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**Annual Business Plan 2022 – 2023**

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**Foreword**

This 2022/23 plan marks the third year of the 4 year strategic plan 2020/21 to 2023/24.

The 4 year strategic plan was developed during the first year of the tenure of the current Police Ombudsman to set out a clear roadmap to consolidate and build on the investigative expertise in the Office. The purpose of the plan is 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.

This Plan was finalised as the Covid 19 pandemic unfolded and there have inevitably been impacts on the delivery by the Office in years 1 and 2 of the Corporate Plan in the face of these events. The Annual Business Plan for 2021-22 became a “recovery year” for Covid 19 and those areas of work that were unable to be progressed in year 1 carried over into that plan. The key focus of 2021-22 has been to address the backlog of work that arose across the organisation as a consequence of Covid 19 while seeking to drive forward with opportunities to work in partnership with other justice partners and to harness improvements and learning opportunities to improve the service to the public from this Office and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

2021/22 saw significant progress by the Office and in particular with successful on boarding to ITAC there was a major improvement in the ability of the Office and its staff to progress many areas of work remotely from the Office. However, it remains the case that some of the work of the Office cannot be conducted remotely.

However, 2021/22 also saw a sustained increase in the level of complaints about police which were received by the Office. This has impacted the speed with which case load backlogs have been able to be cleared. As we move into 2022/23 therefore we recognise that the Office needs to both continue to address case backlogs whilst also moving forward with targets which focus once again more specifically on the timeliness of case progression and customer service

**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 NI 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 NI 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*

*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 the Senior Management Team (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 two years of working through the Covid 19 pandemic. The Office migrated its key IT services to IT Assist during 2021/22 year and is seeking to establish effective ways of working in a post Covid environment. The 2022/23 year will see the roll out of a Hybrid Working pilot and development of policies supporting flexible working that seeks to balance the needs for organisational cohesion and effectiveness with the improvements in work life balance that can be achieved for staff working remotely. An important aspect of this re-alignment will be to ensure that the customer service experience of both complainants and police officers is central to the development of new ways of working.

The review of the objectives is also necessary given the increasing levels of complaints which have been sustained across the 2021/22 year and which are expected to be sustained into the year ahead. Further the absence of clarity on funding for the 2022/23 year has meant that whereas it had been hoped that a three year budget may have been provided, the absence of Executive approval means that the Office starts the 2022/23 year without an approved budget.

This business plan for the 2022/23 financial year has been established by agreement with SMT as a stretching but realistic plan with which to assess our performance across the year.

**Planning Assumptions and Strategic Risks for 2022-2023 Annual Business Plan**

**Planning Assumptions**

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

* 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 2022/23 contingency planning envelope (budget) will be confirmed.
* The volume of public complaints about police conduct will remain at levels comparable to 2021/22 of approximately 3,000 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 ICT provision.
* The Office will further progress, with the Department of Justice, proposals for legislative amendment through the five year review of the legislation review.
* The Office will progress with planning for the operational challenges and implications of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill.

**Strategic Risks**

The following strategic risks have been identified with associated mitigation actions for the 2022/23 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

* Draft budget outlined a 2% budget cut, however additional resources provided for Historic Investigations in 2021/22 have been maintained.
* 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 a further increase in complaints about the police in excess of the +/- 5% tolerance level and will not have the capacity to deal with these given existing caseload pressures

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 ensure recruitment to key posts in the Office that may impact the ability to deliver key aims and objectives.

Mitigation

* Proactive series of recruitment exercises underway to appoint competent staff
* Implementation of a staff development plan arising from ongoing Investors in People (IIP) reaccreditation.
* Development of HR policies and practices to support, attract and retain staff.

**Annual Business Plan 2022/23**

Annual Business Plan

This annual business plan has been developed for the office for 2022/23 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 has continued to contribute 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 Department of Justice (DoJ) in accordance with the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum (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) 2022/23**

The following business objectives, approved by the Police Ombudsman, will be addressed in 2022/23 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 maintenance of the Project Boards for development of a replacement CHS system). The 2022/23 business plan is established to respond to the circumstances created over the course of the 2020/21 to 2021/22 years 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

