



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Overview: Police Service of Northern Ireland

13 February 2020

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)

Ms Linda Dillon (Deputy Chairperson)

Mr Doug Beattie

Mr Gordon Dunne

Mr Paul Frew

Mr Patsy McGlone

Mr Pat Sheehan

Miss Rachel Woods

Witnesses:

Chief Constable Simon Byrne Police Service of Northern Ireland

Deputy Chief Constable Police Service of Northern Ireland
Mark Hamilton

Mr Mark McNaughten Police Service of Northern Ireland

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I welcome to the meeting the Chief Constable, Simon Byrne; the Deputy Chief Constable, Mark Hamilton; and Mark McNaughten, the PSNI's director of finance and support services.

Following the restoration of the institutions, this is the first time that the Justice Committee has been able to engage with the Police Service. I welcome this engagement and congratulate both of you on your appointment. I trust that this will be the start of a positive engagement with the Committee, as we seek to carry out the work that we have to do, particularly given the amount of resource that the Department puts into the Police Service. I intend for this to become a feature of the Committee. We can have conversations on how that engagement can proceed following this meeting.

The meeting will be reported by Hansard. I will hand over to you, Simon, to give us a brief overview. There is a series of areas on which we would like to probe you. We have given you advance notice of some of those, but Committee members may have other issues of which you have not been notified, but I know that you and Mark are more than capable of answering anything that members ask you. There are five broad areas for discussion. Following each discussion, I will open up the meeting to members for questions, and we will then move on to the next area.

Chief Constable Simon Byrne (Police Service of Northern Ireland): Thank you for the welcome, Chair, and thanks to you and the rest of the Committee for the chance for all of us to come along to speak to you. I have to respect the different positions that we fall in between — the Policing Board and

other accountability mechanisms — but I want to cover a few issues to bring you up to speed. We sent you some information in the pre-read on some of the plans for modernisation, but it is probably relevant to add a bit of colour to that.

At least one person in the room might remember where this started for me. When I pitched for the job, having done some reflection and research, I likened the PSNI to a see-saw that was out of kilter, because I thought that the conversation around legacy, terrorism, serious crime, parades, bonfires and public order was pushing the organisation out of kilter. Although acknowledging the importance of those issues, I saw my job as rebalancing the see-saw through a greater focus on day-to-day policing. That is reflected in some of the papers that we have been able to send to you in advance.

We are now trying to prosecute a reform and modernisation programme that has three pillars. The first pillar is to grow the organisation to 7,500 police officers, broadly with the intention of putting those extra officers — not all, but the bulk of them — into neighbourhood policing roles, because it is really important to build on the success of the past and to challenge some of the bigger problems in policing and societal terms — paramilitary crime and terrorism — by having a consistent footprint in communities to build up trust and relationships.

The second pillar is about recognition. I am mindful that you have to make some big decisions about budget. It is about considering how we improve the productivity of the workforce that we have, whether that is police officers or police staff, and about investment in digital PSNI, which is about trying to equip people with handheld technology specific to their role. For example, a response officer with a tablet device to carry out checks and get information in real time from the PSNI could go into somebody's home and be able to take a statement there and then from a victim, recover other evidence digitally and then whoosh that back into the organisation, sometimes faster than we can get a prisoner into the custody centre. There are big gains to be made if we can invest in that space. Over and above the £40 million that we will be requesting for the extra officers, we estimate that about £17 million will be required to be split between revenue and capital to equip us with the sort of front-line, 21st century, real-time technology that a good policing organisation wants to have.

Linked to that, and the third strand of our plans, is some estate modernisation. You have probably been in and out of some of our buildings, but I ask you to focus on Belfast and the headquarters estate. That alone occupies a number of key sites that may be attractive for other use. Our proposal, in a nutshell, is to consider how we can exit those sites and work with a partner to redevelop them, and, at the same time, build a campus-type headquarters to relocate staff to, change the working environment and exploit the investment in technology by investing in agile working, which, particularly for police staff, will bring real benefits.

Underneath that, we will want to come back, over time, Chair, to your interest in policing and how we talk to you about a different type of operating model and relationship, through policing style, with the public.

I am whistling through this. There has been a lot of commentary about the 'New Decade, New Approach' (NDNA) document. We welcome the commitments around justice reform. Whether you are a victim, somebody coming forward to give evidence or somebody accused of a crime, you will agree that it currently takes too long to move through the justice system. In the Crown Court, on average, the length of time is running at almost three years. For victims of crime — we might talk about domestic abuse later — waiting that long for resolution is just not good enough.

There is opportunity for other types of modernisation of legislation. I support the ideas around unexplained wealth orders, but I want to link that to the restoration of a criminal assets bureau. There are a lot of conversations in communities about, to use the vernacular, the “Mr Bigs”, who are seen to be untouchable. How do we use civil powers to take assets off them and then reinvest that money in either communities or policing?

I personally see tackling domestic abuse as being one of the key priorities for the PSNI. Mark and I were talking about that only today. We do not hold all the answers, but I welcome the proposals for new legislation. My simple rule of thumb for work colleagues is that, broadly speaking, that is the one crime where we know who did it. We need to demonstrate that we are doing all that we can to prevent crime, protect victims and bring more offenders to book.

There are some other ideas that, over time, I will want to explore with you and other people with whom I work. I will give a very quick example: Operation Encompass is a programme that has been well evidenced in England and Wales about sharing information about schoolchildren who have been

exposed to domestic violence the night before, not from a child-safety point of view but from a welfare and well-being point of view, so that the school can intervene the next day if a child has seen mum being attacked by dad, or whatever the incident was, and provide support. Look at examples of protecting children from adverse experiences. We cannot do that optimally at the moment here because of legislative blockages, so I would welcome the exploration of how we can work with the Committee and other partners to bring that to fruition.

You would be surprised if I did not talk in this introduction about legacy. Again, I know that that may come up later. It is well rehearsed that, because of all the issues around the spectre of collusion and sometimes questions about our independence in investigations, we have talked about wanting to move the responsibility for investigating crimes that took place in the past away from the PSNI to some form of institution that is better equipped than us to deal with them. That is something on which we encourage development.

I will say a few things quickly before I hand back to you, Chair. One of the hallmarks of policing that I wish to see and develop with the team, you and others during my time here is a shift from policing being an enforcement thing to more of an approach based around community safety. How do we work collaboratively across not just other public-sector partners but with the third sector, business partners and others to determine how we can offer a different type of service? That might need some radical rethinking in the medium term, but we need to place a greater emphasis on crime prevention, problem-solving and the delivery of police-based services to see how we can integrate and support communities to grow and achieve their full potential.

I ask you to consider a couple of things. We miss a trick here in Northern Ireland by having no overall fora where we can go to commission services or to look at good practice. I have talked to others since I have been here about establishing a community safety board. I know that that is something on which the Department of Justice has been keen to support me.

To come back to my comments on domestic abuse, I wonder whether now is the time to commission a cross-sectoral domestic abuse task force to see where the blockages to supporting victims are and to give that crime higher prominence, given its impact right across different sections of society. It creates victims and does harm.

I also ask the Committee to consider putting a duty to collaborate into the legislative space. We have good relationships locally with partners. I have come from an example only this morning in Newtownards where I heard about the good relationships with the Housing Executive and some work being done to tackle antisocial behaviour. You are probably aware that key public bodies do not have a duty to collaborate that pushes community safety and partnership working into a different space, and it is based on practice in England and Wales. Having a duty to collaborate would at least start to create the momentum to get us out of silos and into supporting other people in a different way. There are two final things that I want to put in your mind. I want to wave a flag about our concern about the budgetary situation in which we find ourselves. Sitting before you today, I can say that we have an unfunded gap of over £50 million. If that is not addressed, even the current investment that we have made in neighbourhood policing will be put in jeopardy, because I have to balance the budget. As you probably know from the past, our main asset, in business terms, is people. If our budget is not resolved, the only things that we can start to look at are ceasing recruitment or slowing down recruitment. We would have to turn off the tap while we try to rebalance the organisation. That clearly could have some severe consequences. On the one hand, our asking for 600 more police officers could end up in a reverse situation if we are not able to reverse the budgetary pressures that we are facing at the moment.

Finally, I would welcome thinking and support around how the Government can demonstrate that the PSNI feels truly valued. I see two strands to that, one of which is in the legislative space. We are suffering about three assaults a day on our officers and about one a week on our police staff. At the moment, there is no legislation to support assaults on emergency workers. It would be a real step forward to see whether you can replicate England and Wales again by demonstrating that it is not acceptable to injure officers or staff. It is not part of their job. They are just doing the job that we all want them to do.

I also want to see where you can lend support to speeding up the awarding of pay rises. In recent weeks, there has been a lot of discourse in the public space about other sectors, but the award for police staff, who can often be overlooked, is two years behind. Police officers in England and Wales were awarded their pay rise in September, yet, as the only organisation currently policing a severe terrorist threat, we still await the award to officers who are doing difficult work on the front line, tackling

all sorts of problems on our behalf. Again, through your own discourse and influence, any support to speed things up would be greatly appreciated.

I have rattled through quite a bit there, Chair. I am conscious that time is precious, but you can go back over the detail behind my overview or work through the agenda that you mentioned at the start.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you. That was very helpful. Touching on the duty to collaborate with other agencies, I have always found the Police Service in my local area to be to the fore when it comes to problem-solving and trying to bring in other agencies. The Housing Executive and councils are often the ones that you need to try to persuade, whereas the police, in my experience, have always been at the forefront of wanting to get things resolved. I therefore have every sympathy with your comments.

The first area that members want to touch on is budget-related issues. We will stick to that, and I will start. You mentioned the £53 million. Correct me if I am wrong, but £40 million is for recruitment and £13 million is for with modernisation, the breakdown of which covers estates, body armour and technology. Am I right?

Chief Constable Byrne: In one sense, those are two separate strands, Chair. The first set of figures is effectively for modernisation. The £40 million for extra officers and the digital PSNI costs are to grow a new organisation. The other figures in the letter that you will have seen in your pre-read are just for us to stand still and balance the budget. For example, we have £15 million of unfunded pay pressure. Another big cost that you will see in there — frankly, we do not have a choice here — is the renewal of ballistic protective body armour because of the environment in which we work. That is a cost of nearly £4 million. Those two pressures alone make up almost £20 million of the £53 million that is not currently funded. The money is required just to balance the books.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): The £53 million is to stand still. The cost to replace the body armour is £3.7 million, and that is just a routine replacement programme that takes place.

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): What additional figure are you after beyond the £53 million? To stand still, you need £53 million. What additional funding do you need?

Chief Constable Byrne: If you can imagine, in your mind's eye, that £40 million is needed to grow police officer numbers to 7,500, there is a tail within that for things such as extra uniform and extra vehicles. There is then £17 million needed for digital PSNI, which is the handheld devices. Over £200 million is required for the new estate. We recognise that that is a more difficult ask and will take more exploration. Those are the future-facing asks, but the £53 million is just to bring us in balance as we go into the new financial year.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I see that £8.2 million has been identified for backlog maintenance work alone on the police estate. Can you explain a little more about that figure? Around the management of the police estate, you touched on headquarters. I take it from what you said that you would like to move away from the current site.

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Have you identified a potential new site? If so, where would it be? Connected to that, there have previously been commitments made around the talked-about police museum at the existing headquarters, where the RUC memorial garden is. What are the implications for the project? Where is it at?

Chief Constable Byrne: There are quite a few bits there, so I will try to go through them in turn. If I skip a bit, I am sure that Mark will jump in or you will help me out.

First, capital money was previously set aside for the police museum. We are trying to work with the RUC GC Foundation to take the lead on that project, because we have some asks that, I think, are slightly different from the foundation's asks. We need to demonstrate a clear policing purpose to get the museum up and going. The police museum does not feature in any of the plans that we have put before you, because money has been set aside elsewhere for it.

If you work back from the notion of moving out of Brooklyn, we recognise that the memorial garden is an emotive issue. This is all figurative, but we want to work with the foundation and others either to ensure that the memorial garden remains there and is protected — for example, in a covenant — so that people can still visit it or to explore the possibility, if in a few years we have a new campus-style site somewhere, probably on the outskirts of Belfast, of lifting the lot and moving it.

In the broader scheme of things, we will be looking to exit a number of the sites that we, in police-speak, see as making up headquarters. Those include Brooklyn, Lisnasharragh and Castlereagh. The sites are at least 50 years old, and sometimes older. We seem to own more Portakabins than you can shake a stick at. We are working out of 180 Portakabins to deploy resources across the PSNI to a range of problems, and many of them are simply not fit for purpose.

We have not identified a specific site yet. We are at the early stages of an outline business case. Mark has been doing a lot of work with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB), getting advice on whether the best route is to find a development partner or to use other vehicles in the public sector. When we get the confidence to move forward, we can probably bring you more detail.

