Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

PSNI: Key Budgetary and Resourcing Challenges / Human Rights and Policing in Northern Ireland

16 February 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:
Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Seán Lynch
Mr Alban Maginness
Ms Jennifer McCann
Mr Basil McCrea
Mr Peter Weir
Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

Chief Constable Matt Baggott	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Mr David Best	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Assistant Chief Constable Dave Jones	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Mr Joe Stewart	Police Service of Northern Ireland

The Chairperson: I formally welcome to the meeting the Chief Constable, Matt Baggot; Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) for the rural region, Dave Jones; Joe Stewart, the director of human resources; and David Best, the director of finance and support services. The meeting will be recorded by Hansard and a transcript will be published on the Committee's web page.

Before I hand over to the Chief Constable, I want to say that I am delighted to have this first meeting with the Chief Constable since the devolution of policing and justice. The Committee recognises that, as the police account for 65% of the Department's budget, we have a role to play in scrutinising how the police account for that financial resource. To that end, this is the first of what will hopefully become more regular engagements with the police, which will allow us to perform our job. Thank you very much for coming.

Chief Constable Matt Baggott (Police Service of Northern Ireland): Chair, thank you for the welcome and the invitation. With me are Joe Stewart, our head of human resources; Dave Jones, one of my Assistant Chief Constables with responsibility for a geographic area; and Dave Best, our finance director. We welcome any questions.

As I said in the press conference earlier, I absolutely welcome this meeting. Sometimes, because of controversial issues, we lose sight of the encouragement. The fact that we are before the Justice Committee and that we have a Justice Minister who has set long-term policing objectives and has a sustained budget into the long term is encouraging beyond measure.

If it is OK, rather than getting into some of the specific details of budget management or issues around human rights, I want to provide some of the context of policing within which we have reshaped the use of resources. I also want to deal with some of the threats and dilemmas. I will take about 10 minutes on that and then invite questions from the Committee.

I think that devolution is working. In general terms, we had the biggest rise in confidence levels in policing across Northern Ireland in the past year. I think that that increase was 5% or 6%, which is unprecedented. A lot of that confidence comes with having stable institutions, but much of it comes down to the effective use of resources. Confidence in policing is now well over 80% among those who were asked. We have had reductions in burglaries and armed robberies and have had successes against organised crime, particularly with drug dealing and the trafficking of the most vulnerable people. We have also done huge work in protecting our young people. Overall, crime is about the lowest that it has been for 14 to 15 years, and road deaths are at 1930s levels. None of that takes away the misery of victims or some very real issues of confidence that we have seen played out in the media even in the past few weeks. I acknowledge that there are particular areas of vulnerability and disadvantage that I sense are moving away rather than moving forward, and we may need to have some conversations about that. However, for the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, the world is becoming safer, despite the severe security threat that remains from a small number of dedicated people.

Why is that important in relation to budgets and resources? How I spend the money on policing is not just about policing and law enforcement. Security, safety, confidence, impartiality and accountability to the Human Rights Act are fundamentally about education, tourism, health inequality, quality of life and our young people's futures. I say that because of one of the questions that I was asked downstairs, which was, "Why are you here rather than before the Policing Board?". I am here because you set the long-term objectives and provide the funding, and the Executive join up my work with that of health, education, and so on. By the way, it has been great to have meetings with the Agriculture Minister in the past few weeks, because policing and rural issues are about, for example, the future of farming and even poaching. We have talked about suicide rates at the Policing Board. Those are important issues for the future of Northern Ireland. That was to give some degree of encouragement and context, because I absolutely get this, as do my colleagues, and I wanted to take forward that word of encouragement first of all.

I want to cover four areas very briefly. First, I think that we have been through one phase of revolution that I call the Patten revolution, which I absolutely endorse. It was a revolution of political change that reshaped the PSNI into a much more representative organisation. I think that that was critical, and I stand behind it. We are now in a long-term phase that is much more about the effectiveness of policing, the use of resources and the shaping of our agenda with a different form of accountability. To some degree, I think that that is a lot tougher. The reason being that you have to set your own destiny; it is not done to you, you do it yourself.

There was a downside to Patten in that I think that it introduced a very rigid business practice at a time of immense change. I will give you some idea of that. Until recently — two or three years ago, we had to have 7,500 police officers. That, in effect, meant that hundreds of police officers were working on jobs that they should not have been doing. Civilianising — we might come on to that — some of the more modern business practices around contract management and procurement has meant that there were 700 more police officers on the streets in the past 15 months, which was an objective set by the Policing Board. That is an example of our work in the post-Patten era; it is more about the business of policing rather than simply about being a law enforcement agency.

Another impact of Patten was the massive regulation. In 2009, we produced 57,000 files for a prosecutorial system, much of which did not have to be done. It was asking permission to tell off children rather than dealing with neighbourhood issues. The waste and the cost built into that was significant. I do not question that, but it was there.

