Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

PSNI Budget: Police Service of Northern Ireland

8 October 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Justice

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:
Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr Paul Frew
Mr Chris Hazzard
Mr Seán Lynch
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Patsy McGlone
Mr Edwin Poots

Witnesses:

Mr David Best	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Interim Deputy Chief Constable Alistair Finlay	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Chief Constable George Hamilton	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Mr Mark McNaughton	Police Service of Northern Ireland

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Let me welcome to the meeting Chief Constable George Hamilton; acting Deputy Chief Constable Alistair Finlay; David Best, the director of finance and support services; and Mark McNaughton, the head of finance. I particularly welcome Mr Hamilton and congratulate him on his appointment. This is the first time that you have been to the Committee in this capacity, and we appreciate your coming. Your predecessor had an arrangement whereby he came up here occasionally. The Committee respects the Policing Board's function — that is primarily where you report to — but the Committee has a remit on budgets. We raise other policing matters on the occasions when you are able to appear before us, which is not too regularly, but it is important that we have that dialogue. I will hand over to you to take us through your paper, after which members will have questions.

Chief Constable George Hamilton (Police Service of Northern Ireland): Thank you for that. A paper has been submitted in advance, and it has some fairly comprehensive detail in it. By way of an opening, I will highlight some issues from that, Chair.

Financial challenges are clearly having a big impact on the Police Service. In policing, like all other public services, that is the dominant issue at the moment. As you are aware, I briefed the Policing Board on this issue extensively last Thursday. At the outset today, I will take a few minutes to outline briefly for the Committee the realities of the financial challenges that the Police Service faces. As I

reminded the Policing Board, in all that I am about to say, I ask you to remember that policing is a profession charged with the protection of the public. We ask our officers to place themselves in danger so that our community can be safe. We had a stark reminder of that just in the last 36 hours, with the attack on police officers in north Belfast in the early hours of Tuesday morning.

As members are probably aware, we are required to save £51·4 million in the next six months. To try to give that some context, that is £5 million more than it takes to run our largest policing district for a year. You will have seen the media coverage last week of the release of over 300 temporary workers, so let me give that some context. The release of those temporary workers will reduce costs by £2·1 million, while the total amount that we need to reduce in year is £51·4 million. So it has an impact on the individuals, but it is a drop in the ocean of the savings that we need to achieve. Since I was appointed Chief Constable, I have been asked to deliver, first, 1·5% cuts, and then to plan for 3%, 4% and 5% cuts. Just two weeks ago, I had a finalised figure of delivering 7% cuts in year. Aside from the scale of the cuts, which are challenging enough, the constantly changing picture makes planning how to make the savings unfeasible. I have already notified the permanent secretary of the Department of Justice (DOJ) that, while we are taking all reasonable steps, at this point, I am unable to provide a full assurance that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) can deliver the required budget reductions and live within the revised budget.

The reductions will mean that policing is changing. The level of cuts required will fundamentally change how and where policing is delivered in Northern Ireland. The change in policing will be seen and felt by communities. The PSNI will be a smaller organisation. We will have fewer police officers. Our ability to deliver will be reduced, and there will be harder choices as policing has to prioritise where to focus its efforts. There will be less visible front-line policing in communities, and there will be longer waiting times for police attendance to non-emergency calls. Policing will have to focus on where vulnerability and need is greatest. The operational outworking of such a pure demand-led model is likely to affect adversely the level of reassurance that policing delivers in areas of lower demand.

I will highlight to you some of the initial decisions that we have taken and their implications as we try to grapple with this massive in-year budget cut. From the briefing papers that we provided, you will be aware of a number of decisions that have already been taken. These include the decision not to run a third planned recruitment campaign; the decision not to renew a contract for agency staff; an ongoing review of our managed services contract; and a very significant reduction in our overtime budget.

Needless to say, the implications of these decisions have been significant. In summary, this is what they will mean: the police officer headcount will decline; and it is inevitable that we will be forced to put police officers into a number of back-office functions as we move to replace agency staff. That is reverse civilianisation or workforce demodernisation. Reduced overtime will mean less operational flexibility and more regular abstraction of police officers from core policing duties across Northern Ireland in times of need. The loss of agency staff will mean the closure of some functions such as the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) and a significant reduction in the number of staff available to work on legacy issues.

I am, of course, happy to take questions on any of the issues about in-year cuts, but I will just give you some headlines on the early indications for the 2015-16 budget. As you will be aware from the Minister of Justice's appearance before the Committee last week, the PSNI has been asked to assess the impact of cuts next year of between 10% and 15% against the opening 2014-15 baselines. My initial professional assessment is that cuts of this level will mean a police service that is unrecognisable. It is likely to mean a service with virtually no preventative capability. Neighbourhood policing would be eliminated in all but a small number of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, and, as a service, we would be primarily focused on emergency response policing and serious harm policing to tackle the most dangerous threats. Cuts of this level are likely to require a redundancy programme for police staff as well as the additional funding for such a programme. We would also need to explore the feasibility of compulsory retirement for police officers.

Before concluding, I want to say something about my experience and that of Alistair Finlay in partnership working, particularly in the Scottish context, and how it might assist us in meeting the challenges that we face. In the Police Service, my officers and I are charged with the duty of keeping people safe. That will remain our priority and will not change. These financial pressures will require the prioritisation of policing to an extent never before experienced in Northern Ireland. I will, of course, work with the Policing Board and with the Justice Minister in deciding what policing activity will be reduced or stopped. There are implications not only for the public and for my organisation but for the many partner agencies with which we work so closely. There is a responsibility on all of us in the

public service and in civic leadership over the next few years to understand better the demands faced and how we can work better together for the safety and well-being of our communities.

We need to think about public service delivery in a different way. Members of the Justice Committee will know that many of the greatest demands on public services, whether it be antisocial behaviour, drug or alcohol abuse, educational underachievement, domestic abuse or mental health problems, can be mapped back to the same places. Different agencies are all dealing with the same vulnerable individuals, the same vulnerable families in the same vulnerable areas or communities. We all go back to them time and time again. To save money, we need to reduce this demand across public services. That requires more joined-up local activity, a substantial improvement in information sharing among agencies and encouraging teams of professionals from different backgrounds to work together and to intervene earlier to solve the problem, rather than simply reacting to it.

Information sharing is a decision, and it has no or very limited revenue costs. Information sharing, rather than money, is the real essential ingredient of true partnership working. Information sharing enables a better understanding of demand across agencies and allows us to intervene more intelligently and earlier to solve problems before they become costly issues. Community planning can provide the legislative basis for such information sharing, although my own fear is that community planning is not receiving the joined-up attention it needs to operate effectively amongst the other local government changes. Changing public service delivery is not easy. It does not happen overnight, but we have to make a start. The financial pressures should focus our minds, and the advent of community planning next year provides an immense opportunity for grounding partnership working for the benefit of our communities.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland will be ready to play its part in those changes. My duty to keep people safe will always be my top priority, but we are public servants charged with a duty to produce a balanced budget. We must be ready to work together on behalf of the public whom we serve.

Those are my opening comments. I will be happy to take any questions or have discussions on those comments or, indeed, on the more comprehensive report that we submitted through the Committee Clerk in advance.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I appreciate that. I suspect that most members will major on the budget issue. Any member is at liberty to ask any question on policing matters and to do that at this time. I will not divide the session up between the budget and other policing issues, so if members want to raise that, they can do so. I know that a couple of members need to get away early. I will bring them in first in due course.

I want to bottom out some of the financial savings issues because you said, and you told the Policing Board, that you have been asked to deliver £51 million of in-year savings and to do so within six months. The figures indicate to me that, from your opening line of the £734 million that the organisation receives, you are immediately being asked to get approximately £4·5 million before the June monitoring round. There is also another £11 million, which takes us to around £15 million before June. At the June monitoring round, an additional £36 million was sought. So by my reckoning, it is not quite £51 million to be delivered within six months, and you have had £36 million added to something that you were already aware of before June. It is not exactly accurate to say that you have been asked to deliver £51 million within six months because you were aware of a number of the calculations that get you to that figure pre-June. Obviously, £51 million has emanated from June, which is not six months before the end of the financial year. For accuracy purposes, I want to bottom out when exactly you ascribe that £51 million and the time frame in which you have been told to deliver it.

Mr David Best (Police Service of Northern Ireland): Broadly speaking, what you say is correct. We were asked for 1·5%. I think that that was probably confirmed in June. At that stage, there was also the £4 million, which we referred to as the "winter savings". The additional bit came through two to three weeks ago. So you are correct: the earlier bit was about one to two months ahead of the half-year period.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I agree with you. The situation is chronic, irrespective of when the cuts were asked for. It is important from a presentational point of view, because people have said to me that the Department of Justice was asked to deliver £47 million after the June monitoring round. Chief Constable, you then said that you were asked to deliver £51 million. People were doing the maths and saying that that does not quite add up, so it is important that we break down how we get to £51

million and the stages at which it was arrived in year, after which we can have a better conversation on how you are dealing with it. If that is clear and is what you are agreeing with, I can move on to the next point.

Chief Constable Hamilton: May I comment on that? There was certainly no intention to be disingenuous. It is bad enough for us without trying to make it worse than it is. You are right: there was that initial staging. There was a stage even before that for this final year of the CSR when we had already budgeted and taken out £46·7 million of costs. If we are talking about the cumulative effect, I would make the point that the figure is closer to £100 million, and I want to ensure that, presentationally, it is all catered for.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Yes. It is important to put that in.

Mr Best: For clarification: although that £11 million was notified a couple of months before the six-month period, most of those savings would still have to be incurred during the last six months of the year.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Contracts, obviously, run up to the end of December for your temporary staff. It will take effect only from that point on. I accept that.

What calculation was used to arrive initially at a figure of £734 million to fund the organisation? Is that calculation based on how many officers you should have or how many officers you do have? What is the formula?