The maintenance issue is a concern for us. The backlogs are bigger than is stated in the paper. Previous decisions were made as to how they were stacked up in the past to help us save money. I can paraphrase the recommendations in a forthcoming Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report that you will see shortly. The NIAO's view is that the PSNI singularly suffered the biggest pro rata cuts of any police service in the UK. Previous decisions were made to manage the budget. Reflectively, a bit like putting off redecorating your house or replacing the roof and windows, we are leaking money through our windows and poor roofs, and, in some cases, buildings are in a pretty poor state of repair.

I would not want to bring Mark all this way and not give him a chance to say something on the specifics. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Mark McNaughten (Police Service of Northern Ireland): Without talking about the numbers?

Of the £8 million or so that is listed as part of our pressures, £5 million relates to dealing with the backlog maintenance issue that the chief articulated. We have an ageing estate. We have put off repairs, and the £5 million is just a contribution towards them. It does not deal with the issue. The other £2.5 million or £3 million is just for an increase in rates alone, given the size and footprint of the police estate. You probably get a sense that that is just the tip of the iceberg to keep things moving.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I know that you have the debate around police station closures and that you can have stations with restricted opening hours. Without getting into that, is there any future programme identifying police stations for potential disposal?

Chief Constable Byrne: The outline business case, which you may have seen in the papers provided, contains another figure. We are looking at modernising district police stations. Those will be familiar to most of you. Most of them have a very securitised look and feel. A victim anywhere in Northern Ireland therefore has to go through steel doors and up to armoured glass to begin a conversation with the PSNI enquiry office. We are looking to see how we can either repair or modernise existing buildings. The issue came up at the Policing Board the other day. Enniskillen's is 200 years old. We would be looking to see whether we can exit that site and have a new police station, probably somewhere on the outskirts of the town. There is a range of things to consider.

Part of our discussions with the board around investing in neighbourhood policing covered a programme of work to look at the opening hours of police stations. In his previous life, before promotion, Mark was involved with that. Police stations that are aligned to custody centres tend to have more visitors. In what is a digital world these days, fewer and fewer people are coming into a police station. There will be choices and options. It may be prudent to exit some buildings and see whether we can work better from somewhere else. In the medium term, we are keen on exploring co-location, which, in a security environment, might raise some eyebrows. However, we have seen examples behind the scenes with the concern hubs. How do we work differently with partners in the high street to deliver services to the public? That work is in its very early stages.

Do you want to say anything about the early programme on closures?

Deputy Chief Constable Mark Hamilton (Police Service of Northern Ireland): We are looking at footfall across stations. The demographic keeps changing. The more that we provide people with

digital offers, the less that they come to police stations. That has to be set alongside the fact that people in many communities view a police station as a place of reassurance. Therefore, it is not a binary choice, but there is ongoing understanding of what our footfall is.

Another thing that we are looking at is the custody estate and at how many places in Northern Ireland we will maintain to the right standard so that they can take prisoners. The number of regulations on the care and attention of prisoners increases almost every year, and the associated costs increase enormously. We have a very vigorous programme of trying to keep our custody offices up to speed. The programme will also look at where our key police stations are situated around the Province so that we can make sure that they are not so far away that we cannot move prisoners to them. However, we have so many stations that we cannot afford to keep them all up to the expected standard. There are a number of pieces of work being done, right down to the very paint in a cell having to be a certain type so that it cannot be broken off and used to self-harm. An awful lot of interdependencies are involved.

There is no plan in place at the minute. It will feature as part of the overall estate plan. Ultimately, this will be about affordability. Even when we leave police stations, they will sit in communities for a long time. The decommissioning costs of the most securitised police stations are really high. Sometimes we have had to delay closing stations because we cannot afford to decommission them. One of the big issues with Northern Ireland police stations is the question of how much we future-proof them. Stations built in the past 10 years were still being built to withstand a massive threat. They were generally designed and commissioned at a certain time, but, by the time that they were built, they were not necessarily as up to date as a community might want. It is quite a complex question for us, and it links to what sort of policing environment we see there being in 10 to 15 years' time. An aspiration to redesign the policing estate is very much a long-term aspiration. The costs involved would also change, based on, for example, how much security we think that we will need around a police station in 10 to 15 years' time. That is a difficult one for us to nail down just at the minute.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): You touched on recruitment. Can you give us an update on the recruitment process and the number of applications that you have received so far?

Chief Constable Byrne: The figure was 3,750 as of this morning, so that is a good start. The window does not close until 25 February. We are pleased that we now have support from all five political parties. When the opening bit closes, we will then move on to the different stages of the selection process: initial selection test; assessment centre; and vetting.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Can you make any comparison with numbers from previous recruitment rounds?

Chief Constable Byrne: We have looked at some of the metrics in the background, but it is probably premature to discuss them. Day by day, it is a bit like the flu pandemic numbers: are they going this way or that way? It is probably better to look at numbers at the end because of the daily variation.

One of the interesting things that we have seen from this campaign is that 40% of the applicants are women. We see that as being a positive thing. No doubt, the question that is on everyone's lips is around community background. It will probably be fairer to say in a couple of weeks' time what that looks like.

Mr McNaughten: To put the volume load in context, the chief mentioned that we have had 3,800 or so applicants to date. In the previous campaign, there were just over 6,000 applicants. Therefore, the numbers are very promising, because there are still 10 days to go in which to apply. We are making good progress on overall volume.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Good. You touched on unexplained wealth orders. In that context, you mentioned a criminal assets bureau. Is that a body similar to what was the Assets Recovery Agency (ARA)?

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Given that we have the National Crime Agency (NCA), why do you see the need to have something like the Assets Recovery Agency or a criminal assets bureau?

Chief Constable Byrne: I refer to the old adage about getting the best out of all of us. For example, we have just gone through an exercise with the NCA to review our response to tackling serious organised crime. In the past few weeks, we received a report. We are going through the recommendations to proof them, before beginning a programme of work. It is fair to say that we have a strong relationship with the agency, and with other partners, such as HMRC, but, when one looks at models of good practice, the notion of everyone in a room having all the tools and assets to take unexplained wealth off people is a good one. It is fair to say that, although there is a lot of talk about that as a headline tool, similar remedies already exist whereby we can recover moneys from criminals. There is also the proceeds of crime process. We are the fourth-best-performing police service in the UK for seizures, confiscation and recovery.

We have looked at what the guards are doing. We have a strong relationship with them, and they have an assets bureau. We are also looking at what Police Scotland has been doing. The feeling at the moment is that bringing everyone into one space will bring us benefits as to how we co-locate and use better insight and sharing of information to make sure that those who are exploiting communities, particularly through organised crime, do not just fear arrest but fear losing significant amounts of money and significant assets.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I do not object, by the way. We had the ARA before, and the NCA superseded it. I am just trying to understand why the NCA is not able to do that. I am interested in your view. One infers from what you say that we need a local organised crime agency that deals with asset recovery because NCA is not doing it or is not doing it as effectively as a local organisation. If that is the case, is it because the NCA's work has a greater national focus?

Chief Constable Byrne: In fairness, we have a good relationship with the NCA. Therefore, it is not about what arrangements it is delivering for us. Moreover, even when you go into no unexplained wealth orders, our recent meetings with the NCA have looked at how the agency can effectively do desk-based investigations from London to recover assets from criminals. As you will be aware with your own finances, digitally, money can be traced from anywhere. It is not so much that you need the kit and the insight. We just feel, from conversations with people, that having a co-located team is more effective. Like anyone, you will have shared experiences. It is just about being in the one place.

I have to be careful what I say, because this is a live investigation, but here is a good example. The PSNI's economic crime unit is looking at a money-laundering enterprise, where we estimate the asset that we are exploring to be a couple of hundred million pounds. It spreads out from here into Europe and is a very complex enterprise that we are now trying to take to bits along with Europol. If that is just one example, how much is also here that we might not know about? The feeling is that, if we can just bring everything together, we can use the shared expertise to give us more traction to deal with what is an issue for many communities. In your communities, you will have far more experience of this than me, but people want the Mr Bigs challenged, and that is a way of doing it.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): The source of that case emanates here?

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes. A number of arrests were made recently. You may have seen that on the news. I do not want to say too much more than that at the moment.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): That is fine. Thank you.

Ms Dillon: I have a lot of questions, but some of them are on things that will come up later. First, on the finances, has the Department had any discussions or conversations with you yet about how the NDNA commitment to increase police numbers will be funded?

Chief Constable Byrne: No.

Ms Dillon: So, there has been nothing about that at all.

On Operation Encompass — I raised this previously, and it has been raised with me by a number of different people and organisations because it is a real challenge — as you say, it works really effectively, in that, if there is a domestic violence or domestic abuse incident, the school is contacted before the child arrives at school, and that child then has a very different experience when they arrive. That has a massive impact on their day and on their life. You said that there is a legislative gap.

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes.

Ms Dillon: Will you let the Committee know what that is so that we can look at it? I do not know whether that legislation sits with us, in Justice, or with a different Committee. I would certainly like to know where that is, to see whether something can be done to address it, because that it is a big issue.

That is probably all that I have specifically on finance. As you know, I know about an awful lot of it from the Policing Board; I know about a lot of the details and the challenges.

Modernisation is important. The circumstances in which anybody works have a big impact on how well they work. With the best will in the world, a poor environment makes working and carrying out your job more difficult, and it has an impact. We see that even in our schools, where children and teachers, again, with the best will in the world, try to make those settings as good as they can, but when schools are on an old estate and are in a poor state of repair, that makes it a lot more difficult for the staff and the pupils to do their daily activities. It is important for the public perception of policing. We are trying to make it different and make the public's understanding of what the PSNI does different. All of that is important.

As an aside, on legacy, obviously, there is a big issue around disclosure and the ability to provide that because everything is on paper. Have there been any discussions with the Department on how to fund digitalising paperwork?

Chief Constable Byrne: There were a couple of bits that I will address quickly. On your very first ask about how we get to 7,500, I have spoken to the permanent secretary, Peter May, in a conversation a bit like this, but we have not entered into any detailed negotiations. Equally, I welcome your support for the estate and for Operation Encompass. We have been asked to provide a legislative ask, which is being prioritised. We can send that to you. That is part of the change.

The digitisation of documents is a really interesting issue. Mark and I were talking about that only yesterday. Some work was done a few years ago that you may have in the back of your mind. Obviously, I was not here then. Figures were quoted for the digitisation of records, which, as you know, will sometimes go back 50 years. Paper records are sometimes in a poor state of repair because — back to the environment — they may be water damaged. There was an issue recently because some rats ate something. So, you have all that environment stuff. Then, you also have microfiche, which, in some cases, is 50 years old and is disintegrating because it has been stored for so long. That just adds to perceptions that the police are hiding things when they cannot recover something or it is illegible. It is not a case of collusion and not wanting to get answers; it is just the state of what we are trying to deal with.

We are exploring how we can digitise those records. You may have in the back of your mind a figure of circa £5 million a year to do that for about eight years. To be honest, as of the latest chat that we had even yesterday, even if you thought, "That's great. We'll encourage someone to write you a cheque for that", we do not think that the technology is good enough to enable us to do it, so we are still looking for a solution to be able to scan at the resolution needed to recover it and convince people that you have the correct image. We are working behind the scenes to see whether the technology is viable before we come with a proper ask to say that investing x in this will allow us to confidently say that we can transfer all the records electronically or digitally.

Ms Dillon: Can you let us know about Operation Encompass?

Chief Constable Byrne: I will. There is detail behind it. We can share information at the moment for child protection but we cannot for welfare. It is about working with the Department of Education to close that gap, and we have some proposals on how to do that, so we will do that.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: It is to ensure that we have the right statutory support to share information at the right time. We have a number of things that we are going to bring forward, legislation that we think we might need. If that is going to be one, we will bring it forward. A number of things, not just this, have been sitting for quite a while in the absence of a vehicle to get them delivered. The main issue for us in all these areas is making sure that we legally share information.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Gordon, you wanted to come in during this section to ask about the resources for the Risk Avoidance and Danger Awareness Resource (RADAR) centre.

Mr Dunne: Yes. I welcome both of you. We are delighted that you are here, and congratulations on your appointment to your post, Mark. I wish you well. Chief Constable, I met you before at a conference, and it is good to see you along this afternoon.

I want to put on record the good work that is going on in North Down in relation to local policing teams. We have seen a difference already. There is a good initiative going on there. It has been around for a while and is going back to the old ways of working. I think that it is positive. It is important that the police are out in the communities. They know the good, the bad and the ugly, and they get to know them all. That is important. The whole idea of building up relationships with schoolkids, older folks and so on is now happening in our constituency, and we are delighted to see it. That is important. We wish you every success and support you in this effort for recruitment.

On resources, the management of overtime is obviously important. There was a story in the press some time ago about the lack of management of police overtime. Can you give us an assurance that some further work will be done on that? I suppose the recruitment of additional police officers will make a difference to that.

