



# **PEEL: Police effectiveness 2017**

An inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland

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## Introduction

In 2016, as part of the annual police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) inspection programme, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)<sup>1</sup> inspected all 43 forces in England and Wales.

In the spring of 2016, the efficiency inspections assessed how forces make the best use of available resources, with the overall question 'How efficient is the force at keeping people safe and reducing crime?' In the autumn, our effectiveness inspections assessed how effective forces were at keeping people safe and reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, focusing on four aspects of policing: preventing crime and anti-social behaviour; investigating crime and managing offenders; protecting vulnerable people and supporting victims; and tackling serious and organised crime.

The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, Section 41(2) as amended, requires that HMICFRS inspects and reports to the Northern Ireland Department of Justice on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) each year. In accordance with the Act, on 19 January 2017 the Minister for Justice commissioned HMICFRS to carry out an efficiency and effectiveness inspection in 2016/17 based on aspects of PEEL methodology used in England and Wales.

The objective of HMICFRS' inspection is to inform the public, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the Minister for Justice of the service's strengths and areas for improvement using the PEEL methodology. This will enable the public to understand how the service has progressed since HMICFRS' 2016 reports on the efficiency and effectiveness (vulnerability) of the PSNI and to make comparisons with the performance of forces in England and Wales.

The methodology used in this inspection of the PSNI is based on that applied in England and Wales in the PEEL 2016 programme, with amendments made where necessary to reflect the different legislation and circumstances found in Northern Ireland. The inspection findings will be reported with graded judgments for efficiency and effectiveness, and these reports will form the basis of Her Majesty's Inspector's annual assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the PSNI.

This report sets out the findings of the effectiveness inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> This inspection was carried out before 17 July 2017, when HMIC also took on responsibility for fire & rescue service inspections and was renamed HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. The methodology underpinning our inspection findings is unaffected by this change. References to HMICFRS in this report may relate to an event that happened before 17 July 2017 when HMICFRS was HMIC. Citations of documents which HMIC published before 17 July 2017 will still cite HMIC as the publisher.

## **What is police effectiveness and why is it important?**

An effective police service is one which keeps people safe and reduces crime. These are the most important responsibilities for the police, and the principal measures by which the public judge the performance of their force and policing as a whole.

To reach a judgment on the extent of each force's effectiveness, our inspection answered the following overall question:

- How effective is the force at keeping people safe and reducing crime?

To answer this question in forces in England and Wales, HMICFRS explored five 'core' questions, which reflect those areas of policing that we consider to be of particular interest and concern to the public:

- How effective is the force at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe?
- How effective is the force at investigating crime and reducing re-offending?
- How effective is the force at protecting those who are vulnerable from harm, and supporting victims?
- How effective is the force at tackling serious and organised crime?
- How effective are the force's specialist capabilities?

In 2015, we inspected the PSNI in respect of its effectiveness in protecting those who are vulnerable from harm<sup>2</sup>. The Minister for Justice commissioned HMICFRS to inspect three of the effectiveness core questions in 2016/17:

- How effective is the service at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe?
- How effective is the service at investigating crime and reducing re-offending?
- How effective is the service at tackling serious and organised crime?

## **How does HMICFRS inspect police effectiveness?**

HMICFRS collects data and documentation from police forces, reviews investigation files, interviews senior officers and holds focus groups with officers and staff of all grades and ranks. We also make unannounced visits to police stations to gather evidence from frontline officers and staff.

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<sup>2</sup> The 2015 PSNI effectiveness (vulnerability) report can be found at [www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-police-service-of-northern-ireland/](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-police-service-of-northern-ireland/)

## How does HMICFRS grade forces on their effectiveness?

Our findings against each core question are used to provide an overall graded assessment of a police force's effectiveness. The judgment categories on which HMICFRS grades forces are:

- outstanding;
- good;
- requires improvement; and
- inadequate.

Judgment is made against how effective a police force is at keeping people safe and reducing crime.

In applying the judgments, HMICFRS considers whether:

- the effectiveness of the service is good, or exceeds this standard sufficiently to be judged as outstanding;
- the effectiveness of the service requires improvement, and/or there are some weaknesses; or
- the effectiveness of the service is inadequate because it is considerably lower than is expected.

Although the security threat level in Northern Ireland is the same as in the rest of the United Kingdom, the political and social environment in which the PSNI polices is very different from that faced by other forces in England and Wales. At the time of this inspection of the PSNI there was no elected Assembly, as a result of the resignation of the Deputy First Minister, which prompted the breakdown of the power-sharing arrangements. The PSNI is a national police service, covering the whole of Northern Ireland; all officers are routinely armed; and it is the only part of the United Kingdom that has a physical border with Europe. It is for these reasons that, although this inspection has been conducted using the PEEL methodology applied to forces in England and Wales, it is not possible to draw direct comparisons in all aspects of policing between them and the PSNI.

While the areas of focus of our effectiveness inspection may change from year to year, HMICFRS makes an assessment of the service's effectiveness compared with the previous year's overall effectiveness grade. As our effectiveness inspections continue to develop over the coming years, we will look at different aspects of effective policing. However, the principles of effective policing remain consistent throughout all our assessments, which enables us to make year-on-year assessments of progress.

This report sets out the findings from this wide-ranging inspection of the effectiveness of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The report on the PSNI's efficiency is available from HMICFRS' website ([www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs)).

# Overview – how effective is the service at keeping people safe and reducing crime?

## Overall judgment<sup>3</sup>



**Good**

The Police Service of Northern Ireland is good at keeping people safe and reducing crime. It works well with partner organisations (such as local councils, health and education services) to tackle problems of crime and anti-social behaviour. The standard of investigations is generally good and the service has an effective approach to reducing offending. The service has a comprehensive understanding of the threat posed by dissident terrorism and serious and organised crime. It has effective processes in place to manage organised crime groups and the service works hard to deter people from becoming involved in serious and organised criminality. The service makes good use of a range of media to educate and inform the public.

In last year's assessment<sup>4</sup>, we judged the service to require improvement in respect of the effectiveness with which it protected those who are vulnerable from harm and supported victims. It should be noted that this year's effectiveness inspection did not assess this aspect of the service's effectiveness.

## Overall summary

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is good at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe. In the 12 months to 31 March 2016, recorded crime was stable and below the recorded rate for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The service has a good understanding of the threat and risk of harm within the communities it serves, which has been developed through effective engagement with local communities and policing and community safety partnerships. The service makes good use of social media to inform and respond to the public. The PSNI takes effective action to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour, working well with partner organisations to identify problems and respond early. That said, the service's approach to problem solving is new and inconsistent. Some partners are

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<sup>3</sup> HMICFRS judgments are outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

<sup>4</sup> *PEEL: Police effectiveness (vulnerability) – An inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland*, HMIC, 2016. Available from: [www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-police-service-of-northern-ireland/](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/peel-police-effectiveness-police-service-of-northern-ireland/)



reluctant to be seen to be actively supporting the police, for fear of reprisals from dissident elements, which is hindering the full realisation of potential benefits in areas such as offender management.

