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**CHIEF CONSTABLE'S REPORT TO NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD
THURSDAY 4 MARCH 2021 (report submitted 26 February 2021)**

Content

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

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1. Finance and Resourcing

Last month's report provided an initial assessment of the Police Service's draft budget allocation for 2021-22. In the intervening period, further planning has taken place to address a projected revenue funding gap of £23m. Engagement with internal and external stakeholders has been central to realising the impact of required savings on policing delivery. Despite the scale of financial challenges, we remain committed to achieving a balanced budget in the year ahead, in accordance with statutory obligations.

It is our formal organisational assessment, that the current draft budget allocation is not sufficient to facilitate meaningful delivery of all the outcomes under the Policing Plan 2020 - 2025. Sustainable funding is essential to achieving the renewed focus of, 'strengthening approaches and supporting mechanisms for policing in the community' under *New Decade, New Approach* (January 2020).

Aggregate reductions in the policing budget over the last ten years amount to around £200m, equating to a 20% overall reduction. This has largely been managed through savings in non-pay areas of the police budget. On this basis, there is limited remaining scope to redress the current funding gap by further reducing non-pay revenue spend. Instead, a reduction in police officer numbers will be necessary in order to achieve a balanced budget in 2021-22. In real terms, the police officer headcount will reduce by approximately 300 officers throughout the financial year. It is projected that this will result in a total police officer numbers falling to circa 6,700 by March 2022.

In my report to the Board, dated 11 February 2021, I described the cumulative impact of events of the last few months as a, 'defining moment in the evolution of policing'. The complexity of the current policing environment should not be underestimated. This is not the time to contemplate any reduction in community based policing, either in neighbourhood teams or local policing response to calls for service from the public. Our commitment to prioritising the Neighbourhood Policing function and protecting its existing resourcing levels still stands. Additionally, we will also strive to maximise police staff workforce flexibility and officer visibility, accessibility and responsiveness.

Further detail on proposed budgetary-driven changes will be included in a draft Resource Plan, for presentation to the Resources Committee on 24 March 2021. This will also include information on the development of key projects, which will benefit from an increased draft capital allocation of £68m for 2021-22.

It is important that associated risks and the medium to longer term impacts of reduced financial resource are understood.

- **Police – Community Relations and Visibility:** Recent events have brought into focus the real and persistent challenges faced in securing legitimacy and building confidence in policing. Investment is required to facilitate the Police Service to adapt to a changing social, cultural and technical operating environment.
- **Representativeness** – Reduced headcount will be achieved by balancing recruitment against those exiting the organisation. This will require at least a 50% reduction in police officer recruitment with a foreseeable impact on diversity, notably in relation to gender and community background. This will hinder progress on representative commitments, organisational agility and realising the benefits of increased diversity.
- **Workforce Wellbeing** – reduced resourcing will place additional strain on the remaining workforce. Officers and staff have worked with dedication throughout the public health crisis and are already experiencing fatigue and pressure, on a personal and professional level.
- **Public Order Capability and Reliance on Mutual Aid** - Reduced public order capacity is an inevitable consequence of a shrinking organisation. This will increase our reliance on mutual aid support, particularly considering the fact that the overtime budget will also experience reduction. There is no funding provision for mutual aid, we cannot assume availability and it is considerably more expensive per unit cost than utilising our own resources.

The Police Service welcomes the support of the Policing Board to secure required additional funding on this basis.

2. Policing in a COVID-19 Environment

2.1 Current Situation

On 18 February 2021, the Northern Ireland Executive announced a further extension of the current Health Protection Regulations, until 1 April 2021. An interim review is scheduled for 18 March 2021 to determine which restrictions will remain in place beyond that date.

Current Public Health Regulations appear to be having a similar effect on crime as experienced during the first lockdown in March 2020. Recorded crime levels are below average for the time of year, whereas antisocial behaviour is above average. However, when COVID-19 related anti-social behaviour is excluded, reports of antisocial behaviour are consistent with normal levels.