Chief Constable Byrne: I will bring Mark in, in a minute, because he has majored on this in the last 12 months. We do recognise that, frankly, the overtime bill is high, and it always raises some eyebrows. Sometimes, as you may know from the past, it is a necessary evil because we cannot always predict the uncertain. Given the nature of the challenges that we face here that sometimes are unique, you need that ability to surge quickly, and overtime is actually a more efficient way of doing it. Also, you are right in saying that part of the underpinning assumption is that, if you get more police officers, you will need less overtime. I would not want to leave an impression that if you get to the 7,500, that is the end of overtime, but we do recognise that there will be pressure to reduce what we currently spend.

Secondly, I welcome your kind comments about the neighbourhood policing difference. I agree about the old adage, "Just talk". Officers on foot and officers on bikes create a different dynamic in communities right across the country, frankly, so that is why I am so keen about that. Do you want to touch on the overtime stuff?

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: Sure. The first thing to say is that, when we had more officers, we had more overtime. There is a correlation between the amount of people that you have and the additionality that you ask them to do. Going forward, even with more officers, we have to make sure that the culture of the organisation changes so that, with an increased number of officers, we do not just pro rata increase overtime.

Overtime has fallen dramatically over the period of cuts that the chief talked about, and it is nowhere near the level that it was. It was £35 million a year. The Policing Board, earlier last year, challenged the Chief Constable about the overtime strategy to the effect of asking what the strategy was. We have now rewritten and adjusted and reconsidered our strategy and presented it to the Policing Board. Alongside that, we have delivered a 15-point action plan to the Policing Board, which is holding us to the account for the overtime strategy. I suppose, in short, Gordon, what it seeks to do is examine, first of all, the culture of overtime and whether we just use it because it is there, the purposes for which it is being used and the productivity. The new Chief Constable was very clear with us about the culture of productivity.

Secondly, there are processes and accountability for overtime. We are refreshing and examining those as well. A number of work streams have been allocated to senior people in the organisation. Some parts of the organisation work disproportionately high levels of overtime. It seems to affect specialisms more than anywhere else. Specialisms also have a problem with recruitment. If you have vacancies in a department that is highly specialised, the only way, effectively, to make up for those people is to pay somebody to do their job again, whereas that should not be the case in parts of the organisation where the roles are fully established. You see a disproportionately high amount of overtime among people who are highly specialised. That plays to the overall headcount of the organisation and, then, our ability to select people internally for specialist roles. There are a number of interdependencies around overtime. One or two units, in particular, such as the close-protection unit, are disproportionately affected by that because of the very static nature of the role that they do.

I just want to reassure the Committee that the Policing Board is leaning very hard into this with the Chief Constable and me. I have lost count of the number of letters that I got from the board about this issue in the autumn. I reassure you that a strategy is in place, we are working through it and are

determined to address the issue. However, to follow up on what the Chief Constable said, I cannot say that there will not be overtime.

I just want to put on record that, with justice reform, there are also some systemic issues that we all have about how we operate across the system — court appearances, cancelled courts, early pleas, officers being abstracted from duties to do things other than core duties — that are more than just addressing the overtime budget. They are systems issues. Some of those will have to be addressed over time as well.

Mr Dunne: Good. There has been a lot of discussion about the RADAR centre. Those of us who went and saw it during a recent event — I suppose that it was some time ago now: time flies — saw the value of it. The Committee realises the usefulness of the centre from a youth justice point of view. I am fully aware that there are resource issues. Chief Constable, what are your views on the possible use of it in the future? Have you had any thoughts on that at all?

Chief Constable Byrne: First, I went there myself quite early on in my time here, so I was not just forming a view from afar. As you have seen, in emotional terms, it has a lot to offer. The day that I was there, there were young people, people with learning needs and elderly people. You will be familiar that parts of it address a whole range of safety issues.

The dilemma that we faced, though, is that it was always set up with a presumption that it would be co-funded with other people. Working with the Department of Justice, we have tried and tried — and we were offered support from the Department of Finance — to bring other people to the table to help us to continue to fund the running costs and staffing. Frankly, despite a lot of goodwill and promises, that just did not materialise. Even this year, with the work that, particularly, Mark and I have been doing to manage costs and bring the budget into balance, it came to a point where we just felt that the budgetary pressures were unsustainable. We had to remind ourselves of what was our core policing purpose. If we were trying, for example, to invest in the 400 neighbourhood police officers, which Mark was previously leading on, we were looking to see how we could throw other resources to support that.

We obviously spoke to the staff. We went to the executive board and the Policing Board with the decision to close the centre. We are now commercially coming out of the building. We are not in a position where we can step back. We worked with a third party to try to remedy that, but it has not come to fruition.

Mr Dunne: I appreciate that it is difficult. You have given us the facts about funding and the pressures that you are under. I appreciate fully that it was not a high priority, but it is a sad loss.

Chief Constable Byrne: It is, yes.

Mr Dunne: It is very unfortunate that, to date, we have not found other funders or any other resources to run with it.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: That was the vision of a previous Chief Constable, Sir Matt Baggott. It was his idea. The vision was always for a collaborative approach, and we undertook it. As you said, Chair, we lead on a lot of things. We employed the staff. It wobbled on the brink on a number of occasions, but we kept going with it. As the Chief Constable said, at some point, we have to make a decision as to whether something is a core piece of business for us and us alone. It was the subject of quite a fraught discussion on a number of occasions at our service executive board because I think that everybody recognises its utility. However, we, effectively, felt that there was no more road to travel for the Police Service as a sole entity with it.

Miss Woods: I have a number of other questions for later, but, with regard to some of the budget issues, will you give us a wee bit more information about the co-location approach that you are looking at? There is reference to the use of drones in the new digital technology focus in the Horizon 2025 document. Are there any details on how you envisage that being deployed and used operationally?

Chief Constable Byrne: Those are two good ones. First, co-location is in its very early phases, so I could not yet come back to say these are potential sites. We had a really good meeting last night with the chief executive of Belfast City Council, where we looked at how we embrace the notion of community safety and those ideas. Notwithstanding some of the issues that we have to bear in mind

with the security situation that our staff have to work in, we are trying to explore where there are other opportunities, such as a pop-up shop or something akin to that, where you could deliver not just policing services but community services. There are partners that are often in the back of your mind around housing and other warden services, because that is a variable model right across the country. I cannot come to you yet with specifics, but it is about trying to describe a different sort of future.

Similarly, on drones, obviously, anything to do with surveillance can sometimes be seen as a sensitive issue here. However, it is about flexibility. You are aware that we have helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft here. I realised after I was appointed that I actually own an air force and a navy as well as a police service, as it were, because we have all sorts of assets.

I did a lot of work on that in another place for police chiefs in England. About three or four years ago, I led a whole range of work about modernisation, including how we deliver air support. You know that it is costly. Sometimes, it is weather-dependent. What we have in mind is not — before we get hares running — Reaper drones flying over Northern Ireland; it is the sort of thing that you see on television programmes that are, frankly, not in the get-it-from-Argos-and-fly-it space, but more robust. We already have some examples of where crime scene investigators can take images of serious crime scenes or serious traffic collisions and get a completely different view when trying to establish what has gone on and describe a picture to the courts.

Given the high cost of traditional air support and the complete spread of our geography, an investment in drones, reflecting on good practice, is sensible. Say an armed response unit turns up at a spontaneous incident. If it could pop a drone out of the boot of a car at the same time as surrounding the house to deal with a firearms incident, it would give it better situational awareness. That is the sort of thing that we are talking about. We are not talking about mass surveillance. It is about giving more flexibility to front-line staff.

There are loads of good examples in other parts of the UK, such as hunts for missing persons. I remember quoting one example to a previous police Minister about a drone that went down a gully under a motorway and found a missing person who was in distress. It is about getting the sort of visual that you see on many television programmes these days into policing. It is that sort of space. We own a small number at the moment, but, frankly, they are at end of life. As part of the investment in a broader approach to using technology that I touch on in the Horizon 2025 document, our mindset is to exploit technology for the benefit of policing. It is not fleets of the things; it is more flexibility.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: To reinforce what the chief has said, we had a conversation the other day amongst us about the strategic road network and major road-traffic accidents and trying to get mappers to the scene. Once there is a bad accident, all the roads are blocked up, and then there is a delay as we get services to the scene once we have people removed and so forth. We talked about the organisation's mapping capability. We will do a map of a scene to provide to a court, particularly for a fatal accident. We thought it would be much easier if the responding police vehicles were able to put a drone into the air, do a quick mapped survey of the motorway and then be able to clear the scene much more quickly. When the strategic road network blocks up, everything blocks up — access to hospitals and access to airports. We are very sensitised to the community concerns about surveillance, as we have had previous debates about drones. The chief is well aware of this concern. These conversations are primarily about the more practical crime-scene and community-safety roles.

Mr Beattie: Thank you, Simon. Thank you, Mark squared. *[Laughter.]* It has been really useful.

I have two questions about recruitment. It is always worth saying that we all want a police force that is representative of our society. Therefore, we want to see more Catholics, females and ethnic minorities, and we do not want to put off Protestants from joining. It is difficult. I think 50:50 is a backward step because we do not want to sectarianise recruitment. It does not all sit with you, Simon. Society, as a whole, needs to change the way it looks at the police. Certainly, as a politician, it is very important for us to be very supportive of the police, but so must all of civic society, whether it is in our schools, hospitals or elsewhere, so it is seen as a good career.

I want to ask a question about your new recruitment drive. We are talking about recruiting and training an inflow of about 600 officers. Is the outflow something similar? Therefore, what we are doing is a standstill. Has there been an analysis of the outflow to show why people are leaving, or is it purely people leaving because they have come to the end of their time?

Chief Constable Byrne: It tends to be the latter, frankly. Obviously, sometimes people make different career decisions for family reasons and caring responsibilities, but the bulk is end of service. In my experience, we tend to last a bit longer here than you might see in other places of work. Therefore, it is not unusual to go beyond 30-years pensionable service. Our predictions are based on the current pension scheme, and we look at people we predict will leave at 30 years. Obviously, people only have to give short notice, so it is not an exact science. It is about trying to keep pace with those predictions and that is what these figures are covering.

Mr Beattie: Leading onto the budget issue that you mentioned, if you want to increase to 7,500, bearing in mind that the 600 inflow is a 600 outflow, how long do you think it will take? If somebody said to you, "Simon, here is your £40 million", how long is it likely to take to get up to 7,500 officers?

Chief Constable Byrne: We estimate two to three years. To be fair, we have had very high-level conversations with the Department of Justice about a step. Therefore, if you assume that we get money to protect the overall base — because, as you know, there are a number of discrete funding streams that make up the 6,900; the main grant only covers roughly 6,200 police officers — and we assume that is secure, we would probably see it in two chunks of 300.

Frankly, the pressure point is how you get enough people through the current training college, which is also, in the medium-term, why we are keen on a different, more-modern college. It is about classroom size, classroom access and some of the specific training needs, because we are all fully armed and all have to have — as you probably would want — extensive firearms training. We have explored how we can train off-site using other ranges, but, practically, the view is that we should be putting new recruits through the same standardised experience, and that is the pinch point. That is why we cannot do the recruitment in one chunk.

Mr Beattie: Perfect. If you look at the 7,000 as the all-force number, how many do you envisage would be part-time Reserve officers? Is that 1,500?

Chief Constable Byrne: It is for all full-time. We are looking separately to see how we can refresh the role of part-time Reserve. It was in the neighbourhood policing project that Mark was doing before recent events, and he is keeping it. We want to see how we can return the part-time Reserve to a neighbourhood-policing role rather than a guarding role. We have just short of 300 part-time Reserve officers at the moment. In our back pocket are plans to see how we can increase numbers, but that is a second-order change, given the other things we are trying to do at the moment.

Mr Beattie: OK. So, it will be a resource beyond the 7,500 officers?

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes.

Mr Beattie: OK. It is interesting. I was at a PCSP meeting last night. I think the vision is fantastic; it really is exciting. Certainly, to have a dedicated constable for each ward, where his name is known and he knows the people in the area, is a fantastic idea. It is exactly what we want for community policing. However, if you are not given the £40 million, does that plan crumble?

Chief Constable Byrne: It is not as good as it could be. The truthful answer is that all three of us looked at different scenarios. If you put that prospect to one side for now, we have said for some months that, this year, we are investing 400 extra officers into neighbourhood policing teams, and Gordon spoke about the difference that he had noticed in his community. We are getting a lot of strong feedback from right across the country that people are noticing what are relatively small numbers. If our budget stands still and there is no prospect of growth, before we give up, one of the things that we will look at is how we re-profile the budget to keep a presence in communities rather than seeing it as just a binary choice, because it is so important. We will do that before giving a definitive answer.

There is jeopardy for us even in the current push, which I know Mark has had many sleepless nights about. Some of those officers — from memory, 197, I think, but I might be a couple out — were already funded through EU exit money.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: Two hundred.

Chief Constable Byrne: Clearly, if that position changes, that funding is vulnerable and they could fall away. We would still have the people because we cannot make police officers redundant — nor would

we want to — but there is that risk. The balance, then, comes from re-profiling officers, which Mark was already managing in his previous role. We have taken some prudent decisions to identify posts — they are all volunteers — that will make up the people going into the neighbourhood policing teams that we talked about. That should be finished by the end of March.

