage the public to speak up. Where victims come forward, we will ensure they are safe and supported. We will work tirelessly to bring the criminals before the courts and, with our partners, to seize those assets acquired from exploiting the communities they claim to protect

We have secured funding that will enable us to dedicate an officer to a centralised role specialising in the area of illegal money lending, where they will provide support and assistance to investigators and victims.

Public Protection Branch

On 8 and 9 May 2024, Public Protection Branch hosted the Senior Team from the National Police Chiefs' Council Hydrant Programme & the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce. Training was provided and a peer review session held with our Child Sexual Exploitation Team and key partners in the Department of Health Strategic Planning and Performance Group and the Health and Social Care Trusts, to improve our partnership response to safe guarding children and investigating child sexual abuse.

Project Servator – Disruptive Effects Officers (DEO)

Project Servator aims to disrupt a range of criminal activity, including terrorism, while providing a reassuring presence for the public. Our officers are experienced and specially trained to spot the tell-tale signs that someone is gathering information to help them plan or prepare to commit a crime.

Project Servator police deployments were originally introduced by City of London Police in February 2014. The policing tactic has since been adopted by many police forces, including at a number of airports and across the transport network, and has been used at major events, including the Commonwealth Games, Wimbledon Tennis Championships, music festivals and at the Christmas markets.

Project Servator has been adopted by the Police Service of Northern Ireland for a number of years and we hosted a training course in Belfast in May 2024 in partnership with Belfast Harbour Police allowing us to upskill officers in Project Servator. During this training course, whilst deploying under Project Servator at Lanyon Place Train Station, our officers detected two males who were displaying tell-tale signs indicating they may be involved in some sort of criminality. The officers subsequently stopped them and detained them for the purposes of search. The males had tickets to travel by train to Dublin. Further enquiries showed that one of the males was actively wanted by colleagues in west Belfast for multiple offences linked to a serious domestic related assault that had occurred a couple of days previous. The female victim had sustained serious head and facial injuries as a result of the assault. The male was arrested for Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm and False Imprisonment and was overnight charged appearing in Court where he was remanded in Custody due to the severity of his alleged involvement in the incident, and the fact he had intended on leaving the jurisdiction by travelling to Dublin. The National Servator

Training Team commented positively on the professionalism of our officers in dealing with this incident.

We believe that 'Together, we've got it covered', so we are working with partners, including other police forces, security staff and CCTV operators, local businesses and retailers and members of the public, to continue to keep people safe in Northern Ireland and protect everyone who lives, works or visits here and make it a difficult place for criminals and terrorists to operate. Project Servator patrols are highly visible and can happen at any time and in any location. They are characterised by the use of a range of policing assets - dogs, vehicles, plain clothes - in an unpredictable way. If you see Project Servator officers in your area, there's nothing to worry about. They are normal police deployments designed to disrupt criminal activity and are not in response to any specific threat.

They are made up of a range of resources, including:

Uniformed officers - Officers will talk to the public, local businesses and private security staff to let them know what they're doing and remind them to be vigilant, trust their instincts and report any suspicious or unusual behaviour. You may also see posters on display boards and officers handing out leaflets explaining more about Project Servator. Working with the community is a vital part of making this a success so please feel free to come and talk to our uniformed officers about Project Servator or anything that is of concern. They will be happy to answer any of your questions about what they are doing and why.

Plain clothed officers - These officers won't be easily spotted as they are there to help their uniformed colleagues and keep an eye out for people seeking to avoid police! We can't be everywhere but we could be anywhere!

Police Dogs - Our four legged friends are very friendly. They're also highly trained and fearless

when it comes to confronting threats. They can sniff out hidden drugs, firearms and explosive materials and work hard searching for anything that could put others in danger.

CCTV - This is monitored and used to help detect those who are intent on committing crime.

Searches - The Police Service of Northern Ireland has a positive obligation to prevent and detect crime in order to protect our communities from harm and build a safe, confident and peaceful society. Stop and search is an operational tool used to prevent, detect and investigate crime as well as to bring offenders to justice and officers have a range of powers they can use to stop and search individuals and vehicles.



Outcome 2

We Have Confidence in Policing

Vision Impairment Protocol

As outlined in April's report we have collaborated with the Royal National Institute of Blind People Northern Ireland (RNIB) to instigate a Vision Impairment Protocol.

