



PEEL: Police efficiency 2017

An inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland

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Contents

Introduction	3
Overview – How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and reducing crime?	5
How well does the service understand its current and likely future demand? ...	7
How well does the PSNI understand the current demand for its services?.....	7
How well does the service understand potential future demand for its services? ...	9
Summary of findings	10
How well does the service use its resources to manage current demand?	11
How well does the service’s current allocation of resources match demand, organisational and financial requirements?	11
How well does the service improve the productivity of its workforce?.....	13
How well does the service work with others to improve how it manages demand for its services?.....	14
Summary of findings	18
How well is the service planning for demand in the future?	19
How well does the service identify and prioritise areas to invest in for the future?	19
How well does the service plan its investments?	21
To what extent does the service fund its investments sustainably?	23
Summary of findings	25
Next steps	26

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)¹ 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.

¹ 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.

The report on the effectiveness of the PSNI is available on the HMICFRS website (www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs). This report sets out the findings of the efficiency inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Overview – How efficient is the service at keeping people safe and reducing crime?

Overall judgment²



Good

The Police Service of Northern Ireland has been assessed as good in respect of the efficiency with which it keeps people safe and reduces crime. The service has a good understanding of the demand that it currently faces, as well as the demand it is likely to face in the future, and this has been enriched by contributions from partner organisations (such as local council, or health and education services). It generally makes good use of its resources and uses a regular and cyclical programme of priority-based resourcing to decide the level of service and accompanying resources required. The service has developed its understanding of the skills and capabilities of its workforce and seeks to respond quickly to any gaps. In spite of the short-term, annual nature of funding and continuing uncertainty caused by the absence of an elected Assembly, the service is good at planning for demand in the future. Unlike forces in England and Wales, it cannot build strategic reserves to fund longer-term projects, although it strives to identify savings while improving services. The service works well with other police forces and law enforcement agencies.

Overall summary

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) has a good understanding of the demand it currently faces, as well as the demand it is likely to face in the future. Its understanding has been enriched by the inclusion of information and data from partners, including health services and local councils. The service has also improved its understanding of the nature and scale of emerging and hidden demand; these are matters which are not always reported to the police, such as human trafficking, modern-day slavery, domestic abuse, cross-border criminality and the illegal trade in abortion drugs. Having broadened and deepened its understanding of demand, the service now uses that information to inform a cyclical programme of priority-based resourcing (PBR) decisions to assess and prioritise proposed changes to the service it provides.

The PSNI generally makes good use of its resources to manage current demand. It has embarked on a PBR programme which it uses to decide the level of service and the resource requirements with reference to the priorities in the annual policing plan.

² HMICFRS judgments are: outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

Although the annual policing plan is now based on strategic outcomes, it still contains a high number of performance measures and targets. The application of the PBR process means that the PSNI has a good understanding of the cost of its services and how it can increase efficiency. The service has developed its understanding of the skills and capabilities of its workforce and, through the resource delivery group, seeks to respond quickly to any gaps. The PSNI should ensure that the work of the PBR and workforce delivery group is co-ordinated effectively. The service understands well how changes to improve efficiency affect its ability to manage demand.

In spite of the short-term, annual nature of funding and continuing uncertainty caused by the absence of an elected Assembly, the PSNI is good at planning for demand in the future. It has used the PBR programme to identify the optimum balance of resources to match demand, organisational priorities and financial requirements. The service has limited opportunity to plan future investments. However, its workforce, estates and ICT strategies and plans are built on sound assumptions and a good understanding of the environment and context within which it operates. Unlike forces in England and Wales, the PSNI cannot build reserves to fund longer-term projects, although it strives to identify savings while improving services. It works well with a range of partners, including other police forces and law enforcement agencies, and is working hard to collaborate with other partners, including local councils and the health and social care sectors.

Recommendation

- The PSNI has been judged to be good. HMICFRS has not identified any causes of concern and therefore has made no specific recommendations.

Area for improvement

- The PSNI should ensure that it has in place the necessary governance arrangements to effectively co-ordinate the continuing and extensive programme of change, monitor progress and ensure that potential benefits and savings are realised, while at the same time being able to derive learning.

How well does the service understand its current and likely future demand?

A good understanding of the demand for police services is vital in ensuring that police forces have the right resources in the right place to provide the right level of policing now and in the future. This means not just an understanding of reported incidents but also how well a force proactively looks for demand that is less likely to be reported (e.g. incidents relating to modern slavery or child sexual exploitation) so that it can ensure that it protects the most vulnerable victims. They also need to understand what resources to put into work that prevents crime and anti-social behaviour from occurring in the first place. It is important that police forces continually review how they operate to ensure that they are not wasting resources by operating inefficiently or responding to unnecessary demands.

The police service must understand how demand is changing and how it needs to change and adapt to ensure that it can plan for the future and continue to respond effectively. As well as assessing likely future threats and risks from crime, this also means understanding and assessing the potential effect of wider societal and environmental changes on the demands that it will face.

How well does the PSNI understand the current demand for its services?