The PSNI is good at investigating crime and reducing re-offending. Control room officers and staff apply the 'golden hour'<sup>5</sup> principles well to maximise the preservation of evidence. The overall standard of investigations is generally good, especially those undertaken by detectives in the more serious or complex cases. However, the service could do more to improve its investigations of less complex, volume crime investigations by ensuring more effective supervision. Investigating officers have access to a good range of investigative support, including effective forensic crime scene investigation. The service has its own cyber-crime centre, supported by district eCrime support units, providing evidence recovery from mobile telephones, computers and other digital devices, the demand for which continues to rise, leading to a backlog in computer examinations. The PSNI works well with statutory partners to tackle prolific offenders and reduce re-offending. It has good systems in place to manage the threat posed by dangerous and sexual offenders, although again there are signs that increasing demand is placing strain on resources.

The PSNI is good at tackling serious and organised crime. It has developed a very good understanding of the threat and risk that serious and organised crime and dissident terrorism pose to the communities of Northern Ireland. The service has effective relationships with a wide variety of partner organisations, including law enforcement agencies throughout the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It has effective processes in place to investigate, disrupt and dismantle organised crime groups (OCGs) and makes good use of serious crime prevention orders to manage the most dangerous offenders. The PSNI works well to prevent, deter and divert people away from involvement in terrorism and serious and organised crime. It makes good use of a range of media to educate and inform local people of the threat from organised crime as well as its efforts and successes in tackling serious and organised crime.

### **Recommendation**

- The PSNI is a good service. HMICFRS has not identified any causes for concern and has therefore made no specific recommendations.

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<sup>5</sup> Golden hour refers to the time after a crime has been committed during which there is maximum potential for recovery of forensic evidence.

## Areas for improvement

- The PSNI should ensure that frontline officers, particularly those in neighbourhood teams, apply consistently the service's problem-solving methodology.
- The PSNI should ensure that it is capable of identifying and recording the lessons learned from problem-solving activities.
- The PSNI should improve its supervision of crime investigations, particularly in those cases investigated by uniformed officers.
- The PSNI should continue efforts to reduce backlogs in its forensic examination of digital devices in criminal investigations.
- The PSNI should introduce measures to ensure the effective management of suspects circulated as wanted for arrest.
- The PSNI should assure itself that resource distribution in its five area public protection units is proportionate and sufficient to manage demand effectively.
- The PSNI should consider adopting a tiered approach to the formal review of OCGs, in which tier 1 OCGs are reviewed monthly, tiers 2 and 3 OCGs reviewed quarterly and tier 4 OCGs reviewed every six months.
- In co-operation with the National Ballistics Intelligence Service, the PSNI should secure direct access to the integrated ballistics intelligence database.
- The PSNI should consider adopting the national scale (major, moderate, minor, none and negative) to measure its disruptive effect on organised criminals.

## How effective is the service at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe?

The police service's ability to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour and to keep people safe is a principal measure of its effectiveness. Crime prevention is more cost effective than investigating crime and it makes society safer. The police service cannot prevent crime on its own; the work of other statutory and non-statutory bodies such as health and social services is vital. Therefore, effective policing depends on the service's ability to work closely with other partner organisations to understand local problems and have access to a wide range of evidence-based interventions to resolve them.

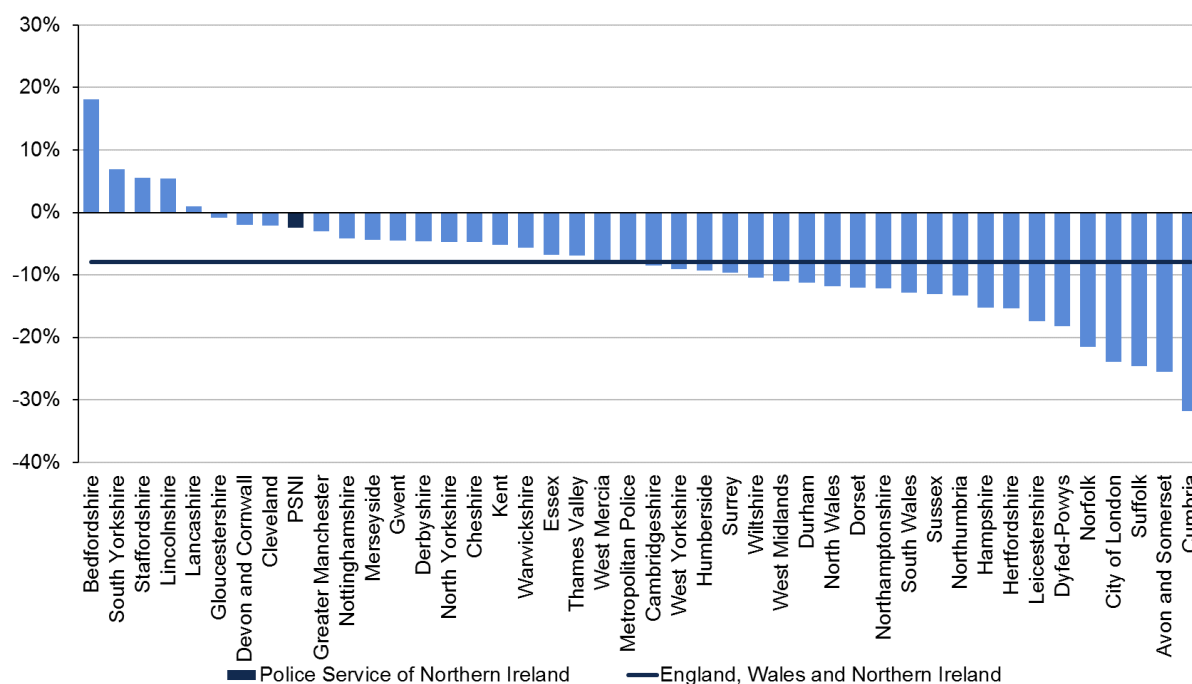
## How much crime and anti-social behaviour is there in Northern Ireland?

Although police-recorded crime is by no means a complete measure of the totality of demand for calls on its service that it faces, it does provide a comparable indication of performance for all forces. Crime rates are reported as a number of crimes per 1,000 population in each police force area to enable comparison between them.