Now live, this protocol complements our 'Quick check' service, and is a two-step process. When we are contacted for assistance and are required to attend, a password will be provided by the caller to the call taker and used by the attending officer to identify themselves upon arrival. Should we have to call to a vulnerable persons address unexpectedly, instructions will be provided for them to keep the door locked, to call 101 and select the 'Quick check' option. Staff in our Contact Management Centre will confirm that it is a police officer at their door.

National Firearms Licensing

The Police Service's Chief Firearms Instructors have completed their yearly College of Policing, National Firearms licensing submission. This submission provides reassurance to the Chief Constable that all officers, including our specialist authorised firearms officers, are qualified and training to the standards required within the National Police Firearms Training Curriculum.

We have also worked tirelessly to re-develop our Firearms and Records Management system. This new system, due to be relaunched in June 2024, compares favourably with anything being used nationally. Indeed, during our previous National Inspection by the College of Policing,

positive commentary was made on our quality assurance and inbuilt safeguarding and governance procedures

Outcome 3

We have Engaged and Supportive Communities

Northern Ireland Policing Board Partnership Committee

On 16 May 2024, the Policing Board Partnership Committee held their monthly meeting at Police College, Garnerville. ACC Bobby Singleton attended and answered questions from members on the Confidence Policing Plan measure.

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice, Jacqui Durkin, and Dr Claire Feehan, Criminal Justice Inspection (CJI) Lead Inspector, also attended to provide an update on progress following the PSNI and CJINI Report on Community Safety and Local Policing Arrangements.

After the meeting concluded members remained at Garnerville to receive a presentation from the Neighbourhood Faculty. The Neighbourhood Faculty is a small team of police trainers, with previous experience within neighbourhood policing teams in a variety of areas, who deliver a mandatory modular course to develop and support neighbourhood officers in their role. The Committee is particularly interested in the neighbourhood policing function and received a detailed outline of the various elements of the programme.

Reference, Engagement and Listening (REaL) Events

The Police Service Strategic Community Engagement Team held a Reference, Engagement and Listening (REaL) event with stakeholders representing the disability sector on 25 April 2024. The event involved focus group discussions across a range of areas, including the potential to improve awareness on ways for

disabled people to report to police.

Attraction, recruitment and retention of officers and staff was another theme of discussion with ideas shared on engaging with disabled people to help promote police staff opportunities. The under-reporting of hate crime amongst the disabled community was also addressed, with a lack of awareness highlighted around current police policy and practice in this area; views were also expressed around enhancing training to ensure police officers feel confident in recognising when someone is being victimised due to their disability.

The team also hosted a cultural awareness session as part of LGBTQIA+ Awareness Week with training delivered by Cara-Friend to a number of senior leaders from across Local Policing on 13 May.

Victim Updates

To increase our accessibility and responsiveness to victims of crime and other users of our services, we have expanded our automated email response process.

The current system involves all online reports receiving an automated email response, the content of which provides the reporting person with the call reference number and details of the Investigating Officer.

The automated response will now be used to provide this information to the reporting person for all non-emergency incidents regardless of their source, whether that be from a phone call, reporting in person, or reporting online.

Key Campaigns and Events

North West 200

As a result of the unprecedented schedule of racing and the exceptional weather, the 2024 NW 200 recorded one of the highest ever attendances in its history. The occasion is not just about the racing. It includes a series of events ranging from vintage vehicle displays to fashion shows.

Our policing operation focused on public safety, road safety and confronting Violence Against Women and Girls. Officers from across the Service deployed daily to these events to keep people safe and maximise the community engagement opportunities they deliver. On practice and race days, almost 50 local officers, including those from the Neighbourhood Policing Team, were deployed in support of the event alongside officers from specialist departments.

Roads Policing officers focused on our objective to 'keep the race in its place'. Operational patrols and Safety Camera vans focusing on primary routes, including the coastal route, made over 200 detections for excess speed and directly contributed to the absence of serious road traffic collisions over the weekend. In addition, Public Order Officers and the Safer Transport Team supported local District Officers throughout the event, in particular on the Saturday night as attendees socialised in the Ports.

A key success of the event was the use of a 'welfare vehicle', which provided officers with a mobile facility from which they could avail of refreshments, toilet facilities and rest. This vehicle will be a key feature of future events in the District following the closure of Portrush Police Station.

Reflective of the current pressures on officer numbers this event was resourced with one of its lowest ever operational profiles. That said, we

are delighted to report that through strong relationships and collaborative working with event organisers and partner agencies, the event passed off without significant incident.

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