Police services cover a wide spectrum of activities and go far beyond the most obvious demands such as providing a response to 999 calls, protecting victims of crime and pursuing offenders. It is important that they have a comprehensive understanding of the whole range of different demands they face, including early intervention work with other organisations to prevent crime and proactively seeking out hidden crimes such as domestic abuse, internet crime, fraud, modern slavery and crime in communities that are more reluctant to trust or engage with the police. The police also need to understand how efficiently they run their own operations in order to avoid wasted effort and to ensure that they make the best use possible of all available resources.

The demands on policing in Northern Ireland are more wide-ranging than those faced by most forces in England and Wales. They include the prevailing threat from dissident terrorist organisations and the presence of a land border between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and Europe.

In our efficiency inspection last year, we concluded that the service had a reasonable understanding of the demand that it faced, although more could be done with partner organisations to understand emerging and hidden demands such as human trafficking, child sexual exploitation and domestic abuse. In response, the PSNI

conducted a comprehensive review of the demand that it faces and its capacity to meet that demand.

The first stage of this process to identify, quantify and map all known demand was completed in autumn 2016 and saw demand classified into five main categories:

- reactive demand: including traditional activity such as responding to calls from the public, investigating crimes, etc.;
- proactive demand: caused through the activities of the service, such as crime-prevention or demand-reduction initiatives;
- internal demand: the necessary or wasteful demand resulting from internal processes, policies and procedures;
- hidden demand: resulting from issues that are less likely to be reported to the police such as domestic abuse or child sexual exploitation; and
- future demand: understanding the potential developments and changes in the nature and scale of likely demand.

The review provided the service with a much broader and deeper understanding of demand throughout all areas of police activity, which in turn has allowed it to make changes in the way services are provided. For example, it identified that many of the service's own policies and procedures were so lengthy and complex that they were not always being complied with and were creating unnecessary and wasteful demand. As a result, there is now a continuing process in which policies and procedures are reviewed and revised to make them more accessible, more easily understood and more effective by removing all but the essential points of compliance.

The PSNI conducts an annual strategic assessment to identify both the current and emerging demand. This assessment includes information and data from partners such as health services and local councils, the public prosecution service and others, including from the voluntary sector. This has led to an increased understanding of issues which traditionally have been less likely to be reported to the police. Examples include: the production of an intelligence profile on the nature and scale of human trafficking and modern-day slavery, which was used to direct several operations to target traffickers and support victims; working with partners, including Women's Aid and the Men's Advisory Project, to encourage the reporting of domestic abuse, particularly among those communities that historically have lacked the confidence to report matters to the police; and understanding and tackling the illegal trade in abortion drugs.

How well does the service understand potential future demand for its services?

Demands for police services are continually evolving and forces need to anticipate and understand likely future changes so their plans keep pace with the public's needs and expectations. Potential future demand includes new and emerging types of crime, such as cyber-crime, modern-day slavery and human trafficking. Also, it includes changes within and between the communities that it serves as well as developments in technology and environmental events, such as flooding.

The PSNI recognises that identifying and understanding changes in likely future demand will have a direct effect on its requirements in terms of workforce skills, technology and estates and this is reflected in the development of its corporate plans, including the people, estates and information technology strategies.

Additionally, in an effort to position the service to be able to meet potential future demand, the PSNI has used the outcomes of the review of demand and strategic assessment process to inform the prioritisation of resourcing. Under the priority-based resourcing (PBR) programme, the deputy chief constable has conducted a review of all areas of police activity to identify the current demand faced, as well as considering likely future changes in demand, to assess and prioritise the allocation of resources. The PSNI plans to undertake PBR reviews each year. In the first year, the programme identified over 70 areas where changes to resource levels could be made to improve the efficiency and/or effectiveness of the service being provided. At the time of our inspection, it had started to implement these changes, which will see increased resources being dedicated to protecting vulnerable people (those who are vulnerable through their age, disability, or because they have been subjected to repeated offences, or are at high risk of abuse, for example) and also enhancing neighbourhood policing, which were two areas that were highlighted for prioritisation.

Unlike forces in England and Wales, whose funding is derived mainly from Home Office grants and a policing precept raised by local authorities, the PSNI is funded wholly by the Northern Ireland Executive out of its block grant from HM Treasury. In common with other public-sector bodies in Northern Ireland, the PSNI cannot raise funds through a local precept, nor can it borrow funds or maintain a strategic reserve and it has no flexibility to carry forward surplus efficiency savings or under-spends accrued during the year. It has access to short-term funding for long-term security needs, but receives no separate funding for the investigation of historic offences or to support current inquests into deaths which occurred during the Troubles, the unpredictable nature of which not only diverts resources away from current demand but also frustrates the service's ability to undertake accurate longer-term resource planning.

The PSNI understands well that the demand that it faces can be affected directly by changes to the budgets of its partner organisations. Following the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly in January 2017, new Assembly elections were held on 2 March 2017. However, the subsequent lack of agreement on power sharing meant that, at the time of our inspection, the financial situation for all public services in Northern Ireland, including the PSNI, was uncertain and no public-sector budgets had been agreed for 2017/18. Consequently, the PSNI had no certainty over its own funding, or that of its public-sector partners, making the results of the PBR programme even more important.

