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# Reduction in police complaints

Members of the Policing Board's Performance Committee have welcomed a reduction in complaints and allegations against the police, the lowest recorded in 5 years.

The Board has a statutory duty to monitor trends and patterns in complaints against police officers and recently met with representatives from the Police Ombudsman's Office to receive the latest report on the complaints process.

Committee Chair Nelson McCausland MLA said:

**The fact that the number of complaints against the police has reduced by 10.4% to 3,018 and the number of allegations by 13.6% to 4,863 compared to the previous year is welcome.**

**The number of allegations made against police in relation to failure in duty, oppressive behaviour and incivility well exceeded the targets set out in last year's Policing Plan to improve the quality of**

**service of policing delivered to our community.**

**However, despite the reductions, as a Board we must continue to focus attention on the reasons behind the complaints and allegations that continue to be made to see if there are policy, procedural or training issues that require action by the PSNI.**

**It is vital for confidence in our policing service that officers consistently comply with the professional standards and behaviours set within the PSNI Code of Ethics. Where there are concerns about police conduct, the community and the police can be assured that the office of the Police Ombudsman will deliver an independent and impartial investigation into the matter.**

To view the figures published by the Police Ombudsman's Office

[click here](#)



**Members of the Board's Performance Committee discuss trends and patterns in complaints against the PSNI with officials from the Police Ombudsman's Office and the PSNI.**

## What's the difference between a complaint and an allegation?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by or on behalf of a member of the public about a member of the police service. Each complaint can be made up of one or more allegations. For example, if a person alleges a police officer failed to deal with their case and was rude about it, it would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations.

## The Police Ombudsman records allegations of:

**Oppressive behaviour...** which includes oppressive conduct, harassment and assault  
**1,198** a reduction of **15%\***

**Incivility...** which refers to officers being rude, disrespectful or abrupt  
**373** a reduction of **9.9%\***

**Failure in duty...** includes failure of an officer in how they have investigated, responded, recorded information, provided information and remained impartial  
**2,086** a reduction of **11.8%\***

There were **27** complaints relating to the handling of domestic violence incidents.

Complaints relating to parades/demonstrations rose from **22** to **63**.

**39%** of investigations by the PSNI's Anti-Corruption and Vetting Branch were about inappropriate disclosure of information.

**376** complaints arising from breaches of the Code of Ethics.

\*Figures for the period 1/4/15 – 31/3/16

# HMIC Reports welcomed

**Policing Board Chair Anne Connolly has welcomed the publication of two new Inspection Reports which consider the efficiency and effectiveness of the PSNI.**

Completed by Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC), the Reports examine how the PSNI uses resources to discharge key responsibilities and provide a graded assessment of strengths and areas for improvement.

The Reports provide the Board with an independent professional policing assessment of how the PSNI is performing and discharging its responsibilities in a number of key areas and the actual cost impacts these have on day to day resourcing and capability.

Board Chair Anne Connolly said:

**Whilst the assessments make some very positive comments around how the PSNI currently uses resources to meet and manage policing current demands, there are some areas of the Report that cause**

**concern and will require immediate attention by the PSNI.**

**Given the focus, priority and commitment that the PSNI has given to keeping people safe and ensuring the protection of vulnerable people, it is disappointing that inconsistency in approach across a number of areas has been identified.**

HM Inspector of Constabulary, Mike Cunningham briefed the Board on the Report findings at the August meeting, explaining that they identified areas where the PSNI could be more efficient in building a clearer understanding of future demand and better planning for how it uses its workforce.

He said: **We were pleased to find that the service is demonstrating a good understanding of current demand for its services and is good at financial management.**

**However, we do have concerns with how the force responds to and protects vulnerable victims.**



**Board Members discuss the HMIC reports on PSNI effectiveness and efficiency.**

**In particular we were concerned to see inconsistencies in how staff recognise and assess vulnerability.**

With regard to the areas of improvement in vulnerability, the PSNI said that the HMIC inspection will help them to further develop the work of their Public Protection Branch. They outlined that they have dedicated additional detective resources to the investigation of Child Sexual Exploitation and strengthened relationships with the Health Trusts to ensure appropriate responses to

complaints of child abuse and domestic abuse.