Mr Best: It is not that simple. We had a budget under the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). We had to make savings of £135 million over the four-year period, this being the final year of the last CSR. In this final year, we had to save £47 million, so we took the budget that we had when we reported through Westminster and took £47 million off that final year. That is how we arrived at the figure. Carrying forward a budget from the past and adjusting it through efficiency savings gets us to our current position.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): So it is not the case that the organisation should have 7,000 officers, and you have been funded to that level?

Chief Constable Hamilton: There was a change a few years ago to give us more flexibility, whereby we had a Patten figure of 7,500 officers. At our own request, the compulsion to stay at 7,500 officers went because we realised that there was a cheaper, better and more efficient way to deliver the same quality of service. We made use, for example, of managed services contracts to get CCTV operators, custody detention officers and station enquiry assistants to fulfil those functions that previously, even in the immediate Patten era, were being done by police officers. We found a different way to configure the workforce that was more efficient and increased our capability.

The organisation has a tail or a legacy into the previous non-devolved regime, so comparative police forces in England and Wales — Thames Valley Police or Northumbria Police, for example — have a lower staffing level than ours. We also have a Northern Ireland additionality for parades, security issues and trying to tackle the threat of serious harm from violent dissident republicans, fallouts between loyalists and all of that, which is 27% of our budget. So there is a comparator with similar-sized police services. It has also been acknowledged that we have pressures that do not exist in other parts of the UK. That is clearly where the budgets have their origins.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Will you elaborate on exactly what work the legacy investigations branch will carry out and how its case load will be prioritised?

Chief Constable Hamilton: The speed at which all this is happening means that it is slightly chaotic. It is two and half weeks since our final figure was agreed.

The idea of the legacy investigations branch is to bring together into one place a number of legacy functions. We had, for example, the work that was previously done by the Historical Enquiries Team. It dealt with Troubles-related deaths but not with catastrophic incidents or tragedies other than deaths. Another investigative function dealt with non-Troubles-related legacy cases. Given that the HET went up only to 1998, there were a number of legacy cases that were not as old, dating from post-1998 through to the creation of the crime operations department in 2004. We would say that, by the time

that we got to 2004, we had the benefit of a number of reports and had got ourselves properly organised and structured for serious crime investigations and accountability mechanisms for the various functions, we have a six-year window in which there were a lot of investigations over which we would have question marks about quality and comprehensiveness. That was another pocket of legacy work. We routinely have a huge amount of queries from families, NGOs and lawyers, which are not requesting investigations but are looking for answers to questions about issues from yesteryear. We have tried to create accountability mechanisms and bring together, under one command and in one branch, the work that was previously conducted by all those functions. The HET, for example, was largely a review function, along with trying to provide information to families. Some families were very satisfied, and some, as we know, were unsatisfied. That culminated in the report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), and shortcomings were identified in the practice and inconsistencies in the standards of investigation.

The legacy investigations branch will try to bring together all those functions so that we know what our demand is, can prioritise it better and will have in place properly trained, accredited police officers with a review and investigative function as well as a support function for the plethora of other queries that come in. The support function probably does not need to be provided by police officers, but it will pool information from investigations. That will all sit together in one place.

We have a very robust tasking and prioritisation mechanism that the HET and other disparate units were previously separate from. That sits under the assistant chief constable of crime operations. Through that tasking and prioritisation model, we will work out what we are going to do and when. So there will be a review mechanism — the previous HET function — an investigative arm and the other support function. We have a number of current live investigations, for example, which we will continue to work on. They have potential, with real lines of inquiry, evidence to be secured and the possibility of a criminal justice outcome. However, all that will have to be done with a lower cost base and, therefore, less human resource. That is just a feature of the predicament that we are in.

I did set for the team — after a discussion, we were all agreed — some priorities for how we would handle the financial crisis. The first one of those was that we would deal with keeping people safe today as a priority in a general sense over dealing with legacy issues, but there is a caveat in that we accept our legislative responsibility to deal with historical investigations, and we will not shirk that. We also accept and acknowledge the pain and anguish that still exist for many families out there. We will be honest with them and will deal with their expectations, but we will not pretend that we can do something that we cannot deliver. That is why we have been quite upfront and vocal about that.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Is it the case that, although resources will be taken from current historical investigations, they will continue? If there are cold cases still to be reviewed that could generate investigations, as per the HET model, are they being put in abeyance, with no new casework being taken?

Chief Constable Hamilton: There are a number of live investigations that we need to keep going, albeit they will go at a slower pace. We have been given responsibilities, for example, in the report of the Hallett review of the on-the-runs (OTRs). We want to get that finalised and dealt with, and we will continue to work on it. Up until two weeks ago, we probably had close to 40 people working on that. Likewise, in the Bloody Sunday investigation, we had a significant proportion of investigators — probably not enough — some of whom were temporary workers. All that will start to reduce in size. The investigations will keep going but with fewer people and, therefore, at a slower pace. The review work, which was primarily an HET function, will continue but, again, with fewer people and at a slower pace.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Could there still be prosecutions for historical legacy-related issues.

Chief Constable Hamilton: There could be. Clearly, as time goes by, the potential for securing evidence changes. People get old, die or forget and so on, and the potential reduces over time. We have not taken this decision lightly. We would prefer to put a proper resource to it and deal with a lot of these running sores that go much wider than policing and into communities and grieving families, but we cannot do everything.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): My last point is unrelated but topical. One reason that JTI Gallaher gave for its closure was the illicit trade in tobacco. Obviously, the company is operating on a Europe-wide scale and has been undermined by that, but illicit tobacco is a serious problem in Northern

Ireland. How serious is the problem, and what is the PSNI doing to target those who engage in that activity, which has been one of the contributory factors to 800 people losing their job?

Chief Constable Hamilton: The illicit cigarette industry is significant. It is part of organised criminality. We have a full branch dedicated to tackling organised criminality. We prioritise its work on the basis of threat, risk and harm, and the financial harm caused to the Exchequer and to Northern Ireland society through cigarette and other contraband smuggling is significant.

I do not have the numbers to hand of arrests and seizures and so on, but we work with other agencies, and a lot of this needs to be tackled upstream. There is an ongoing debate with the Department of Justice, the Home Office and the National Crime Agency about where we all fit together, but it is certainly taken into account as we prioritise our organised crime resources.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much for the presentation. I have a couple of brief points. Your briefing paper states that you are moving towards a more demand-led model of policing. Will you explain that a little further? It appeared from your explanation that you may not be able to attend an increasing number of incidents.

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Alistair Finlay (Police Service of Northern Ireland): As the organisation shrinks, as it inevitably will, the inescapable fact is that we cannot afford the size of our organisation. We have had agreement from the Policing Board and the Department of Justice in our resilience review of capacity and capability, which stated that we should have 6,963 police officers and around 2,400 staff. We agreed that that was the size of the organisation that we needed in order to be resilient and to deal with all the challenges in Northern Ireland and to deal with enough surges in demand that we were not seeking to call for mutual aid from Great Britain regularly. That is not affordable.

The organisation will get smaller. We are losing around 200 people through retirement each year. As you know, we have not recruited for some time. Later this week, the first squad of new trainees and new police officers from Garnerville will graduate, but we will end up with a smaller organisation. That recalibration of the organisation will mean that we will have to change our policing style in some places. We will probably not have the luxury, potentially, of separating neighbourhood and response policing, and we will probably have dedicated neighbourhood police officers only in the areas of highest community prioritisation. That will mean that we will probably have to ask people to wait for longer for service for non-emergency calls.

At the moment, a significant number of calls are resolved over the phone without deployment and others by diaried events. However, that will increase, and the police officer footprint will not only be less proactive but less visible. It will be based more on responding to incidents as opposed to proactive patrolling. Our visibility across the streets and countryside of Northern Ireland will inevitably reduce, and there is an issue in balancing the potential risks and harm that come from that against the way in which we deploy our officers. That is broadly what we mean by more demand-led. There will be more responding to calls for service, less ability to be proactive and an awful lot less ability for preventative work. Some of the work on preventing harm, in engaging with young people, motorcyclists, road users and all those groups that we try to educate and inform will not be affordable.

Mr Elliott: It is very depressing to hear that you will have virtually no community officers and that they will evolve into response teams. You may say that they are still community officers, but, instead of a response team, it sounds to me as if it will mainly be responsive as opposed to proactive. You said that policing will be less proactive and less visible. I think that, when people in some communities hear that, they will say that community officers could not be any less visible than they are at present because they are just not there. If that situation gets worse in some areas, I do not know where the police response will be, never mind the proactive work. How will you define the highest prioritisation areas that you mentioned for community officers?

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: We have analysis of indices of deprivation and crime mapping. We can map the highest instances of crimes that have the greatest impact on the person. We will build up our mapping based on those statistics to show where there are the biggest risks. For example, even at the moment, we have on average about 150 police officers — sometimes more — engaged in interface patrolling every night in Belfast. At interfaces, there is a high risk of harm being caused but for the police presence and the constant reinforcement around the challenges that occur between communities at certain interfaces. That sort of information, about where there is a risk of significant harm between and within communities, will drive us to prioritise where our resources will go.

I guess that your next, inevitable question is probably this: how does that differentiate between urban and rural areas? It looks as though the greatest risk of harm is most frequently in urban areas, and there is a sense that that will cause us to be more in urban areas. Across the rural areas, the thin blue line — or green line, as it is in our case — will probably get slightly thinner.

Mr Elliott: I hate to think what it will be like if it gets any thinner than it is at the moment.

I will move on. Another point that I wanted to raise was about the Historical Enquiries Team (HET). What can you tell the families that are waiting on a review to be completed? I understand that some of those reviews were completed by the Historical Enquiries Team but were never delivered. They were on the point of being delivered when the HET was suspended. Some families have been waiting for years, while reviews have been ongoing; others recently got a published report but are awaiting feedback or a meeting. What can you say to those families?