In spite of the short-term and uncertain nature of its funding arrangements, the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 requires local councils to undertake community planning with designated partners, including the PSNI. In doing so, they are required to consider long-term objectives for improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area. The Policing with the Community project was created by the PSNI to improve collaborative working with local partners in communities, to assess community expectations and measure levels of confidence and satisfaction. The service is careful to consider the needs and expectations of all communities when considering changes to the services it provides, in particular to avoid suggestions that it favours one community over another. There is an obvious tension between the short-term nature of its funding and the requirement to consider long-term objectives; this is beyond the control of the PSNI, but a future Assembly may wish to consider this.

Summary of findings



Good

The Police Service of Northern Ireland has a good understanding of the demand it currently faces as well as the demand it is likely to face in the future. This understanding has been enriched by the inclusion of information and data from partners, including health services and local councils. The service has also improved its understanding of the nature and scale of emerging and hidden demand; these are matters which are not always reported to the police, such as human trafficking, modern-day slavery, domestic abuse, cross-border criminality and the illegal trade in abortion drugs. Having broadened and deepened its understanding of demand, the service now uses that information to inform its programme of priority-based resourcing decisions assessing and prioritising proposed changes to the service it provides.

How well does the service use its resources to manage current demand?

The police service needs to operate in a way that makes the best use of all available resources so that demand is met and public expectations are satisfied. We looked at the extent to which the PSNI has the right people with the right skills in the right place to protect the public and to fight crime. In the United Kingdom, police resources have been reduced over recent years. It is increasingly important that resources are aligned with priorities to provide value-for-money services that tackle priorities, manage demand and meet financial requirements. This not only involves a force using its own workforce as efficiently as possible, it also requires the police service to work in new ways with others to ensure the best possible service to the public and to use all available resources to improve efficiency.

For a number of years, police forces throughout the United Kingdom have been focused on changing the way they operate and finding ways to save money in order to manage reducing budgets. It is important that these savings are sustainable and forces can demonstrate that they have achieved efficiencies while continuing to have the capacity and capability to meet demand.

How well does the service's current allocation of resources match demand, organisational and financial requirements?

Police forces need to consider many factors when deciding how to allocate their resources, including the nature and scale of the demands that they face, local risks and the priorities of local communities. As part of our inspection, we examined how well the PSNI assesses these factors in making decisions about the level of service to provide and how to use its resources to best effect.

Managing demands for police services

Following consultation with the public and other principal interested parties, the Northern Ireland Policing Board published its long-term vision for policing³ in 2016, in which it set out the strategic outcomes for the service to achieve by 2020. These longer-term outcomes are supported by the publication of an annual policing plan. The policing plan for 2016/17⁴ focuses on five overarching themes: communication and engagement; protecting people and communities; reducing offending; the more efficient and effective delivery of justice; and more efficient and effective policing.

³ *The strategic outcomes for policing 2016–20*, Northern Ireland Policing Board, 2016, available from: www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/outcomes-policing-annual-policing-plan

⁴ *Annual policing plan for Northern Ireland 2016–17*, Northern Ireland Policing Board, 2016, available from: www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/sites/nipb/files/media-files/Policing-Plan-2016-17.pdf

Although the policing plan is structured around the 5 overarching themes, these are underpinned by 12 strategic outcomes. These outcomes are then broken down into a series of performance measures and targets, which the board uses to monitor the service's progress in providing an improved service to the public. Having regard to the priorities, outcomes and targets, the deputy chief constable has completed the first in a series of cyclical priority-based resourcing panels. Through these panels, the service has examined every area of police activity and considered the demands it faces as well as the existing level of resources required to meet those demands. Resources have then been allocated in order to support the overarching themes set out in the policing plan.

Through the application of this model, the service has identified more than 70 areas where cost savings could be achieved without an adverse effect on the achievement of priority outcomes and targets. The first tranche of changes are planned for implementation during 2017/18 and the service estimates that savings in excess of £20m can be made over the following four years. In addition to the reductions in cost, the service anticipates that over 450 police officer posts and about 200 police staff posts have been identified as being suitable for redeployment to the areas of highest priority, which at the time of our inspection had been identified as protecting vulnerable people and community policing. Examples of changes that have been implemented recently in the service include: replacing the paper-based system for firearms licensing with an online process which has automated the application and payment processes, releasing several police officers from mainly administrative tasks; and identifying duplication of effort and excess capability in public order and search resources between the district support teams and the central tactical support group, which will release about 80 police officers to be redirected to local policing.

In addition to the annual inspection of efficiency and effectiveness conducted by HMICFRS, the PSNI is subject to detailed and regular audit and inspection activity from a range of bodies, including the Criminal Justice Inspectorate for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Audit Office, the Policing Board and its own internal auditors. While there has been good progress in developing a more outcomes-based performance framework for the service, this imposes a significant resource demand on the service in managing, monitoring and reporting on a range of performance issues. For example, the previously mentioned annual policing plan for Northern Ireland 2016–17 is arranged around 5 overarching themes, 12 strategic outcomes, 26 discrete performance measures and 13 individual quantitative targets. HMICFRS would encourage the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Policing Board to work together to further develop the outcomes-based approach to performance management and to reduce the number of numerical targets.

