

Annual Business Plan 2021 – 2022

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Foreword

This 2021/22 plan marks the second year of the 4 year strategic plan 2020/21 to 2023/24.

The 4 year strategic plan which was developed during the first year of the tenure of the current Police Ombudsman to set out a clear direction of travel through which to consolidate and build on the investigative expertise in the Office so as to ensure that the current police complaints system for Northern Ireland is operating efficiently and effectively in collaboration with other justice partners to hold police to account and to maximise the learning from complaints.

The Strategic Plan and the first year Annual Business Plan was finalised as the Covid 19 pandemic unfolded and there have inevitably been impacts on the delivery by the Office in the face of these events. There are some areas of work that were unable to be progressed in year 1 which will now carry over to this year's plan. In other respects, largely due to limited ability to work remotely from the Office, caseloads were often not able to be progressed in the normal way within the normal timescales. A key feature of this year's plan will therefore be to address the backlog of work that arose during this period across the Office whilst seeking to drive forwards with opportunities to work in partnership with other justice partners and to harness improvements and learning opportunities to improve the service that the public can expect from this Office and the PSNI.

Marie Anderson – Police Ombudsman

Olwen Laird – Chief Executive

Role of the Police Ombudsman

The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland provides an independent, police complaints system for the public and police of Northern Ireland. The Office investigates complaints about the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Belfast Harbour Police, the Belfast International Airport police, National Crime Agency (NCA) officers in Northern Ireland and Ministry of Defence Police in Northern Ireland. The Office also undertakes investigations into serious complaints of criminality by Immigration Officers and Designated Customs officials when exercising police powers in Northern Ireland. These complaints are dealt with through a legal agreement developed jointly with the Home Office and the Department of Justice.

The Office investigates complaints about the conduct of police officers and, where appropriate, makes recommendations in respect of criminal and misconduct proceedings. The Police Ombudsman also investigates matters referred to her on certain matters and where appropriate reports on these investigations to the Department of Justice, the Policing Board and the Chief Constable. In addition the Police Ombudsman may commence an investigation on her own motion in relation to certain matters where she believes it is in the public interest to do so. The Office publishes statements and makes policy and strategic recommendations where these will improve policing standards and practices in Northern Ireland. Statistical reports are also published by the Office on public and police confidence in the office and on complaints statistics and outcomes to the PSNI and the Policing Board.

As a corporation sole, I have personal responsibility for all decisions and actions taken on my behalf by staff in relation to the oversight of police conduct.

The Police Ombudsman is:

- a corporation sole appointed by Royal Warrant
- established by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998
- an executive NDPB
- accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly
- constituted and operated independently of the Department for Justice, PSNI and NI Policing Board
- required to have regard to guidance on complaints issued by the Department of Justice.

Our Strategic Aim, Vision, Values and Service Charter

Our Aim

Delivering a fair, efficient and effective police complaints system for the people of Northern Ireland

Our Vision

A world class police complaints body with modern ombudsman legislation and a centre of best practice in investigations

Our Service Charter

The Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland plays a pivotal role in enhancing confidence in policing in Northern Ireland and in so doing contributing to the strategic priorities of the Department of Justice in relation to police accountability. The Police Ombudsman must exercise her powers in such a manner and to such extent as appear to be best calculated to secure the confidence of the public and members of the police force in the system and the efficiency, effectiveness and independence of the police complaints system. The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 outlines the determinations, decisions and recommendations the Police Ombudsman must make. The duties imposed by the Act include undertaking at least every five years, a review of the legislation. Key to the adequate performance of these obligations our commitment to support the Department of Justice's aim of good governance and observing laws, duties and regulation.

Our Values

- *Independence*
- *Fairness*
- *Integrity and*
- *Respect for others and their human rights*
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The work of the Office is underpinned by the values. The values were developed in consultation with staff and reflect how we aim to treat those who use our service and each other. Our Service Charter which addresses these values and commitments is set out at Appendix A.

