

# Written Ministerial Statement

*The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.*

## Department of Justice

### HMICFRS EFFICIENCY INSPECTION 2020-21

*Published on 17 May 2021.*

**Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice):** On 2 April 2021, I invited Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) to undertake the 2020-21 inspection of the efficiency and effectiveness of the PSNI, in line with the requirements of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

In commissioning this inspection, I took account of the request I had received from the Northern Ireland Policing Board for "a thematic inspection into the PSNI's handling of the funeral of Mr Bobby Storey – its operational decision making, application of the law in the context of the COVID-19 regulations, and review the PSNI's policy and procedures around police engagement with event organisers and others, and consistency of approach given the findings of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) statement of 30 March 2021".

Given this context, I asked that the inspection should:

- assess whether the approach taken by the PSNI to the events surrounding the funeral of Mr Bobby Storey was within the parameters of national policing standards, in the context of COVID-19 health protection regulations; and
- Offer relevant learning to assist in policing of COVID restrictions through the 'four Es' approach in coming months.

In light of the high level of public interest in the PSNI's handling of these events, I asked that the inspection should be completed by 14 May.

I have today received the report of this inspection from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), which has been published on their website, and I have placed a copy in the Assembly Library. I am grateful to HMIC and his team for their swift response to my request and for producing such a comprehensive report.

The report concluded that the PSNI prioritised public security over enforcement of COVID-19 regulations at the funeral, an approach HMICFRS said it understood given the likelihood of tensions and because the regulations were confusing. The report also confirmed that HMICFRS saw nothing to suggest that there was bias towards one community or another in the way the PSNI dealt with the funeral. The inspectorate did have some criticisms of how the PSNI engaged with the event organisers before, during and after the funeral but emphasised that since these were not especially serious failings, they did not justify individual officers being censured or called upon to resign.

There is not just learning in the report for the PSNI. It highlights again the need for the PSNI to be better supported by those with responsibility for public health regulations in interpreting changes to the law that could affect the policing of events.

Finally, the report highlights that all politicians and community leaders have a part to play in working with the police to build and maintain public confidence in policing, and that they should be mindful of the consequences, intended or otherwise, of their comments.

In the wake of the PPS statement, I called for political leadership that upholds the rule of law and which calms rather than inflames community tensions. I would again like to remind my Assembly and Executive colleagues that we have well-established and carefully calibrated arrangements in this

jurisdiction for policing oversight and accountability. Today's report demonstrates the value of allowing those charged with overseeing how the PSNI operates to exercise that role, free from any political interference.