Chief Constable Hamilton: What we have tried to do over the last few weeks is to act with integrity, honesty and authenticity, beyond the politics directed to communities and families. What we are doing is just working our way through those families and trying to explain the predicament that we are in and the difficult, almost impossible, decisions that we are having to take. We are giving them the reassurance that we are doing our best with what we have, but what we have is ever-reducing because of the budget cuts.

What I do not want to do is to lead people on a merry dance, thinking that there is some inefficiency in policing. Maybe there is a wee bit of inefficiency, but it is not worth £51 million within six, eight or nine months — whatever it is, it is in-year, anyway — which can be squeezed out, so that people will not see or feel any difference. People are going to see a difference in the policing service that is delivered for them, and we have had to prioritise dealing with the present over investigating and dealing with the past. It does not mean that we do that glibly; it is one of the difficult choices that we have had to make.

Mr Elliott: Effectively, are you saying to those people, "Too bad; you are not going to get your report"?

Chief Constable Hamilton: I would like to think that we would not use such blunt language, but what we will say —

Mr Elliott: Effectively that is what you are saying.

Chief Constable Hamilton: We will say that there will be a delay in reviewing your case or in revising your report. You are right: reports were paused on the basis of the HMIC work and the difficulties and challenges that arose out of that. We would like to be working our way through that with the 300 temporary workers. I know that that was a contentious issue anyway, but notwithstanding that, they were doing critical work and we were grateful for it. Of the 320-something workers, around 78 of them worked in HET. By the end of December, they will have gone. We will try to do this in a measured, tidy way. We will try to deal with the work that is ongoing and to get it finished. We will have teams that will be engaging with families so that expectations can be tailored according to the revised, realistic timescales. It is unfortunate. We do not want to do it. I remind members that, of those families, over 200 are the families of police officers who were murdered during the conflict. We have to deal with all that as well with our internal constituency. It is not something that we are doing lightly, and we would prefer not to be doing it.

Mr Elliott: Effectively, what I am asking is this: are they going to get the report?

Chief Constable Hamilton: The process has been amended and is in a better, more professional place on the back of the HMIC recommendations. Of those, 19 related to the Police Service and one related to the Policing Board. The 19 recommendations for the Police Service have all been completed. We are cooperating with the HMIC in coming back to do a health check on the quality of our work around those. All that is to try to give greater clarity to the role of the police and to ensure that the quality of the reports is of a consistent and high standard. People will get them, but I cannot pretend that they are going to get them at the same speed, as we have let probably three quarters of the staff engaged on it go out the door because we are ending temporary-worker contracts to balance the budget.

Mr Douglas: Thank you, Chief Constable, for your presentation so far. I wish you every success in your role.

Chief Constable Hamilton: Thank you.

Mr Douglas: You have done an excellent job so far.

Annex B states:

"Cuts will have a severely detrimental impact on police resilience and capacity."

A few years ago, you may remember, George, I was on the Policing Board. I remember going to the headquarters, as a number of us did, because of widespread violence in Ardoyne, which predated what is going on at Twaddell. Looking at it from a heli-tele point of view, the thing that struck me was that the police were literally at breaking point. Miraculously — I do not know how they did it — they did a superb job and kept thousands of people apart on 12 July. A few years later, resources are worse. We have heard a very depressing story today, but the problem is that things are going to get worse next year. In the event that you have widespread disorder, there must come a point when you say to yourself that you just do not have the capacity. You may have the resilience and the courage, but it may come to the point where you do not have the capacity. Is that a fair enough comment?

Chief Constable Hamilton: It is one description that is getting close to being accurate. What will happen is that we will have to strip more and more assets from other specialisms. Let us take your public order scenario, for example. At the cost of over £2,000 an hour for the heli-tele, there is a question mark around cutting heli hours because we just cannot afford to do it. There will be huge opportunity costs in removing police officers working on very important harm-related topics, like child sexual exploitation, cybercrime, human trafficking or, as the Chair challenged, what we are doing around contraband cigarettes. We cannot be emptying containerloads of contraband cigarettes and standing behind shield lines in Ardoyne. It will have to be where the greatest threat, risk and harm is, in the immediate sense, which will be at Ardoyne and Twaddell, standing between opposing crowds behind shield lines. We do not want to be doing that. However, the reality is that, before we get to a stage of saying that we do not have the capacity to deal with it, we will strip everything else out so that we get to that point.

That is the value of the review of resilience and capability. I am a bit exasperated by a lot of commentary that the police do not know where their costs are and do not tell their story, that the narrative is poor and it is a cash-rich organisation. The review of capacity and capability had concurrence from the Policing Board and the Department — not just concurrence but agreement — that it had an evidence base and sound professional judgement attached to it. We had the agreement of the Policing Board that we needed a number just short of 7,000. The Department of Justice gave us the same. The Northern Ireland Office, although less directly relevant, still needed reassurance about what we are doing in dealing with the national security threat. All those key bodies to which, in one way or another, we are accountable and that hold the purse strings for us all agree that that is what was needed. We have now got ourselves to a position where, even though I am saying that we still need 6,963 officers to address the problems in a post-conflict society, which you have identified, we will simply not be able to afford them. I cannot bring people into the organisation if I do not have the money to pay. The recruitment plans will basically be turned down to a trickle because we have some contractual arrangements with the outsourced provider and so will cut, probably by 50%, the number of officers coming in over the course of this competition. Then the competition due for next year to get us to almost 7,000 by 2016 will not happen, and we will have to absorb more risk with fewer people.

Mr Douglas: Your report talks about an ageing workforce. We are talking about people who are very highly skilled and have lots of experience. Could you give us a profile of where that is at the moment and the numbers of people retiring that we will be talking about over the next year or so?

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: The average age of the police officer cadre is somewhere in the region of 36. There is an argument that policing, particularly public order policing, is a physical role that requires a degree of fitness and agility. As we age, some of that becomes more problematic, so there is a need to balance new people coming into the organisation and building their experience, because it is maybe less about fitness and more about experience. The experience that you build up over the years, particularly in skilled areas and suchlike, takes time to build up. As a consequence of moving our agency staff out, we will reshape some of the organisation. Those roles need to be done,

and people will move into them. The people who will move into those roles will not be immediately skilled. There will be a dip in performance as we do that in some areas. For example, the legacy support that we give to inquests and suchlike is a legally driven process, and we will be taking people out of there. We have got and had planned to bring people in, but we planned a time to overlap them with the existing provision and then phase out the agency staff, because this was going to be a continuing demand. We will not be able to do that, with the consequence that those people will launch into it instead of being mentored and trained. They will not perform in the same way. So, because of that outworking, we anticipate further criticism from the coroner, for example, about the delay in us providing documents to the inquests.

I will go back to your earlier conversation about our capacity. We have demonstrated that we can use mutual aid, but I have to say that it is not a sticking plaster for this. Mutual aid coming from GB has all sorts of issues surrounding it, not least the cost, because the cost formula of that means that we pay not only for that officer but for that officer's backfill in their home force, as well as for the transport, accommodation and the whole range of equipment that goes round it. That is not a cost-effective way to do business in any sustainable way. If it is for a very short term, you use it in that way, but you cannot use it frequently. It is hugely expensive, and, indeed, the appetite and capacity in GB to support us on that is reducing a bit because, as police services across there are getting smaller, they are relying on each other for mutual aid and are sharing more amongst each other. So, the overall capacity to come to our assistance is more problematic, amongst other issues.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): I want to pick up on you being exasperated, Chief Constable. You said that the people who control the purse strings know exactly what you need. Is it those people who are saying that your organisation should be more transparent, open up the books and let people help you? Is that who you are exasperated with?

Chief Constable Hamilton: I did not say that it was people; I said that it was the narrative. There is this impression created, and we need to look at ourselves about how we tell our story. We think that we have outlined very clearly what the pressures are and what the capacity and capability is that we need. Clearly, there is an element of our work that deals with national security issues and with the violent dissident republican threat, where huge amounts of invisible policing goes into play and the public and the politicians generally only see the tip of the iceberg. So, there is a section of our work that is a bit invisible, but, actually, for the vast majority of it, I think that we have, for the review of resilience and capability, told the story, explained our rationale and explained what our demand is and how we trying to meet it in an efficient way.

My exasperation comes from the fact that, for some reason, we do not seem to be landing that message. I and my finance colleagues are very happy to sit down with officials in whatever Department to work through our budget lines and explain what the costs are. We are happy to have somebody from the operational side sit alongside them to explain what it actually means. For example, because of the way that we are asked to produce our accounts, the miscellaneous budget line looks very heavy. It looks like it is lots of paper clips and pencils. The miscellaneous budget line actually includes for the Police Service the bills of Forensic Science Northern Ireland. It is 10-point-something million pounds that is hidden away in a miscellaneous budget line. If you were applying scrutiny to the spreadsheet and saying, "Where is the fat for the police?", all of us would probably go to the miscellaneous line first to trim that. However, in there sits the Forensic Science budget, for example, and part of that is simply because of how the accounts have to be produced back to the parent Department and then back to DFP. My exasperation lies with not being able to communicate the extent of explanation or justification that we have given for how we use our money.