* Complete 80% of initial complaints processes within 10 working days
* Complete 70% of Category C investigations within 90 working days
* Complete 60% of Category B investigations within 110 working days
* Complete at least 12 Category A Current Directorate investigations
* Complete ten historical “Troubles related” investigations
* Manage the organisation’s Category C caseload to 350 cases or less
* Manage the organisation’s Category B caseload to 200 cases or less
* Manage the Current Investigation Directorate’s Category A caseload to 80 cases or less
* Reduce the organisation’s overall caseload by 10% from 1230 cases at 1 April 2022 to no more than 1100 by 31 March 2023
* Publish at least six public statements in relation to Category A investigations undertaken by the Current Investigations Directorate
* Publish six public statements in relation to historical “Troubles related” investigations
* Conduct four thematic reviews across the Current Investigations Directorate to identify areas for improvement

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

* Develop a youth engagement strategy to build on workshops undertaken in 2021/22 with a view to improve access to the police complaints system by young people
* Develop an engagement strategy to seek to improve access to the police complaints system for vulnerable persons
* 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 and publish an information sharing protocol/MOU with the Security Service
* 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

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

* Complete a policy and practice investigation in respect of the manner by which the PSNI identify and respond to vulnerability in order to identify opportunities for better resolution for members of the public
* Establish and embed a learning from complaints model with PSNI / NI Policing Board to ensure recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman are promptly followed up
* Ensure effective disclosure through the legal disclosure unit to support the Coroner’s Legacy Inquests
* Participate in police oversight and ombudsman networks to identify cross jurisdictional issues and good practice.

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

* Manage and monitor resources in line with Managing Public Money NI and the Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM), taking account of guidance and requirements of DoF and ensure 98% of resources made available to the Office are effectively utilised
* Establish a program of work to progress areas for improvement identified from IIP accreditation process
* Implement arrangements for new ways of working, including hybrid arrangements where appropriate, whilst ensuring the Office retains a public service focus
* Reduce the level of sickness absence to a target of 4%
* Agree and embed a new Partnership Agreement in line with DoF “Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies: NI Code of Good Practice”
* Develop relevant business cases for DoJ approval and secure funding where required
* Ensure progress of the CHS project board including ensuring that procurement of a revised Case Management System commences by 31 March 2023
* Work to ensure an effective transition to new arrangements being established for dealing with Troubles related investigations under the Northern Ireland Troubles (Reconciliation) Bill

**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 2022/23.

**APPENDIX B**

**2022-23 BALANCED SCORECARD AIMS TARGETS AND MEASURES**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **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** |
| * Complete 80% of initial complaints processes within 10 working days * Complete 70% of Category C investigations within 90 working days * Complete 60% of Category B investigations within 110 working days * Complete at least 12 Category A Current Directorate investigations * Completion ten historical “Troubles related” investigations * Manage overall Category C caseload to 350 cases or less * Manage overall Category B investigations to 200 cases or less * Manage overall Category A Current Directorate investigations to 80 cases or less * Reduce the overall investigations caseload by 10% from 1230 cases at 1/4/22 to no more than 1100 by 31/3/23 * Publish at least six public statements in relation to Category A investigations undertaken by the Current Investigation Directorate * Publish six Public Statements into historical “Troubles related” matters * Conduct four thematic reviews on across the Current Investigation Directorate to identify areas for improvement | * Develop a youth engagement strategy with a view to improve access to the police complaints system by young people * Develop an engagement strategy to seek to improve access to the police complaints system for vulnerable persons * 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 and publish an information sharing protocol/MOU with the Security Service * 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 | * Complete a S60 investigation in respect of the manner by which the PSNI identify and respond to vulnerability in order to identify opportunities for better resolution for members of the public * Establish and embed a learning from complaints model with PSNI / NIPB to recommendations made by the Police Ombudsman are promptly followed up * Ensure effective disclosure through the legal disclosure unit to support the Coroner’s Legacy Inquests * Participate in police oversight and ombudsman networks to identify cross jurisdictional issues and good practice. | * Manage resources in line with MPMNI, FReM and DoF guidance and ensure 98% of resources made available to the Office are effectively utilised * Establish a program of work to progress areas identified in IIP accreditation process * Implement arrangements for new ways of working, including hybrid arrangements whilst ensuring the Office retains a public service focus * Reduce the level of sickness absence to a target of 4% * Agree and embed a new Partnership Agreement with DoJ * Develop relevant business cases for DoJ approval and secure funding where required * Ensure progress of the CHS project board including commencing procurement of a revised Case Management System 31 March 2023 * Work to ensure an effective transition to new arrangements being established for dealing with Troubles related investigations under the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill |