

28 January 2022

Christine Darrah  
Clerk to the Justice Committee  
Room 242  
Parliament Buildings  
Stormont  
BT4 3XX

Dear Christine

### **Draft Budget 2022-25**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide to the Committee for Justice some additional information about the impact of the draft budget advised by the Department of Justice to the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. The information presented in this correspondence is based on information provided by the Office to the Department of Justice officials in December 2021 on the Impact of the draft budget allocation.

### **Background**

The Office, like other parts of the public service has faced budgetary constraints over a protracted period of time. The consequence of this is that areas in which further budgetary cuts could be imposed within the Office without service delivery impacts have been exhausted. The Office has a high proportional spend on staff costs. Therefore when there is a requirement to consider further budgetary reduction, the reality is that the Office faces reduction in staffing complement. Any reduction in headcount will inevitably lead to impacts on the front line service delivery of the investigating of complaints through delay leading. This is not in the interest of the complainant nor the police officer subject of investigation.

### **Current Budget 2021/22**

The Office has two separate budget baseline amounts –£10,292k for the core office and for an additional amount of £1,700k which is to enable a more timely investigation of historic investigations.

### **Draft Budget 2022-2025**

The table below shows the draft budget amounts that are indicated will be provide to the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland over the 3 year budget period.

	<b>21-22 £k</b>	<b>22-23 £k</b>	<b>23-24 £k</b>	<b>24-25 £k</b>
<b>BASELINE*</b>	10,292	10,086	10,292	10,292
<b>BASELINE – HISTORIC INVESTIGATIONS</b>	1,700	1,666	1,666	1,666

### **Core Baseline**

The £10,292k budget is the baseline budget which has been provided to the Office to meet its statutory duties. The budget provides for the resources to cover all costs including staffing, premises costs and other support costs. As noted above, in the context of previous budgetary pressure, the only area of expenditure that can be substantially reduced by the Office is staffing. The consequence of a reduction in staffing will inevitably have an impact on the service delivery by the Office in the investigation of complaints. Delays in investigation impact not only the complainant making the complaint but also the officer who is subject of complaint. It is relevant to note that the Police Ombudsman has a statutory duty to secure the confidence of both the public and police in the police complaints system.

### **Summary of Impacts,**

The Office has been provided an indicative budget for the next 3 years with a 2% cut in our baseline for 2022/23 (£10,292k down to £10,086k) and then it remains flat (at £10,086k) for 2023/24 and 2024/25. Although the draft budget is flat in the latter 2 years there will be pay and price inflation to be met – which represents a real pressure in the baseline particularly as we move through the financial years to 2023/24 and 2024/25. However in addition to the baseline we have a ring-fenced now £1,666k for additional legacy investigation work for each of the years of this draft budget. This is reduced from £1,700k in 2022/23.

The 2% budget reduction with no inflationary pressures being met across the 3 year period means to live within budget will be to reduce headcount. This will present ongoing challenges for the Office as it continues to deal with a backlog of cases which arose during the pandemic alongside increases numbers of complaints. (Statistics for 2021/22 record the highest level of complaints being received by the Office in over 5 years). There is a risk there may be a detrimental impact on the time taken for investigations and may going forwards limit the ability of the Ombudsman to undertake other important work. To make savings the Office expects that it will need to rely on attrition and a freeze on future recruitment.

The Office will fully use the £1,666k ring fenced resource for the investigation of historic matters. The investigation of historic cases will be progressed by both existing resources allocated to this work from within the general baseline and the additional ring fenced Historic Investigations allocation. The remained of the baseline budget will support other non-historic work within the Office. When staff have been recruited under the additional business case for Historic Investigations which was approved in 2021, this will provide the Office with an increased capacity to undertake historic investigations.

It is recognised that the future of historic investigations remains highly uncertain pending decisions by NIO on new legacy legislation. The Office awaits further clarity on this matter.

I trust that this information is useful to the Committee. If you require any further information or assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

**Olwen Laird Chief Executive**