



**OFFICIAL - PUBLIC**

**CHIEF CONSTABLE'S REPORT TO NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD  
3 DECEMBER 2020 (report submitted 27 November 2020)**

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to update the Northern Ireland Policing Board about:

1. Policing in a COVID-19 environment
2. Serious and Organised Crime
3. Looking forward to 2021

*Please note that this report was prepared in the week leading up to 27 November. Figures were correct at the time of writing.*

## **1. Policing in a COVID-19 environment**

### **1.1. Introduction**

The Police Service of Northern Ireland has been responding to the challenges of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Health Emergency since March 2020. Over that time there has been a shift from the initial 'policing a Covid-19 crisis' to 'policing in a Covid-19 environment'.

As we approach the end of 2020, I must place on record my pride with how colleagues have coped and adapted to the evolving circumstances throughout the year. We have continued to respond to calls for service, maintained our efforts to counter terrorism and serious and organised crime and to build our service to local communities via our expanded neighbourhood policing offer. All parts of our organisation are made up of people who have faced the same worries and concerns as the rest of society about their own health and that of their loved ones. Their collective commitment is to be commended.

### **1.2. Organisational Capacity**

We have maintained operational capacity throughout this crisis, which is a credit to the commitment of our police officers and police staff. Over the period between 16 March 2020 to 25 November 2020, 230 colleagues tested positive for Covid-19 and were absent for a period of time.

As of 25 November 2020, 417 colleagues were absent for Covid-19 related reasons, of which 359 were self-isolating, 59 were confirmed as sick with Covid-19 and two were symptomatic.

### 1.3. Enforcement

We continue with our proportionate approach to enforcement, maintaining the 4Es. Latest enforcement figures as published on 23 November 2020 are:



### 1.4. Challenges

Policing events that arose during the Covid-19 period has not been without its challenges. There has been much debate about how we have policed some protests, gatherings and funerals. I welcome the scrutiny and challenge that comes from our accountability bodies in that regard. We are an open, reflective and learning organisation and often that feedback is invaluable in shaping our thinking and tactics for future events and operations.

We are in receipt of your report entitled “Report on the Thematic Review of the Policing Response to Covid-19”. My senior colleagues and I are working our way through it in a systematic and structured way and will respond in detail as soon as possible.

Criminal justice processes including a number of Judicial Reviews are ongoing, so I am limited in what I can say publicly at this stage. However, it is clear to me that our policing of sensitive and contested matters such as gatherings and protests has caused upset, hurt and frustration for some. That genuinely held view is personal to those involved and I recognise the depth of feeling in some quarters.

Upon reflection, and drawing upon my experiences from policing in London, Liverpool and Manchester, I believe our structured engagement with the diverse communities across Northern Ireland has room for improvement. We have invested 400 new officers into Neighbourhood Policing this year.

This is the *what*. The *how* is about improving our understanding of community needs and expectations, to enable more responsive problem solving approaches. I want to reassure the Policing Board and all communities across Northern Ireland, that I will be prioritising community engagement in 2021 to seek to improve trust and confidence amongst those that were particularly affected by these events and others who may feel isolated or marginalised.

To that end, I will be establishing a new Community Relations Taskforce led by Assistant Chief Constable Mark McEwan. It will seek to include membership from across communities, academia and critical friends, as well as our professional leads and our Staff Associations and networks. The aim will be to build a much better appreciation of the needs and concerns of the many diverse communities across Northern Ireland and use that to inform our policing style and our operational approach. I would like to work closely with the Policing Board in shaping the work of the Taskforce and its Terms of Reference

Finally, I also recognise that my recent decision to issue Spit and Bite Guards to most frontline officers is contrary to the expressed view of the Policing Board as outlined in your Thematic Review. I respect the role of the Board in holding me to account and have always adopted a transparent approach with Board Members in addressing their

queries and concerns. This decision is not meant to disrespect the role of the Board or its expressed view, but on this occasion I have reached a different operational conclusion on the basis of the legal, medical and professional advice of which I am in receipt. My detailed rationale was outlined in my letter to the Chair of 18 November 2020. I can advise Members that our revised policy guidance will also state that,

*"Where officers or staff are already aware that a member of the public is vulnerable by way of age (under 18), mental health or other debilitating condition, which the use of a Spit and Bite Guard could exacerbate, the presumption will be that a Spit and Bite Guard should not be used."*

These new arrangements will still be reviewed monthly and oversight from the Police Ombudsman remains a cornerstone of our checks and balances both in policy terms and deployment tactics.

Recognising the breadth of opinion about this subject, I have directed that a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) now be undertaken to inform any future policy decisions about use in a "non Covid-19" scenario and would encourage every interested party to make detailed submissions in order to inform our future thinking. Details of the EQIA process will be published in due course.

## 2. Serious and Organised Crime

We continue to work closely with the National Crime Agency (NCA) as outlined by the report the Board has also received from the NCA Director General.

Additionally, work continues apace in our own efforts to tackle serious and organised crime across Northern Ireland.

### 2.1. Paramilitary Crime Task Force (PCTF)

The Paramilitary Crime Task Force is proactively investigating six paramilitary organised crime groups (OCG), namely East Belfast UVF, West Belfast UDA, INLA Belfast, INLA North West, South East Antrim UDA and North Antrim UDA. Examples of recent successes are outlined below.

#### *East Belfast UVF*

- In October 2020 searches were carried out on an address in East Belfast and controlled drugs with an estimated street value of £80,000 were seized. This included various forms of cannabis, approximately 2,000 suspected Diazepam tablets and £2,400 in cash. One person has been charged for various drug supply offences and possession of criminal property. In addition, a number of searches were carried which resulted in class A, B, C drug dealing paraphernalia and £6,000 pounds of cash being seized. One person has been reported to the PPS regarding the seizure of £600 worth of cannabis.

#### *West Belfast UDA*

- In September 2020 a number of suspects were reported to the PPS in relation to Money Laundering Offences in relation to licenced premises in the Belfast area.
- In October PCTF officers conducted a joint search of a property in the Shankill Road area of Belfast with local NPT officers. A quantity of Class A and Class B Controlled drugs were located. An individual was charged with a total of 11 offences which included the result of two previous searches.

- In October 2020, two vehicles were stopped in Nelson Street, Belfast. £2,800 in cash was seized from one vehicle and £36,000 of cocaine was seized from the other vehicle. One person has been charged with possession of Class A and possession of Class A controlled drugs with intent to supply in connection with the cocaine seizure and he was remanded in custody.
- Also in October 2020, officers searched an address in Belfast area where they seized £30,000 of cocaine, suspected mixing agent, drug dealing paraphernalia and two stun guns. Two people were arrested and subsequently charged with possession and possession with intent to supply of Class A controlled drugs, possession of prohibited weapons and being concerned in the supply of a controlled drug.

#### *INLA*

- In August 2020, an address in West Belfast was searched, following the postal interception of a Taser. One man was charged with a firearms offence.
- Also in August 2020, following a planned operation, two addresses were searched resulting in the recovery of Class A & B drugs, £3,140 in cash and drug dealing paraphernalia.
- In September 2020, an operation in the Belfast area resulted in the recovery of approximately 3.5kg of suspected herbal cannabis with a value of c£70,000. Two men were charged with drugs offences.
- In September 2020, a residential property was searched in West Belfast, resulting in the recovery of a firearm and 17 rounds of 9mm and 0.38 ammunition.
- In September 2020, searches were carried out in the Derry/Londonderry area. One of the searches resulted in the recovery of small amounts of cannabis, suspected Class A Drugs and a suspected cutting agent accompanied by drugs paraphernalia, and electronic devices.

- In October 2020, PCTF officers targeting the criminal activity of the INLA in Derry/Londonderry intercepted cannabis with an estimated street value of £3,000.

#### *South East Antrim UDA*

- As part of an ongoing investigation three suspects have been charged with a variety of drug related offences, possessing an imitation firearm with intent and possession of a prohibited weapon (stun gun).
- Searches were conducted as part of an ongoing investigation into large scale cannabis cultivation. Two men were arrested and charged with a number of drug offences. In addition, a referral was made for suspected Housing Benefit fraud.
- In September 2020, a search was carried out at an address in Carrickfergus. A suspected canister of CS spray was recovered along with a small quantity of white powder. Enquiries are ongoing.
- In October 2020, searches were carried out on an address and at a boat in the Carrickfergus area. A small quantity of Class B controlled drugs were recovered from the address and evidence of cannabis cultivation was present. The boat was subsequently seized as suspected of being the proceeds of crime.

#### *North Antrim UDA*

- Four searches have been conducted recently against criminals linked to North Antrim UDA by the PCTF. The reviewing of the seized material continues to be assessed for evidence of crime.



Summary of PCTF Activities

Activity	Aug-2020	Sept-2020	Oct-2020
Arrests	2	11	9
Charges & Reports	6	20	6
Searches	9	28	15
Drugs Seizures	5	9	10
Vehicle Seizures	0	0	3
Weapon Seizures	0	3	3
Cash Seizures	£3,140	£9,565	£17,577

2.2. Organised Crime

Some examples of success follow below -

Lithuanian OCG

- PSNI has been conducting a proactive investigation targeting a Lithuanian OCG who has been conducting criminality in the Republic of Ireland, Lithuania and Northern Ireland. These individuals are believed to be involved in human trafficking, money laundering and possession and supply of Class A drugs namely heroin and crack cocaine. It is assessed those involved are trafficking victims to sell drugs on behalf of OCG members in various cities including Belfast, Dublin, Waterford, Tralee and Cork. The OCG is headed up by a Lithuanian National living in Lithuania but with accommodation in Dublin.
- In August 2020 Judicial authorities and police from the UK, Lithuania and Ireland, with support from Eurojust and Europol conducted a joint search and arrest operation targeting all identified members of this organised crime gang. In total 18 arrests were completed (Lithuania - 10, Republic of Ireland - 5, Northern Ireland - 3). 65 searches were completed between Lithuania, Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the following property was seized; Money - Lithuania €153, 841, Republic of Ireland €558,200 and £500, Northern Ireland £2,180. Seized

property to the value of more than €600,000. Various assets were seized with an estimated overall value of €700,000.

- The operational day of action on the 26 August was the culmination of a three year investigation in which the PSNI had arrested and charged 53 street dealers working on behalf of the OCG. This OCG has proved to be a significant challenge to date but it is now hoped that it has been dismantled.

#### Drug Supply and Money Laundering by a Criminal Network

- PSNI has also been conducting a proactive investigation targeting drug supply and money laundering by a criminal network with links to Northern Ireland. In August 2020, three premises were searched in the Belfast Area, during which 2.5kg of herbal cannabis was recovered in one premises and £10,000 in a second premises. Two people were arrested in relation to this and in relation to the seizure of 96kg of cannabis in Belfast in July 2020 and the seizure of 72kg cannabis in England in June 2020. One of these people was also arrested in relation to the seizure of £50,000 by the PSNI in May 2020 and a further £50,000 seizure by West Midlands Police at the same time. The seized drugs have a potential street value of approximately £3.41m. Both persons were charged and remanded in relation to drug and criminal property offences.

#### High Value Operations

- In September 2020, a person was arrested attempting to take possession of a parcel containing 9kg of herbal cannabis in the Banbridge area. This person was linked to three previous seizures in the Lisburn area in March and August 2020, two previous seizures in Banbridge area in April 2020, one seizure in Belfast area in May 2020 and was subsequently linked to a seizure in Bangor area in January 2020. In total this person was charged for attempted possession with intent to supply of 36kg herbal cannabis, with a potential street value of £720,000.

- In October 2020, 17kg of herbal cannabis was seized following postal interceptions. These drugs were destined for an address in the County Tyrone area. The potential street value of these seizures is in the region of £340,000.
- In October 2020, 5.5kg of cannabis was seized following an operation in the Dunmurry and Newtownards areas. The estimated street value of these drugs was £110,000.
- In October 2020, working with partners in the National Crime Agency and Border Force, £6m of cocaine was discovered concealed in refrigerated goods in the Port of Holyhead. These drugs are believed to have been destined for Northern Ireland. One person was charged by NCA with exporting Class A drugs.
- In addition a drugs factory was discovered and dismantled in the Cookstown area. Suspected cocaine with a street value of £600,000 was seized alongside £4,000 of suspected cannabis and £10,000 cash. Three persons were charged with a number of drug related offences and possession of criminal property.
- In late October 2020, two intercepts resulted in the seizure of 15kg of herbal cannabis with an estimated street value of £300,000. Subsequent searches resulted in approximately £1,000 of Class A being seized.