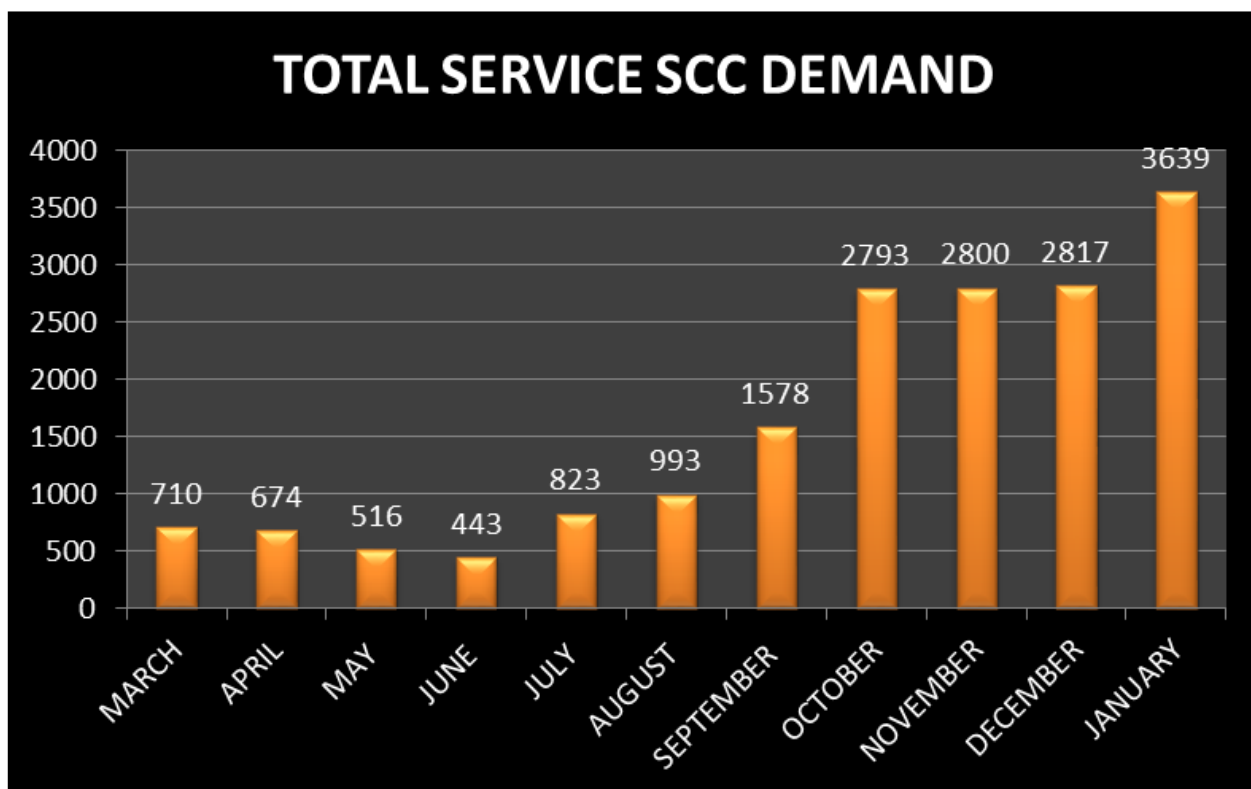
Recent crime figures from England and Wales demonstrate a similar pattern, although recorded crime levels in Northern Ireland have not decreased to the same extent as in England and Wales. Between October 2019 and September 2020 there was a 5.4% decrease in recorded crime compared to the previous twelve months in Northern Ireland, whereas a 6.6% decrease was experienced in England and Wales in the same period.