Increasing efficiency

As a result of the priority-based resourcing (PBR) programme, the PSNI has a good understanding of the cost of the services that it provides and how it intends to increase efficiency. In addition to its own police officers and directly employed police staff, at the time of the inspection the PSNI also had several contracts with third parties to provide a range of members of staff, including civilian detention officers in the custody suites, enquiry assistants who staff the public enquiry counters at police stations and call handling staff who receive calls from the public in the control rooms. The service continues to experience high levels of turnover among contracted staff, particularly with call handlers in the control room, who often leave to work in private call centres where their skills and training attract higher salaries. The service is currently reviewing these contracts to ensure it is deriving the maximum efficiency.

How well does the service improve the productivity of its workforce?

In order to ensure that police officers remain visible, on the beat and engaged in activities to reduce and fight crime, it is essential to find ways to make police officers and staff more efficient when they are out in their communities and reduce time spent doing back office functions. Police forces spend about 80 percent of their budget on staffing, so it is vital that the workforce is as productive as possible. This means forces need to ensure that all members of their workforce have the skills and capabilities to provide the required level of service. We assessed how well the PSNI understands the skills its workforce need, both now and in the future. Where there are gaps in either capacity or capability, we assessed whether the steps it is taking are appropriate to ensure that officers and staff work as efficiently and effectively as possible. We looked in particular at whether the workforce have the right level of digital skills, both to make the most of current ICT systems and to investigate crime digitally.

Understanding current workforce capabilities and gaps

The PSNI has developed its understanding of the skills and capabilities of its workforce over the last year. This has been achieved by developing a series of role profiles for police officers and staff, which identify the skills and training necessary for each role. The role profiles are based on the College of Policing's Policing Professional Framework and also incorporate the national occupational standards set by the College, as well as identifying the behaviours necessary to implement successfully the service's ambition of Policing with the Community. All officers and staff are required to complete an annual individual performance assessment process, which is used to assess how well individuals match the requirements of their role.

The service has recently conducted a range of promotion selection processes for police officers and, for the first time in many years, police staff. This has been welcomed by the majority of people we spoke with. However, we were told that this had created gaps in skills and capabilities among the lower ranks and grades, though most said that the problem had been addressed to some degree through the programme of PBR decisions. The service has introduced a range of technological equipment for frontline officers, designed to improve efficiency by allowing them to complete tasks without the need to return to the police station. This technology includes smartphones which allow officers to access force IT systems, and body-worn video cameras which are available for use by local policing teams.

Tackling workforce gaps

The service has a strategic resource delivery group responsible for identifying and monitoring workforce gaps against the human resource distribution plan, which sets out the level and type of resources that the organisation needs. The group meets on a monthly basis to monitor levels of recruitment and promotion as well as those leaving the organisation through retirement or resignation. The group is responsible for identifying the mix of skills and capabilities that the service needs both now and in the future. It is responsible for succession planning by identifying future vacancies and how they will be filled. The service should ensure that the work of the resource delivery group integrates with the priority-based resourcing programme, in order to minimise the duplication of effort, and also identify at an early stage the wider implications of resourcing decisions, which would allow the service to avoid any unintended adverse consequences.

In an effort to achieve budget savings and reduce long-term costs, over the last two years the PSNI has offered police staff the opportunity to apply for voluntary early exit from the organisation, the costs of which have been met by the Department of Justice. According to figures provided by the service, in the two years to March 2017 about 900 members of staff have applied for voluntary early exit, which resulted in 307 individuals leaving the organisation; this generated payroll savings of £9.56m. The resulting gaps in capability and capacity created by the reduction in workforce numbers had been considered and addressed during the PBR process.

How well does the service work with others to improve how it manages demand for its services?

We assessed how well the PSNI has explored all opportunities to work in collaboration with others to increase efficiency and provide better, more resilient services. This can include work with other police forces, local public-sector organisations, the private sector and the voluntary sector. We examined whether the service has a clear rationale for the decisions it has taken about how it works with others, and whether it has a good understanding of how successful its joint working has been in helping it to meet demand for its services better.

Unlike forces in England and Wales, the PSNI faces unique difficulties with regard to collaborative working as a result of geography and history. The service does not have a border with any other United Kingdom police service, which makes travel and access more restrictive and costly and deters much collaborative working with other forces. The history of paramilitary conflict and community polarisation and the continuing security concerns mean that some partners are reluctant to be seen to co-operate too closely with the service. Notwithstanding this, the service does work in collaboration with a variety of partners, including other police forces and law enforcement agencies, local councils and the private and voluntary sectors.