Figure 1: Recorded crime per 1,000 population in the PSNI in the 12 months to 30 June 2016

	Police Service of Northern Ireland	England, Wales and Northern Ireland
<b>Crimes</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Victim-Based Crime</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Violence Against the Person</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>
Homicide	0	0
Violence with injury	8	7
Violence without injury	11	10
<b>Sexual offences</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Robbery</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Theft Offences</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>30</b>
Burglary	5	7
Vehicle offences	3	6
Shoplifting	4	6
All Other Theft Offences	7	8
Theft from the person	0	1
Bicycle Theft	0	1
<b>Criminal Damage and Arson</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Other Crimes Against Society</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

**Figure 2: Percentage change in the volume of anti-social behaviour incidents, by police force, comparing the 12 months to 31 March 2015 with the 12 months to 31 March 2016**



In 2016/17, the PSNI recorded 32 incidents of anti-social behaviour per 1,000 population. This is 2 percent fewer incidents per 1,000 population than during the previous 12 months. In England and Wales as a whole, there were 8 percent fewer incidents per 1,000 population in 2015/16 than were recorded during the previous 12 months.

## How effectively does the service understand the threat or risk of harm within the communities it serves?

It is vital that the police service has a detailed understanding of the communities it serves in order to protect them from harm. This understanding should include those communities which may, for a variety of reasons including previous experience, have less trust or confidence in the police, for example, migrant communities, young people, and political or religious groups which are hostile or mistrustful towards the police. A good understanding of what matters to these communities helps the police to gain their confidence and create safer neighbourhoods for citizens.

The Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2011 created a requirement on local district councils to establish policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs). The precise make-up of PCSPs varies throughout the 11 local council districts in Northern Ireland, which mirror the PSNI's 11 local policing areas. However, as a minimum each partnership includes the local council, the police and independent members. The Act sets out the functions of a PCSP, which include:

- acting as a general forum for discussion and consultation;

- securing the co-operation and views of the public about matters concerning local policing;
- preparing plans and providing financial and other support to reduce crime and enhance community safety; and
- monitoring the performance of the police in carrying out the local policing plan.

In general, officers and staff we spoke with felt that the PCSPs helped in understanding the issues faced by different communities, including those communities that had historically been difficult to engage, and that PCSPs played a principal role in identifying and setting local policing priorities.

The PSNI has developed a good understanding of the communities it serves through a variety of sources. The PCSPs provide regular feedback from local people about policing issues, concerns and priorities. Additionally, each PCSP area is further divided into smaller district electoral areas (DEAs). The PSNI has created local profiles of each DEA, including police data and information on the geography and demography of the areas.

In 2015/16, in response to budget pressures, the PSNI reviewed and restructured its approach to neighbourhood policing. It replaced the existing dedicated neighbourhood policing teams in each DEA with local policing teams, whose primary function is to respond to calls from the public. Although each local policing team officer is allocated responsibility for a specific geographic area, the demands originating from response policing mean that they spend very little of their time addressing neighbourhood issues. The restructure reduced the number of dedicated neighbourhood policing teams and those that remain are now focused on the 34 local electoral areas with the highest levels of crime, social deprivation or rural isolation, or where there is a particular policing need. Each DEA holds regular meetings with its dedicated neighbourhood policing team and in DEAs with no dedicated neighbourhood team, designated members of the local policing team attend.

The PSNI's policy is that a dedicated neighbourhood policing team should not be routinely taken away, or abstracted, from its designated area. Any such abstractions are recorded and monitored by senior managers in the district. The majority of neighbourhood officers we spoke with confirmed that they were not often taken away from their areas, apart from during the marching season, when there was a traditional spike in public order demand.

The PSNI has made good use of social media, including having Facebook and Twitter accounts for each of its dedicated neighbourhood policing teams. These are used to provide current information and advice, as well as to report back to local people on the action taken against identified local priorities in a 'you said, we did' format.

During the inspection we attended several daily management meetings, which are held in each of the PSNI's 11 policing districts every morning. At the daily management meeting a senior officer from the district reviews information, incidents and intelligence to assess the level of threat, risk and harm within local communities. These meetings are wide-ranging and cover issues such as significant incidents or events; people missing from home; hate incidents; and the threat from dissident terrorist organisations. While the quality of these meetings is variable, they are an effective way for senior managers to monitor the prevailing level of threat, risk and concern within local communities. Officers from the local and neighbourhood policing teams receive daily briefings about any developing community issues, which allows them identify appropriate interventions.

## **How effectively do service actions and activities prevent crime and anti-social behaviour?**

The police service uses a range of options to prevent crime, tackle anti-social behaviour and keep people safe. It uses structured approaches to solving local problems which aim to deal with criminal and anti-social behaviour. It also uses legal powers and specific policing tactics, such as analytics to predict high-crime areas and target patrols or providing individuals with crime prevention advice and practical support which vary depending on the situation. HMICFRS expects forces to review their activity as well as other sources of evidence in order to improve their ability to protect people over the long term.

At the time of the inspection the PSNI had recently published its new crime prevention strategy, with the aim of reducing repeat victimisation and increasing partnership activity and support. We found that all officers had a good awareness of basic crime prevention techniques and a range of equipment available to support crime prevention activity, including advice leaflets, access to temporary alarms and CCTV. It has experienced and qualified crime prevention officers in each district.

Having previously worked with academics and researchers, the PSNI is seeking to make more use of predictive analysis tools to identify opportunities to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour. The service is now using an internally developed system which uses identified crime hotspots to inform officers deployed on preventative patrols.

During the inspection we saw some good examples of local neighbourhood officers working with partner organisations to resolve long-standing, recurrent problems of crime and anti-social behaviour. Examples included the use of patrol calendars to direct preventative patrols in areas of persistent anti-social behaviour; work with the local council, housing and youth justice services to divert young people away from crime and anti-social behaviour; and early intervention work co-ordinated through the multi-agency concern hub, to prevent problems caused by the complex needs of vulnerable individuals from escalating. We also found examples where the efforts of officers to tackle problems were being hindered by the reluctance of individual members of partner organisations to be seen to be actively supporting or working with the police, for fear of reprisals from dissident groups. Notwithstanding these good examples, the service's approach to problem solving lacked consistency in both methodology and quality. That said, HMICFRS recognises that the PSNI has recently introduced a structured approach to problem solving, although training for officers in the new methodology only began in January 2017. The new approach is based on the national decision model (NDM)<sup>6</sup> and the application of the problem analysis triangle<sup>7</sup>. At the time of the inspection, we found that while many officers were aware that the new approach was being introduced, very few had received the training. We also found little evidence that the service was actively analysing the results of problem-solving activity to identify what worked.

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<sup>6</sup> National decision model (NDM) is specific to policing. It provides a consistent framework in which decisions can be examined and challenged, both at the time and afterwards. It is composed of six main elements: the police code of ethics being central to the decision; gather information; assess threat and risk; consider powers and force policy; identify options; and take action and review what happened.