2.2 Demand

The month of January 2021 generated a peak in COVID-19 related demand for the Police Service, aligned to community infection and hospital admission rates. Infection rates at the beginning of January reached a peak of 665 people infected per 100,000 of the population. Hospitals also experienced a surge in demand around the same time with 108 COVID-19 related hospital admissions on 8 January 2021. By 17 February 2021, the infection rate had reduced to 109 people infected per 100,000 of the population.

At the same time, the Police Service Strategic Coordination Centre (SCC), which is responsible for managing the day to day policing response to COVID-19, recorded its busiest period since the beginning of the pandemic. In the month of January 2021, a total of 3,639 COVID-19 related incidents were managed across the Service, with specialist tactical advice provided to police responders on 2,475 occasions. Dedicated COVID-19 protected resources were deployed on 821 times during this period, based on risk assessment. Comparatively, between 1 February and 22 February 2021, a total of 2133 incidents were managed by SCC, with tactical advice provided on 1328 occasions. COVID-19 protected resources were deployed 451 times.

The below graphic provides an overview of monthly COVID-19 related demand in the period March 2020 – January 2021, as overseen by the Strategic Coordination Centre.



2.3 Organisational Impact

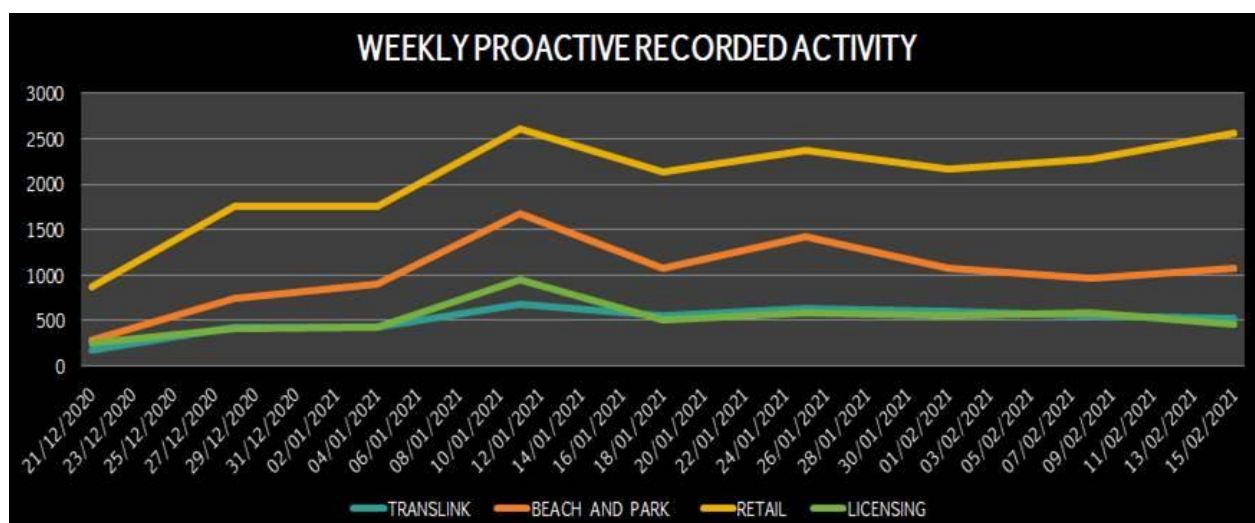
The organisation has remained resilient, and our people committed, throughout the pandemic. Our tailored management approach and risk mitigation measures have been successful, to date, in controlling the impact of infection in the workplace. At the time of writing, 91% of police officers and police staff were available for work. During the course of the public health crisis, between 16 March 2020 and 24 February 2021, a cumulative total of 600 people, comprising 478 officers and 122 staff have been confirmed as having COVID-19. In terms of self-isolation, there have been a cumulative total of 8,375 occurrences, involving 6,938 officers and 1,437 staff. A further 72 officers and staff have been protected by shielding, for a variety of reasons.