Strategic Objectives 2020/21 to 2023/24

Introduction

The Strategic Plan 2020/21 to 2023/24 set out four strategic objectives for the Office based around themes of transparency, fairness and human rights based approach, collaborative and ethical ways of working. They are driven by the Office vision and values and the aim to be a modern ombudsman's office and a centre of investigative expertise.

Objective 1 – to provide a high quality complaints and investigation service which is accessible and fair to all parties reflecting human rights standards in order to hold the police to account.

Objective 2 – to further increase transparency in decision making in relation to police complaints, referrals and investigations and their outcomes

Objective 3 – to work with criminal justice stakeholders to ensure our recommendations and research reports positively impact on policing policy, standards and practices

Objective 4 – to be ethical and accountable in our service delivery and use of public funds

These objectives are high level aims that have been reviewed by SMT to ensure they remain relevant given changes in the operational and financial environment. Our review of the Strategic Objectives has been particularly pertinent following the experience of the last year working through Covid 19 pandemic. We are migrating our IT services to IT Assist during the early part of the 2021/22 year. Consequently we are yet to establish the most effective way of working in a post Covid environment. During the period of the pandemic we have had limited access to information for staff outside of the Office which has significantly curtailed our ability to work as effectively as normal. This is clear in caseload and timeliness statistics and will be a feature of the Annual Report for the 2020/21 financial year. The review of the objectives is also necessary given the annularity of funding which has been the norm in recent years in Northern Ireland and the unpredictability of complaints(and other work) volumes.

This business plan for the 2021/22 financial year has been established by agreement with SMT as a stretching but realistic plan with which to assess our performance across the 2021/22 year.

Planning Assumptions and Strategic Risks for 2021-2022 Annual Business Plan

Planning Assumptions

There are a number of planning assumptions that underpin the aims and objectives for the next four years:

- The Office understand the challenging financial climate due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and acknowledges that there can be no guarantees regarding future years funding. However it is assumed that any budgetary changes will not affect investigation capability and that the 2021/22 budget will be confirmed.
- The volume of public complaints about police conduct will remain at +/- 10% of 2,500 complaints per annum.
- The Office will work to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the police complaints systems and work with other criminal justice partners to achieve this.
- The Office will wherever possible seek to achieve efficiency savings.
- The Department of Justice will continue to provide assistance in relation to the ICT provision and in particular funding for a replacement case management system.
- The Office will further progress proposals for legislative amendment through the five year review of the legislation review and will engage in consultation with the Department and other key stakeholders.

Strategic Risks

The following strategic have been identified with associated mitigation actions for the 2021/22 year. It is anticipated that other risks may emerge over the period and will be addressed through the established governance and risk management arrangements

Strategic Risk 1 - That the Office will face reduced funding due to the impact of Covid 19 or other pressures on the availability of public funds which will undermine the capacity and capability of the Office to meet its statutory functions.

Mitigation

- Budget provides a flat budget with additional resources for Historic Investigations
- Identify further opportunities to enhance efficiency and effectiveness that do not impact on the capability and capacity to deliver statutory functions.
- Undertake more proportionate investigations in less serious (Category C) cases.

Strategic Risk 2 - That the Office will receive an increase in complaints about the police in excess of the +/- 10% tolerance level and will not have the capacity to deal with these given the backlog caused by reduced staffing during lockdown

Mitigation

- Monitor volume of complaints and reassess and alter performance targets if necessary.
- Proactively manage demand for services through strategies to reduce complaints as a consequence of improved policing, informal resolution and mediation.
- Undertake more proportionate investigations in less serious (Category C) cases,
- Consider 'leaseback' of complaints to PSNI.

Strategic Risk 3 - That the Office will be unable to achieve its digitalisation strategy and that the on boarding project and case handling project are not progressed.

Mitigation

- Work to on board to ESS is on schedule for delivery early in the 2021/22 year.
- Contingency planning is undertaken jointly with the Department of Justice to manage the risk should it emerge.