<sup>7</sup> The problem analysis triangle is a method of analysing three elements of recurrent problems: victim, offender and location. Further information is available at: [www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/intelligence-management/analysis/#problem-analysis-triangle](http://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/intelligence-management/analysis/#problem-analysis-triangle)

## Summary of findings



**Good**

The PSNI is good at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe. In the 12 months to 31 March 2016, recorded crime was stable and below the recorded rate for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The service has a good understanding of the threat and risk of harm within the communities it serves, which has been developed through effective engagement with local communities and policing and community safety partnerships. The service makes good use of social media to inform and respond to the public. The PSNI takes effective action to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour, working well with partner organisations to identify problems and respond early. That said, the service's approach to problem solving is new and lacks consistency and some individuals in partner organisations are reluctant to be seen to be actively supporting the police, for fear of reprisals from dissident elements, which hinders the full realisation of potential benefits.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The PSNI should ensure that frontline officers, particularly those in neighbourhood teams, apply consistently the service's problem-solving methodology.
- The PSNI should ensure that it is capable of identifying and recording the lessons learned from problem-solving activities.



## How effective is the service at investigating crime and reducing re-offending?

When a crime occurs, the public must have confidence that the police will investigate it effectively, take seriously their concerns as victims, and bring offenders to justice. To be effective, investigations should be well planned and supervised, based on approved practice, and carried out by appropriately trained members of the workforce. In co-operation with other organisations, the police must also manage the risk posed by those who are identified as being the most prolific or dangerous offenders, to minimise the chances of continued harm to individuals and communities.

## How well does the service bring offenders to justice?

Since April 2014, police forces in England and Wales have been required to record how investigations are concluded in a new way, known as 'outcomes'. Replacing what was known as 'detections', the outcomes framework<sup>8</sup> currently contains 21 different types of outcome. The outcomes framework does not apply in Northern Ireland, where official statistics cover eight different types of outcome.

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<sup>8</sup> Further information on the outcomes framework for England and Wales, including data, can be found at [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/539447/crime-outcomes-hosb0616.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/539447/crime-outcomes-hosb0616.pdf)

**Figure 3: Proportion of outcomes assigned to offences recorded in the PSNI, in the 12 months to 30 June 2016, by outcome type**

	<b>Police Service of Northern Ireland</b>
<b>Charged/Summoned</b>	<b>20.7</b>
<b>Taken into consideration</b>	<b>0.0</b>
<b>Out-of-court (formal)</b>	<b>3.8</b>
Caution – youths	1.0
Caution – adults	1.9
Penalty Notices for Disorder	1.0
<b>Out-of-court (informal)</b>	<b>4.0</b>
Community resolution	4.0
<b>Prosecution prevented or not in the public interest</b>	<b>0.9</b>
Offender died before proceedings	0.2
No prosecution directed (not in the public interest, PPS/CPS)	0.3
Prosecution prevented - suspect under age	0.2
Prosecution prevented - suspect too ill	0.1
Prosecution prevented - victim/key witness dead/too ill	0.1
Prosecution time limit expired	0.0
<b>Evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)</b>	<b>9.4</b>
<b>Evidential difficulties (victim does not support action)</b>	<b>18.4</b>
Evidential difficulties: suspect not identified; victim does not support further action	1.0
Evidential difficulties: suspect identified; victim does not support further action	17.4
<b>Investigation complete - no suspect identified</b>	<b>40.0</b>
<b>Action undertaken by another body/agency</b>	<b>0.7</b>
<b>Total offences that have since been assigned an outcome</b>	<b>98.0</b>
<b>Offences not yet assigned an outcome</b>	<b>2.0</b>
<b>Total offences % (excluding Action Fraud)</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Due to the different categorisation of outcomes, it is not possible to make direct comparison between outcomes in Northern Ireland and those in England and Wales.

## **How effective is the service's initial investigative response?**

The initial investigative response is critical for an effective investigation. From the moment victims and witnesses make contact with the police the investigative process should start, so that accurate information and evidence can be gathered. It is important that forces record evidence as soon as possible after a crime. The longer it takes for evidence-recording to begin, the more likely it is that evidence will be destroyed, damaged or lost. Recording this evidence is usually the responsibility of the first officer who attends the scene. After the officer has completed this initial investigation the case may be handed over to a different police officer or team in the service. This process must ensure that crimes are allocated to people with the right skills to undertake an effective investigation.

The PSNI is good in its initial investigative response. Call handlers in the control rooms assess all incoming calls by applying COSTS, a systematic approach that requires consideration of:

- customer and community impact;
- organisational, area and local priorities;
- susceptibility of the caller;
- threat, harm, risk and opportunity; and
- solvability.

This structured approach allows call handlers not only to fully assess each call but also to decide on the most appropriate response, including the speed of that response. The PSNI uses a four-tier system of graded response, identifying incidents as either emergency, priority, scheduled or suitable for early resolution. Not all of the calls made to the service necessitate the attendance of a police officer. Many can be dealt with appropriately over the telephone and such incidents are assigned the grade of early resolution. At the time of our inspection the PSNI resolved 42 percent of recorded incidents by way of early resolution. Although this is higher than the England and Wales average of 31 percent, we were reassured that if investigative lines of enquiry are identified subsequently in an incident that has been assessed as suitable for early resolution, the matter is referred back to the control room for a police officer to be dispatched.

Call handlers have also received training in the golden hour principles. Frontline officers who we spoke with said that call handlers were good at questioning callers and extracting relevant information and also providing good practical advice to callers. Similarly we found that officers who attended incidents were well versed in the golden hour principles and that, in the main, they had the time to undertake a good initial investigation, including securing and preserving physical evidence, looking for any CCTV footage, conducting house-to-house enquiries and identifying potential lines of enquiry. Many frontline officers who we spoke with had been issued with personal mobile devices, which as well as allowing remote access to the PSNI's computer systems also allow officers to photograph evidence at crime scenes, including physical injuries. Several officers told us that, where a potential threat to the security of the attending officers had been identified, the important golden hour principles had to be balanced against the need to ensure their safety. This occasionally, though necessarily, led to a delay in their response.

The PSNI has issued guidance on the allocation of different types of investigation, designed to ensure that that investigators have the relevant experience, skills and training to conduct effective investigations. This guidance sees the less complex and generally less serious cases being dealt with by officers in local policing teams, who often attend the initial incident, or by officers in the volume crime support teams, established in some areas. More serious or complex matters are investigated by detectives and the most serious crimes are allocated to experienced detectives, often in specialists units. Decisions on the allocation of individual crimes are made

by sergeants and we saw good evidence of uniformed and detective sergeants discussing cases to identify and allocate investigations to the most appropriate resource. Allocation decisions are further subject to review by senior managers, which provides assurance to the service that the allocation guidance is being applied correctly.