In recent months, we were pleased to provide much needed support to the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to alleviate operational pressures they have experienced. A total of 11 police officers received training and participated in 66 shifts, attending 110 Ambulance Service calls. Ambulance Service staff reported positively on the willingness and professionalism of our officers. The success of this collaborative initiative demonstrates the benefits of partnership in securing resilience of front line service delivery in the interests of public safety.

Since my last update, online interviewing has been successfully introduced for police staff external recruitment. Online interviewing is also being considered for specific internal promotion and selection processes. This is a progressive step forward in continuing to make appointments to operationally critical roles. It is anticipated that we will conclude our 2020 police officer campaign assessment centres in the coming weeks.

2.4 Enforcement

Police officers continue to play an active part in supporting the combined public health effort, working hard to provide a visible police presence, whilst engaging to explain and encourage adherence with the 'Stay at Home' message. Between 1 January and 22 February, police officers provided high visibility presence on the Translink network on 4,267 occasions, tourism/beauty spots on 8,952 occasions and provided support to the retail sector on 16,915 occasions.



January 2021 was the busiest month on record in terms of enforcement activity, with 1080 £200 fixed penalty notices (COV4) issued across Northern Ireland. A total of 617 COV4 notices were issued in February 2020 (01/02/21 – 22/02/21). The majority of enforcement focused around gatherings in private dwellings with more than 6 times the amount of prohibition notices issued to private dwellings than to business owners operating in contravention of Regulations.

From March 2020 to date your Police Service has issued:

2101 COV1

3229

COV 4

Penalty Notices (COV4 now replaces COV1 with fines starting at £200)

1486

COV 2

Prohibition Notices issued to licensed premises or for restriction of gatherings in a private dwelling

220 Commercial
1266 Private

57

COV 3

Failure to Isolate (£1,000 fine)

67

COV 5

Penalty Notice issued to a business and/or premises for breach of the regulations starting at £1,000 to a max of £10,000

4

COV 6

Penalty Notice of £200 issued for failing to wear a face covering without reasonable excuse

2071

CRNs

Community Resolution Notices

These figures are provisional and are subject to change



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Police Service of Northern Ireland



As we move into Spring, with increased daylight hours and better weather, pressures are likely to emerge around public adherence to social gathering restrictions and travel guidance. We have sought to proactively use social media platforms and local police presence to discourage travel to key sites of interest where large numbers of people are congregating. However, we have no powers to enforce in this space. This is anticipated to be an issue of increasing significance with St Patrick's Day and Easter on the horizon. A preventative cross-sector response is required, rather than relying solely on a policing enforcement solution. This is particularly relevant, in light of both the limitations of police powers under Health Protection Regulations and continuing public debate about the police enforcement remit.

We continue to keep the policing style under close review. This is to ensure we strike an appropriate balance between enforcement of the Regulations and wider policing responsibilities, notably our responsibility to work cooperatively with communities and to build public confidence in policing.

A follow up review of how the Police Service uses discretion and penalty notices was published by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland on 18 February 2021. This report is very relevant at this time. It is encouraging that the report identifies improvements in our governance and oversight arrangements. We will work with our partner agencies, as we continue to face challenges in the months ahead, to ensure that together we deliver a service which meets the needs and expectations of everyone in our community.

Since the last Board meeting, we have worked with the Public Prosecution Service to extend the period in which fixed penalty notices can be issued after the date of a breach of the Regulations. This change in policy responds to feedback regarding delays and the perceived effectiveness of police enforcement. It also offers greater operational flexibility, by allowing a period of up to 14 days to gather necessary information and evidence. Best practice remains to issue notices as soon as is reasonably practical, however, timescale flexibility may be utilised where immediate issue is either impractical or inappropriate in the circumstances. Officers continue to receive the benefit of 24/7 guidance and support on operational decision making by senior officers in the COVID-19 Strategic Coordination Centre.