During our inspection, we saw and heard of many examples of the PSNI working collaboratively with others. For example, the partnership for reducing offending, which operates throughout Northern Ireland, involves the police service working closely with the Department of Justice, the youth justice agency, the Northern Ireland prison and probation services and a range of voluntary organisations to tackle the offending behaviour of those who cause the greatest harm in local communities. The programme has three distinct strands: to prevent and deter people from committing crime; to catch and control those who do commit offences; and then to rehabilitate and resettle those people back into society. The reducing offending partnership has commissioned independent reviews to assess the effect of the integrated approach to managing offenders, the latest of which was conducted in 2016 and showed a reduction of 72 percent in re-offending by those prolific offenders being managed on the scheme.

The service is part of a multi-force collaboration with five forces in the north-west of England to provide a casualty bureau service. This is used to provide information to and receive calls from the public at times of civil emergency or crisis, ranging from environmental threats such as flooding to terrorist incidents. By making use of technology, the collaboration is able to provide a single co-ordinated service in response to incidents in any of the force areas or on a national scale. This means that individual forces do not have to train officers and staff or maintain a facility that is only used occasionally.

Local police and community safety partnerships have been established throughout Northern Ireland and, although these are at varying levels of maturity, they each involve local officers working with councils and local services to identify solutions to problems of crime and anti-social behaviour. As part of the PSNI's Policing with the Community programme, a multi-agency support hub has been created in the Derry City and Strabane area. This brings together the police, local council services, the Health Trust and other partners to intervene at an early stage to resolve problems faced by those individuals and families that place the greatest demand on local services.

The cross-border joint agency task force was created in 2015 as a result of the Fresh Start agreement⁵. This brings together the PSNI, An Garda Síochána, HM Revenue & Customs, the Revenue Commissioners in Ireland, the Home Office immigration and border services and the National Crime Agency, as the agreement says, “in a concerted and enhanced effort to tackle cross-jurisdictional organised crime and to bring to justice those involved in it”.

As well as collaborating with other police forces, law enforcement agencies and local council, public and third-sector partners, the PSNI has also entered into collaborative ventures with the private sector for the provision of a range of services. These services include: civilian detention officers working in custody suites; enquiry assistants working at public enquiry counters; and call takers working in the communications centres, although as previously mentioned, these contracts were under review at the time of the inspection. In addition, it has commissioned a private company to provide its underwater search capability.

How well does the service understand how any changes made to improve efficiency have affected its ability to manage demand?

As resources are reduced and demands on police services become ever more complex, it is increasingly important that forces fully understand the benefits that are realised from any investment and the effect of any new ways of working. This understanding enables them to learn from what works and to take swift action to mitigate any negative results.

The PSNI is accustomed to operating in an uncertain financial environment where budgets are set from one year to the next and where pressures in other essential public services can sometimes necessitate in-year savings. Indeed, at the time of our inspection, the lack of an elected Assembly meant that the service did not have an allocated budget for the year 2017/18. The short-term nature and uncertainty over current and future budgets means that investment and long-term planning can be problematic. However, the service has a record of operating within the budget set and achieving the savings necessary while also implementing change and investing in the future. The service has chosen to use a programme of priority-based resourcing (PBR) decisions to identify the changes necessary to maintain its capability and capacity in the future, at the same time as reducing its costs. Having identified more than 70 areas where it intends to make changes in the level of service and generate financial savings, the PSNI needs to ensure that it has the necessary governance mechanisms in place to co-ordinate these changes effectively, monitor progress and ensure that potential benefits are realised, while at the same time learning from the change process.

⁵ *A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan*, 2015, available from: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/479116/A_Fresh_Start_-_The_Stormont_Agreement_and_Implementation_Plan_-_Final_Version_20_Nov_2015_for_PDF.pdf

The service has continued to make changes to the way it operates and to its supporting infrastructure, in order to increase its efficiency and improve its ability to manage demand, including developments in information technology, vehicle fleet and its estates strategy. All change projects are subject to a post-project evaluation which assesses whether and to what extent the anticipated benefits of the project have been realised. Examples of projects to improve efficiency include making information available to frontline officers through mobile technology, including access to the intelligence and crime-recording system. This allows officers to undertake a variety of tasks while out on patrol without the need to return to the police station. Additionally, the service provided mobile access to the national fingerprint identification system, allowing officers to check the identity of suspects at the roadside. According to the post-project evaluation, this resulted in savings in officer time equivalent to financial savings of £1m. The PSNI first provided mobile data to officers in 2010, and the service has since developed the software used to access its systems to ensure that it is now compatible with any device, regardless of its operating system. This means that the PSNI is not restricted to a particular hardware provider and can negotiate more favourable terms, as well as ensure that its platform is capable of responding to future development.

Other technology projects the service has implemented have included the installation of 'Locate', a GPS-enabled location system fitted to all vehicles. Knowing where all vehicles are at all times not only increases officer security but it also allows the control room to deploy the nearest resource to priority incidents. The evaluation of the project identified that the service was not making the best use of its vehicle fleet and allowed it to reduce the number of vehicles by over 100, resulting in significant financial savings. The evaluation also identified that implementation of the system had been accompanied by an unexpected reduction in accidents involving police vehicles by as much as 45 percent, which again resulted in additional savings.