A statement explained:

**Vulnerability is not an issue which the PSNI can deal with alone and HMIC has recognised the positive relationships that exist with a wide range of partner agencies.**

**To view the report on PEEL: Police efficiency**

[click here](#)

**To view the report on PEEL: Police effectiveness (vulnerability)**

[click here](#)

# Board Meeting News

Opening the August Board meeting in public Board Vice Chair Debbie Watters welcomed the overall peaceful outcome of events during the Twelfth period which she described as **“a testimony to leadership in the community, discussion and dialogue to resolve issues.”**

Ms Watters also emphasised the importance of the recently published reports by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) on PSNI effectiveness and efficiency which will be a focus for the Board’s work in the time ahead to make

sure that actions are taken to redress the areas that require improvement.

The Vice Chair praised the two officers whose actions were recently commended by the Coroner in attempting a rescue.

In his monthly report to Board Members, Chief Constable George Hamilton welcomed the reduction in tension and public order over the Twelfth period which was **“not only good for wider society but also good for policing as it allowed the police to focus resources**

**on keeping people safe and tackling harm in communities.”**

The Chief Constable also responded to the HMIC reports which detail findings of inspections conducted at the beginning of February. He explained that the concerns raised by HMIC in respect of workforce sustainability will be addressed through a root and branch review of all PSNI functions and how they contribute to keeping people safe which, he confirmed, has already been undertaken through Priority Based Resourcing.

Encouraged that a good grading was received in the ‘Police Efficiency’

inspection, he acknowledged the areas of improvement identified in the ‘Police Effectiveness (vulnerability)’ report. However the Chief Constable also emphasised the scale of vulnerability that the PSNI deal with. Of approximately 500,000 calls for service received over a one year period, 36% relate to the most vulnerable in the community. He told Members that overall the PSNI are heading in the right direction and the HMIC report has set out the next steps to be taken.

[Click here](#)

for the Chief Constable’s report



**Board Members questioning the Chief Constable at the Meeting in Public**

## Focus on HMIC reports

During the meeting Board Members further questioned the Chief Constable on the findings from the two HMIC inspection reports. Asked to explain the key success factors that contributed to the reduction in sickness levels by 10% since the inspection was undertaken, DCC Drew Harris attributed this to a more focused look at the health and wellbeing of officers. This has included an emphasis on psychological illnesses which has been facilitated by additional funding being made available from the Police Federation for counselling. **Continued...**

# Board Meeting News continued

## Focus on HMIC reports continued...

The report highlighted an excessive reliance on overtime and the Chief Constable was asked if a strategy was now in place to address this. The Chief Constable told Members that, while financial insecurity made this more challenging, Priority Based Resourcing should reduce the use of overtime. He explained that this process was not simply about cutting costs but targeting resources where they were needed. He also emphasised that while it was still high there had been a huge reduction in overtime over the last 5 years and having the flexibility to use it when there was a surge in demand was a necessity.

While the Chief Constable confirmed that a trainer was now based in the Contact Management Centre to progress training for staff on the issue of vulnerability, he was asked to explain why the PSNI was not aware of the limited understanding of domestic abuse among call handlers due to lack of training as identified in the report. Acknowledging the issue, ACC Todd also told Members that this had been identified well before the inspection report was undertaken and was a work in progress.

Asked if further inspections would follow the Chief Constable said he would welcome more having found the experience positive and the engagement with the HMIC of high quality.