There is another frustrating factor that sits alongside this. We are engaged in an exercise of public safety where, when nothing happens, it is a success. If we do nothing, violence will occur. Let me give you an example. In August 2013, the anti-internment parade that came from north Belfast down through the city centre into Royal Avenue and out into west Belfast was an absolute mess. We had approximately 70 officers injured, some of them very seriously, and some of them are still not back to work as a result. We had literally the shop window of Belfast broken in Royal Avenue, and that was not a good day for communities or for policing. We learnt a huge amount from that. It was the first time that the event had occurred. We had Parades Commission determinations that were challenging to police and all the rest of it, but we did our best. We learnt a lot from that, and, in 2014, we policed the same event, and there was almost no violence. There was a little bit of argy-bargy between protest groups and those involved in the parade, but we got through it without any serious disorder, no damage to property, no police officers injured and very little violence between the two sides. That success of nothing happening cost us £330,000. It is a huge challenge to explain that and the planning and police resource that went into it to the public and to the layperson who was not there in

2013 and able to compare it with 2014. That was my point around the exasperation at us not seeming to be able to land our story, when I have every confidence that we are making good use of the resource that we have. Of course, in a budget this size, there will be an inefficiency here or there, but it will certainly not come anywhere near £51·4 million. That was my point, Chair.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much for the presentation. I will try not to get into figures and statistics, because I think that people can get lost, although my first question will be around figures. You have said to the Policing Board and in your public commentary and here today that your service is now unrecognisable. How much money do you say that you need for you to be able to withdraw that statement?

Chief Constable Hamilton: For accuracy, I will explain what I said about these cuts along with the cuts of 10% or 15% in the next financial year. Sorry to be quoting figures at you.

Mr McCartney: That is OK.

Chief Constable Hamilton: You have £51·4 million in year coming out, plus the £47 million that was planned to come out, which is approximately £100 million. On top of that, there is £10 million to £15 million to come out next year. We are planning on another £120 million coming out. Not all of the costs that we have removed are recurring. Some of them, to meet in-year budgets, will be deferring of payments, slowing things down and all of those usual tricks that we do in year to try to balance the books. My point was that, when you take the current cuts plus next year's cuts and apply them to policing, it will be unrecognisable. That is the point that we are at. As I said in my opening remarks, I accept that the pressure is on the entire public sector, and we know that there will be pain and reductions and that we will have to absorb and manage that risk and look at our appetite for risk and all of that. We are up for that, and, with the team that I have working with me, I have every confidence in our ability to do that. However, the scale of this is such and the depth of the cuts is so great that I do not want to be pretending that everything will be all right when I know rightly that that it will not.

Mr McCartney: In whatever conversations you have with the people who are, if you like, telling you that these are the types of cuts that you have to make, have you given them a figure for where you believe that, once you go beyond that line, you come to the decision that this will be unrecognisable? Have you a figure in mind that keeps you above that decision to say that this is unrecognisable?

Chief Constable Hamilton: There is no doubt that the look and feel of policing will change with cuts of this scale, but the figure that we have come up with that has an evidence base behind it, along with an agreed and scrutinised professional judgement, is the figure in the resilience review. That was agreed just a year ago, and it is still relevant. It is 6,963 officers. That is what I need to be able to deliver policing to a standard that is expected with confidence in keeping people safe and not relying on officers coming from GB under mutual aid, which is a very expensive option anyway. That is the figure that we have got. One of my strategic principles that I and the team have been working to is that we need to do what we can to keep the officer number effectively at that 7,000 figure. How many do I need so that the public do not notice the difference? That is a very subjective question, and it will depend on where you live, where you work and what your previous experience of the police is.

We will be doing things. We know that the level of crime and people's fear of crime are not always in the same place. There is no consistency between those, and you tackle the fear of crime largely by a visible, reassuring presence. We will not be able to do high-visibility patrolling just for the reassurance value, accepting that we would like to do that. We will have to be responding to the calls for service, which involves dealing with the shoplifters, the road traffic collisions, the serious assaults, the night-time economy and all of that. That will mean that, for the policing of the quality-of-life issues, such as lower level antisocial behaviour that often does not meet a criminal threshold, we will have to say to people that we cannot go to that and that they will have to work with voluntary organisations or the churches or the council or whoever, because, as the cuts bite deeper, we will be moving to a more reactive and demand-led model where we will just have to sweep up the mess afterwards rather than trying to deliver the service that we are delivering now, which is one of reassurance and prevention.

Mr McCartney: Obviously, a big strength and one of the major aspects of Patten was community policing. From practical experience, you see the benefit of it through confidence and engagement and people being part of the process of dealing with crime. Has an impact assessment been done of the result of taking that away? In the process, who comes down with the final decision to say that it is better to put money into the crime branch rather than into community policing? One will have an impact on the other. If people are not engaging with you at first base, the danger is that they

disconnect. If they do not see their police officer in front of them, they disconnect. That could put a bigger bill on you for having to clear up crime because they are not engaging with people. Who makes that overall assessment? Is it the number crunchers or is it people who will make decisions on practical policing?

Chief Constable Hamilton: We will look at the evidence and analysis, but, fundamentally, calls of that nature are more an art than a science and, therefore, it will ultimately come down to a judgement call that I will have to stand over. I am happy to work with other people about how we strike that balance. I know that the Policing Board will hold us to account for those decisions. They are effectively operational decisions for me to take, but I fully accept and respect the role of the board in holding me to account for how we make those decisions.

There is a very important point that I really want to emphasise to members. The community policing ethos, the policing with the community framework and the way of doing business is not changed whether we have 4,000 officers or 7,000 officers. I think that it is a mistake for us to say that community policing and engaging with people in a way that a police officer can be proud of and the community can feel better about is just as important for the officers sitting in the crime department as it is for the neighbourhood policing officer. Of course, neighbourhood policing teams have had a key role to play through reassurance, high-visibility patrolling and engaging with communities; I am not detracting from that. However, the challenge for us a senior executive team is to get the officer who is working on organised crime and trying to lock up the cigarette smugglers or lock up the violent dissident republican to think about how their actions impact on the wider community and how they will leave this person feeling at the end of the interaction. What I tell our people internally is not to use the lack of money and resource as an excuse for not treating people properly or for not treating them in a way that they can be proud of, because that is more about how you do it rather than what you do. Now, some of what we do will have to change. We will not be able to do as much preventative, reassuring patrolling and all that, but it does not mean that we can throw out policing with the community. It actually becomes more important with less resource.

Mr McCartney: I am glad about that, because some of the public commentary appeared to almost suggest that community policing might disappear and that you would only see a police officer if there had been a 999 call rather than in daily routines, community centres and many other things.

Are there issues around article 2 compliance with the new investigation unit to deal with the legacy issues?

Chief Constable Hamilton: No, not from our perspective. We have investigative standards and accredited investigators who will be able to complete thorough investigations with independence. There are also accountability mechanisms that will click in now that there is no ambiguity about whether this is at arm's length from PSNI and all the rest of it. We will have a head of branch who will be responsible to the ACC crime, who will be responsible to me, and I will be accountable and answerable to the Policing Board. The ombudsman will have full powers over all those police officers. Temporary workers will go, and any ambiguity that there was around accountability arrangements, however nebulous that was, will disappear because temporary workers will disappear. They did a great job for us and, although I know it was contentious, they filled a gap and allowed us to keep police officers on the front line. By necessity, they are going anyway. Article 2 compliance is something that we have confidence in.

Interestingly, though, it is not just about me having confidence and being able to technically convince a court that we are article 2 compliant. That is important. I know that there are significant groups in the community who do not have the confidence that there will be an article 2 compliance investigation. The twentieth recommendation of the HMIC report had to do with the Policing Board establishing an oversight panel or an assurance panel of experts. It was not specific about who they should be, but, without wanting to undermine the board, we had envisaged perhaps a lawyer, a senior police officer who understands investigations and potentially people from the victims' sector. Their role in this oversight capacity would be to try to breathe confidence into the work of what was the HET. I would be keen that that recommendation is still fulfilled and that it is empowered by the Policing Board to do that oversight and report jointly to me and the board so that we both have a degree of confidence about the impartiality, the independence and the effectiveness — the article 2 compliance, in other words — of the investigations. However, as yet, the Policing Board has not come to a conclusion on whether it is going to establish such a panel. To me, it would really help if it did, because it would give confidence to what I believe to be a high standard of investigation.

Mr McCartney: The compliance might be tested; that is something that will unfold. I raised it because, in the past when presentations were made, the HET and the Police Ombudsman's office were part of the package to say, "These are article 2 compliant". Now, with the HET away, you have lost a plank, and it is internal to the PSNI, which, I think, will put a bit of strain on it, but that is to be tested.

Chief Constable Hamilton: It has to be tested. One of the problems that we had with the HET was mission creep. When Hugh Orde established it in 2005-06, he said that it was not intended to be an article 2 compliant investigative unit. It was going to answer families' questions and, if evidence fell out of that, it would be exploited by somebody else and those lines of enquiry would be pursued. So, it was never intended to be related to article 2. We got into difficult waters because, by the time Patricia Lundy came in a couple of years later, the head of HET was trying to convince her that it was article 2 compliant. Something had happened in the meantime, whereby its reason for existence moved from being one of answering questions for families and understanding that, if something fell out of them, it would be investigated because we were still a policing organisation. The primary focus was not to deliver an article 2 compliant investigation; it was to answer families' questions. This unit will be compliant with section 32 of the Police Act, that is, where people have committed crimes, we will do what we can to bring them to justice. Sitting alongside that is article 2 compliance around independence and thoroughness of the investigation.

Mr McCartney: I am not saying that the Justice Minister had broad support last week, but he certainly had some support. Do you think that there is any sort of case to be made for the British Government taking up some of the legacy costs, similar to those associated with hearing loss, as I said last week? Should some of the money come from here and the excess directly from the British Government? Do you think that there is any case to be made around legacy issues that would help ease particular pressures?

Chief Constable Hamilton: I see it as a core policing function. Policing and justice is a devolved matter. If there needs to be negotiation between the Executive — the devolved Administration — and the British Government or anybody else around additional funding, I think it is in the political space and not one for the Chief Constable to comment on. I would be grateful for the money, so long as it was done ethically and lawfully, from whatever source. I do not think it is my position to be pointing the finger and saying who should be paying. My job is to deliver a policing service within the funding envelope that I have.