3. EU Exit

Dedicated work continues to manage the various impacts of EU Exit on policing, with planning underway in regards to the next phase of EU Exit transition. This has been informed by a recent 'think-tank' between partner organisations and representatives from the Northern Ireland Office. We remain committed to working with local communities and partners to reduce tensions and build safe and inclusive communities.

Some positive examples of collaborative outcomes resulting from proactive work at ports include:

- On 22 February 2021, we provided support to a National Crime Agency led operation which resulted in the interception of 20kg of Class A controlled drugs from a vehicle at Belfast Port, with an estimated value of £1.6 million.
- On 23 February 2021, a partnership operation with UK Border Force resulted in the arrest of three Organised Crime Group suspects involved in the importation of Class B controlled drugs using the postal system. The investigation has resulted in the interception of 60 kg drugs over the last three months, amounting to an estimated total value of £900,000.

EU Exit and controversy surrounding the Northern Ireland Protocol has seen a re-emergence of identity politics and a rising tide of tension. The resultant societal and political environment has implications for policing. This highlights the importance of adequate funding and resource to manage a potentially volatile, fast paced, unpredictable and complex set of circumstances.

Graffiti, posters, placards, banners and stickers expressing discontent with the Northern Ireland Protocol have been encountered across Northern Ireland. A total of 117 occurrences of graffiti have been reported with a further 79 occurrences involving posters, placards, banners or stickers (at 25 February 2021). Graffiti incidents have mainly been concentrated around Belfast and Derry/Londonderry with recent incidents in the Larne

area. The majority of reported posters/sticker incidents have occurred across a wider geographical area, affecting a number of Policing Districts.

Gold Command structures were implemented on the week commencing 3 February 2021 in response to this trend. An uplift in resourcing was implemented which was primarily utilised to focus on patrolling at key locations, particularly near the ports. We continue to work with partners in local Councils and those Departments responsible for the Northern Ireland Protocol. We continue to provide crime prevention support and advice.

Recent graffiti, threats and disruption directed towards journalists, political leaders and other high profile individuals are unacceptable and have concerning impacts for civic society. I met with National Union of Journalists to provide reassurance on the seriousness with which we hold these events. A meeting is also scheduled with the All-Party Group on Press Freedom and Media Sustainability on 19 March 2021. Incidents of this nature will receive a consistently robust corporate response, including the allocation of a single Senior Investigating Officer to coordinate the investigative response and crime prevention support.

4. Operation PIVOT

Operation PIVOT was launched following paramilitary intimidation in the area of the Ballymac Community Centre in east Belfast on 2 February 2021.

On 17 February 2021, three men were arrested in connection with this incident and were subsequently charged with a number of public order offences, reported for the offence of intimidation, and remanded in custody. A dedicated team of Detectives continues to actively pursue lines of enquiry in respect of this investigation, working in close partnership with local neighbourhood officers. Within the last week, this has led to further arrests. On 24 February 2021, four men were arrested on suspicion of terrorism and other related offences, which have been reported to the Public Prosecution Service. On 26 February 2021, a further arrest operation resulted in three men being detained, all of whom remain in police custody at the time of writing.

An enhanced neighbourhood and public order policing presence has been established in the wider area throughout February 2021. Neighbourhood officers and the management team from Strandtown Police Station continue to engage across the community in the interests of reassurance and partnership working. Officers continue to seek to build community confidence and enable those, who might otherwise not feel able, to come forward and report any incidents.

5. Spit and Bite Guards Update

A 12 week consultation period for the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) into the use of Spit and Bite Guards in a non-Covid environment will commence on 1 March 2021. It is anticipated that the results of this assessment will be published in June 2021.

6. Assaults on Police Officers and Police Staff

In April 2020, we introduced a new Nine Point Plan to improve the way assaults on police officers and police staff are investigated. This sought to acknowledge the wellbeing impact that abuse and assault can have on individuals, when incurred routinely in the course of public service. We do not accept a culture where assaults on police are seen as, 'just part of the job'. As an organisation, we are committed to preventing attacks on our people and to providing support and robust investigation of such incidents. A formal review of progress is underway and will determine next steps in this important long term area of focus.