The service has recently introduced body-worn video cameras for use by frontline officers. Based on the experience of other forces, the PSNI anticipates this will improve the investigation and outcomes in cases where victims are less likely to support a prosecution, such as domestic abuse, as well as reduce complaints against the police, but this has yet to be evaluated formally. The service has also made significant savings in recent years by rationalising its estates strategy. This has led to a reduction in the number of operational stations, many of which have been sold, generating capital income, while others have been closed, resulting in reduced running and maintenance costs.

Summary of findings



Good

The Police Service of Northern Ireland generally makes good use of its resources to manage current demand. The service has embarked on a cyclical programme of priority-based resourcing. It uses this to decide the level of service and accompanying resources with reference to the priorities in the annual policing plan; although this is now based on strategic outcomes, the performance monitoring framework still contains a high number of performance targets and indicators. The application of the PBR process means that the service has a good understanding of the cost of its services and how it can increase efficiency. The service has developed its understanding of the skills and capabilities of its workforce and, through the resource delivery group, seeks to respond quickly to any gaps. In order to ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from the PBR programme and that unintended negative consequences are identified and avoided, the service should ensure that there is effective co-ordination and governance of the various continuing change initiatives. In spite of geography and history, which work to restrict opportunities, the service does work well with a range of partners, including other police forces, law enforcement agencies, local councils and others in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Although the short-term and uncertain nature of public-sector funding in Northern Ireland does not lend itself to long-term planning and investment decisions, the service understands well how changes to improve efficiency affect its ability to manage demand.

Area for improvement

- The PSNI should ensure that it has in place the necessary governance arrangements to effectively co-ordinate the continuing and extensive programme of change, monitor progress and ensure that potential benefits and savings are realised, while at the same time being able to derive learning.

How well is the service planning for demand in the future?

HMICFRS examined how well forces are using their understanding of current and future demand for their services to develop more efficient ways of operating that balance ambition, realism, innovation and risk. Our assessment examined the extent to which the PSNI's plans are adequate and achievable, and at the same time creative and ambitious. This included how far the service is aiming to improve efficiency through its workforce plans, collaboration plans, financial plans, ICT plans and approaches to risk.

How well does the service identify and prioritise areas to invest in for the future?

It is important that forces have good plans in place which take account of future demands for their services as well as the likely future funding available to them. They need to invest wisely for the future in order to ensure that they have the right capabilities to meet future demand. HMICFRS examined the service's financial plans and workforce plans to assess how far it is set to meet future changes in demand and local priorities. We looked in particular at how well the PSNI has considered its future ICT capabilities as well as any wider changes to the communities it serves.

Matching resources to demand, organisational priorities and financial requirements

As previously mentioned, unlike forces in England and Wales, the PSNI is funded wholly by the Northern Ireland Executive out of its block grant from HM Treasury. Under the devolved arrangement for policing and justice, the the service is part of the Department of Justice and the PSNI accounts for 70 percent of the department's funding. Throughout the year the Executive monitors the actual expenditure of Departments against their allocated budget. In the event of a potential shortfall in funding being identified within the Department of Justice or elsewhere, the PSNI is sometimes required to make in-year savings in order to contribute to the overall public sector budget position.

The development of a medium and long-term financial strategy continues to be hampered by the existing annual budget-setting process, which means the service cannot carry forward any under-spend, build financial reserves or raise additional revenue. The current political uncertainty caused by the absence of a power-sharing agreement means that no budget had been set for any of the public services in Northern Ireland for the financial year 2017/18. Furthermore, without a change in legislation, no budgets can be set until an elected Assembly is in place or the UK government exercises direct rule of the province from Westminster. In accordance with section 59 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, in the absence of an elected

Assembly, civil servants in the Department of Justice are empowered to allocate up to 75 percent of the 2016/17 budget for 2017/18 and, if no Assembly is in place by the end of July 2018, that allocation rises to 95 percent of the previous year's budget. This is not conducive to effective medium and long-term planning. As a consequence of the extant restrictions on funding, the service is unable to respond as flexibly as police forces in England and Wales, and this has been further exacerbated by the unusual circumstances prevailing at the time of our inspection.

Notwithstanding this, the service has used the priority-based resourcing (PBR) programme to balance resources better to demand, organisational priorities and what it anticipates will be a reduced financial provision for 2017/18. It has conducted scenario-planning exercises to assess how it would respond to budget reductions of between 2 and 15 percent. Having completed a comprehensive review of the demand that it faces, the service has identified over 70 areas where efficiency savings can be made, including removing police officers from a range of posts where the powers of constable are not required, such as staff officer and other support and administrative positions.

In addition to the PBR programme, the finance and HR departments work together to develop proposals for the medium-term resourcing plan, in which they seek to identify the optimum workforce balance between police officer and police staff numbers. These proposals are presented to senior leaders at the 'ServiceFirst' board for consideration, with decisions being made with reference to the allocated budget. The resource delivery group then meets monthly to monitor the actual workforce numbers against the medium-term plan. The absence of an agreed budget for 2017/18, together with the effect of the voluntary exit scheme on the service's police staff capability and capacity, make for a turbulent planning environment. HMICFRS urges the service to align the PBR programme as closely as possible with the work of the resource delivery group in order to minimise duplication of effort and to identify at an early stage the wider implications of resourcing decisions to avoid any unintended adverse consequences.