By the time we get into the new financial year, I might be able to give you more clarity about what the threat is. We are doing some work behind the scenes to understand, for example, if we get more science into how we manage calls into the contact centres, can we resolve calls there and then? How do we prioritise calls a bit differently? Only this morning, we talked about the importance of the 999 response across Northern Ireland, which needs to be more consistent across the country. If we can get that bit right, it gives us the space to ask, "Can we afford, literally, to put more police officers into neighbourhood policing?". That has to be the prize, in my view, because it can open so many other doors.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: The big prize of long-term investment in neighbourhood policing is, hopefully, demand reduction. The short-term approach whereby we were making lots of cuts was about trying to have officers attend and resolve calls, but that does not deal in the way that we want to with repeat victims, repeat offenders or repeat problems; nor does it provide place-based solutions for repeat areas and communities. Risk-based investment in neighbourhood policing is also about trying to reduce problems, which reduces the demand in the organisation for 999s, 101s and officers going to calls. That, however, is an invest-to-save initiative, in that it has to be pushed forward. Then, hopefully, if we have the right policing model and the right problem-solving model, we will see a dividend for the community. Sometimes you will see an increase in reporting for a while, but antisocial behaviour, local drug-dealing and so forth are the problems that we want to try to start delivering solutions to.

It is a function of resource against demand and risk. There is then a longer-term process of all coming together to reduce demand. That is the theory, anyway, Doug. The Chief has asked us to try to progress this very vigorously. There is a certain risk with the numbers that we have put in, but they are based on our current establishment. Any reduction in our establishment would require us to have a really hard think about the distribution of front-line officers. We did that: we put 400 out at the same time as taking 156 posts out of front-line policing. We took out 156 posts and put another 400 out in neighbourhoods. We have stretched the band on the demand model as much as we can under current circumstances. If we move to 7,500, all that will become comfortable and then grow. That is the chief's vision.

Mr Beattie: It is really important.

Simon, the morale component of any police force is very important. How much does not getting the 2.5% pay rise affect officers' morale?

Chief Constable Byrne: Frankly, people just feel let down. It is well rehearsed that we ask an awful lot of our officers. I run these sessions called "meet the chief", and I was in Newtownards this morning talking to staff. Of course, because of my personal policing experience in other jurisdictions, people ask, as you can imagine, "What is it like?". My answer is always the same, and it is a genuine answer: my admiration for everybody is enormous because of the choices people have to make every day. In some places, staff have to be careful about describing their occupation. They get security advice about how to behave at work and how to behave outside work. That is an enormous ask. We have very strong values and vocational people. They see cheques being written in England and Wales for extra officers and pay rises being awarded almost immediately. The fact that we are nearly seven months behind and still have not seen the pay rise is a real shame and a disappointment. Aside from my own feelings and our determination to back the officers, it is just too little and taking too long. The federation takes a strong and active interest in that. Similarly, police staff are a year behind. We are not just two bits of one organisation; we rely on a lot of police staff to keep the place running, and that sort of delay affects their feeling valued.

Mr Frew: I am glad that you mentioned the civil staff because they are a vital cog. Those guys and girls have been fighting a long, long time to get parity, even with the Civil Service, which they left to go and work for the police. That is a massive issue for them, and they have been treated very unfairly, I believe, over the last number of years.

The Chief Constable talked about legislative protection for his officers. We already have increased tariffs for assaults on ambulance, police and fire brigade staff. I brought in the ambulance piece a

number of years ago; that is why it is of so much interest to me. What are you asking for over and above what you have, and what are the comparisons with GB?

Chief Constable Byrne: I have not yet done direct comparisons on, for example, sentencing, but it is in that space of the approach to the criminal justice system. I made phone calls yesterday to three officers, all injured in different ways.

Before I come on to the second half of the question, I will say that we signed off yesterday on a nine-point plan to give more support to police officers and police staff who are injured and assaulted on duty. In the current format, if you get hurt at work, you have to write your own statement. You are, more or less, a one-person investigation into yourself. We are trying to see them more as victims. We are looking at parity. We can give you some detail behind the scenes on the language in the emergency services legislation in England and Wales. The federation, conscious of what you are saying, is keen that we get that parity.

Mr Frew: I would be interested in pursuing that through the Committee, Chair.

Mr McGlone: You are very welcome, Chief Constable and Deputy Chief Constable. Congratulations on your appointments.

I will start on the issue that Doug was pursuing, namely the pay award. From what I understand, the money is there. Is it with the Department of Justice and the Minister for sign-off?

Chief Constable Byrne: I understand that it is in the Department of Finance at the moment in somebody's in tray.

Mr McGlone: That is really bad for the morale of officers, as those I have been speaking to tell me. Chair, it might be useful — I am sure that other members will agree — to write to DOJ or DOF, whichever of the two or possibly both, to see whether we can stimulate some activity on that front, if that is OK.

Secondly, I was reading through your briefing document earlier. It refers to a review of contact management, including calling 101 and a redefinition of neighbourhood policing. I am delighted about both. That 101 system simply does not work. People want to speak to a police officer and it is not happening. I would add a caveat on the redefinition of neighbourhood policing. I am not exaggerating, but perhaps it might be useful to insert training in telephone use for some officers. I find it hugely frustrating that there are great police officers who may well be doing the job correctly and following up on crimes and everything, but they simply do not return phone calls. That is basic. If that simple thing is not done, I get a phone call, I ring the chief inspector or the superintendent, and they have to do things that they should not need to do. It is extremely frustrating to see that problems at that level are still there, and they are. It is not just good practice, it is good manners. With your recruitment, it is imperative that that is drilled into new officers. Please also include it in ongoing training for existing officers. It undermines credibility in quite a lot of cases. I am not saying that it is paramount or extensive, but it comes to me frequently enough for me to know that it is a problem, and it is tangled up with the 101 system, which is just not that good. I am glad that you have spotted it. Good luck to you with that. Hopefully, it will come around.

I want to ask about other issues, such as the EU and the like, that I will come back to. Chair, are we dealing with the questions in sections? Will I be able to come back to those?

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Yes, I will bring members in.

Mr McGlone: OK. In the meantime, thank you.

Chief Constable Byrne: May I quickly respond to that? I do not want to spend too much time on it. We both recognise the issue with the 101 system. Last summer, when I had checked in, as it were, Mark had already started work on that. However, as was well rehearsed at the board, in Linda's former life, we have seen dramatic improvements in answering time and we want to sustain that. Simply, that was about putting more people on the right shifts to answer the phone.

The next big question is what happens afterwards, and you might have stories. Sadly, I agree that we could be far better at response. Even in the day job, as it were, I have had to personally intervene in a

number of cases recently to say, "Just ring them back". We now routinely — I do it, Mark does it and other senior officers do it — pick five victims a month and ring them. I do not always say that it is me. I just say that I am ringing from the PSNI. It is about understanding the victim experience. When you look at the broader question of public confidence, there is an evidence base, which is academically proven, about ease of contact — for example, 101 — and good response. Crucially, however, follow-up is what gives people confidence and makes them feel that they have had a good service from the police and are satisfied with what we have done. That also creates a ripple effect in communities, as opposed to, "Don't bother with that lot, because you'll never hear from them again". We need to do an education piece to encourage officers to see that closing the victim journey is as important as starting it.

Mr McGlone: OK. Thank you for that.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I just want to tidy up this section. Your report refers to the fact that you came in on budget in the last two years because of substantial funding through in-year monitoring. Do you know how much money the police received in in-year monitoring in each of the last two years?

Chief Constable Byrne: I will pass that to my finance expert.

Mr McNaughten: This year, there were significant funds, not least because of the pension pressures and so on, for which we got about an additional £30 million. When you set all that aside, we got a genuine uplift of around £11 million or £12 million in-year, which has helped us through a very difficult financial settlement. As we moved into this year, we received an increase in our budget of 1.5%, which was welcome, but it did not go anywhere near our requirement. We project an in-year position of break-even by the end of the year, but that has been possible only with those additional moneys to deal with very real pressures.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): The 8% uplift on the baseline to stand still that is referred to in the report is the opening position, not the cumulative position.

Mr McNaughten: Yes, Chair. It is the opening positioning, not how we have benefited as the year progressed.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I just want to tidy up on the perennial issue of 50:50 recruitment issue. Why we discuss it, I do not know. You cannot do that without legislation. Am I correct?

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I will just make this point: it will not happen. We will not tolerate 50:50 recruitment that discriminates against Protestants. So, having that conversation is totally counterproductive. The Minister has indicated that she is up for that conversation. Let us tackle the underlying reasons why we cannot get enough recruits from minority sections of our community, from wherever they emanate, but the solution is not to institutionalise sectarian discrimination in a recruitment process, and we will just not tolerate it. I will not ask you to respond. This place will not give you the opportunity to recruit on that basis. It is not a space that we will entertain. It should not have happened; it will not happen again.

Linda, you wanted to tidy up on some of this too.

Ms Dillon: Yes, Paul. I will come in on that point. With the greatest of respect, I am sure that you agree with me that it is not for the Chair of the Committee to decide whether it will happen. It is a decision that will be taken by the whole Assembly. I do not want to take up any more of this meeting with it. Paul is right: it is not a decision that will be taken here today, so there is no point in going on about it. However, it may happen. Who knows what will happen? Lots of things happen. Obviously, our party is supportive of it, for natural reasons, but I do not want to take up the meeting with it today. I just think that it is unfair to give an impression that that is the view of the Committee, because it is not.

Mr McGlone: The "we" does not reflect the entire Committee.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): It certainly was not meant to reflect the Committee, but people know how you get legislation passed when it is sensitive and controversial.

Linda, you indicated earlier that you want to ask about the budget.

Ms Dillon: It is OK. It was covered in a previous answer. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Do you want to touch on the issues that you are dealing with in respect of exit from the European Union — the preparations for Brexit?

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes, I can canter through that. Given where we have been, we had specific teams set up to look at different scenarios as this moved along in the last 12 months, including an almost imminent no deal. Where we are operating this afternoon is that there is little change from the start of January, frankly. There are now a couple of places in Europe that will not extradite their citizens, including Germany and Austria, but, broadly, all the protections that we enjoyed before the EU exit are still in place. We still have a dedicated team and a senior officer on point for negotiations as they manifest. We need clarity on a whole range of things because we are working closely across policing to make sure that information sharing continues and that the European arrest warrant is replaced by something that is workable. There are contingencies to deal with that if we cannot get a remedy in the time that is available, albeit that they will be far more clunky and a lot slower than, for example, the extradition proceedings that we enjoy at the moment.

The other thing to stress is our strong working relationship with an Garda Síochána. Wherever we end up, we will still police a border. It has been really encouraging — Mark has more operational experience than me — to see the level of cooperation from the commissioner there both daily and behind the scenes. Ironically, the investigation into the now notorious Quinn kidnapping case used, for the first time, European legislation to help us to set up a joint investigative team. Some pressures that existed few months ago are no longer there. We are, however, keeping a close eye on clarity because broader economic and tariff decisions might still have a policing backlash. Also, we continue to meet the information and legislative requirements to keep pan-European policing going.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: The other thing is that our current headcount is predicated on, as I said earlier, EU exit funding, and we still believe that there is a strong need in Northern Ireland to provide that community-based policing reassurance to people through this period. We need the funding to be sustained to keep the headcount where it is. It is part of our overall strategy for a community-based approach and policing-based approach to how we have left the EU and all the policing issues around that. You asked about numbers and headcount earlier. Three hundred posts have been recruited on the basis of EU exit funding, and that is an essential part of our offer to communities.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): When it comes to the policing of wherever the checks will take place, what have been the preparations should they be at the ports?

Chief Constable Byrne: Mark did work on this but, broadly, we have to separate out what is for a policing purpose and what is for other agencies to do, depending on what eventually happens. We are having those conversations behind the scenes with, for example, with the Border Force: if we go into a checking scenario, that is its responsibility. We may see a situation where we have to support it in doing that, but it is about respecting our different positions. I was quoted in the summer speaking about taking legal advice on our statutory position and our responsibility for checks as opposed to the responsibilities of other agencies, whilst recognising that we have a part to play. It may come up later, but, for example, as the Essex tragedy showed us, there is a need to protect people who are smuggled across borders and to tackle human trafficking. This plays out in a number of ways.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: On a practical level, of the 300 posts, nearly 200 were for neighbourhood policing, but a large number of the balance of 100 went into intelligence branch to increase the capacity of portal policing for the movement of people. That was based on our assumptions last year that what had been viewed as a North/South issue was now more an east-west issue. We have increased the capacity of policing at the ports to address movement there, and that increase was made as part of the 300 officers recruited as part of the EU exit funding.

Last year's planning had, essentially, been around Operation Yellowhammer, Operation Snow Bunting, Operation Nebraskan and Operation Cookhouse, which were primarily about contingency planning for the worst-case scenarios for a no-deal exit. Those scenarios have, effectively, been set back because we did not have to deal with the without-deal exit scenario that we believed could have happened at the start of the year. As the Chief said, we now wait to see what legislative issues evolve during the year and for the final resolution.