Assaults on Officers and Staff: Our Nine Point Plan

Physical assaults on our people are unacceptable and should not be considered 'part of your job'.

We have developed a Nine Point Plan that outlines how we will deal with such attacks.

- 01** Assaults on Police Officers and Police Staff should be investigated with the same care, compassion and commitment as an assault on a member of the public
- 02** The Victim Charter applies to all victims and therefore to assaults on Police Officers and Police Staff
- 03** The assaulted Police Officer must never be in charge of the investigation into their own assault
- 04** Colleagues recover better and more quickly if they receive the appropriate welfare options and supervisory support
- 05** The supervisor must ensure that the Duty Service Silver Commander is informed when a Police Officer or Police Staff member is hospitalised
- 06** The assault should be raised at the next available local DMM
- 07** To achieve a successful prosecution, the best evidence must be presented
- 08** Chief Constable Statements should be considered in all cases of Assault against Police Officers or Police Staff
- 09** The assaulted Police Officer or Police Staff and their Supervisor must complete the online Accident Reporting (Health & Safety) Form on SAP

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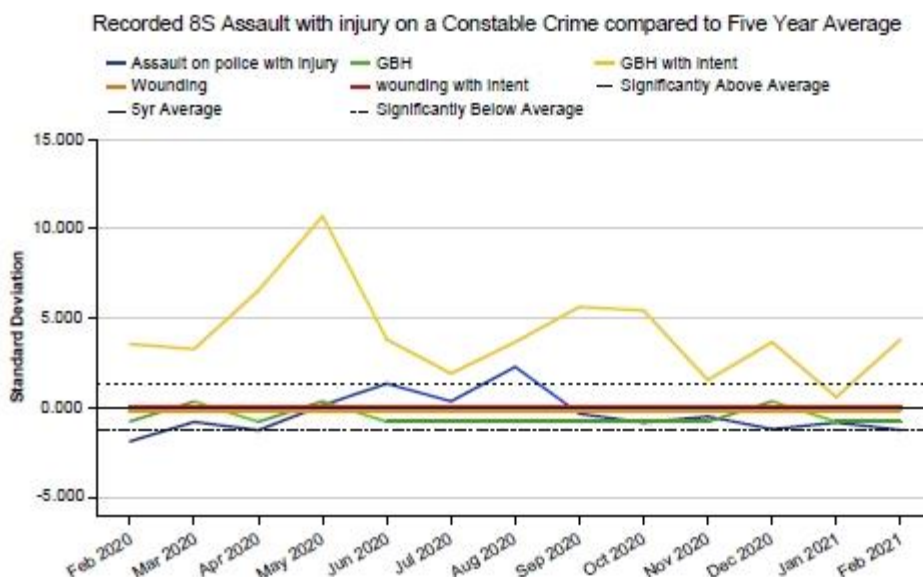
Keeping People Safe 

It is of concern that provisional crime figures for the financial year to date indicate a 13.6% increase in the number of recorded crimes for ‘assault with injury on a Constable’. Whilst the five year overall assault with injury trend has remained relatively stable, there has been a significant increase in the severity of assaults on our officers and staff. Over 22% of assaults with injury on police recorded in the financial year to date were classified as Grievous Bodily Harm or Grievous Bodily Harm with Intent offences. The five year comparison is stark, with equivalent offences only accounting for between 2% and 8% of total assaults with injury in the years between 2015/16 and 2019/20. **It is emphasised that crime figures within this report are provisional and do not represent official crime statistics.**

The below graph demonstrates the significantly above average rate of GBH with Intent offences perpetrated against police officers this financial year. Contributory causes of this increase remain undetermined but many are attributable to the policy of recording Covid-19 related spitting incidents as GBH with Intent offences.