## **How effective is the service's subsequent investigation?**

Every day, police forces throughout the United Kingdom investigate a wide range of crimes. These range from non-complex crimes such as some theft and assault cases through to complex and sensitive investigations such as rape and murder. HMICFRS referred to national standards and best practice in examining how well forces allocate and investigate the full range of crimes, including how officers and staff can gather evidence to support investigations. These include the more traditional forensic approaches, such as taking fingerprints, as well as more recently developed techniques like gathering digital evidence from mobile telephones or computers to find evidence of online abuse.

Prior to the inspection we examined a small number of crime investigation files covering offences of common assault, wounding, robbery and burglary. During the inspection we reviewed a further selection of case files with the investigating officers. Overall we found that investigations were conducted to a good or very good standard, with potential lines of enquiry being identified correctly and pursued effectively. We found in most cases that investigations had been undertaken by an officer with the relevant knowledge, skills and experience. However, we did find two unrelated cases where uniformed officers from local policing teams had investigated serious wounding offences which we would expect to have been dealt with by suitably qualified and experienced detectives.

In all the cases we examined it was evident that supervisors had involved themselves in the investigation. However, the degree of their involvement and its effectiveness was mixed. The quality of guidance and investigative direction from detective supervisors in the more serious or complex cases was consistently high. The same could not be said for the consistency of the supervision provided by uniformed sergeants, which in many cases (particularly burglary investigations) failed to provide any direction to pursue lines of enquiry or add value to the overall investigation. This inconsistency is something that the service should rectify.

The PSNI operates a triage system for crime scene investigators (CSIs). All requests for CSI attendance at crime scenes are channelled to an experienced CSI in the control room, who offers advice on forensic preservation and recovery of evidence. This triaging allows an informed decision on CSI attendance and examination, which reduces wasted effort of CSIs attending scenes with no realistic prospect of useful evidence. Frontline officers expressed confidence in this system, valuing the advice offered and reporting prompt attendance from CSIs when appropriate.

The service's specialist cyber-crime centre is responsible for prevention, investigation and forensic support in relation to cyber-enabled crime. The cyber-crime centre is complemented by five district eCrime support units in strategic locations throughout Northern Ireland, which provide information and advice to officers and the forensic recovery of evidence from mobile telephones, computers and other digital devices. All officers we spoke with were aware of the support available and spoke of varying turnaround times for different services. All requests for digital examination are assessed using a scoring process to prioritise submissions for processing. The assessment process takes account of the threat, risk and harm, including the severity of the offence. Investigating officers can appeal the resultant prioritisation. Counter-terrorism and serious and organised crime receive the highest priority and we found no evidence of delay in the processing of such requests. However, we did find evidence of delays in the examination of non-prioritised cases, which in the case of computers can extend to more than 12 months. Delays in examinations can lead to delays in prosecution decisions and potentially leave offenders at large to continue offending. The service acknowledges and understands the high and increasing demand for digital forensic support to crime investigations. It has introduced robust triage mechanisms and sought to reduce delays by increasing the resources dedicated to this important area of work. However, more remains to be done to reduce and minimise backlogs in the examination of devices.

The Victims Charter for Northern Ireland sets out the standards of contact and care that victims of crime can expect from the police and the wider criminal justice system. As a minimum, victims should be contacted regularly and updated about the progress of their crime. In common with several forces in England and Wales, the PSNI uses the Niche record management system to record crime reports and investigations. The Niche system is used to generate automatic reminders for investigating officers and supervisors and we found good evidence that regular contact is being maintained, monitored and recorded on the system.

## **How effectively does the service reduce re-offending?**

We assessed how well the service works with other policing authorities and other interested parties to identify vulnerable offenders and prevent them from re-offending, and how well it identifies and manages repeat, dangerous or sexual offenders.

The service is part of the Northern Ireland Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP) arrangements. Together with partners from the probation, youth justice and prison services and the Department of Justice, the PSNI has established ten reducing offending units (ROUs) throughout Northern Ireland. Although not physically located together (due to security concerns of some partner organisations), officers in the

ROUs work closely with their partners to implement the three strands of the ROP strategy, which are to:

- prevent and deter;
- catch and control; and
- rehabilitate and resettle.

Partner agencies can nominate individuals for inclusion in the programme, although the cohort of offenders is largely made up of those with a history of prolific serious and acquisitive crime offending. Those at risk of becoming involved in serious crime or paramilitary activity are selected for the prevent and deter strand. Each individual placed on the scheme is allocated to an identified offender manager and, at the time of the inspection, offender managers were each managing an average of eight offenders.

The inspection found a good level of awareness among all frontline officers of the ROU scheme and those offenders who were being managed in their area. We heard of several good examples of activity to prevent people becoming involved in or divert them away from criminal and paramilitary activity, including:

- ‘Stay on Side’, a programme with the Irish Football Association, which provides football coaching skills and qualifications to young people at risk of involvement in crime and
- a scheme using reformed offenders to educate and inform young people on the damaging effect of criminality and substance abuse.

Unlike in England and Wales there is no statutory basis in Northern Ireland for the drug testing of offenders on arrest. The ability to identify drug use at the time of arrest enables the police to refer offenders with drug or substance dependency to treatment services while in custody. During the inspection we were told that many prolific offenders have a history of drug and substance misuse. We were also told that in spite of the absence of a statutory scheme, drug testing was undertaken but only with the consent of the person arrested. Although refusal to submit to drug testing can be used to inform decisions concerning an offender’s recall to prison or removal from the scheme, the Department of Justice may wish to consider whether to place in statute a scheme of drug testing on arrest, like that used in England and Wales.

The PSNI has previously considered extending the ROP programme to work with both repeat domestic abuse perpetrators and serious violent offenders. However, this has not been pursued due to the effectiveness of existing alternative arrangements. The ROP steering group, which oversees the reducing offending programme, is made up of strategic leads from each of the constituent partner organisations and monitors performance each month. This monitoring includes

tracking the progress of individuals through the three strands, the rates of re-offending and qualitative measures such as the timeliness and efficacy of information exchange between partners. According to information provided by the service, the offending by those being managed on the programme had reduced by 72 percent.