Ms Dillon: You got money to plan for this, but, regardless of what happens, there has been a cost to the PSNI from matters relating to that preparation and planning. Although you got money to increase the number of officers, there was quite a substantial cost to the PSNI in planning and preparation. Am I right?

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: We captured all the personnel hours, right down even to my own, for a bid against EU funding. We were trying to make sure, Linda, that, as much as it was feasible, we argued to make it as cost neutral to the policing budget as we could. Mark, do you want to comment on that?

Mr McNaughten: We had a budget of around £20 million, which was supplemented in this year with a bit of additional money. By and large, we project that we will spend all of that and a little more, with a small pressure of around £500,000. Most of that additional activity has been fully funded.

Ms Dillon: Has it been fully funded by the Government through the block grant?

Mr McNaughten: Yes, through the additional moneys given from Whitehall through the Executive to us.

Ms Dillon: Fair enough.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Do any other members want to come in on Brexit before we move on?

Mr McGlone: We have a fair idea, at least at this stage, where Brexit might be going. However, I am very concerned about the exchange of information. You say that you have a very good relationship with an Garda Síochána, and I have no doubt that that is the case, but there are other police forces throughout the member states of the EU. As we know, criminal gangs and the like are not confined to this island. As you explained earlier, a lot of their activity is extensive and international. Until now, we were in the EU, so you had access to the flow of information and were part of collaborative efforts and all of that. How will you, at best, substitute what is to be removed? What measures will you put in place to ensure that, at least, the mechanism for exchange of information that has been so exceptionally required, and which is required even more now, will be retained at the same level? In fact, it will probably need to be improved, given all that we hear about other terrorist threats, emergency legislation being brought in at Westminster and the like.

Chief Constable Byrne: Principally, this is not just an issue for policing here but for right across the UK. In the way that people like Mark and I work in other parts of the 43-police-service jurisdiction, there are people on point who understand the impact of negotiations on what is now a different form of relationship with Europe. The planning assumption is about replicating what we had with some other form of relationship that will be the same but through different legislation. It is too early to say whether we will be in that space. The worst-case scenario is that there will be ad hoc bilateral agreements to get information or that we will rely on legislation from, I think, 1957 to extradite people, although that does not come with the power of arrest. It is too early to say, given the length of time before we will see an absolute risk. Given the frequency of Committee meetings, it is probably prudent to come back later in the year to update you on where things lie.

Mr McGlone: Thanks for that. That is the application of how you get a criminal from one jurisdiction to another.

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes.

Mr McGlone: As you will know, the flow of information is crucial to building up cases. It is about retaining the international flow of information and at least some form of those mechanisms to ensure that that flows, at least at the same level, as it develops in other EU member states, to ensure that the level of service and activity is at least duplicated within GB and the North.

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes, absolutely. That is the goal or prize, if you like. I think that you are talking about the Schengen information system as being the key vehicle that does that. Policing, through the Government, is trying to aim for parity, but, frankly, we are in the hands of others at the moment with the negotiations and how they go. We will just have to adapt to whatever legislation finally comes to the fore as the year progresses.

Mr McGlone: Chair, with your permission, I am trying to establish what that mechanism will be. Will it be through the Home Office? How will you ensure that that flow of information about the issues, as the PSNI perceives them, are fitted into the thinking and mechanisms in the Home Office, Number 10 or wherever it may be?

Chief Constable Byrne: We brief into the National Police Chiefs' Council. Indeed, the chair of the council is here today, and we are doing a fact-finding tour for him. He is here for two days. We have that relationship and that butts into the Home Office and other parts of government that are dealing with all the different bits of transition. Police chiefs are trying to advocate on behalf of policing and show what are the legislative asks, the risks and the priorities. It is not that Mark or I are personally in negotiation with others. We are relying on the broader national body to do it.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: To reassure the Committee: throughout the last 12 months, there have probably been very few police forces that have been as individually involved in the national discussions as the PSNI; we have had people in London regularly. There is a national group working on justice measures, and we are part of that.

While the question is not for us to answer, and the Home Office is effectively leading on it, we have a very strong presence in making sure that the information-sharing issues for Northern Ireland are understood. The Department of Justice has also been working directly with the Government in Dublin to try to ensure that information sharing between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána is optimised. We await the ultimate decisions on those things.

Mr McGlone: OK. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): We will move on to the next areas. There is a range of policy areas that members want to ask questions on. I will bring in Paul Frew first and then Rachel Woods on restorative justice. Linda and I want to discuss other issues.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Chair. I want to ask, first, about the Bill on domestic violence and abuse. Will you really need one year to train up your officers after the legislation has passed through this place?

Chief Constable Byrne: I have not heard that figure quoted. You may be about to tell me that somebody has said that.

Mr Frew: Yes, it was the Department of Justice.

Chief Constable Byrne: Oh, right. Well, that might be breaking news to me.

Legislation obviously changes all the time. There are different strands to the proposals in legislation, even if you went to the Operation Encompass piece that we talked about earlier. These days, training in changes to the law is usually covered through what we call notices. We advise officers of the legislative ask and then have online packages that advise of the changes to practice. I would not necessarily anticipate it taking a year.

There are some specifics. For example, I am keen to have something similar to domestic violence protection orders to give some immediate protection to victims, and there would be specific training, for example, if we were to replicate what superintendents do in England and Wales to issue those orders. I do not think that that would take a year, so we may have to have another conversation with the Department.

Mr Frew: To put it in context for you and to be fair to you: the Department said that it would take a year to get the legislation passed in this place, which we think is very conservative, and a further year to roll it out and put it into practice. A lot of it will be for you to roll out, but I think that that is very conservative and we should get it done far quicker than that.

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes. There may be some specific bits. I know that anecdote makes bad law, but, this morning, I talked to public protection officers. There may be some stuff for which, in niche roles, you want to have gold standard understanding, but team briefings and things like that can quickly translate information that says, for example, if we get stalking and coercive behaviour legislation, "These are the key points to prove". There could be more investment with the people who

work with officers to get files match fit and their relationship with the Public Prosecution Service. I would not give any hostages to fortune, but I would be surprised if it took a year.

Mr Frew: OK. Thank you very much. That is very useful information to know, and we should go back to the Department on that.

The child protection disclosure scheme is something close to my heart. I brought it to this place, and I have been very disappointed in the police response to the roll-out of the legislation. It is a very useful tool for parents to arm themselves with the information that they require to protect their children, and I do not see it being rolled out or promoted by the police. I think that Paula, whom I have met, has earmarked some sort of relaunch. It is drastic that we have to have a relaunch. One reason why I wanted it on the agenda was to bring it to your attention, Chief Constable, because you cannot be across every minutiae of the police force.

Can we please have a satisfactory roll-out and promotion of the child protection disclosure scheme and what it means? I just do not understand why we have had hostility from the police and barriers in trying to promote it. When I first thought of this legislation, I spoke to your organisation. I will not go into names, but, at the very highest level, I got the impression, through phone calls and engagements, that the organisation was scared of the process and what it would mean for your day-to-day commitments, information or people walking into the station. I told them that their fears were unfounded, and we got the legislation passed anyway, despite the opposition of the PSNI, and then it just sat there. The legislation sat there, and nothing was done. It grieves me greatly. I ask for your comment on that.

Chief Constable Byrne: Obviously, it is a shame that you have that disappointment. I saw some of the figures before coming here, and I recognise that it is probably one of the things that we have not embraced as fully as we should have done. Having spoken to others, like Paula's team, I wonder whether we have set the bar too high. There is a culture of risk aversion around the disclosure of decisions. I think that that is why Paula, operationally, wants to relaunch it and to look at the bar. I might be keen to come back in a few months to give you an update. You may have heard that the Department of Justice has a PhD student working on it — I do not know whether that has been shared with you — to look at the *[Inaudible]* of the whole scheme. We recognise that probably a more concerted approach is needed to get the benefits. Obviously, it is about protecting people.

Mr Frew: I am keeping the pressure on this, because, simply, I have a deep distrust of Departments, and I would not put it past a Department, or an organisation like yours, to process this to death, to the point where you do a midterm review — a progress report — and say, "Not much progress. The legislation is not much use. Bin it". I fear that from both the Department and your organisation. I would resist that greatly.

Chief Constable Byrne: There are comparable schemes as well, on domestic abuse, about access to information. Organisationally — without being too condemnatory about where people are — my impression sometimes is that we are risk averse. The bureaucracy grinds us down. We are just launching some other work, in a broader sense — it is not to dodge this — to see how rules that we set make life difficult for a service to the public, and this might be an example. The proof of the pudding is how we listen to the feedback and make sure that, where we have been given legislation, we are using it to protect people.

Mr Frew: I have one last issue in this range: the on-the-runs (OTR); the comfort letters. It amazes me that it was even in the press this weekend. I think that it was through freedom of information, and I do not know how this information passed through that vehicle. We read in our papers at the weekend that the PSNI is planning to arrest a number of the 33 IRA members classed as wanted by police before receiving comfort letters. Now, I might be simple on this, but that scenario paints a picture to me that you are going to get boys hotfooting it across the border, out of your grasp and jurisdiction. How was that information ever able to be released for the media and public consumption?

Chief Constable Byrne: I think that there was a freedom of information request.

Mr Frew: Yes, I believe it was.

Chief Constable Byrne: It burst into life over the weekend, which you are probably familiar with. A senior officer worked, throughout the weekend, with some people around him to try to work out where

the request came from and who answered it. The reflection was that we dropped the ball, basically. There was a phrase in the answer that should not have been included. The good thing was that someone recognised that quickly. The response to the FOI created undue angst.

Mr Frew: Do not get me wrong: I want to see those dangerous people being arrested and taken off the streets. It is about not just the 33 but the 158 priority-2 suspects. I want to see justice being done efficiently and effectively. Broadcasting it over the news before any activity can take place seems like very substandard professionalism. What happens if there is a mass exodus and you have to apply for extradition warrants and everything else? I am mindful that I am talking about this in a public forum, but it is such a fundamental error for that to have happened.

Chief Constable Byrne: Obviously, there is one very high-profile prosecution case running at the moment that fits that space, so I do not want to be drawn too much further in a public meeting about what we are planning to do. Is there anything further that you want to say, Mark? You dealt with that in a previous life.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: There were other FOI questions to which we applied exemptions. In drafting the answers to the questions, even around numbers, there were others things that we were asked for that we refused to specify and tried to rely on the protections of the FOI regime. As for the numbers that were published, I can only assume that the decision maker for the FOI was not able to, in their view, rely on an exemption from an FOI to hold that number back. There is always a real balance between the questions that we are asked, the transparency that we want to give, the legality of what we are going to say or refuse to say, and a real fine balance for people. For something as difficult as that issue, there were a lot of intricacies to how it was answered, but there were other parts of the FOI that we exercised an exemption on not to answer.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): What was the phrase that should not have been there?

Chief Constable Byrne: It was the third paragraph of the FOI. I have to check the answer, but I think that it was — I am paraphrasing — that we were turning a blind eye to it and trying to write off those cases. I can check the specifics and let you know.

Mr Beattie: I am right in saying, Simon, with the on-the-runs, the changed status of the 33 that we have, all that we have done is the phase 1, which is to identify that there are 33 who had a changed status. We are now into the next phase, which could take another year or two. Some of them already live overseas; they are not even in this jurisdiction. We are actually a long way down the road. Is that accurate?

Chief Constable Byrne: There has been an extensive review of the 33, which is currently being led by ACC George Clarke. That has nearly been completed. From memory, I think that it has cost about £4 million.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: There have been 500 incidents.

Chief Constable Byrne: I am not sure what work has begun on the status of the 160.

Mr Beattie: The point that I am making is that, even for the 33 on which the extensive work has been done, that is to identify certain aspects; there is still quite a bit of work to go.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: That was to examine 500 incidents and identify whether there were further investigative or criminal justice opportunities against those incidents.

Mr Beattie: Now we have to go in to that investigatory process.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: Yes. That is absolutely right. Some of those will relate to incidents in the sequencing model for murders that still have to be investigated.

Mr Beattie: This is really important for society. Whether you fully understand the OTR letters, or whether they were a mistake or people should not have had their status changed, there is the perception out there that they may be something that they are not. Until it is proven that they are no

protection, I guess that there will always be that doubt out there. I guess that that is why there is so much public interest in it.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): The PSNI is operating, though, on the basis that the letters of comfort have no standing to prevent prosecution.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: That is correct. We are proceeding with our investigative lines. It will then be a matter for a court or others to decide whether or not a letter has status. That is the basis on which we are proceeding.

Miss Woods: This is on restorative justice. In the last couple of years, commitments have been given and projects have been discussed in respect of a centre of restorative excellence. I asked the Department of Justice officials when they were here and there was some issue about which Department would take it forward. I was just wondering whether we could have a little update from you. Have you anything to do with that? On the wider issue, with you having taken over, is the PSNI still committed to restorative practice as a means at their disposal that involves the community?