#### Update on Operation Pharmic

- Operation Venetic is the name of a UK wide operation targeting middle and top tier organised criminality. Operation Pharmic is the PSNI response to the national Operation Venetic.
- To date, a total of 80 searches have been conducted resulting in 31 arrests of known Op Pharmic nominals. As a result of these arrests, 30 people have been charged with a total of 208 offences including Conspiracy to Murder, Possession of Firearms with Intent to endanger life, Possession of Explosives with Intent to endanger life, Intimidation of Witnesses, as well as importation and possession of

Class A, B and C controlled drugs, associated conspiracy offences and money laundering. As a result of the searches and operational activities, the following items have been seized:-

- Suspected Controlled Drugs - Class A (86kg cocaine; 5g MDMA); Class B (2.9 kg herbal cannabis and 3.5kg cannabis resin); Class C (quantities of diazepam, temazepam, lyrica, alprazolam and steroids); 30kg of mixing agent for Class A drugs and assorted drugs paraphernalia.
- In excess of £417,500 in cash as well as quantities of Euros and American dollars.
- Crossbows, 826 rounds of ammunition and one imitation firearm.
- 31 vehicles, a number of which are high value.
- Other high value goods seized include a number of designer handbags, clothing, watches, jewellery and a large quantity of signed sports memorabilia (valued in the hundreds of thousands of pounds).
- Four restraints on assets, total value in the region of £2m.

### 2.3 Serious Crime

Serious Crime Branch deals with homicide, terrorism investigations, slavery and high end cyber offending and digital evidence. At present it is dealing with 250 high level complex investigations with 100 centred on homicides and 120 on terrorism. The success of its work, particularly in the field of terrorism is an integral part of creating an environment where local neighbourhood based policing with the community can flourish in safety. The casework alone does not describe its full remit as it works with internal and external partners to stop people becoming victims in the first place. A selection of its activities is highlighted below, and is a testament to the professionalism of our officers and staff.

## Terrorism Investigation Unit (TIU)

- Throughout 2019/20 TIU worked closely with partners to counter the terrorist threat in Northern Ireland. TIU has played a proactive and central role in disrupting national security attacks during this time. Examples of this are the recovery of two substantial explosive devices in Derry/Londonderry, the recovery of the firearm which was used in the murder of Lyra McKee and the recovery of a heavy-duty weapon that is capable of firing armour-piercing rounds. Since April 2020, TIU has worked with partners to manage approximately 45 new national security threats. During that same timeframe TIU has conducted 50 terrorist related searches, arrested 31 people and charged or reported 25 individuals with 67 offences. This collaborative effort has resulted in no national security attacks being carried out across Northern Ireland in that period.
- OP Arbacia - In August 2020 TIU co-ordinated overt police counter terrorism (CT) activities across Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Scotland and at Heathrow Airport. Those policing operations, known as Operation Arbacia, were the overt consequences of a covert investigation that had been developed by TIU, Intelligence Branch, Specialist Operations Branch and MI5 over many months and resulted in the arrest and charging of ten people – nine of whom are accused of being senior leaders of the new Irish Republican Army. Those ten people are now remanded in prison, charged with 39 terrorist offences, including directing terrorism, preparatory acts of terrorism and conspiracy to possess explosives and ammunition.

## Major Investigation Teams

- More than 100 cases remain under active investigation across our Major Investigation Teams (MIT), with a number of cases stretching back many years. This caseload includes the investigation into the murder of Lisa Dorrian, who disappeared from a caravan site in Ballyhalbert in 2005. Lisa's body has never been found, despite extensive searches, including a search in recent weeks and further active lines of enquiry still being progressed 15 years later. More recently,

the investigation into the murder of Donald Rennie in Ballymena resulted in two men being charged. The investigation into the murder of Patrycja Wyrebek in Newry, resulted in one man being charged.

- Whilst a number of recent cases, including the murders of Warren Crossan, Kieran Wylie and Robbie Lawlor and the attempted murder of Sally Cummins have been very challenging, our teams have experienced significant levels of support from local communities. Those crimes remain under active investigation. A significant amount of investigative work remains ongoing into the deaths of Morgan Barnard, Connor Currie and Lauren Bullock at the Greenvale Hotel in March 2019 and the murder of Lyra McKee in April 2019.
- Since March 2020, Covid-19 has required a considerable change to how Major Investigation Teams conduct their work, particularly in relation to face-to-face interactions which are essential to our ability to progress investigations. More than two thirds of officers and staff from across Serious Crime Branch have benefitted from our agile working strategy, and are now equipped with remote access laptops, to maintain and improve our service to the public.

### Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

- The number of potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking recovered in Northern Ireland this year continues to rise. Since the beginning of this financial year 86 people have been referred to the National Referral Mechanism for specialist victim support. This is a substantial increase from 57 for the same reporting period last year, despite the restrictions on travel caused by Covid-19.

- During the last financial year 2019/20, 111 potential victims of human trafficking were identified in Northern Ireland but the actual number of people in Northern Ireland affected by the crime is ultimately unknown as it often goes unreported and undetected within the community. Since the establishment of Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit in April 2015, 396 Potential Victims of Trafficking have been recovered in Northern Ireland and the Unit has had reason to engage with and screened over 1,200 persons for signs and indicators of Human Trafficking.

## Cyber Centre

Our key aims are to detect, prevent, and protect.

- Cyber Crime Centre has processed and examined over 200 devices connected with the major investigation into Dissident Republican activities, under Op Arbacia which is a key component of the enquiry.
- Cyber Crime Centre provided substantial support in relation to the use of encrypted communications devices through the Organised Crime investigation, Op Venetic. This included the production of 700 evidential exhibits and represents a serious strike against the insidious nature of organised crime in Northern Ireland.
- Detectives from the Cyber Crime Centre are currently working in collaboration with national and international Law Enforcement partners from the United States in investigating a cyber-attack targeting a high profile international company. A suspect within Northern Ireland has been arrested, interviewed and currently remains on bail pending digital forensic examination of a number of devices. This is a substantial investigation highlighting just one example of the international collaboration required when investigating cyber dependant crimes that impact on a global scale.

- A school's cyber education online package has been developed jointly between PSNI's Cyber Prevent Officer, NI Cyber Security Centre, Education Authority and C2K. Two identified issues led to the development of the resource, namely a shortfall in cyber security awareness/education within schools and the need to amplify the PSNI Cyber Prevent officer's reach to every post primary school in Northern Ireland to deliver the cyber prevent key messaging. The package will be launched to education on 2 December 2020.
- As part of the UK Policing Cyber Protect network, the Cyber Crime Centre has proactively engaged with a number of local organisations identified as being exposed to network vulnerabilities. This includes the identification of remote access credentials (username/password) linked to two companies recovered from a criminal database by law enforcement partners. These companies were unaware of their vulnerabilities and were protected.
- Working to help raise awareness of cyber security within the health sector, the Cyber Crime Centre have been engaged with Community Pharmacy NI (CPNI). This has resulted in a joint communique by CPNI and the Cyber Crime Centre to NI based Pharmacies highlighting the steps they can take to help protect their organisations, promoting the advice offered by our partners at the National Cyber Security Centre.



### **3. Looking Towards 2021**

The volume and complexity of the work outlined in this report illustrates just some of the unique demands we have faced throughout 2020. As outlined last month, crime levels and calls for service have returned to expected levels. It is fair to say that these challenges will continue into the first half of 2021 at least, no matter how welcome the news of possible Covid-19 vaccination programmes.

However, in the midst of the immense operational demands that we faced, the Service has continued to build foundations for our modernisation plans that will make us ready for the medium term challenges that will undoubtedly come our way. Budget pressures will remain a reality and it is more important than ever to maintain a focus upon building our business acumen within the Service. I look forward to the appointment of a Chief Operating Officer and an Executive Director of People and Organisational Development in early 2021 to increase the capacity within our senior leadership team and help deliver upon our ambitious but necessary transformation plans.

The foundations provided by our new People Strategy and Crime Prevention Strategy and forthcoming Digital, Fleet and Digital Strategies, will ensure that we continue to build a well-equipped workforce to meet community needs, an ethos of 'Prevention First' amongst all parts of the organisation, and an evidence based approach to capital investment in technology, fleet and estates.

At the heart of all of these plans is our desire for visible and responsive local neighbourhood policing teams. After the interruption of Covid-19 earlier this year, we have regained some ground in the building of the enhanced neighbourhood offering. We are currently 22 officers short of our target of 400 additional officers, with that gap to be closed in the first quarter of 2021. I look forward to reporting to the Board over the coming year about the work being undertaken by these teams.

In closing, I would again thank my colleagues for their commitment and professionalism throughout 2020.