The border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland extends for over 300 miles. However, as both sides of the border are within the common travel area of the European Union, there are no physical border controls in place. While this allows for the free movement of people and goods across the border, it also presents opportunities for the cross-border movement of criminals and criminality. The PSNI works closely with An Garda Síochána and other partner organisations through the joint agency taskforce to identify and respond to such threats. The PSNI's extradition and international liaison unit works closely with the Home Office immigration compliance and enforcement team to identify and take appropriate enforcement action against foreign national offenders. The service has effective processes in place to secure the arrest of suspects wanted on European Arrest Warrants and those wanted for the most serious offences. However, the same cannot be said for those suspected of or wanted for less serious crimes. Like many forces in England and Wales, the PSNI uses the Niche computer system to record information relevant to reported incidents, crimes and intelligence. As soon as a suspect is identified as being wanted for an offence, a 'flag' is placed on their Niche record, indicating to anyone who views the record that the person is 'wanted for interview'. At the time of the inspection the service advised us that 1,275 people were currently flagged on Niche as wanted. Efforts to trace and arrest those circulated for more serious crimes, including high-risk domestic abuse perpetrators, are generally well managed and effective. We found little evidence of a similar systematic approach to the management of people wanted for less serious offences.

Public protection arrangements for the management of dangerous and sexual offenders in Northern Ireland differ from those in place in England and Wales. The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 established the public protection arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI) and set out the statutory duties of specified partner organisations, including, among others, the PSNI, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The range of preventative orders available in Northern Ireland is also different from that in England and Wales.

The PSNI and its partner organisations assess the risk posed by dangerous and sexual offenders using recognised risk assessment tools (Stable and Acute 07 (SA07) and Risk Management 2000 (RM2K)). Offenders are categorised according to risk; category 3 offenders present the greatest risk. At the time of the inspection, 1,527 offenders were being managed under the PPANI, comprising 20 category 3 offenders, 160 category 2 offenders and 1,347 category 1 offenders.

The service allocates each offender to an offender manager and makes them subject to a local area public protection management plan, which is reviewed at intervals proportionate to their risk category.

The service has five public protection units, aligned with the five health authority areas in Northern Ireland. Officers in these units are responsible for managing PPANI offenders. During the inspection we spoke with several of these officers and we were assured to find that the management of the most dangerous offenders, those in category 3, was both rigorous and effective. However, we were told that in some areas the number of category 1 and 2 offenders was such that officers struggled to effectively manage scheduled visits to offenders and review risk assessments. This is an area that the service should address.

In addition to prosecution, the service uses a range of preventative orders, including risk of sexual harm orders, sexual offence prevention orders and the recently introduced violent offence prevention orders. We found good evidence that frontline officers and officers in neighbourhood and local policing teams received weekly briefings about category 3 offenders and those who were subject of a preventative order who lived in their local area.

## Summary of findings



**Good**

The PSNI is good at investigating crime and reducing re-offending. Officers and staff in the control room apply the golden hour principles well to maximise the preservation of evidence. The overall standard of investigations is generally good, especially those undertaken by detectives in the more serious or complex cases. However, the service could do more to improve the standard of volume crime investigations by ensuring more effective supervision. Investigating officers have access to a good range of investigative support, including effective forensic crime scene investigation. The service's cyber-crime centre, supported by district eCrime support units, provides recovery of evidence on mobile telephones, computers and other digital devices. However, the rising demand for this service is contributing to a backlog, particularly in computer examinations. The PSNI works well with its statutory partners to tackle prolific offenders and reduce re-offending. It has good systems in place to manage the threat posed by the most dangerous and sexual offenders, although again we found that the management of those categorised as lower risk needs improvement.



### **Areas for improvement**

- The PSNI should improve its supervision of crime investigations, particularly in those cases investigated by uniformed officers.
- The PSNI should continue efforts to reduce backlogs in its forensic examination of digital devices in criminal investigations.
- The PSNI should introduce measures to ensure the effective management of suspects circulated as wanted for arrest.
- The PSNI should assure itself that resource distribution in its five area public protection units is proportionate and sufficient to manage demand effectively.

## How effective is the service at tackling serious and organised crime?

Serious and organised crime poses a threat to the public throughout the whole of the UK and beyond. Individuals, communities and businesses feel its damaging effects. Police forces have a critical role in tackling serious and organised crime alongside regional organised crime units (in England and Wales), the National Crime Agency and other partner organisations. Police forces that are effective in this area of policing tackle serious and organised crime not just by prosecuting offenders, but also by disrupting and preventing organised criminality at a local level.

## How effectively does the service understand the threat and risk posed by serious and organised crime?

In order to tackle serious and organised crime effectively the police service must first have a good understanding of the threats it poses to the communities it serves. Police forces should be using a range of intelligence (not just from the police but also from other partner organisations) to understand threats and risks, from traditional organised crime such as drug dealing and money laundering to the more recently understood threats such as cyber-crime and child sexual exploitation.

The PSNI has a comprehensive understanding of the threats posed to its communities from serious and organised crime, which is often closely linked to the threat posed by dissident terrorist groups. This inspection is confined to the threat posed by serious and organised crime and does not consider terrorist activity.

The service has developed its understanding of the nature and scale of organised criminality by preparing local organised crime profiles. Although the Government Agency Intelligence Network<sup>9</sup> (GAIN) does not extend to Northern Ireland, we found good evidence that the PSNI has been able to build these profiles using extensive intelligence, information and data from a wide range of other law enforcement and investigative agencies. The profiles have been created by the rigorous application of the MoRiLE<sup>10</sup> methodology.

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<sup>9</sup> The Government Agency Intelligence Network (GAIN) is a large network of partners, including all police forces in England and Wales, which disseminates information about organised criminals.