Five Year Trends

Over the past five years, crime levels have remained stable at around crimes recorded per day for 8S Assault with injury on a Constable. The chart below shows how recorded, rolling 12 months, compares to the previous five-year average.



7. Gender Representation

7.1 International Women's Day 2021

We look forward to involvement in and promotion of International Women's Day on 8 March 2021. This year, our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit will be working with the Women in Policing Association to deliver a short video in support of this year's theme – ***#Choose to Challenge***.

This is an opportunity to reinforce our commitment to ensuring an inclusive workplace culture where women can thrive. The importance of women's contribution to policing is not underestimated. Our new People Strategy will provide the basis for increasing female representation and visibility in the Police Service and securing a truly inclusive culture. Central to this will be to ensure appropriate gender representation across all ranks, grades and specialisms as well as throughout our key decision making forums.

The Service Executive level gender gap that is created by Assistant Chief Constable Barbara Gray's promotion to her new role as Deputy Assistant Commissioner in the Metropolitan Police Service is recognised.

7.2 Good Practice

Our Women in Policing Association coordinates internal and external mentoring programmes for female officers and staff. The external scheme matches senior leadership participants with mentors from organisations such as NI Water, Ulster Bank and Legal Island.

The Police Service holds corporate membership for Women in Business, which provides the benefit of cost-free or reduced cost participation in networking events, mentoring programmes and learning/development opportunities to all female officers and staff.

This month, a bespoke Gender Action Plan was launched by Operational Support Department as a medium to long term project to strengthen and embed diversity in the Department. The Gender Action Plan specifically aims to increase the number of women and other underrepresented groups within specialist functions, particularly Armed Response, Close Protection, Road Policing, Tactical Support and Firearms Training.

The focus is on providing an environment which is inclusive and enabling to women and other underrepresented groups. Working arrangements, estate and facilities along with wellbeing and support mechanisms are under active consideration. A mentoring scheme has been launched as an initial step towards addressing the gender imbalances present within some areas of the Department. This scheme will support female officers prior to and during application processes. Upon appointment, mentoring will continue in order to support new officers during their initial transition into role.



7.3 Promotion

In terms of representativeness, we have recently made a number of appointments within our Chief Inspector, Superintendent and Chief Superintendent ranks. Over the past 12 months, a total of 103 of police officers and 88 police staff who identify as female have been promoted into first line, middle and senior management roles. It is encouraging to note the progression of female candidates within these promotion processes and we will continue to keep this progress under close review as we progress other senior police staff and police officer opportunities across a range of specialisms in the coming months.

Police Officer Promotions	
01/01/20 – 17/02/21	
Rank	Female Promotions
Assistant Chief Constable	50%
Chief Superintendent	25%
Superintendent	29%
Chief Inspector	39%
Inspector	50%
Sergeant	33%
Combined Total	34%

Police Staff Appointments & Promotions	
01/01/20 – 17/02/21	
Grade	Female Promotions
Grade 7	44%
Deputy Principal	33%
Staff Officer	47%
Executive Officer 1	55%
Executive Officer 2	64%
Combined Total	55%

8. Service Executive Team Portfolios

With effect from 8 March 2021, Assistant Chief Constable Mark McEwan will assume responsibility for Crime Department. Assistant Chief Constable Alan Todd and Temporary Assistant Chief Constable John Roberts will remain in their current positions in District Policing Command and Operational Support Department. A new Temporary Assistant Chief Constable will assume leadership of Community Safety Department upon selection, towards the end of March 2021.

In addition, Pamela McCreedy will take up her post as new Chief Operating Officer (COO) at the beginning of March 2021. This is a key position within the Senior Executive Team with portfolio responsibility for People and Organisational Development, Corporate Services and Transformation. Pamela's experience in health and social care, audit and accounting, strategic leadership and cultural change will be invaluable to addressing current and future challenges faced by the Police Service.



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