Mr McCartney: I am sure the British Government do everything ethically and lawfully.

On a final point, you touched on the fallout, for want of a better term, around the legacy issues and some of the investigations that are taking place. There are a number of cases. I want to talk about the Bloody Sunday families, because I am familiar with their case. At the meeting in December 2012, commitments were made to the families by the then Deputy Chief Constable and the Assistant Chief Constable. Regardless of the impact unfolding, you should explain to the families what is going to unfold. Do that with any family you have made commitments to. If you do not do that, people will have to deal with it unfolding in the media. They will have to deal with media speculation rather than hard facts that you should present to them.

Chief Constable Hamilton: I agree completely. I am keen to explain the rationale to families, personally, if needs be, as I have explained it here today. I do not expect that they will be happy, but I think that we owe them the courtesy of an explanation at least. I have explained part of the problem that we have with this to you. Hopefully, I am not sounding as if I am whining and moaning too much, but this is a constantly changing figure. You get a 7% figure on a Friday and are asked to outline how you are going to handle it by the next Friday. In the meantime — a period of four working days — you cannot possibly communicate, consult with and explain to people before it goes public. Of course, our confidential response to the Policing Board and the Department of Justice was leaked to a media outlet. That meant that it was impossible for us to retain control of the information going into the public domain.

Mr Frew: I think Alistair mentioned community prioritisation when it comes to community police officers. What does that mean? Obviously, it sets off alarm bells for me, straight away, with regard to urban/rural. How will you be able to prioritise that? If it is about using some sort of measurement of deprivation, it may well leave communities that have — for want of a better term — low levels of crime and young people who behave themselves at a disadvantage.

(The Deputy Chairperson [Mr McCartney] in the Chair)

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: I think the answer is that it would do that. It would be us putting the right resource to the right level of community risk. If communities have differential risk, as there is between areas of Belfast and between cities across the Province and rural areas, it will not be a universal service. If what we are about is keeping people safe, we will look to those functions, areas and communities where people, in our understanding, are less safe and we will apply a greater degree of resources to make sure that they stay safe.

Mr Frew: Sorry, are you talking about community beat officers or do you mean the establishment itself?

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: This is much broader than just community beat, neighbourhood and response officers. It is about how we calibrate the service. I described some of the impacts of this to Mr Elliott earlier. We are not really talking about the next couple of months; we are talking about the longer-term impact as a consequence of cuts of £51·4 million this year and potential cuts of £120 million next year. It is towards that end that we see such a significant impact that the Police Service is going to look different in where it is and how it responds to some of its calls. The differentiation between neighbourhood response and the different functions that we have within the organisation will get blurred. As the Chief Constable said, the intention and goal is to drive the ethos of policing with the community across all the functions. The ethos, standards, values and ethics are different from circling a certain number of officers and saying, "That is your particular role". So, there is a challenge for us to drive that across the organisation in terms of how people are treated. It will mean that we put different resources to different risks and we will measure those risks or take soundings on them in different ways with different metrics and from different departments.

Going back to the Chief Constable's introductory remarks, those were some of the strengths that came out of community planning in Scotland. If community planning in Northern Ireland can get to that place, our ambition is to have a shared understanding in a community planning partnership area of where the demands are and the differential risk. There is learning from places like Salford, outside Manchester, where we have mapped, for a certain number of families, the amount of intervention that comes from the public service as a whole, including health, education, probation and policing — all the wide gamut. Taking that wider look at things enables all those services to achieve a better outcome for the individuals with less cost and more cohesion. So, if we can get community planning in Northern Ireland to that level, there are real opportunities for us.

Mr Frew: There is always the community side of policing. I represent North Antrim, and where I live, it is not necessarily the case that to see a police officer is a safety valve or safety net. There is a perception that you need to see police officers on every street corner. That is not the case or the reality where I come from, but people really want to see police when they need them. How do you see these budget restraints affecting response times?

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: Response times and suchlike have been a challenge for policing for many years. There is a dichotomy in that people want to see the police officer walking the beat, but, when you call for service, you want them to come by car as quickly as possible. You do not necessarily get both.

(The Chairperson [Mr Givan] in the Chair)

Some of the work that we are already doing on the way that we handle our calls means that we can resolve a lot of them without deploying an officer. We can prioritise calls so that those in the most urgent need continue to get a fast, significant response, with the level of threat getting the response that is required. All services have to do that sort of triaging, and, as in other places, we negotiate when people want the police to come to talk to them. In some places, it is more convenient for people to come to a police station, and we have seen that in certain parts of the country. Now, one of the challenges for us in our cost-cutting is that we anticipate that we will have fewer stations that are open to the public and, if they are open to the public, the opening hours will be restricted. So, we are going to have to seek to manage that. We will offer more of a menu of options, if you like, as to how the police will deliver that service.

You are absolutely right though: at people's time of need, they want that response quickly. They want the reassurance of officers turning up quickly and being equipped and professional to be able to deal with their particular crisis. We will continue to provide that through our triaging. We do not always get our triaging right because we do not know all the information at the time. There is always some variation.

Mr Frew: Mr Hamilton, you talked about your frustration with the unseen work of the police and the results that are unseen. Intelligence-led policing has to play a key role in the future, especially against organised crime or well-organised terrorist groups. How will the budgetary restrictions and restraints affect the intelligence-led policing that will be so key in the future?

Chief Constable Hamilton: We need to work through the detail of that. We cannot take this amount of inputs out of policing and pretend that all elements are going to be the same. All elements will have reduced inputs. We need a bit of prioritisation and we need to be sophisticated in that. It is inevitable that our proactive capability will be reduced, and a lot of that proactive capability is invisible — by definition, it needs to be — and we will do our best to mitigate that. We will do our best to work better with what we have, but there will be a reduction in capability right across the piece, and that is a concern to us.

The more you invest in that capability, the better, and, even though it is very front line, it is invisible at times. It is not just around the terrorist-related stuff, although that is true, but it concerns tackling organised criminality, child sexual exploitation and human trafficking. All that policing tends to be done by officers who are not in uniform. If we were to be too blunt about maintaining our capacity and capability in those areas, the only places that the capacity could come from to maintain them are the neighbourhood policing team, road policing officers and all of that. When you start to try to manage where the real threat/risk/harm lies, an example is that 62 people have lost their life on the roads this year. Right away, there is a very strong argument that would come from the head of road policing — it would come from me actually — to ask whether we really want to reduce the deterrent and preventative capability that makes us all hit the brakes when we see officers parked at the side of the road, keeps the speed down and, therefore, reduces road deaths. In this small place, 62 lives have been lost on our roads. If 62 people lost their life by any other means, there would be a hue and cry about it. It would be a health epidemic. It would be a catastrophe if it was as a result of a terrorist incident because 62 people have lost their life.

The only places that we can take resource from are the neighbourhood policing team, road policing or response policing. Taking it from response policing would mean reduced response times to deal with the proactive, often invisible, but very important capability that is there to reduce harm and keep us all safe.

Mr Frew: How much of a comfort would the National Crime Agency be? Have you costed the difference that it would make if the National Crime Agency was allowed to have the operational status here that it has in mainland GB?

Chief Constable Hamilton: I do not have the specific details to hand, although I will have them tomorrow when I meet the Policing Board on that. We should not blur the relief that the National Crime Agency would bring too much into this argument. I had my personal reservations that I was quite public about around some of the accountability gaps that were there in the original proposals for the National Crime Agency. I am satisfied that those have now been met and, from a policing perspective, we are good to go. The director general of the National Crime Agency will not be able to tell me what to do. He will not be able to do anything without my agreement and, therefore, if it has my agreement, the Policing Board can hold me to account for what I am agreeing to happen on my patch with another law enforcement agency. A lot of those, I think, valid challenges around the National Crime Agency and around accountability have now been addressed.

Operational activity by the agency here will be on high-level international crime issues, where it wants to come and do some sort of an intervention, with our concurrence, in this jurisdiction. I am not sure that that capacity would bring too much relief in the context of the scale of these budget cuts. So, what would end up happening is that, if there was a need for an arrest or a search on the basis of a National Crime Agency job currently, we would have to look at that in terms of the threat, risk and harm to Northern Ireland posed by what it is asking us to do alongside all the other tasks that we have to do and make a judgement call. It would be much easier if we could agree, "Yes, that it is a valid thing to do, we have considered the community impact, now you have the powers in this jurisdiction and you are accountable to me and the ombudsman, so go and get on with it". That is the nature of it.

There is some capability around things like public protection and child protection where the National Crime Agency in other parts of the UK has taken the operational executive action. In fairness, however, in the majority of cases, but not all, it has tended to provide intelligence and evidential packages for local police forces to go and do the executive action. That is something that we could

continue to do. If it was something to do with a child at risk or some public protection issue, then just by definition — this threat, risk and harm that we keep talking about — that would move up the prioritisation scale.

The NCA, in its resolution to that conundrum, is important for us for operational reasons. However, in fairness, I would not want to present to this Committee or to the Policing Board the fact, that if we have the NCA, it will bring a big alleviation to our financial problems, because it really will be marginal; it will be around the edges, just simply because of the level of criminality that it operates against. It tends to operate at the more serious and international end.

Mr Frew: I know it is only a year old, but is there any evidence in other jurisdictions that constabularies in GB have found comfort or savings or less pressure?

Chief Constable Hamilton: I do not have all the papers to hand, but there are examples that I have gone public with recently where things either have not been done or have not been done as fast as they should have been and opportunities were lost around requests that were coming from the NCA to the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the bureaucracy and the demand, set alongside our local demand, meant that things were not getting done. There is a tangible impact arising from us not having the National Crime Agency.