Investing in ICT

The service's ICT strategy is designed to align with and support the Policing Board's policing plan. However, the ability to make long-term investment decisions is not helped by the short-term, annual nature of the budget-setting process. In spite of this, the ICT department regularly submits bids to fund significant longer-term projects. For example, the PSNI is in the process of replacing outdated mobile devices with new smartphone technology which will allow officers to access more information without the need to return to the station. Body-worn video cameras have been introduced to over 2,000 frontline officers and the ICT department has introduced a system which allows the direct transfer of evidence from body-worn devices to the public prosecution service without the need for repeated downloading. The service is also planning to replace its command and control operating system,

which has been in use for over 20 years. During our inspection, we were impressed with the quality and commitment of the police staff within the ICT department and the way they continue to derive benefits for the service from advances in technology, in spite of the restrictive environment in which they operate.

How well does the service plan its investments?

A force's plans for investment and savings need to be credible, realistic and informed by a full understanding of the future challenges (both financial and operational) that it is likely to face. HMICFRS assessed the extent to which the PSNI's future plans are prudent, robust and based on sound assumptions about future demands and costs, while at the same time being ambitious enough to meet public expectations, including identifying new ways of working and providing services in the future.

The PSNI has an established and effective governance structure in place to make realistic and informed investment and planning decisions. The Northern Ireland Policing Board has produced its strategic plan for the service⁶, which outlines the five strategic outcomes for the next four years. In consultation with the service itself, local police and community safety partnerships and other principal interested parties, the Policing Board also produces an annual policing plan⁷, in which it sets out targets for the service during the year. Through the application of the MoRiLE⁸ process, the service then prioritises in its corporate plan how it will achieve the strategic outcomes, measures and targets set by the Policing Board. The ServiceFirst board, chaired by the deputy chief constable, meets monthly to monitor progress against the corporate plan, to consider any proposed changes to financial and other resource allocations and to oversee the progress of change projects. Alongside this, the deputy chief constable also manages the priority-based resourcing (PBR) programme. During the inspection, we found widespread agreement among those we spoke with that this process had led to senior leaders throughout the service having a more detailed understanding of the demand that their part of the organisation faced now and expected to face in the future, as well as the skills, capability and capacity necessary to deal with that demand and the costs associated. However, a recurring theme that emerged was the difficulty of operating within an annual budget-setting process while planning for changes over a three to four-year timeframe. At the time of our inspection, this was further exacerbated by

⁶ *The strategic outcomes for policing 2016–20*, Northern Ireland Policing Board, 2016, available from: www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/outcomes-policing-annual-policing-plan

⁷ *Annual policing plan for Northern Ireland 2016–17*, Northern Ireland Policing Board, 2016, available from: www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/sites/nipb/files/media-files/Policing-Plan-2016-17.pdf

⁸ 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.

two concerns: the lack of an elected Assembly, which resulted in no budget being set for the new financial year, and the uncertainty over the outcome of negotiations for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, in particular what this would mean for security and the policing of the border with the Republic of Ireland.

Planning for the future

Leaving aside these continuing concerns and uncertainties, the decisions on which the financial and organisational plans of the PSNI are being developed are rational and based on sound information and good understanding. The service has a strong record of operating within its allocated budget and making the required savings, including, in recent years, achieving additional budget savings in-year to support investment in other public services.

Assumptions about future income are both prudent and realistic. At the time of our inspection, the service was planning for a net reduction in funding of 3 percent for 2017/18, following correspondence from the Department of Justice. However, in the absence of an elected Assembly and an agreed budget, the service had completed a scenario-planning exercise to understand the potential effect of budget cuts of up to 15 percent. The service has developed strategies to support the overall corporate plan. These include: the people strategy, which identifies not just the number of people the service will require but also the mix of skills and capabilities of both officers and staff; the estates strategy, which focuses on reducing and rationalising the service's estate footprint, to reduce costs and support changes in operational policing while still remaining accessible for the public; and the ICT strategy, which seeks to maximise the opportunities and benefits from advances in technology, such as increasing the digital exchange of information and data throughout the criminal justice system, reducing cost and increasing efficiency.

As well as planning for the future and policing in the present, the service is also facing significant demand on resources in respect of the past. The number of investigations, inquiries and inquests into historic events, ranging from historic abuse allegations to dealing with unresolved issues from the Troubles, continues to grow. Unlike forces in England and Wales, which can apply to the Home Office for consideration of special grant payments for unexpected incidents or events which absorb more than 1 percent of their budget, the PSNI has to bear the cost of these investigations from its annual budget. This means that the service is dedicating increasing resources into investigating the past at the expense of resources for current investigations. This is presenting an increasing challenge to efficiency and effectiveness of the PSNI.

To what extent does the service fund its investments sustainably?