Annual Business Plan 2021/22

Annual Business Plan

This annual business plan has been developed for the office for 2021/22 but is set within the context of the Strategic Plan 2020/21 to 2023/24. In this way the objectives and targets contained within this Annual Business Plan will contribute towards the delivery of the objectives and targets set out in the Strategic Plan. Each successive business year thereafter (2022/23 and 2023/24) will continue to work towards the delivery of the Strategic Plan in the context of the delivery to date.

Staff Engagement

This Annual Business plan has been communicated to staff in each directorate and feedback sought by SMT through team briefings. The plan has also been shared with unions and staff representatives for comment. This engagement is to explain the importance of the vision and values and to respond to staff concerns and ideas.

Accountability and Governance

Each Directorate will assess its achievement against the objectives set out in the business plan for the accounting year. Annual appraisals with staff will reflect their roles in achieving the business plan objectives. The Police Ombudsman and Chief Executive will hold Directors to account for the delivery of the relevant business plan objectives. A report on the achievement against business objectives will be provided by the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer to the Permanent Secretary of DOJ in accordance with the MSFM.

Overall Office performance against all business plan objectives will be assessed using the balanced scorecard and communicated to and discussed at Audit and Risk Committee.

Our Annual Business Plan (in detail) 2021/22

The following business objectives, approved by the Police Ombudsman, will be addressed in 2021/22 and SMT will develop internal plans to achieve the actions outlined below. The plan sets out the activities of the Office and how they support the delivery of each of the strategic aims. The plan is a combination of regular business as usual activity and initiatives to deliver specific pieces of work (such as the establishment of Project Boards for ESS on boarding). The 2021/22 business plan is unique given the need to respond to the circumstances created over the course of the 2020/21 year by the Covid 19 pandemic and the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on our people, premises, systems and operations as we move forwards.

Objective 1: to provide a high quality complaints and investigation service which is fair to all parties reflecting human rights standards

- implement 'backlog' strategy to address operational pressures caused by Covid 19
- establish operational procedures to best utilise digital technology in complaints assessment and investigation
- develop a stakeholder engagement strategy to improve access to the police complaints system for young and vulnerable persons
- ensure effective disclosure through the legal disclosure unit to support the Coroner's Legacy Inquests
- develop a quality agenda including the establishment of a programme of work for the Quality and Innovation Committee, charged with ensuring the standards of complaints and investigation are consistent, fair and impartial and meet human rights standards
- finalise a new investigation manual framed on human rights principles
- publish six Public Statements following investigations by the Historical Investigations Directorate
- complete five historical investigations
- ensure new cases received by the History Directorate will progress to IPAG1 within four weeks of receipt and will progress to IPAG2 no later than a further four weeks.

Objective 2: to increase transparency in decision making in relation to police complaints, referrals and investigations and outcomes

- pilot a Lessons Learned report on the outcomes of complaints including the publication of strategic recommendations made to the police together with responses received
- develop a recommendations template for action by PSNI and reporting to NI Policing Board
- ensure that we give full and adequate reasons for all our decisions
- review the Office publication scheme under the Freedom of Information Act 2000

Objective 3: to work with criminal justice stakeholders to ensure our recommendations and research reports positively impact on policing policy, standards and practices

- establish and embed a learning from complaints model with PSNI / NIPB to ensure recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman are promptly followed up
- participate in DOJ stocktake exercise on police accountability
- participate in police oversight and ombudsman networks to identify cross jurisdictional issues and good practice.
- develop information sharing protocols/MOU's with other police oversight bodies
- undertake a programme of consultation with stakeholder groups on the proposals contained in the 5 year review of the legislation by the Police Ombudsman
- work with the Department on work to deliver changes to the legislation following consultation

Objective 4: to be accountable and ethical in our service delivery and use of public funds

- further develop arrangements to ensure effective new ways of working post Covid 19 including home-working where appropriate
- ensure resources made available to the Office are effectively utilised to support our work
- secure adequate funding through the development of business cases for DOJ approval
- ensure successful on boarding to ESS during 2021/22
- maintain a project board to ensure a revised Case Management System is developed and procured
- embed the new complaints procedures and support the newly appointed independent assessor of complaints
- maintain level of sickness absence within 4%

APPENDIX A – Police Ombudsman’s Service Charter

A critical component of our approach as a public service is this Service Charter. The Charter derives from our Values and underpins what we expect from all staff in providing our services. It describes what both the public and police officers can expect from us.