The biggest area that is making us tackle criminality with one or maybe two hands tied behind our back is the civil recovery of assets. There is no alternative, localised solution to the absence of that. No new cases have been taken on for 12 months. If I was an organised criminal in Liverpool, I would probably relocate to Belfast because my assets would be much safer under the current arrangements. We need to get an alternative arrangement in place or get some sort of political consensus around the legislation that is required for the use of the NCA in this jurisdiction.

There are other areas around drugs interventions and other issues that have been frustrated — I use the term loosely — because of the NCA having a lack of powers here. To be fair, it is a small number of cases, but they are quite high-impact. The big pain that we feel routinely is our inability to tackle organised criminality through civil recovery. We need the NCA to do that, and we do not have it.

Mr Poots: Thank you very much, and congratulations, Chief Constable, on attaining your post.

I fully understand your concerns and worries in relation to finance, particularly having to cut things in-year, which greatly exacerbates the negative impacts. I appreciate the difficult position that you find yourself in. First, you indicated that you spend around 27% of your budget dealing with terrorism. I think that public order probably comes into that as well. You also indicated that around half of dissident republican prisoners will be released over the next two years. I had the opportunity to visit Maghaberry prison some time ago, and what struck me was that there were a lot of young men in there who were kindergarten kids when the first ceasefire happened, but the level of anger that existed in there was palpable. These are young men who should be out enjoying life but, instead, are locked in jail. I assume that there has been work done and that you have been developing intelligence on the element of risk associated with the release of around half of the prisoners currently in that republican wing.

Chief Constable Hamilton: It is something that we are mindful of. We have a number of initiatives that are not, I suppose, conventional methods of tackling serious harm or terrorism — let us call it what it is. Those involve engagement with communities through the voluntary sector. We realise that, in the recognised period when the Troubles were happening, there was a balance to be struck between the exercise of police powers in a way that was proportionate, measured and necessary. If you were too crass and blunt about it, there was evidence that, in some cases, young people were pushed into violent extremism. We do not want to handle this with kid gloves or anything like that, but we want to be intelligent about how we execute enforcement and the exercise of powers, particularly under the Terrorism Act. We are trying to be professional and emotionally intelligent in how we do all of that, as we realise that overzealousness can, in some circumstances, create an outcome contrary to what we would all hope for.

A lot of the people who are in prison now have crossed that Rubicon. They have made decisions about how they will conduct their life and about their willingness to use violence for their ends. The concern that we have with a release between now and 2016 of over 50% of the violent dissident republican population from Maghaberry prison is that we need to be in a position where we understand their intent and that we have to have the capability to counter that threat. All of that is

happening with an ever-decreasing funding envelope, because no part of the police grant and no part of our current functions will be immune from some sort of pressure on the budget. I do not like to say that. I would not like people who have violent intent to think that the pressure will be taken off them — it will not be — but there is no point in pretending that we will have the same resource and inputs to apply to this as we have had in the past.

Mr Poots: We all have a responsibility, and the parties in here have a responsibility, to give people fewer reasons for engagement in terrorist activity. That is something that we take seriously, and, hopefully, we will be able to continue to give leadership on those issues. However, as the Chair and Mr Frew mentioned, organised crime is one of the biggest sources of income for terrorism. The message that we are getting here is that organised crime is not being dealt with as effectively as it could be and that, as a result of the cuts that you will have to make, it will be dealt with less effectively again. The consequence of that is that people who are engaged in paramilitary organisations will benefit, and it will enable them to engage in further activities which, obviously, we want to stop.

Chief Constable Hamilton: It is perhaps a debate for a different place. People who have decided that they want to take their violent intent and turn it into explosions and gun attacks on communities and police officers do not need a lot of money to do that. I am not saying that there is no correlation between organised crime and violent dissident republicanism, but our assessment is that violent dissident republicanism is not awash with cash and whatever organised criminality happens to be going on and may be connected with that community, it does not seem to be necessarily invested in firearms and explosives. It is not that expensive to create a couple of hundredweight of home-made explosives with fertiliser. The recipe is pretty much open-source material.

I joined the police to keep people safe, lock up bad people and all of that, and, whether they are organised criminals or violent, dissident republicans, I will do that and try to lead this organisation as it does that. However, I do not want people to think that there is a stronger correlation between organised criminality and violent dissident republicanism than that which actually exists. By the way, I am not saying that dissident republicans are not involved in organised criminality, but there is a difference between saying that and saying that that is where they achieve their capacity and funding for their evil intent.

Mr Poots: One thing that constantly disappoints the public is when, for example, they see fuel laundering plants dismantled without there being any arrests. I cannot recall the last time that there was an arrest in those circumstances. Again, it may be that the power really rests with others or whatever, but something that the public just does not understand is how you can go in and carry out a major operation but there never seems to be anybody there.

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: HMRC leads on that aspect, and we offer support for it. I understand that disquiet. I do not want to speak for the Revenue, but its primary task is stopping loss of revenue and recovering revenue. However, I think that the sense of getting prosecutions through has landed, and, through the Organised Crime Task Force, I hope that such criticism begins not to have the same force that it had in the past.

Mr Poots: I would like to ask about the public order element of the budget. In the main, have the officers at Twaddell Avenue been diverted from other duties, or is that purely an overtime bill? We hear a lot about the £1 million a month. I would like to drill down a little into this issue.

Chief Constable Hamilton: This financial information is not quite up to date; it is up to the end of September, and so it is 8 days old. In the 407 days since the protest started, the total cost has been £13·5 million, which is made up of additional costs — mainly overtime — of £9·4 million and opportunity costs of £4·1 million. The opportunity costs are officers taken out of major investigations, organised crime teams, public protection, neighbourhood policing and the like, and they come to £4·1 million. In very rough terms, the cost is made up of two thirds overtime and one third opportunity costs.

Mr Poots: So, on a cold, wintry night, how many officers are up there?

Chief Constable Hamilton: That is constantly being reviewed. I was up there the other evening, and there were three public order units. In addition to that, there were about 15 local officers, trying to keep the neighbourhood peace, keep relationships going on both sides of the road and all the rest of

it. On that occasion, you would have been talking about somewhere around 75 officers to police the protest activity.

Mr Poots: On most evenings, is it not the case that there is a couple of handfuls of people hanging about at the corner there? I would like to try to establish what the justification is for having police officers there, because it strikes me that an awful lot of their time is spent sitting in the back of a Land Rover not actually doing anything. It appears to be there in case something kicks off; it is more pre-emptive. I just wondered about the justification of all of that in the current circumstances: do we need so many police officers to be sitting at Twaddell Avenue as is currently the case? Are you concerned that people are going to try to parade? Are you concerned that there are going to be people from the other side of the community who will gather up and spring a surprise attack on the people who are at Twaddell? What police intelligence and concerns do you have that mean that there is not just one vehicle, for example, monitoring activity there with the ability to call officers in a city situation onto the scene quickly if things start to break out?

Chief Constable Hamilton: Please believe me when I say that we have no desire to have officers sitting there doing nothing. Apart from anything else, the predictability of them being there at the same time every night presents a huge risk to them. That manifested itself no later than on Monday night, with the new type of lethal and reckless device that was intended, we believe, for police officers. We have had automatic, high-velocity weaponry used against police officers policing that very point. Therefore, if there was a way out of this from a policing perspective or a way of reducing the policing footprint, we would remove it.

The numbers on a routine evening can fluctuate anywhere from around 30 up to 500 people. We have, in the past few weeks, had surges, without any prior notice given to the police, of what we assess to be 450 to 500 protestors. I acknowledge that behaviour has been lawful. Our assessment is, however, that there are some elements — not all, and not even necessarily the organisers — among those protesting at Twaddell who, if they could push their way through the police lines and get up the road, would do so. That is an operational policing assessment. I do not want to go into how or why I have come to that assessment, but I have.

We are constantly reviewing the resourcing levels at Twaddell. However, the volatility of Belfast of an evening, and it is not going to get any easier coming into the dark nights, is such that we need a significant police surge capacity in order to keep the peace. We have had, for example, 55 arrests at an east Belfast interface since April of this year. We have had dozens of incidents of disorder, ranging from fairly minor stuff to pretty serious incidents in that one interface alone. It is no longer newsworthy because it has been going on for so long, but it brings a certain amount of fatigue and is an awful waste of public money to police.

Every night across Belfast, we have between 150 and 200 officers who are either abstracted from meaningful police duties or are there on overtime to keep two sides apart at interfaces or, in some cases, as we saw a week ago last Monday, within an area of north Belfast, to keep feuding elements within loyalism apart. At one point — this stuff does not make the media, although I do not know why — we had 40 people out on the streets going at each other with cudgels and baseball bats and so on, and the police were stuck in the middle. You cannot get away with one Land Rover or three police officers in a car holding apart people who have violent intent towards each other, whether they are from opposing communities or, ironically, in some cases, from the same community.

I used an example earlier that was quite extreme, but the same principle applies: the Royal Avenue parade, which was successful, cost £330,000 to get a peaceful outcome. To go back to the point where I used the term, perhaps unwisely, of being "exasperated", trying to explain to the public that a peaceful outcome comes at a huge financial cost is very frustrating. I do not really expect people who are not in the blue suit standing behind the shield line or the planner sat in the office trying to find ways, scratching their head, to get the costs down to understand that, but a peaceful outcome costs money in this operating environment because tensions are high.

Mr Poots: I understand that very well. With regard to community engagement then, I assume that close engagement is going on with local community representatives and leaders to ascertain where people are in an attempt to reduce the numbers that you have there?

Chief Constable Hamilton: We are grateful for and respectful of the work that community workers and leaders are doing in interface areas. They have a problem. It is one of authority. It is one of them needing to influence, rather than exercising any sort of punitive action. We do not want people

to cross a line, which has maybe happened in the past in some areas and communities. We see a lot of well-intentioned youth workers, people from churches right across the spectrum, community leaders and some elected representatives actually out standing with us at the interfaces nightly. The problem is that, in our society, this has become so routine that it does not make the BBC or UTV any more. This is part of the difficulty. It is the difference between policing Belfast and policing Northumbria or Thames Valley. They would be our comparative-sized police forces if it were not for those Northern Ireland additional factors.