## Other Questions

**With the recent tragic death of a young mother killed by a scrambler in a park in West Belfast, the Chief Constable was asked how current legislation on the use of scramblers in public spaces is being enforced by the PSNI and if there is a strategy to deal with these machines. ACC Stephen Martin confirmed that scramblers are designed for off-road use and that this needed to be enforced. He confirmed that the PSNI has engaged in a range of preventative work yet acknowledged the need for collaborative working with the community to tackle this issue fully. The need to ensure that the legislation on anti-social behaviour with regard to scramblers is applied consistently across districts and that officers are aware of their powers was also raised.**

With regard to the Billy Wright poster recently erected in Dungannon, the Chief Constable was asked if he would acknowledge that the PSNI response had caused deep hurt and damaged public confidence within the community. In answering the Chief Constable accepted that the words used in the initial statement had caused hurt and offence and that in hindsight a different form of words could have been used. Endorsing these comments ACC Martin added that while he viewed the poster as “distasteful, offensive and inappropriate” he was advised by lawyers that there was no contravention of the law. The issue of multiple permanent memorials located across Northern Ireland that commend the actions of paramilitary organisations was also raised and if the PSNI has considered their removal. In his response ACC Martin said police were often left to deal with what was a “societal and cultural” problem.

The police response to the burning of effigies and election posters on bonfires was also raised and clarity was sought on when a hate incident becomes a hate crime. In explaining ACC Martin told Members that there must be a substantive criminal offence and this can be very difficult to prove in relation to the burning of election posters and effigies. Having considered whether offences under the Public Order (NI) Order 1987 were applicable, in particular article 9 which makes it an offence to stir up hatred or arouse fear, ACC Martin said the evidence required to prosecute is very difficult to gather. He also emphasised that the response to issues surrounding bonfires needs to be a multi-agency one.

Other questions raised included an explanation for the increase in outcome rates for crimes against older people and the need for a secure unit for young people with mental health issues.

[click here](#) 

to view footage from the August meeting

[click here](#) 

to view Written Answers to Chief Constable's Questions

# Busy at Committees

## National Crime Agency Update



Jenny Bell, Rob Burgess and Liam Byrne from the NCA along with ACC Will Kerr brief Members of the Board's Performance Committee.

**ACC Kerr and officers from the NCA recently provided an update report to Board Members on the progress of performance and activity in Northern Ireland, reporting 44 'disruptions' over the past year which include drugs trafficking, organised crime and other investigations.**

The PSNI has provided support to the NCA with

intelligence, arrests and operational deployments with the NCA supplying the PSNI with investigative and operational support. Board Members heard that there are currently 33 case files being prepared for the ongoing Operation JARRA, a joint operation with the PSNI and National Crime Agency (NCA) into the accessing, sharing and distribution of indecent images of children.

Questions were also raised on the impact of operations arising from Brexit, funding and resourcing of operational activity and current governance structures for tackling organised crime.

The Director General of the NCA will report to the Board in October.

To view the NCA Annual Report

[click here](#)

## Finance update

At the July Resources Committee, Members were briefed on the latest financial picture by DCC Drew Harris and discussed issues related to a number of PSNI contracts.



## Positive observations

**A group of Independent Community Observers (ICOs) has reported positive findings about the most recent PSNI recruitment campaign.**

ICOs are volunteers from the community who monitor key elements of the PSNI recruitment process by measuring if the same procedures are applied to all candidates and evaluating whether facilities and arrangements are adequate. They then report their findings back to the Policing Board.

The Board's Resources Committee heard that the ICOs observed 58 tests and rated all visits as 'good' or 'acceptable'.

Any negative issues raised by ICOs during the campaign – such as excess noise outside the exam room - were either resolved locally or passed to the PSNI for consideration in future campaigns.

For more information of the work of Independent Community Observers

[click here](#)



**The Policing Board's Chief Executive Amanda Stewart recently met with Acting Director of the Probation Board Cheryl Lamont to discuss the work both organisations carry out in relation to policing.**