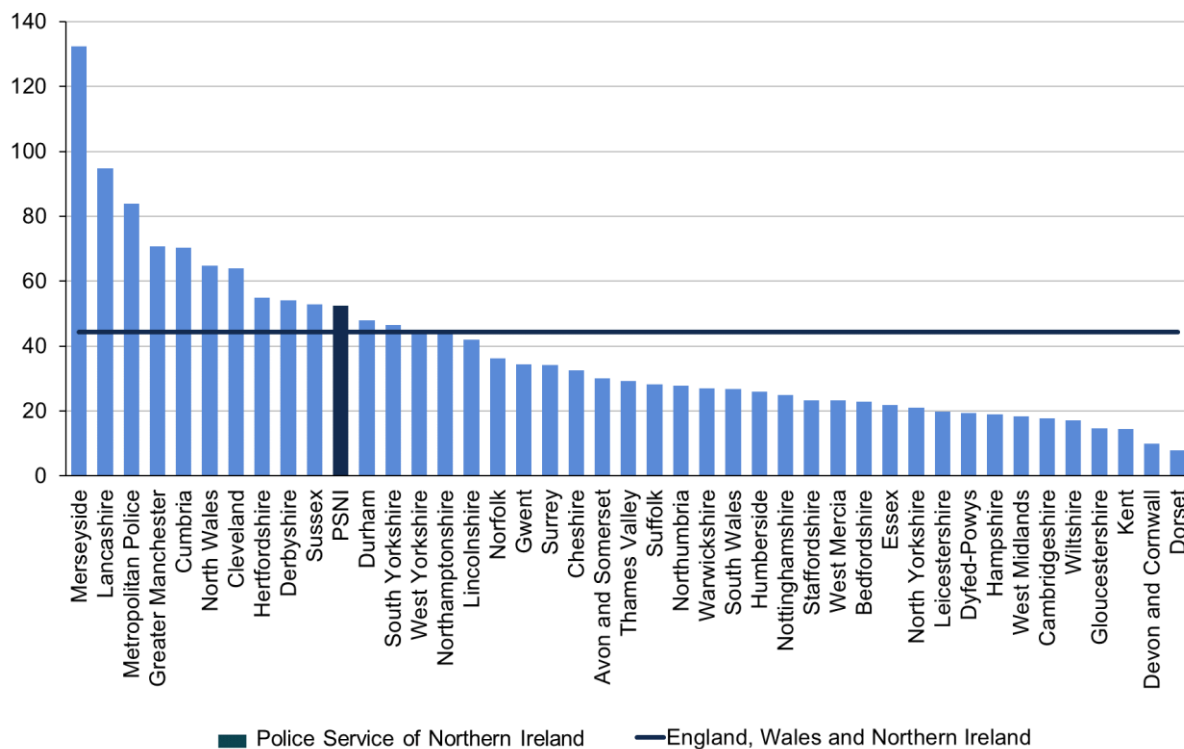
<sup>10</sup> The 'management of risk in law enforcement' process, developed by the National Police Chiefs' Council. This tool assesses the types of crimes which most threaten communities and highlights where the force does not currently have the capacity or capability to tackle them effectively.

We found good evidence of cross-border liaison and co-operation, particularly with An Garda Síochána, as well as inputs from both HM Revenue & Customs and the Revenue Service in the Republic of Ireland to support the PSNI response to serious and organised crime groups (OCGs).

HMICFRS also found good evidence that the service is responding to newer threats such as foreign national offenders, modern-day slavery, human trafficking, child sexual exploitation and cyber-crime. The PSNI has established effective research and analysis processes to improve its knowledge of these areas. These efforts are supported by the service’s close links to academia and its awareness of the threats throughout the UK, through its membership of the national strategic meeting of regional organised crime units. The PSNI incorporates the threat from these emerging issues in its strategic intelligence assessment. The service has put in place dedicated resources to tackle cyber-crime and human trafficking, in addition to its assets already in place in respect of child sexual exploitation.

As of 1 July 2016, the PSNI was actively disrupting, investigating or monitoring 52 OCGs per one million of the population. This is above the England and Wales rate.

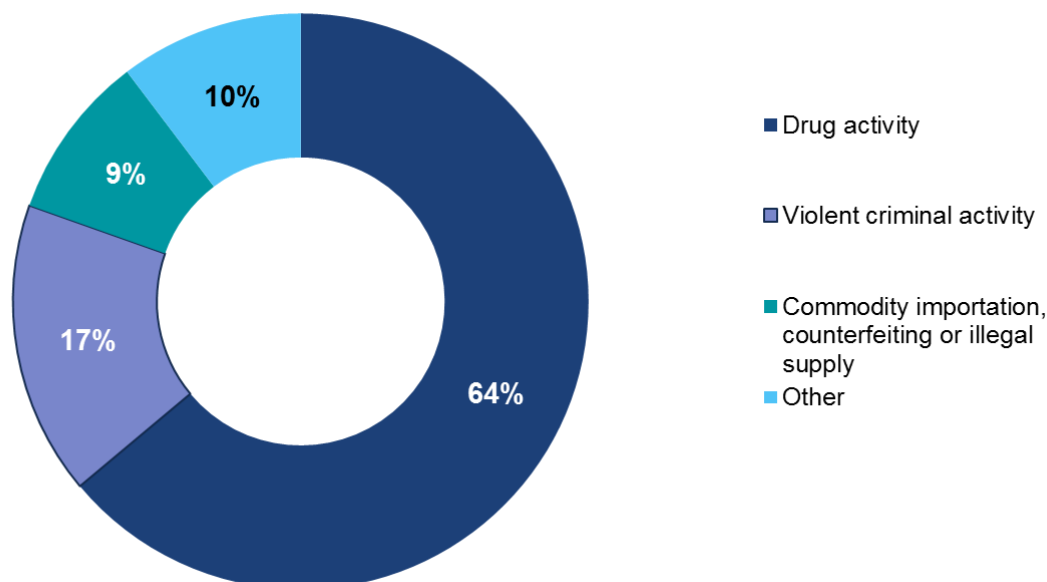
**Figure 4: Rate of organised crime groups per 1 million population, by police force, as at 1 July 2016**



Police forces categorise OCGs by the predominant form of criminal activity in which the group is involved. Although OCGs are likely to be involved in multiple forms of criminality (for example, groups supplying drugs may also be supplying firearms and be involved in money laundering), this indicates their most common characteristic.

Drug activity was the most predominant activity (64 percent) of OCGs mapped by the PSNI as at 1 July 2016. Drug activity was also the most common OCG crime type mapped by all forces in England and Wales.

**Figure 5: Breakdown of active mapped organised crime groups by predominant crime type as at 1 July 2016**



## How effectively does the service respond to serious and organised crime?

An effective police service will pursue and prosecute offenders and disrupt organised criminality at a local level. It will use specialist capabilities and non-specialist capabilities such as its neighbourhood teams. While it can be complex for the police to assess the success of actions against serious and organised crime, it is important that they understand the extent to which it disrupts this crime and reduces harm.

The PSNI manages effectively its response to organised crime groups (OCGs). On 1 July 2016, the service was managing 97 OCGs, all of which had been mapped appropriately. We found good evidence that the service regularly and routinely prioritises OCGs based on a structured assessment of threat, harm, risk and the opportunity to dismantle or disrupt. The service formally reviews all OCGs every four weeks, regardless of their assessed priority, which places significant demand on the analysts. A tiered approach to reviews, such as that used in England and Wales, where tier 1 OCGs are reviewed monthly, tiers 2 and 3 quarterly and tier 4 every six months is an effective approach, would release the analysts to undertake other work.

The PSNI assigns an experienced senior investigating officer to oversee and coordinate all investigative and disruption activity against each OCG. We found good evidence in the form of daily situation reports that senior investigating officers were

actively managing their assigned OCGs. Officers in neighbourhood and local policing teams had a good awareness of OCGs and their members. The service has introduced the 'OCG-on-a-page', which is a short briefing document to inform frontline officers of OCGs, their members, the type of criminality they are engaged in and any requests for intelligence.