Police forces have made significant financial savings over recent years, and this has enabled them to reduce their costs and protect frontline policing. They continue to face financial challenges and it is vital to their ability to sustain effective policing that they continue to seek improved efficiencies and drive down costs so that they can not only balance their budgets but also invest in improving their capability in the future. Forces need to consider different ways of changing the way they work in order to secure effective policing in the longer term. This may include plans to establish different joint working arrangements with other organisations or investing in ICT to improve operational efficiency.

Saving to invest for the future

The funding position, which is unique to Northern Ireland, means that any savings accrued by the PSNI during the year are retained by the Department of Justice to support other public service expenditure. It is therefore difficult for the service to save for future investment. That said, the priority-based resourcing programme is designed to derive maximum benefit from the available resources and to ensure that any surplus or savings generated in one area can be redirected to support other priority areas of demand. In the first year, the PBR programme identified 78 discrete areas where savings of over £20m would allow resources to be redirected to priority activities. The service also seeks to make savings in other areas. For example, the expenditure on police overtime in Northern Ireland has always been high. This is partly because in England and Wales forces would ask surrounding forces to provide support in the form of mutual aid for large-scale events, particularly those that occur spontaneously. The remote island geography means that this option is not one that is readily available to the PSNI and it has to resource such events from within, making overtime essential. At the time of our inspection, the projected expenditure on overtime for 2017/18 was £45m, although more than half of that is in respect of national security operations. The service has established an overtime steering group, chaired by an assistant chief constable, to reduce the amount spent on overtime, in order to reduce costs and also to reduce the demands placed on officers.

The service's corporate development team identifies processes and practices that are inefficient or require improvement. Having identified such practices, the team then supports their redesign and the implementation of improvements to enhance performance and the service to the public. This reduces or eliminates unnecessary bureaucracy and administrative burden, thereby removing inefficiency, improving consistency and reducing costs. One such example of this approach is the redesign of the firearms licensing system, which changed from a paper-based system to an online process. As well as reducing costs, this resulted in a much faster service to over 22,000 applicants each year.

As previously mentioned, over the last two years the PSNI has offered police staff the opportunity to apply for the voluntary exit scheme, allowing them to leave the service before retirement age. According to figures provided by the service, almost 900 people applied for the scheme and 307 staff left, resulting in payroll savings of £9.56m in the two years that the scheme was open. The early departure of such a large number of police staff has left gaps in experience, knowledge and skills, which the service is now seeking to address through the people strategy and the PBR programme. At the time of the inspection there were several continuing and evolving change programmes, including the PBR programme, the resource delivery group and the voluntary exit scheme as well as the introduction of new technology. The speed and volume of change in the PSNI is so significant that the service needs to ensure it has a structured and co-ordinated approach to the governance of change, to ensure that it maximises the benefits of change while being able to identify and mitigate any unintended negative consequences and manage effectively the associated risks.

Working together to improve future efficiency

The PSNI is actively working with a variety of police forces and other law enforcement partners in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. Some examples of this include: being part of the north-west casualty bureau arrangements (see above); the national procurement collaboration; working with the public prosecution service and the court service to exchange information electronically; the road safety education partnership with the fire and rescue and ambulance services; and the cross-border task force, working with An Garda Síochána, HM Revenue & Customs, the Revenue Commissioners in Ireland, the Home Office immigration and border services and the National Crime Agency to tackle cross-border crime. However, the level of partnership working and collaboration between the police and non-law enforcement agencies, including local councils, health and social care services, is not as widespread as in many parts of England and Wales. There are some excellent but isolated examples of how effective partnerships can increase trust and confidence in the police, and, more importantly, provide improved services to local people, such as the support hub in the Derry City and Strabane area, which brings the police together with local council and health partners to intervene effectively with those in need of multi-agency support, but these are the exception rather than the norm. Security concerns among some partners can deter them from being seen to engage or co-operate too closely with the police. Unlike in England and Wales, there is no legislative requirement compelling partners to collaborate with the police. Such a requirement has the potential to be of significant benefit to partnership working in Northern Ireland.

Summary of findings



Good

In spite of the short-term, annual nature of funding and continuing uncertainty caused by the absence of an elected Assembly, the Police Service of Northern Ireland is good at planning for demand in the future. It has used the priority-based resourcing programme to identify the optimum balance of resources to match demand, organisational priorities and financial requirements. It has limited opportunity to plan future investments. However, its workforce, estates and ICT strategies and plans are built on sound assumptions and a good understanding of the environment and context within which it operates. Unlike forces in England and Wales, it cannot build strategic reserves to fund longer-term projects, although it strives to identify savings while improving services. It works well with a range of partners, including other police forces and law enforcement agencies, and is working hard to collaborate with other partners, including local councils and the health and social care sectors.

Next steps

HMICFRS will assess progress on any recommendations and areas for improvement identified within its reports in a number of ways. We may re-visit those forces where we have identified a serious cause of concern, go back to assess as part of our annual PEEL inspection programme or receive updates through regular conversations with 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 the country and may contain additional recommendations directed at national policing organisations, including the Home Office, where we believe improvements need to be made at a national level.