Chief Constable Byrne: Northern Ireland Alternatives, which you are probably familiar with, and the community restorative justice scheme are really good ideas. A few months back, I spoke at a conference where I posed this question: do we make enough use of this legislation or this approach to divert people from being penalised for life by other outcomes? Clearly, with some crimes, there is a place for prison and that sort of punishment. However, the whole idea of trying to divert people out of that part of the criminal justice system, where it is appropriate, is really strong. I, personally, have not had a discussion with the Department of Justice on the idea of one centre of excellence, but it may be something that Mark has touched on in the past.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: If I cast my mind back, I think that that was in the old Programme for Government. I think that that was the last time that I saw it. I am not across the detail, so I do not want to talk out of turn, but I think that that was an aspiration in the last PFG. I do not believe that any substantive progress was made on that. That is my understanding.

Ms Dillon: I have a quick question on restorative justice.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Yes, and feel free to go on to the other area.

Ms Dillon: No bother. That is great; thank you.

I am not saying that there is not a need for the centre of excellence but the more recent discussions have been more about trying to put the restorative justice groups that are there on a —

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: Statutory footing.

Ms Dillon: — make them statutory — for want of a better word — in having secure funding. It is extremely important that they remain organised in the way that they are because they work because they are from the community up. If you were to do it any other way, they would just become another police service, which is not beneficial. It would be a good move forward, but it should be ensured that the way in which it currently develops is how it continues.

Legacy matters were touched on earlier. That is a massive issue for the PSNI resources, for a start, and then the whole disclosure process, the difficulties around article 2 and not being able to carry out investigations. A number of investigations have been given to Jon Boutcher and other police services, and I know from the Policing Board that, quite frankly, you are running out of people to go to. Big investigations into historical child abuse and different issues are coming up across the water. They will have a lot of their own big historical investigations on their hands.

The PSNI's response to the legacy consultation said that you were fully committed to the principles set out in the draft Stormont House Agreement Bill. For a number of reasons, I want you to reaffirm that that is still the PSNI position. We talked about the resource issue. I appreciate Paul's position on 50:50 recruitment, and, in fairness, it is the position of a number of others. However, not having 50:50, alongside legacy, which is poisonous and toxic to the whole policing debate, is a massive issue for you as regards recruitment, being accepted within communities and within particular sections of communities. We cannot overemphasise the importance of removing legacy from the PSNI, for the

benefit of the PSNI as much as anything else. Again, have you had any conversations about that with the Department, Minister or NIO? Obviously, now, we have another new Secretary of State, so there is somebody else to have a conversation with about what will happen. We have been told that it is coming in within 100 days, but we are 30 days into those 100 days and I do not see any movement. We certainly have not had any conversations. Based on questions that I asked before, I do not think that they have approached the Department or the Minister, for that matter.

Chief Constable Byrne: I have a few things to say in response to that. I will take you right back, firstly, even to restorative justice: not only is it a good tool, but I think that we should see it as part of the whole relationship between communities and policing, and the policing with the community ethos. Ideas of place-based policing and community planning are all part of that relationship shift, if we can get there. I would not want just to see it in its own right.

On the whole legacy question, broadly, we retain the position that was part of the consultation. Since I have been here, I have been trying to understand it and take a view. We want that responsibility to be moved away from policing here. There are potential responses to that, but I know that — again, like other issues — it is emotive.

In the past, we have advised government officials about the threat to the current situation regardless of what the answer will be. You will be aware of Jon Boutcher's Kenova inquiry. Having seen it myself, I think that he is doing a very thorough, first-class job of what he has been asked to do. You may consider as Committee members, or with others, going to see what he is doing, because, having done it myself, I know that it is really good to get that confidence about how the system works. We have a number of other police forces carrying out investigations, principally Police Scotland, but our worry is the fact that England and Wales etc have run out of detectives. Without a response, even if we get another adverse court judgement that says that we are not practically independent, we would wonder where to go, so we would welcome that support.

In answer to your specific question, I have not had a conversation with anyone in the Northern Ireland Office about clarity, nor anyone in the Department of Justice.

Mr Beattie: Simon, we have spoken about the issue. We all know that we will all have different views on it. My view is very different from Linda's. That is fine. It is just a fact. We all have to put our points across. However, in your statement in November, you said that the judicial finding is that the PSNI is hierarchically and organisationally independent but does not demonstrate practical independence. Can you define what that means? What does not having practical independence mean?

Chief Constable Byrne: That is the whole reason why we have sought further legal advice around the point. There are two competing judgements, which may imply different things. That is why we have challenged that decision; to get clarity on what practical independence is. There could be an argument in a different space about why the PSNI could not investigate some of those cases, but there are two specific instances where that has been judged otherwise. We are seeking legal clarity on exactly what that means so that we can proceed. At the moment, we do not have that answer.

Mr Beattie: If it were to come back in a judicial review, and your challenge came back, that you are actually practically independent, that would allow you to conduct investigations.

Chief Constable Byrne: It would create that open space. There is another issue, and I do not want to open up too much of a debate here because —

Mr Beattie: Of course.

Chief Constable Byrne: — it is for another space. Earlier, you touched upon recruitment. When I speak to advocates for and people whom I have met in the Catholic community, there are two issues that people cite as blockages to joining policing: dealing with legacy, because of the collusion issue, and the security situation. We have to see the issue in the round, with balance, and in a way that is equitable to everybody.

Mr Beattie: Is there any way in which we can pass that backwards slightly? All that started when HM Inspectorate of Constabulary brought in its report. Was that eight years ago now?

Chief Constable Byrne: Its report on the Historical Enquiries Team?

Mr Beattie: Yes.

Chief Constable Byrne: It was a long time ago. I understand, from previous conversations, that the Department of Justice, before we got to where we are now, had commissioned work to look at what an operating model could be. Obviously, if that clarity comes, we would look to see how we get additional funds to help that transition. Clearly, as was touched on before, we are part way through some investigations. What does that mean? Similarly, on the other question about records, how do we extricate from the PSNI all the information that we have access to and either allow access or give it to somebody else? Transition to something else, where it is not exactly clear what that would be, could be significant. Our position is that we would welcome it not being a responsibility of the PSNI.

Mr Beattie: I can see why, and I do not think that you need to go into that. The reality is that any historical investigations unit would not, then, have any PSNI officers in it?

Chief Constable Byrne: Not at the moment, certainly, because of the practical independence. All that has to be worked out in the detail.

Mr Beattie: I know that this is difficult and that we all have a different view on it, and I am not pressing too much. It takes me back to one of my very first questions about society and about getting more Catholics, more females and more ethnic minorities in there. We all have a part to play in this. If we start talking about the police being our police, who police our past, our present and our future trends, then you get away from that argument of, "You're not independent".

Chief Constable Byrne: It has been said a number of times in recent weeks that much of the solution to this is not a policing issue but a societal issue. Equally, dare I say it, in some cases, it is a judicial issue, because they need to give us that clarity.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I wanted to touch on the human trafficking issue to get an update on the extent of the problem that we have. Are you able to comment on that?

Chief Constable Byrne: Clearly, there are a number of strands to that. Obviously, the Essex tragedy brought it into sharp focus. We are supporting Essex Police in that investigation. I think that an arrest was made only the other day because of something that we were able to help with. In broader terms, to try to paint a picture, it is hard to give an accurate estimate of the size of the problem because it is one of those issues where the more you look, the more you see.

We do a number of things. We have a modern slavery and human trafficking unit that has existed for nearly five years. That is our main resource for dealing with different types of slavery, servitude and things like that, and trafficking, whereby people are getting moved. We participate in the national referral mechanism, whereby when you see somebody at risk, you push them into places of safety. Sometimes that can be quite difficult. To give you some sense of the figures, last year, in 2019, we carried out 57 referrals, which is pretty similar to the year before, into the national referral mechanism scheme.

We do a lot of work through the human trafficking team to try to rescue potential victims. There have been a number of operations that you have probably seen in the media, whether it is addressing brothels, factories or car washes. We take the issue seriously, and we often work with partner agencies. To try to get a sense of how big it is, it is a bit hard to define when you are relying on year-by-year comparisons. Obviously, that is also reflective of how people move around the world and our part in that.

Essex was an eye-opener in terms of vulnerability. It made us see that it is not just a policing issue. It is about trying to educate people and to encourage them to step forward and give us information if they see others working in different conditions that they are not sure about. I think that the phrase is "modern slavery is a hidden crime in plain sight". It is about trying to get people to realise that it is not age-specific and is not confined to certain nationalities. We have rescued 252 potential victims since the unit was set up, so there is a benefit, but I dare say that sometimes we are not in sight of the full picture.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Do we have an idea of the proportion of people involved in human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, domestic servitude and forced labour? Do you have rough figures for where those proportions exist?

Chief Constable Byrne: I have not brought those figures with me today, but we can probably bring that back to you through a letter, if you want. Unless you have that detail, Mark?

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: I do not have those figures to hand, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I would appreciate that. I am asking because we passed human trafficking legislation, and we are just trying to figure out how to assess the effectiveness of that legislation, so that any review that may take place is informed by its impact. I am not sure whether the police have done their own assessment of the legislative powers that were provided through that process. I would certainly be interested to get a sense from the police as to what your view has been of the legislation that we passed.

Chief Constable Byrne: The easiest thing to do is to come back with that specific detail, Chair. Since I have been here, it has had its place in all the mechanisms behind the scenes that prioritise police work because, clearly, in the modern police service, you are looking at harm and vulnerability as key flags that you follow. For example, ACC Barbara Gray runs what we call the strategic assessments and the tasking process, which identifies these sorts of risks to make sure that, if the human trafficking team needs additional resource to carry out raids and things like that, it gets that support to get into communities where we have had information. Only about two or three weeks ago, a number of simultaneous operations across Northern Ireland targeted hand car washes to see whether there were people at risk there.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): In preparation for the summer season, what planning is being put into preparing for parades and bonfires? What lessons were learned from last summer? We know that, when it arrives, incidents occur, and we often hear that planning for this needs to take place, with community support, long before we actually deal with situations that arise. I just want to flag it up now in advance. What are the preparations to deal with those issues?

Chief Constable Byrne: On reflection, the Avoniel bonfire was really the first time that Mark and I met. I remember Sir Hugh Orde saying, when I spoke to him, "Forget 100 days of settling into the job," and, a few days later, we were speaking to each other, trying to explain what was going on. Only yesterday, we were with Belfast City Council. Obviously, that is not the whole issue, but it is about looking at how we see our respective positions because we have landowners, the Department for Infrastructure and ourselves.

In lessons learned, nobody wants to be in a situation where things are running round at the last minute, and, whilst you have to respect culture and tradition, the big issues for me last year seemed to be — you will be well familiar with this — about the size of bonfires as well as where they were. Therefore, we had difficulty with coming in at the last minute to support anybody else to take down huge towers of pallets with lots of tyres in them.

I get the sense that there is a lot of work going on with Belfast City Council to, if you like, mediate and negotiate in certain places to try to limit the size of fires this year so that there is less potential for us to have to intervene. Mark and I want to give greater clarity to commanders about the operating philosophies. There has been an overarching strategy set, which Mark did in his previous role before promotion. We have tried to pare back to now to make sure that we are not just walking into something a couple of weeks or even days before a conflict in different communities. Frankly, we will have to wait and see by the summer how that approach plays out, but our operational position is that I really do not want to be in a position where we are getting played by different communities and we end up in an operational stance that looks aggressive or, indeed, causes disorder. That is the issue for us.

Do you want to give any updates on your previous work?

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: Structurally, there has been work through Belfast City Council. There have also been regular meetings with the permanent secretaries, and there is a forum on bonfires and flags that — I may be wrong — I believe is chaired through the Executive Office. We have been working on that since last summer. We have also been refreshing our strategy since last summer, and that will come before the chief and the executive team. I do not know what the outcomes are going to be this summer but, to reassure you, Chair, an awful lot of effort has been put in during the wintertime, particularly around the bonfire issue, to make sure that we try to progress it as much as we can. That is not just "ad hoc-ery"; there are a lot of formal mechanisms ongoing to see where we get to.

As I say, the chief has been meeting with Belfast City Council through the chief executive's office, and we are doing our planning. The sense is that there is the issue at hand and there is also the issue that, when the police get involved, it becomes about being involved with the police as opposed to being about the issue at hand. It is about the proportionality of what people ask us to do and the outcomes. The key issue and challenge, as the Chief Constable said to me last year, is about trying to get peaceful outcomes to those situations, which sometimes is more difficult because of how many police officers are there. We are trying to strike a real balance between supporting people and communities, upholding the law and trying to make sure that things do not escalate.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): The work on consistency of approach will always be a challenge, because individual cases may require different responses.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: Yes.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): It has been covered, but there was the incident last year in the New Lodge, where you tried to take the bonfire down and had to retreat, an individual ended up getting knifed, and the media coverage of that incident was damaging to the police. You had been there and then withdrew. Then, literally within a day or two, a flute band was surrounded by police officers because of an emblem and its members were pulled off a bus. It seemed disproportionate: someone got knifed when the police withdrew; a flute band got surrounded by the police because of an emblem.