Mr Poots: Thank you. I have just one quick question, Chairman, if I am permitted. Historical institutional abuse is in the headlines. We heard the awful stories about Rubane House yesterday. I just think that it would be absolutely appalling if we were not able to provide support for the victims of historical institutional abuse wherever that happened to take place. Can we have some assurance that resource will be applied to that particular issue?

Chief Constable Hamilton: Well, resource will be applied to it because there is a statutory responsibility. I know that the chair of the panel would have conversations with me at a very early stage if the flow of information was holding him back at his work. We are not at that point yet. I would not like us to get to that stage, but nor can I give cast-iron guarantees that any aspect of policing will not be impacted by cuts of this magnitude. Like everybody, or most people, in society, the Police Service acknowledges the need for the historical institutional abuse inquiry and for people to get answers and closure. We will do our best to service that. I cannot write blank cheques, as I am sure you understand.

Mr Poots: It should lead to people actually being tried for crimes committed against children and young people. There is where my concern comes from, as opposed to actually facilitating the inquiry.

Chief Constable Hamilton: There is that facility. There are two bits of demand for us in this. One is that we sit on some information that the inquiry needs. We are doing our best to feed that. I am not getting any serious complaints. There might be the odd glitch here and there, but, generally speaking, we are able to feed the inquiry with information that the police sit on that may be relevant. Then, there are some referrals coming the other way, whereby victims have indicated that they would like to pursue a criminal-justice outcome and there is a starting point for an investigation. Of course, we will take that on board.

Mr Lynch: At the outset, George, you mentioned comparative terms with other police services on these islands. The gardaí have around 12,000 officers with a budget of around €1 million. They would say that you were fairly well off in that context. I know that the challenges are different, but they have their challenges. You are well off. Have you gone through the overtime budget forensically? It is hugely high.

Chief Constable Hamilton: Yes. A huge amount of scrutiny is applied to it. Maybe Alistair can talk about this. Part of the problem that we have is that police officers can be directed to work overtime. In some areas, people are being bombarded with so much overtime just to meet the needs that we have been talking about to Mr Poots, for example. For some people, the only way that they can get a day off is to go sick. This is not some sort of gravy train that individual officers or the organisation want to be on. I have mentioned this figure of 7,000 officers as what we need. Part of the rationale behind that is the amount of money that we spend on overtime, backfilling and all the rest of it to meet the current level of demand. At the moment, we are operating with just below 6,600, and that figure is only going to go down. The reliance on overtime, which is a flexible resource, is huge. For example, we say that we will cut the overtime budget in the next financial year to £5 million. That sounds like a lot of money, but, to give it some context, in the last financial year £63 million was spent on overtime. A large part of that is dealing with these surges in demand arising out of public order scenarios or long, protracted investigations.

Mr Lynch: How does that compare to the gardaí?

Chief Constable Hamilton: I am not sure what their budget is. You mentioned £1 million?

Mr Lynch: Their budget is €1·3 billion, which is approximately £1 billion. The gardaí cover four fifths of the island. They also argue that they do not have enough resources.

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: I am sure that they would argue that. There comes a challenge in comparing different police services in different parts of the world. An easier comparison than that with our colleagues in the gardaí is in the work that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) does. It covers England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and it works on benchmarking. Every year, it produces a document called 'Valuing the Police', in which it benchmarks individual costs in different parts of the service relative to a bundle of the constabularies that are closest to our make-up. HMIC has produced that data for the last few years.

The PSNI is expensive, and that is down to that Northern Ireland factor. In basic terms, no other constabulary is running three different fleets. We have a soft-skinned fleet, an armoured fleet and an armoured Land Rover fleet. Our armoured Land Rover fleet was really decaying and withering, but, in the last few years, the need for it has been re-emphasised and so the Land Rover fleet has had to be refreshed, with each of those vehicles costing about £100,000. So the comparisons particularly with our colleagues in an Garda Síochána are difficult, but we have benchmarking data that is useful. We also have data that comes through HMIC on the work of cutting budgets in England and Wales. It produces a report on what has worked in England and Wales, and we can benchmark ourselves against that approach.

There is a fundamental difference about our accounting treatment as compared to England and Wales. England and Wales had these cuts put in at the beginning of the CSR period and, therefore, were able to ease them in over that period of three to four years. They also have access to borrowing; they have reserves; and in England, certainly, they have access to the police precept. So the accounting treatment in England and Wales makes the task different from the position in Northern Ireland, but that is useful benchmarking comparison data. That is where the data can stand some scrutiny.

Mr Best: Can I just add to that? When I joined the police, we did a comparison of the cost per police officer per head of population in Northern Ireland compared to the average in England and Wales. We were over 3·5 times more expensive per head of population. Over the last number of years, that factor has fallen to well below twice as expensive. We are down to somewhere between 1·5 and 1·7 times more expensive. So, over time, the PSNI has reduced its costs considerably.

Mr Lynch: This is my last point, Chair. Alistair, you mentioned barracks. Barracks and buildings are not always the best methods of policing. My colleague got a response to a freedom of information request about Castlederg police station. It opens only for five hours a week and, over the last two years, it has cost £111,000. That is about £200 per hour; that is not good value for money, and it is not always the best method of policing a community.

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: What was that in respect of?

Mr Lynch: It was a freedom of information request about the cost of keeping Castlederg police station open for five hours a week. There is a joke current that it is just a toilet for patrols in the area.

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: We will inevitably revisit all our estate and look for the rationalisation that we can take back out of that. We have dipped into opening hours and all of those issues in looking at where we can cut costs. That is an example of value for money as against public value, where we have to triangulate those things.

Mr Hazzard: Thanks for the update today. I want to ask, first, about the increase in sickness, which went up by slightly more than a third in the last year. George, you mentioned, maybe glibly, that the amount of overtime meant that people had to call in sick just to get a day off. Has an analysis of that increase been done, and is there a strategy in place to reduce sickness?

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: Yes. We discussed that only this morning. The rise in sickness is not attributable to short-term absence. That was a previous blight, when people were off for frequent short periods. The issue at the moment is people who are off for longer terms. We have large numbers of people off every day, and sickness is rising at a rate that is unacceptable. We have taken a range of measures to provide support to district and departmental staff in interventions to get people back to work and reduce absence. In H district, for example, the commander has taken a personal interest and involved himself in an intervention strategy. He had 46 people off sick, and 11 of those are now back at work after a relatively small number of weeks. We have made interventions and are driving that forward.

Mr Hazzard: Will you disseminate what he did?

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: Yes. That is part of the toolkit that we have given to commanders. We made decisions today on how we will follow that up, look for performance data and hold people to account in order to drive behaviours that help us to get our people back to work.

Mr Hazzard: OK, that is good, thanks.

We talked today about the opportunities that exist through the devolution of more powers to local councils and the role of community planning. I was looking at some of the events listed in your briefing paper and noted that the running costs for the Olympics were £1·4 million. Is that the type of thing that you should be looking for local councils to take a lead on and play a bigger role in so that you can free up your responsibilities in that regard?

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: There are two separate elements to this. These are examples of major public events that, by all our reckoning, have been good for the overall benefit of Northern Ireland through showcasing the place, bringing visitors here and showing its good side on TV and video. However, there is a question about the amount of policing time that goes into that without any compensation. We are picking up the cost, but the question is this: will we have the ability to do that any longer?

If we look to other parts of government that have had to cut funding to festivals, culture and suchlike across the public sector, we see that they are pulling away. The question of the extent to which we can maintain that sort of profile, which allows those events to go ahead, remains. We are engaging with the Policing Board on cost recovery for public events. That is where that major piece of work is.

Mr Hazzard: Great, thanks. Finally, the briefing states that 27% of the budget is spent on security. Do you have a figure that includes security legacy — generally conflict-related — spend?

Chief Constable Hamilton: That figure includes legacy and the efforts that we need to make to keep people safe because of the dissident republican threat and to deal with parades and protest activity. It is a Northern Ireland-specific spend. If you were in Birmingham, it is a spend that you would not have. That is what we mean by that figure.

Mr Hazzard: So the 27% is —

Chief Constable Hamilton: Sorry, another small top-up that comes largely from the Treasury reserve in London, and a very small proportion from the Executive previously, helped us to address some of the very specific problems that we had hoped would go away but did not. There is, for example, the cost of protecting judges. They need to have protection officers with them because, in our assessment, they will get killed if they do not. There are things like that, but they are sticking plasters or top-ups, whatever the right metaphor is. Of the main police grant, aside from that additional very small top-up, 27% —

Mr Best: It represents about £200 million, so, if you are cutting the police grant, which you are, there will be an impact on that. At £200 million, it is a sizeable amount.

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: Twenty-seven per cent of the budget is about £200 million.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): What are the indications from Treasury about being able to continue to access funds from it?

Chief Constable Hamilton: There is a squeeze right across the UK Government. There are constant meetings, and colleagues and I make constant representations to London — Treasury, the Cabinet Office, NIO and so on — on our needs and concerns. As yet, there have been no assurances for the next CSR period.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): The criteria to access the reserve are based on a national threat. You cannot access the reserve to deal with routine policing issues; a case of exceptional circumstances has to be put forward.

Chief Constable Hamilton: Yes, through the National Security Council in London.

Mr Best: Our case was built on specific criteria and specific PSNI activities. It represents about £50 million in revenue and £10 million in capital. We got it initially for three years, and it was extended for two subsequent years. Recently, next year's was confirmed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Treasury, but we have no guarantees after that.