Being Independent and Impartial

- We will investigate all complaints and referrals free of any influence based on the evidence we have obtained.

Being Fair and Respecting Others

- We will treat people with fairness and respect for their rights (including their human rights).

Being Accountable and Acting with Integrity

- We will do what we say we will and we will explain our decisions and findings clearly giving full reasons.

Measuring Success

We will measure how well we do by asking people who use the service; the following are examples of the questions we ask in measuring our performance; did we meet our commitments to you?

- Did we explain things in a way that you understood?
- Did you understand the reasons for our decision?
- Did we listen to you?
- Did we speak to you respectfully?
- Did we respond to you in a timely way and meet your needs?
- Did you think our decision was fair?

We measure our performance through an independent survey of complainants and police officers. Our performance measures and targets are detailed in our one year Business Plan for 2021/22.

2021-22 BALANCED SCORECARD AIMS TARGETS AND MEASURES

Year	Key Aim 1: Provide a high quality complaints and investigations service, fair to all parties reflecting human rights standards in order to hold the police to account	Key Aim 2: To increase transparency in decision making when dealing with complaints, referred matters, investigations and their outcomes	Key Aim 3: To collaborate with criminal justice partners to ensure recommendations and research reports positively impact of policing policy, standards and practices	Key Aim 4: To be ethical and accountable in our service delivery and use of public funds
2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a ‘backlog’ strategy to address operational pressures caused by Covid 19. • Reduce ICIT caseload (mainly Category C matters) by at least 25% from 464 at 31/03/21 to 350 or below, excluding cases at IR). • Reduce CORE Team caseload (mainly Category B matters) by at least 15% from 262 at 31/03/21 to 223 or below. • Reduce the SCT 1 and SCT 2 caseloads (mainly Category A matters) by at least 10% from 41 and 30 on 31/03/21 to 37 and 27 respectively. • Reduce the overall organisational investigations caseload by 10% from 1312 on 31/03/21 to 1180 • Establish operational procedures to best utilise digital technology in complaints assessment and investigation • Develop a stakeholder engagement strategy to improve access to the police complaints system for young and vulnerable persons • Develop a revised agenda and program of work for the Quality and Improvement Committee, including dip samples and thematic reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot a Lessons Learned report on the outcomes of complaints including the publication of strategic recommendations made to police together with responses provided • Develop a recommendations template for action by PSNI and reporting to NI Policing Board • Ensure that we give full and adequate reasons for all our decisions • Review Office publication scheme under the Freedom of Information Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a learning from complaints model with PSNI / NIPB to recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman are promptly followed up. • Participate in DOJ stock take exercise on police accountability. • Participate in police oversight and ombudsman networks to identify cross jurisdictional issues and good practice. • Develop information sharing protocols with other police oversight bodies. • Undertake a program of consultation with stakeholders groups on the proposals contained within the 5-year review of legislation • Work with the DOJ to secure changes to legislation following consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop arrangements to ensure effective new ways of working post Covid 19 including home-working where appropriate • Ensure resources made available to the Office are effectively utilised to support our work • Secure adequate funding through the development of business cases for DOJ approval • Ensure successful on boarding to ESS during 2020/21 • Maintain a project board to ensure a revised Case Management System is developed and procured • Embed the new complaints handling procedure and support the newly appointed independent assessor of complaints • Maintain level of sickness absence within 4%

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise a revised investigation manual framed on a human rights approach • Ensure effective disclosure to support the Coroner's Legacy Inquest process. • Publish six public statements/Regulation 20 reports on Current Directorate Category A investigations. • Complete a further six Current Directorate Category A investigations. • Publish six public statements relating to historic investigations. • Complete a further five historic investigations • Complete 85% of IPAG 1 & 2 processes for historical matters within 8 weeks of receipt of complaints. 			
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