Consistency of approach is key. I do not envy your decision-making processes — you have to weigh up all those things, granted — but we certainly all have to deal with people asking why you policed it a certain way here and a different way there. Managing all the perceptions that people can have will be important as we go into the next year, as well as using political leadership and community support to try to resolve those things before they happen. We all have a role to play in those things.

I will bring in Linda and then Gordon. Sorry, Simon, you wanted to come back on that.

Chief Constable Byrne: For the record, on the second issue that you mentioned about the policing of the band, through the board, we reported that we had commissioned an independent review of that, which ended up being conducted by Police Scotland. Whilst that caused a lot of *[Inaudible]* about two-tier policing, the review concluded that, although there were some bits of the operation that we could have improved on, our decisions were largely endorsed. There was some feedback around the edges of it. Equally, there was reflection on our response in the New Lodge. It might have been the right tactic but on the wrong day. That was the learning.

Ms Dillon: I think that you are right: moving in on it was the right tactic on the wrong day. I think there was agreement, and Paul has already touched on it. The real issue is probably using those community leaders who genuinely want to lead their communities, who do not want to lead them down the wrong road and who genuinely want to do the right thing. You should listen to those people and encourage whoever is the gold, silver or bronze in the area on any given issue to work with community leaders in those areas and take some guidance from them. It is not that you should not deal with the issues, because you have to carry out your policing duties, but it is how you do it. In both incidents, had work been done with the leaders and those who want to lead properly in their communities, they would probably have been handled very differently. Those people are there to try to give some leadership in their communities, so they will work with you.

Chief Constable Byrne: At the end of the day, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Whatever happened last year is now behind us, but, yesterday, there was a sense of a broader spirit of cooperation and a recognition that, as you said, the best way of moderating it is through the community itself, rather than the police getting involved.

Mr Dunne: Community policing, which was raised earlier, also plays into this issue. There are so many parades and, what, 90-odd% of them pass off peacefully.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: It is higher than that.

Mr Dunne: Yes, it is probably, what, 96% or something?

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: It was 99% for a while.

Mr Dunne: What is it?

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: I would say about 99%. We very rarely have disorder at parades.

Mr Dunne: I know. That is the sad thing about it, and there are a lot of good people out there organising traditional parades, and they have done that for generations in various locations. The point that you touched on was about early engagement through the councils, the various agencies and the community groups. There were difficult issues about bonfires being removed, and when you stepped back from it, you asked, "Why was someone not in there earlier?".

Chief Constable Byrne: Exactly.

Mr Dunne: The implications of those things need to be thought through. We need to look at them and try to weigh up the implications. We saw it before when bonfires were removed by contractors. We can all appreciate the immediate safety issues, but the implications can be far-reaching. It gives irresponsible people reasons to come out on to the street. It happened in our constituency in Newtownards and so on prior to the Twelfth of July one year. It was most unfortunate. In no way can it be justified — and in no way am I trying to justify it — but the far-reaching implications affect so much of the community. They have such a negative effect on all of us and on this Province. It is a difficult job, but the whole thing is around building relationships with people. A lot of them are good people. Some of them are not, but, in the main, good people are involved. We need to work with them.

One other point that I think that you have an interest in is traffic management and road safety. The community out there want to see more resources being put in to it. I appreciate that you have been sitting there for a long time and that it has been difficult for you, but it is something that I feel strongly about. I am a bit of a motor-sport enthusiast, but motor sport is not on the roads, and speeds should not be abused on the roads. There is a real problem with aggressive driving and people driving through red lights, especially coming late into junctions. There is a feeling of, "Well, we get away with it. The police are not there any more". We need to see more of a commitment to traffic police being back out on the roads, especially major roads and rural roads, where people are at risk.

Chief Constable Byrne: I have spoken, hopefully, within a different resourcing reach that, if we grew to 7,500 officers, whilst I talked about the bulk going in to neighbourhood policing, roads policing would also be one of the operational priorities, because it is important. Clearly, we have a strong and well-formed road safety partnership. It operates cameras and the camera vans, which is part of the deterrence around speeding, and also prosecutions or awareness. I am doing work with Mark to make sure that the vehicle fleet that we have for roads policing is fit for purpose and equipped with the best technology to catch people speeding or breaking the law. It is not just about enforcement but video evidence from our vehicles so that, if there is middle-lane-hogging, undertaking or aggressive driving, we can bring more people to book, frankly. It is partly about education, but it is also about setting standards.

The way the networks are policed at the moment is that specialist officers tend to rely on the motorway network most of the time because, as Mark said, if the motorways stop, it has a broader impact on the economy and people getting around. They are the best-trained officers we have to work in quite a dangerous environment. I would like to see that change. I have spoken with the assistant chief who runs road policing to see, even within existing resource, what can be eked out for roads policing and then link that to making more use of camera technology that reads number plates so that we take more cars off the road that are stolen, are not insured or have impacts on communities, be it antisocial driving, criminality etc. It is an area that I want to see more investment in.

Mr Dunne: Good.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Just before I go to the next section on investigations, I want to ask about the Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Bill, which was introduced yesterday at Westminster. That does not apply to Northern Ireland. What was the consultation process between the Department of Justice in London and the Police Service here?

Chief Constable Byrne: I am not aware of any dialogue. I might be wrong, because it might have gone on somewhere else in the PSNI. We would have to check, but I was not aware of anything yesterday.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): So there was no contact with the Department?

Chief Constable Byrne: I do not know. It could be that the Department of Justice spoke to another part of the organisation, particularly the area that deals with terrorism and investigation. I would have to check.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): In 2011, the counter-extremism strategy was not extended to Northern Ireland either. My understanding is that the police were consulted then in respect of that issue, and a case was made not to include Northern Ireland. That is something that I want to pursue as well. Do you have a particular view as to whether it should be extended to Northern Ireland?

Chief Constable Byrne: In terms of the sort of —?

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): This is to do with the response to the Islamist attack and prisoners who get out after serving 50% of their sentence, and the change that that will now go up to two thirds in England and a new process. Should that apply here in Northern Ireland?

Chief Constable Byrne: Well, it is not something on which I would want to make a decision on the hoof without consultation. Sometimes you want to mirror what goes on in England and Wales, and other times our circumstances are unique. Without some consultation, it is something I would rather have a bit more time to think through. As you said earlier, as far as I am aware, we have not been asked to contribute to that change. Clearly, the message sits also in that whole modernisation of justice, making sure that things speed up. You have probably seen examples in England and Wales where people who have been arrested for terrorism offences are in the courts far more quickly than here. Also, there is the broad presumption that, in those cases, prison is about punishment and deterrence. I would not want to create a headline here just for the sake of it, without looking at the detail of what is in the Bill and what our relationships with communities will be because of a snap decision I make here.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK. I am certainly keen to get a view from the Police Service in respect of that legislation.

Mr McGlone: If I can rewind, you referred earlier to the people-trafficking issue.

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes.

Mr McGlone: You specifically mentioned the awful Essex incident, and those poor people are back in the news today. There are links to Ireland and the shame that those people brought to this country and to their own families with their involvement in this. You mentioned that you had — I think the proper title for it was a "modern slavery and trafficking unit" within the PSNI?

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes.

Mr McGlone: Can you give me an indication of what they do and how many people are employed in that unit, please?

Chief Constable Byrne: Firstly, to go back to the investigation in Essex, I will be careful not to comment at all on that because, obviously, it is a live investigation. I would not want to —.

Mr McGlone: No, I get that.

Chief Constable Byrne: No, but even condemning people and things, because they are now in the criminal justice process.

The team is a relatively small one, and it is part of the crime operations command. A detective inspector runs it. I think it is about 10 officers, but I would have to check. Basically, they either carry out operations themselves or give specialist advice to district police on the issues that they are trying to deal with. The headcount I can get you separately.

Mr McGlone: I was thinking more of their role externally with other countries — mainland Europe and the likes of that. How does that work?

Chief Constable Byrne: Some of that would be international trafficking, because it is not just Europe.

Mr McGlone: No, I know.

Chief Constable Byrne: That is through the National Crime Agency.

Mr McGlone: OK. All right; that is fine.

There is one other thing I would like to ask you. It is not related to that, but maybe your deputy would know about it. There was a proposal in Belfast City Council, or Belfast Council as I should call it, for a drug task force. Have you any ideas on that? It seems to be a conglomerate approach, or a cross-departmental or cross-agency approach, to try to draw on the best experiences of other jurisdictions. Have you any ideas around that that could maybe help the Committee? The Department that we oversee was mentioned, as far as I can recall, in that motion.

Chief Constable Byrne: Funnily enough, it was only —. Time flies, but at the last Policing Board meeting — I think it was last week — I reported on the issue of drug misuse in Northern Ireland. There is a major link not only between the high numbers of drug-related deaths and the broader impact on communities through crime, organised crime and the profits that flow from that, but the chaotic behaviour of persons suffering from mental health or addiction problems. We painted the picture that, although policing sometimes has a prevention message that it can help with, and also an enforcement arm, this is really more of a societal issue about attitudes to drug misuse.

We talk a lot here about the most harmful drugs — crack cocaine and heroin — but also here, compared with other places that I have worked, the hidden misuse of legal prescription drugs seems to blight many communities. Where does that really get aired? What is the solution to that? It seems to have its roots in trauma from the past. The board has agreed to support me in having that conversation. There needs to be a cross-governmental conversation about the problems we are trying to face here and what sort of solutions there are. In a policing response, we ran an operation over Christmas called "Season's Greetings". Belfast is a key area where there was concern about street level drug dealing, and we saw an increase in arrests and seizures. We have upped seizures in the last few months through the paramilitary crime task force, local work and organised crime operations against drug dealers. We have been seizing more drugs, and it was reported in the news this morning that £200,000 worth of drugs were seized from a stop. There is support for a cross-government look at this to see what draws people into this world and where the models of good practice are, not just in the UK but across the world, to try to reduce the link between people's life experiences, addiction, crime and all the consequences. The answers obviously lie beyond policing, so we are really supportive of that.

Mr McGlone: Thank you for that. Chair, this might be helpful to us: has the PSNI developed its thinking around this type of approach? Maybe something on paper, when it is available, could be shared with the Committee.

Chief Constable Byrne: We can certainly share a public document. As a first step, we could share the report that we sent to the Policing Board last week. We could probably do some work in other places because, from the policing side, I mentioned the review that the National Crime Agency did of our crime operations branch. There is an intelligence strand to this and a community policing strand, as well as an investigation and enforcement strand. You touched on trafficking, and the National Crime Agency supports us on the international importation of drugs, and then there is stuff that happens in Northern Ireland. Most drugs come here from somewhere else but not all of it. We are trying to identify and deal with cannabis farms, in particular. As Mark touched on, there is the Brexit question and the relationship with the guards. There are probably models. There is an issue with language. I have heard it said that we do not have — in mediaspeak — a "county lines" problem here, but we probably do. Those drugs have been imported, and the tactic is similar to that in other parts of the UK, where you might get drug dealers from Liverpool or some other part of the north-west flooding an area with drugs in a pretty similar way. We are just not recognising that it is the same pattern. In terms of relationships and intelligence gathering, we can probably look at a fresh approach to see how we tackle the aggressive behaviour that tries to establish new drug-dealing networks.

Clearly, the pan-Europe issue is a concern. The primary commodity of two thirds of all organised crime groups that we identify is drugs, and there is a strong eastern European footprint as well as people who are home-grown drug dealers.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I will hand over to Pat, who wants to talk about the Muckamore, neurology and hyponatraemia investigations.

Mr Sheehan: Thanks for coming in, Chief, and congratulations, Mark, on your promotion.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: Thank you.

Mr Sheehan: In another role, I have been dealing with a large number of individuals and families who have been adversely affected in their contact with the health and social care system. There has been plenty of publicity around them. There has been Muckamore, the hyponatraemia scandal, Dunmurry Manor and the neurology recall. I have been in contact with the PSNI at different levels. I have spoken to Barbara, Paula Hilman and others about those cases. I have a couple of questions. I appreciate that they are not all the same type of investigation, but, first, I want to know whether the PSNI has enough resources to deal with all the cases. I understand that some of them will be very complex. Secondly, can you give a time frame for a conclusion to the investigations?

Chief Constable Byrne: In a sense, a lot of this is about how much resource is trained. We mentioned the 7,500 police officers, and a lot of these investigations are by specialist officers with specific skills to achieve best evidence from victims and then conduct interviews. As you say, they are really complex. For Muckamore, it is estimated that 300,000 hours of CCTV has to be viewed. That is significant. It involves a large number of victims. At the moment, we have 26 victims and nearly 200 potential suspects. Now, that does not mean that everyone is a suspect, but all that has to be worked through in that case alone. It consumes a large amount of resource from the investigative side of policing, particularly the public protection side. On any one of them, it would be unfair to give specific time frames for bringing it to a conclusion.