Mr Dickson: You are welcome, Chief Constable, and congratulations on a new but, obviously, very taxing role for you. Most of the big ticket issues have been raised, whether policing Twaddell Avenue or the current pressures on the wider budget. In the paper that you provided for us, I want to focus on what might be perceived as an easy target for budget cuts but one that may very well have long-lasting repercussions: the withdrawal of community police initiatives. As a former member of a PCSP, I have been passionately involved in supporting organisations such as Women's Aid. I have seen the incredibly good work that has been done on the ground by community teams working with such organisations. I recognise that you have provided support to them to allow access to criminal justice. I am very supportive of people who have become victims in family domestic disputes. Is it necessary to withdraw the complete budget stream for that, or is it possible that at least some support can remain in that area?

The same question applies to community restorative justice and Policing with the Community funding grants to community groups. I am specifically concerned from a criminal justice perspective. Very vulnerable people have been supported by organisations such as Women's Aid to get to the point of bringing prosecutions and assisting you in prosecutions. Now, they are being left without that very important support. That, it seems to me, will have a knock-on effect. It may be a line item in a budget and part of a broader withdrawal of community policing initiatives — I appreciate how difficult the budget situation is — but have you thought through the consequences and the knock-on effect on community confidence in all those issues but specifically domestic violence? I have a couple of other questions, but maybe you want to deal with that one first.

Chief Constable Hamilton: We have thought it through. Do not forget that these were discretionary spends. We chose to invest because we saw the value in them. We did not want to make the Committee's job impossible by listing everything, but there are literally dozens of small projects that we know have a big impact for public good. The challenge is that, on the budget line, it looks like a discretionary spend, which it is, but, if you make that spend, you reduce demand on policing. The problem that we are faced with is that we need a certain number of police officers just to deliver the core functions.

We have not had a huge pushback on the decision that we have taken. People have raised, as you have, the value that these things add, but, when it comes down to being able to deal with high-risk threat and harm versus these discretionary spends, there is no option in cuts of this magnitude. It is not as though we were asked to go away, run an efficiency programme and come back with what we could deliver. The cuts being imposed are massive, and, when trying to maintain the headcount at its current level — we said that we need to get it back up towards 7,000 — these things become vulnerable. I do not want to be absolute in an answer, and I am not ducking the question, but I also need to tailor people's expectations. We do not envisage being able to fund these initiatives if the cuts are made at the level that is being expressed. That is to everyone's detriment.

Mr Dickson: Yes, and there is recognition that, effectively, it means that we are turning back the clock on changes that you have made and driven forward, working with the voluntary and community sector. In the long term, you are the people who will have to pick up the consequences, because the other side of that coin is that, if those support mechanisms are not in place, there is the potential for ongoing call-outs for domestic violence, whereas one-off support intervention might have made the difference.

Chief Constable Hamilton: I agree with you. It is bizarre and there is no real logic to it. Similarly, our spend on temporary workers is discretionary. I know that this was a contentious issue, but all 300 jobs were valid and allowed us to have 300 more uniforms on the street. Likewise, the managed services work: we have people viewing CCTV, looking after people in police detention and dealing with people's firearms applications when they come in to the front counter of a station. We will end up going back to how it was when I joined the police, with police officers doing those jobs. In fact, some of those jobs require a skill set that means that police officers are not necessarily the best people for them.

Mr Dickson: Exactly, and that is recognised in the programmes that you have been operating.

Chief Constable Hamilton: In the contact management centre, when we used a significant number of managed services staff through a contract, we found that people came in with better skills and aptitude for that particular work than a police officer would provide. Clearly, there are things that a police officer could do that they could not, but, if people have one job to focus on and have a particular aptitude for it, they tend to do it better than a generalist would. We will end up having to release some of those people at some stage and put police officers back into the centre. That will mean taking police officers off the street and having them do a job that they are probably not the best equipped to do — at a much higher unit cost. However, on the small number of days each year when you need a surge in capacity to deal with a public order scenario, you can say to that person, "Put your blue suit on tomorrow and get yourself a shield". You cannot do that with managed services.

Mr Dickson: I understand that. Mr Poots referred to the Rubane House situation, and I would like to widen that discussion. What would be the financial and resource implications for you if and when the Government decide to include Kincora in a national investigation?

Chief Constable Hamilton: I do not have a specific figure, but I know that, because of the number of reviews of Kincora and the attention that it has been given over the years, the material that the police own is one place, and we are a lot better organised for Kincora than for some other legacy issues. Frankly, we have not costed it, but we will be in a relatively good place to show what we have and share it with the inquiry as and when the remit extends.

Mr Dickson: I think, Chair, that it is a very welcome comment that the PSNI has, as it were, a package ready to go should that happen.

My final question relates, in a sense, to the National Crime Agency and the role of the Border Agency in Northern Ireland. Last week, a very disturbing report on Radio 4 revealed that the agency, which operates a scanner at Belfast port, has the resource to operate that only two days a week. So, five days a week, you can bring lorries and containers through Belfast port and be certain that they will not be scanned. What interaction do you have with or what support do you give to the Border Agency and, in turn, to the NCA? Are we at risk as a result of budget cutbacks?

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: We have done a lot of work with the Border Agency, which is one of these agencies that keeps changing its name as it is split up and does different things. Immigration Enforcement is the bit that now works with us. We do joint work and are working on potentially embedding some background intelligence people. Ports are key for us because they are part of the common travel area and, therefore, of interest to the whole UK. The recent development of the Republic of Ireland-UK visa is helpful. Immigration Enforcement has resources in Northern Ireland to tackle a range of different issues, and we work in partnership with it. It has a detention centre in Larne, which we lease back to them, and we have done a range of joint initiatives, particularly during the summer when the ports were busy.

The Immigration Enforcement scanner is moved from port to port, so it operates at different places at different times. I did not hear the report on Radio 4, but in our work with Immigration Enforcement, including joint tasking with specialist dogs and such like, we also work with colleagues from operational support. We move from port to port, and we do small ports and large ports and move about in order to be as disruptive as we possibly can with limited resources. We also work in partnership with the Belfast harbour police, police at other ports and the airport police at Belfast International Airport.

Mr Dickson: That is only part of a much bigger picture that the NCA will see Europe-wide and globally.

Interim Deputy Chief Constable Finlay: Yes. The NCA has a border policing command element that dovetails into the elements of what was the UK Border Agency (UKBA), which was split up. It coordinates that bit, and we deal solely with the non-devolved issues in and around ports across Northern Ireland.

Mr A Maginness: I do not know about you, but I am exhausted after listening to all those questions.

Chief Constable Hamilton: We are on the receiving end of it. *[Laughter.]*

Mr A Maginness: Congratulations, Chief Constable, and thank you for your frankness in answering those questions. I think that you make a very powerful case on the situation in which the PSNI will find itself in a year or 18 months' time. I do not think that you will be able to function in the recognisable state that you do now, and I think that the situation calls for additional funding from Britain. You are a unique case, and the PSNI has a unique set of circumstances, spending 27% of its budget on security — that says it all as far as I am concerned.

I represent North Belfast, which is the epicentre of most, if not all, of those problems, but parading in particular. People feel very apprehensive and concerned about the parading issue. I ask for reassurance that there will be sufficient police cover for parading. We talked about Twaddell Avenue and the Royal Avenue anti-internment march, neither of which is justifiable in my opinion. If you want to demonstrate against internment or whatever, you can go to a hall, a playing field or whatever. It is the same with the Orange — I understand their concerns, although I do not agree with them — but they can do it in a different format. People are concerned about the capacity to police parading.

Chief Constable Hamilton: I suppose that it is the other side of the coin from the earlier question about why we spend so much resource and nothing happens. It is a constant balance, and we are subjected to scrutiny, rightly, by the Policing Board and, in a less direct or less frequent way, here. However, we need constantly to walk a tightrope: not overpolicing these issues but ensuring that we uphold our responsibilities under the Parades Commission's determination and, more fundamentally, our responsibility to keep people safe, and that is what we will do. We keep it under constant review, and we routinely challenge each other as a team on whether we are getting the resource deployments right because, as I said earlier, it is more of an art than a science. When you are subject to the accountability mechanisms in this jurisdiction, you do not take those decisions lightly. When we have to take resources from other parts of policing to police Twaddell, Royal Avenue and other big high-profile events, that is subject to a lot of internal and external challenge.

We are looking at how much risk we can absorb and have discussed that as a team. There is corporate manslaughter legislation, health and safety legislation, and individual officers can find themselves personally liable for a decision on whether to deploy water cannon, for example. We constantly challenge ourselves on that, but we see it as part of a graduated response and a much better option than having to deploy attenuating energy projectiles (AEPs) or plastic bullets, as they are called in some quarters. Every time you deploy water cannon, you take 22 officers away from making the roads safer, and it costs £6,000 a night. Every time that you take the helicopter up for an hour, it costs £2,000. These are the constant challenges that we have, whereby operational colleagues meet financial colleagues, and sometimes it is an impossible task to get it absolutely right.

The challenges to us today have covered both aspects, which is welcome. It is a mirror image of some of the debates that we have had. Even this morning, we had such a debate at our resource demand and risk committee, where we go through this sort of stuff and challenge ourselves on whether we can stand over something. We look at the audit trail, ask what happens if it goes wrong, ask whether we are being risk-averse and whether we have the right risk appetite. These are professional judgements, and there is no right or wrong answer. We are conscious that, sometimes, we will make decisions on the basis of a certain set of information and in a condensed time frame. We know that the scrutiny that comes afterwards will take many months, lots of expertise and lots of intrusive scrutiny to decide whether the police decision — taken in a very condensed, very short time frame — was well intended and made in good faith by professional police officers. Such decisions will be the subject of that magnifying glass for a prolonged period.

The short answer is that we will do our best, but this is an art rather than a science.

The Chairperson (Mr Givan): Thank you all very much for coming to the Committee today. It is much appreciated. I think that the two hours have been time well spent, and I appreciate your coming to the Committee.