The PSNI works well with a variety of partner organisations to tackle the threat from serious and organised crime, not just in Northern Ireland but also with partner organisations in the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, including the National Crime Agency, representatives from which attend the service's strategic and tactical meetings. We saw many examples of multi-agency, cross-border co-operation in operations against OCGs, including the organised crime task force, which was established in 2000 to provide a multi-agency partnership approach to tackling organised crime in Northern Ireland. The task force brings together police, customs and other law enforcement agencies, along with government departments, the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the local business community to combat organised crime.

The history of Northern Ireland and the evidenced links between serious and organised crime groups and dissident terrorist organisations mean that some OCGs have access to and make use of illegal firearms. Unlike all forces in England and Wales, the PSNI is not a partner to the memorandum of understanding with the National Ballistics Intelligence Service, although it does have good relationships with service. However, any checks by the PSNI against the integrated ballistics intelligence database have to be facilitated through neighbouring forces in Police Scotland or An Garda Síochána. HMICFRS is aware that the PSNI is keen to secure full access to the database. We strongly support this.

Most forces in England and Wales have adopted a new scale to measure their disruptive effect on organised criminals. Under the method, forces categorise each disruption as either major, moderate, minor, none or negative (for example, because a covert operation is compromised). This measurement method is new. Forces are still developing their approach to recording disruptions in a way that enables them to see whether communities are more or less at risk of serious and organised crime. Work is underway in England and Wales to provide a clearer understanding of the effect of police and partner activity on serious and organised crime, without introducing excessive bureaucracy. The PSNI does not use this new scale, rather it measures the effect of its activities on serious and organised crime by how successfully it frustrates, disrupts or dismantles OCGs. While this gives a level of assessment, it does not allow it to understand fully those occasions where its activity has either failed to have the desired effect or has had a negative effect. For this reason, the service should consider adopting the scale used in England and Wales.

## **How effectively does the service prevent serious and organised crime?**

To tackle serious and organised crime effectively, the police need to be able to stop people being drawn into this crime. Many of these people may be vulnerable and already involved in gang and youth violence. It should also be using a range of approaches and powers to prevent those known criminals continuing to cause harm. HMICFRS expects the police's approach to prevention to be a significant element of its overall strategy to tackle the harm that serious and organised crime causes communities.

It can be difficult for the PSNI to draw a clear distinction between those at risk of involvement in organised crime and those at risk of being drawn into dissident terrorist activity. However, we found good evidence of the service's efforts to identify and deter those at risk of becoming involved in serious criminality, irrespective of motivation. For example, the service is working with the University of Ulster to identify how funding available under the Fresh Start agreement can be targeted most effectively to prevent people becoming involved in extremist, terrorist and serious and organised criminal behaviour. The service is working with partner organisations from the health service, using research into deaths related to the use of illegal drugs, to develop a joint strategic assessment and also to direct education, prevention and enforcement activity by the police and health professionals. Other examples of work aimed at diverting or preventing people from involvement in organised crime include the recently introduced TEACH initiative (teaching ethical alternatives to child hackers) and multi-agency work through the concern hub in the Derry City and Strabane area, where the PSNI work with local partners, including council, health and care services, to identify those at risk of being drawn into serious and organised crime in order to provide alternative early intervention.

The PSNI recognises the importance of the long-term management of offenders involved in organised crime, beyond the initial investigation. It has recently refreshed efforts to monitor and manage offenders in prison in preparation for their release, developing effective processes to gather prison intelligence. Working with the Public Prosecution Service, the PSNI has also made good use of serious crime prevention orders (SCPOs) which enable them to impose a wide range of restrictions on criminals convicted of very serious crimes as part of a lifetime-management approach. They are a powerful means of preventing organised criminals from re-offending. Breach of an SCPO is a criminal offence which can result in a prison sentence of up to five years and an unlimited fine. At the time of inspection, the PSNI had 31 SCPOs in force. A dedicated senior investigating officer is assigned to oversee the management of each offender subject of such an order.

The PSNI communicates well with the public about serious and organised crime. We found good evidence that the service is using proactively a wide range of media to educate and inform, including local and national radio and television outlets; social

media; and face-to-face meetings between neighbourhood policing teams and local people. This is co-ordinated by the service communications department, which works closely with senior investigating officers to devise individual media strategies for specific investigations, particularly when covert investigations are moving into an overt arrest or disruption operation. In such cases the local neighbourhood policing teams undertake a community impact assessment before and after the operation. This co-ordination by corporate communications and the close co-operation with investigators and local policing ensures consistency in its external communications and full consideration of the most effective method of communicating success. We saw good evidence of this approach in several operations against organised criminals, which resulted in high-profile media coverage of successful outcomes and increased confidence in the PSNI among the public.

## Summary of findings



**Good**

The PSNI is good at tackling serious and organised crime. It has developed a very good understanding of the threat and risk that serious and organised crime and dissident terrorism pose to the communities of Northern Ireland. The service has effective relationships with a wide variety of partners, including law enforcement agencies throughout the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It has effective processes in place to investigate, disrupt and dismantle organised crime groups and makes good use of serious crime prevention orders to manage the most dangerous offenders. The PSNI works well to prevent, deter and divert people away from involvement in terrorism and serious and organised crime. It makes good use of a range of media to educate and inform local people of the threat from organised crime as well as its efforts and successes in tackling serious and organised crime.

### Areas for improvement

- The PSNI should consider adopting a tiered approach to the formal review of OCGs, in which tier 1 OCGs are reviewed monthly, tiers 2 and 3 OCGs reviewed quarterly and tier 4 OCGs reviewed every six months.
- In co-operation with the National Ballistics Intelligence Service, the PSNI should secure direct access to the integrated ballistics intelligence database.
- The PSNI should consider adopting the national scale (major, moderate, minor, none and negative) to measure its disruptive effect on organised criminals.

## Next steps

HMICFRS assesses progress on causes of concern and areas for improvement identified within its reports in a number of ways. We receive updates through our regular conversations with forces, re-assess as part of our annual PEEL programme, and, in the most serious cases, revisit forces.

HMICFRS highlights recurring themes emerging from our PEEL inspections of police forces within our national reports on police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy. These reports identify those issues that are reflected across England and Wales and may contain additional recommendations directed at national policing organisations, including the Home Office, where we believe improvements can be made at a national level.

Findings and judgments from this year's PEEL effectiveness inspection will be used to direct the design of the next cycle of PEEL effectiveness assessments. The specific areas for assessment are yet to be confirmed, based on further consultation, but we will continue to assess how forces keep people safe and reduce crime to ensure our findings are comparable year on year.