You mentioned the neurology case. We are waiting for some third-party updates, and we may be able to give some answers a bit more quickly, but I could not yet say that that will be by March etc.

Mr Sheehan: What does that mean, Simon?

Chief Constable Byrne: I do not want to go into too much detail, and that is the trouble with some of these cases. They are live investigations, and this session is in public. Without being disingenuous, there are limits to what I can say in this space. Obviously, there are people on the other side of this.

In Fermanagh, we are making progress on the issue there, and we talked about that at the Policing Board. On the child abuse inquiry there, we now have 46 victims. We have made two arrests and interviewed one other person under caution, so there has been progress. Again, it is slow because we are working at the pace of victims who are dealing with a lot of traumatic experiences, and we have to be careful that we are not seen to cajole people into saying or doing things. That is taking time, and, obviously, on that case, we rely on active dialogue with the Public Prosecution Service. We recognise that there are issues that have themes around vulnerability, abuse, care and public concern, but we are anxious to investigate thoroughly. There is a complexity to some of those cases, and sometimes specialist evidence is needed. You can imagine trying to unpick 300,000 hours of CCTV. It is painstaking to correlate individual incidents with people and victims, so it will take a good while before we can give specifics.

Mr Sheehan: I understand that, and I do not want to say anything that might compromise investigations. However, time seems to be moving quickly, and a lot of people who, in many cases, are vulnerable, are waiting for the police to act. I will cite one case: Claire Roberts, who was nine and a half and died as a result of hyponatraemia. Her parents were misled as to the cause of her death in 1996. It was only when they saw an investigative report on television that they realised that something similar had happened to their daughter and got an inquest opened. Some people believe that the coroner at that time was misled as to the cause of Claire's death. The public inquiry led by Justice O'Hara into hyponatraemia revealed other evidence, I suppose, that led to another inquest being opened and the Roberts family finally getting a third death certificate of the cause of their daughter's death. They have been waiting since 1996. They have been led up the garden path on numerous occasions by the people they have been dealing with in the health and social care system. How much longer do they have to wait?

Chief Constable Byrne: Again, I think that it would be unfair to give time frames that they would then latch onto. There are five hyponatraemia victims, and we have engaged fully with four of them. A new

senior investigating officer was appointed in December, because the team was really set up in December 2018, I think. It is slow progress, but it is difficult to give accurate time frames to you at the moment.

Mr Sheehan: On neurology, I suppose, the question is how long it will take before a decision can be made on whether anyone was deliberately harmed or any criminal activity took place? What process needs to be gone through before a decision can be made? Do the police make that decision, or is it the PPS? Do you do it in collaboration with each other?

Chief Constable Byrne: Eventually, once the investigation has concluded and come to a point where the investigating officer is satisfied that there is enough evidence to bring before the PPS, a report is sent to it for a decision. We have to be careful that we do not draw the PPS into something where it could be seen to be directing an investigation, because you have to recognise its independence. There can legitimately be active and ongoing dialogue with lawyers there to make sure that we follow the right lines of inquiry. That is pretty much all that I can say in public at the moment because of the complexities of that case.

Mr Sheehan: You are not prepared to give a time frame.

Chief Constable Byrne: It would be unfair to do so. Sometimes, decisions are out of our hands and involve a number of bodies. At the moment, it would be premature.

Mr Sheehan: Surely you are able to give some indicative time frame for your own investigation.

Chief Constable Byrne: I cannot accurately say today. From the investigating officer's point of view, they are allowed to pursue this independently of me. They need to follow proper lines of inquiry and gather the best evidence. It may that we can get a better sense of time frames the next time we are here. Because there is obviously a lot of interest and emotion about the issue, it would be unfair to say that I anticipate it being March without having that assurance from the investigating officer.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): There has been a call for a public inquiry into Muckamore. From speaking to some of the families, I know that there is a concern that there may be an unwillingness to grant a public inquiry until the police have carried out all their work. Given what you outlined — 300,000 hours of video footage, 200 suspects and so on — that could take time. I know that those families are keen for a public inquiry to take place. Are there any issues with a public inquiry going ahead in parallel with the police investigation?

Chief Constable Byrne: You need to be careful that that would not be seen to frustrate the investigation, which normally takes primacy. It is a difficult issue.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: The experience with public inquiries is that witness evidence is taken under different circumstances from those for, say, witness evidence in a criminal inquiry. Legally, I do not know the answer, but there are a lot of complexities between how you use a witness for a public inquiry and how you use a witness or somebody who was a witness and then becomes a suspect in a criminal inquiry. As it stands, we usually have one or the other, and one feeds off the other. We have not experienced them running at the same time. The same personalities are involved. There are terms of reference for a public inquiry, and there are terms of reference for an investigation, and they are not always exactly the same. It strikes me as being very complicated, but that is just my initial response.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I know that the legal representatives of some of the families are citing the Hillsborough football incident as a precedent because the public inquiry and the police investigation ran concurrently.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: None of these things is impossible. To my knowledge, it certainly has not happened in Northern Ireland to date.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK. Thank you.

Mr Frew: Before we move on, I thank Pat for raising those serious issues. What the families have gone through in all those scenarios and real-life issues is highly traumatic, and we need to get the truth on all those occasions. It is important that we as a Committee raise those with you.

When a person of influence — an elected representative, an MLA, a Committee Chairperson, a Minister or an MP, no less — tarnishes the name of a murder victim and continues to tarnish the name of that victim, deeply hurts the family and throws a veil and a shadow of suspicion over the deceased and their family in an area where, historically, the police have found it hard to engage in the community — a community that has been tortured by and is riven with organised crime and terrorism — what impact does that have on a criminal investigation that you and, indeed, the gardaí will have to conduct?

Chief Constable Byrne: I think that I know what you are hinting at; you have not said a name. That investigation has been led by the guards, but I would not want to go any further than that. You have made some comments. It would not be my place operationally, given our issue of impartiality and independence, to get drawn into comments that could take us down a different route.

Mr Frew: What is the status of the investigation by the PSNI?

Chief Constable Byrne: We are supporting the guards. They are leading the investigation. If we were asked to do something by the guards, we would, but it is their investigation.

Mr Frew: Have you liaised or will you liaise with the guards on this with regard to asking Minister Murphy to help with the inquiries?

Chief Constable Byrne: Again, that is a call for the investigating officer in the guards. It is not for us to suggest what they should do.

Mr Frew: Is there an issue with transparency and accountability if we did not pursue every avenue? It is clear that Minister Murphy has said that he met people after the murder; it is on the public record. Those are people whom the Quinn family describe as "the boys". Is it not simply a matter of professionalism for you and the guards to pursue all avenues and ask Minister Murphy to help with those inquiries and give information to the guards? Ultimately, there is a message that we want as much information as possible to solve this crime, and I see that as a massive barrier. Is there not a lack of professionalism if all avenues are not pursued?

Chief Constable Byrne: This touches on some of the earlier questions about lengthy investigations. We have to respect protocol and due process. The investigation is being led by the guards, and we would like, with some other issues that cross the border, support with requests for interview or to gather evidence. It would be inappropriate to go any further than that. We would not normally suggest lines of inquiry for an investigation to somebody else when we do not have the full picture because we are not leading the investigation.

Mr Frew: I am not saying that the guards are not conducting the investigation properly, but, if you are looking across and seeing an investigation take place in which there are weaknesses, do you not have a duty to inquire, request or actively pursue something?

Chief Constable Byrne: It is about which end of the pipe you are looking at things. We touched on the Essex investigation, which is another live inquiry, and we have that operational link with another police service. Hypothetically, if you are taking it into that space, the host organisation has the full purview of witnesses, any contradictions, credibility and new lines of inquiry. Clearly, there is dialogue between the two organisations, but it should be led by the lead service and the lead investigator.

Mr Frew: If evidence comes before you, what is the process to solve Paul Quinn's murder? If you are given information by somebody who walks into a PSNI station, how do you take it from there?

Chief Constable Byrne: If, hypothetically, someone came in to give evidence about any investigation that was running that was relevant, we would take a statement and see whether there was anything else that we needed to do immediately because of what they were saying — we might need to secure other forms of evidence quickly — and liaise with the investigating officer, whether in the PSNI or somewhere else.

Mr Frew: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Is there a dedicated team in the PSNI that is engaged in that murder investigation? I know that it is being led, as you said, by the guards, but is there a dedicated PSNI team?

Chief Constable Byrne: I am not sure that there is a dedicated team as such. I can check. That would go into the crime command, and we would respond to requests to interview witnesses or gather evidence at the pace of the guards.

Mr Beattie: I want to clarify something. I know where this is going, and there is huge public interest. What Paul is trying to get to is the push-pull piece. You do not sit with evidence waiting for the guards to pull. If you have evidence, you push it to them straight away. Is that fair?

Chief Constable Byrne: Yes. I go back to Paul's last question. If someone came forward with fresh evidence on any crime that, we thought, was relevant, we would have a duty to capture that evidence, probably in a statement, and deal with the other organisation that is leading the investigation. We would not just turn a blind eye.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): OK. We will move on.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: Chair, may I just return quickly to your question about public inquiries and concurrent investigations?

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Yes.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: I have been racking my brain. The historical institutional abuse inquiry passed investigative matters to the police, and those ran semi-concurrently. I am not sure that it is exactly the same issue that you raise, but I would not want the Committee to think that there is no precedent at all for our investigating or starting investigations while an inquiry was ongoing. That is just by way of clarity, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): That is helpful. Some of the families will have a meeting with the Department of Health very soon. That is one of the areas that they will want to explore with the Department.

Deputy Chief Constable Hamilton: I just wanted to clarify that.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you.

Throughout the past two and a half hours, you have touched on cross-border crime and cooperation with the guards. I raise the issue because I want a comment from you on gangland-type activity, such as the particularly gruesome killing in Drogheda, and get a sense of the implications of what is happening in the South. Are there connections in Northern Ireland? How are we working with the guards to combat that?

Chief Constable Byrne: We have a joint task force that looks at organised crime. We have good dialogue with the guards. We have talked about the organised crime matrix that we run here to identify groups that are at risk of causing harm to society, be that through drugs misuse, peddling firearms, people trafficking etc. We have good relationships. Obviously, if there is an incident somewhere else and there is a likely consequence, we work with the guards to mitigate that, whether that be people fleeing between jurisdictions or the potential for repercussions and feuds, because, clearly, our primary duty is public safety.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): The final issue that I want to raise is the current status of paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland, if you are able to comment on loyalist and republican paramilitaries. What is their current operational status?

Chief Constable Byrne: As you are aware, it is not for me to advise you on that. Obviously, the Independent Reporting Commission's report gives that clarity. I would refer you to it with regard to the status.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): That is helpful, because I have that with me. With regard to loyalist paramilitaries, that report indicates a spectrum in loyalism whereby there are those who want to move forward and are engaged in constructive work but are still part of their organisations and have not left, and there are those in the same organisations who just wrap themselves up in a flag to justify their criminality. How does the police approach dealing with individuals in those organisations who are in the category who want to move on but have not yet stepped away? How do the police engage with them?

Chief Constable Byrne: It is our experience that that engagement is case by case rather than a blanket response. Is it for a clear policing purpose? Does it fit that and, equally, is it consistent with our code of ethics? That is the advice that we give to officers who are in that position.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): The report refers to dissident republicans. It does not mention the Provisional IRA. Is that because the Provisional IRA no longer exists?

Chief Constable Byrne: Again, that is a matter of record. It is not for me to comment on the status of the Provisional IRA. Again, that is something on which we would rely on the Secretary of State for comment.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Whom do we ask? The body that, you say, we should ask does not mention the Provisional IRA in its last report.

Chief Constable Byrne: My understanding is that, if there were any need to ask about the status of the Provisional IRA, it would be through the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Office.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I hear your answer: ask the Secretary of State. Do members want to raise any other points?

Simon, Mark and Mark, thank you. It has been a long session. I appreciate the fact that you have engaged with us constructively. All of that is incredibly helpful to us in carrying out our scrutiny of the Department, particularly when the Police Service accounts for £700 million-plus, over 70% of the Department's budget. It is important that we as a Committee understand all aspects of policing.

As this is our first meeting since the institutions were restored, I would like to have a conversation about how our engagement goes forward. I would like to take forward that engagement. I know from your paper that the Deputy Chief Constable is looking at governance as a future issue. We have already had a discussion with the Justice Minister on oversight. You have the Policing Board, local policing partnerships, obviously, the Minister and the Department and now the Committee for Justice. There could be a timely look at the general governance of the police, not just internally but in the broader sense: are we getting it right and what would that look like? I am keen to engage with you on that, so that the Committee could maybe have a discussion about looking at that in the future.

Chief Constable Byrne: That would be an interesting discussion. The bureaucracy of inspection is another issue. We are probably the most inspected police service in the UK. At the moment, we are still working on over 100 recommendations from various bodies. They are all uncoded. We are left to make choices about what the priorities are. A fresh look at who inspects us and with what purpose would be welcome.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you.