Much of our business management has been process-driven. We will come on to business cases. However, we have dozens of business cases being produced, and for an arm's-length body that manages risk, that is quite stifling. That was a product of the Patten era. It was also very difficult to plan ahead because of the one-year planning cycle. I do not know how anybody runs a £750 million business when they can plan only one year in advance. From my jobs as Chief Constable of two forces in England and Wales, I know that we had much more flexibility. We could plan for the long term, invest money, hold strategic reserves and deal with the short-term need. I was able to borrow money over a 25-year process and invest that in capital for the future. None of that has existed until recently. The situation now is much better because of devolution. With colleagues, I put a very heavy emphasis on good governance. We have argued for four-year planning rather one-year cycles. We have fought for and won a £250 million investment. I am very grateful to the Executive for pump-priming that and for a reinvestment of some of the money that was taken out.

We have a very focused policing plan on the things that matter rather than a plan full of targets without a huge amount of focus. We have long programmes of work dealing with local concerns, call management and personal policing, all of which are significantly effective. So I guess what I am saying here is that, for me, governance was one of the critical things. It was about getting focused. I am not interested in mission statements on the wall. I am interested, however, in whether a statement on a wall is connected to what a police officer does. This year alone, we are answering 500 calls more a month because of the complete reforms that we carried out around our call-management system. That is personal policing, and it is more cost-effective. So governance has been really important to me. It is about managing a tighter grip of the money. I will move on fairly quickly.

The business of policing is a controversial area because it is so sensitive. I absolutely get that. If you look at modern business practice elsewhere internationally, you will see that the critical issues for the police are compliance with human rights, in relation to protecting people and keeping them safe; making sure, within the budget, that you can manage everything from investigating the past to servicing inquests to dealing with child abuse and monitoring sex offenders; and from keeping roads policing going to answering over one million calls a year and being in neighbourhoods. In England, Wales and elsewhere, when it comes to contracted services, modern business practice is applied without the same degree of political sensitivity. Some of the things that we have to do, to some degree, within a finite budget and in a recession, have to be more in line with modern business practice than we are able to do at the moment. We spend a lot of money on business processes and servicing some of that. We will come to that in a minute.

I absolutely tie into accountability and transparency. In fact, some of the recent controversy has come about because we are prepared to be utterly transparent. I am not obliged to provide some of the things that I do provide, but I do so because I think that it is absolutely right. We have imposed a greater degree of accountability on ourselves. We have a new appraisal system, which has taken a year to establish, and which will hold all police officers to account for the confidence that the public have in them. That will dictate promotion and career moves, and we have tightened right down on self-imposed accountability. All senior colleagues through that accountability are required to demonstrate financial prudence and value for money.

We have issued a set of commitments to the public. Hopefully, members will have received a copy through their own letter boxes. Those commitments are unprecedented in the North of Ireland/Northern Ireland. We are absolutely committed to ringing 9,000 victims back to make sure that we are providing a quality of service and value for money. For me, accountability is critical, and all that is about good budget management.

What are the dilemmas looking forward? There are some serious debates to be had now about the Minister's long-term policing objectives. I would not call myself a simple police officer, but my job is very simple. It is to keep people safe, provide value for money and make sure that we are effective

across all areas of policing. I face some real dilemmas. First, the more that we are involved in neighbourhoods, the more people want us, generally speaking. People want to see good policing in their neighbourhood, and we have created an expectation for that that we have to fulfil. That was part of having 700 extra police officers on the streets.

Secondly, as Northern Ireland progresses, so do the global threats. Organised crime is targeting Northern Ireland because it is a good place to make money. It is not just about smuggling; it is about people trafficking, the sex trade and drugs. I have to keep people away from here, and we are doing a great job with our Garda Síochána colleagues on that. I absolutely pay credit to them; I have never worked with a finer bunch of people, and I want to say that publicly. Organised crime is targeting Northern Ireland. We charged 150 people with serious offences last year, and we are keeping them away.

Thirdly, we are unique, because of obligations under the Justice Act, in having to fund investigations into the past. It is not for me to comment on that; it is a legal requirement. The Historical Enquiries Team (HET), the support for inquests and the whole business of tackling a legacy will be with us for the next three to four years. I have to fund that, and a lot of our time is spent looking back. I do not question that; it is a reality.

We still have a severe security situation, which we may discuss, but it is very real.

We are a complex business. The architecture of policing is still not fully understood. I have to operate within the St Andrews Agreement and the Police Act . I look to London on national security and I look to the Executive on local issues. There is a grey area, which has been described to me as Matt Baggott's conundrum. Actually, it is not Matt Baggott's conundrum; it is the reality of a political settlement that Matt Baggott works with impartially. I will give you an example of that in relation to budgets. Although the £250 million has been received with a welcome, I cannot speak to people about some of it because I am not allowed to. Budget management is devolved, as are the business cases, but I am limited by law as to what I can tell people. That is not Matt Baggott being difficult; that is the reality of the political settlement within which I work.

A lot of our processes are linear. When I was the acting chief in the West Midlands and the chief in Leicestershire, I could spend money through a policing board, but with external scrutiny from an audit committee. Here, I have to go to the Justice Minister and the Finance Department, and some of the business cases take over a year to be realised because the process is not fitted to an arm's-length body that deals with immediate risk. Those are real dilemmas because, coming back to that point, my job is simply to keep people safe. Dilemmas are created by the devolution settlement and by the way in which we manage finance. A lot of that is being worked through, and I give huge credit to colleagues in the Justice Department for the flexible way in which they are trying to help me on that, but it is a difficult and complex area that is not of our making.

For a few minutes, I will address the question of what next. I want to continue having debates about how I keep policing effective with value for money and how I keep people safe and what that means for the long-term use of money. There is controversy around that, and I absolutely understand that, but, ultimately, my job is simply to keep people safe. If I do not spend money on modern business practice, I have to take police officers off the streets to fulfil those jobs. In a recession and where I still have a budget gap of £25 million that is waiting to be closed, which is the equivalent of 400 police officers, if I do not modernise, where do we go? Will the Executive stump up another £25 million for me into the next comprehensive spending review (CSR) period or will we simply remove a significant chunk of neighbourhood policing? That is not a threat but a reality. Those are the big debates that we need to have. We absolutely need financial accountability, but financial freedom is becoming more and more necessary.

The second issue is that we need to think already about the next CSR period. In the future, I will probably ask for a higher degree of strategic reserve so that I can equalise the budget from year to year to provide a soft landing rather than having to click my fingers and remove 200 or 300 people. You will not find many companies or businesses that plan even just for four years; they plan for 10 years ahead. My total carry forward is £25 million, which, out of a budget of £750 million with all the implications, is not enough. We need to make the case and argue for that.

We need to continue to tackle bureaucracy and take some risks around how we manage the money, because it is tying us up unnecessarily. I would like our community safety partnerships to be really focused on value for money. I come back to the issue of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and vulnerable groups. A lot of money is being spent, year on year, without ever getting to the root cause of why there are social inequalities in Northern Ireland. I could name the neighbourhoods, but they have been there for decades. They remain under the grip of paramilitaries. There are huge suicide rates, which are disproportionate, and there is health inequality. With policing where it is, there is a huge potential to resolve that in the long term. That may not provide value for money strictly from the policing budget, but, in joining up partnerships, it is a value-for-money argument. In the justice system, we need to work hard at a total-systems approach. It was unacceptable that we were producing 57,000 files for little purpose, and we need to resolve that.

There are a number of things that we can do, but you absolutely have my commitment that whatever we do will be utterly founded in the rule of law. Secondly, I will be as accountable as I can be in legislation and the devolution settlement. My focus is simply on keeping people safe and providing great value for money, which is why we have done so much work on moving to long-term planning, programmes of change, reform and greater accountability.

There is a great framework for this, and it is called the Human Rights Act. I mean that in two ways: you can apply the Human Rights Act to financial management as well as you can to police behaviour. First, the Human Rights Act causes you to ask whether what you are doing is legitimate, lawful and in accordance with national good practice. Secondly, it causes you to ask whether what you are doing is necessary and to ask what the consequences are if you do not do it. Thirdly, is it practical? Fourthly, is it proportionate? You can apply that to budget management as much as you can to anything else. Finally on human rights, if we apply human rights to social inequality, we will certainly provide value for money well beyond the boundaries of policing.

The Chairperson: Thank you. It is useful to set the broad context of where you are coming from. I have a number of questions, and I will then open the meeting up for questions from members. We will not rush through this as it is the first time we have had these witnesses at the Committee. We will take our time and get through the issues and, as far as possible, cover everything that people want to discuss. We will do that without going into individual operational-type matters that are for the Policing Board to scrutinise. I do not want to talk about how a parade was policed or something like that. I will try to use a little bit of guidance if members take me down that route.

The delivery savings plan is for £135 million over four years. Looking at the paper, I see your intention is to realise a lot of that in the last two years. Taking on board your comment about the pressure and the demands that are being placed on the service, how far along are you in delivering the savings plans that the Department has asked for, and what pressure is that putting on front line services?

Chief Constable Baggott: I am very pleased that, before I arrived, the PSNI conducted what it called a strategic review. That was a very hard, self-critical look at the areas where money was being spent without any benefit to the public. A lot of that I spoke about already around processes, bureaucracy, regulation, rigid numbers and lack of forward planning. That is why from day 1 we have gone for focused governance on all the things I mentioned.

We have taken the bull by the horns on this. David can speak about the specific figures and Joe about some of the reforms, but suffice to say the gap has narrowed quite significantly towards years 3 and 4. I am grateful because, unlike the rest of the UK, my gaps open up after years 1 and 2. In England and Wales, the gap is there from day 1. We have been able to work through putting more police officers on the street and becoming more effective in how we manage demand over the last year or so. Much of that work has been done by David under a ruthless process that we call resource to risk, where every single police post has had to be justified against what it is doing. That has been very effective.

The gap is narrowing. We have done a huge amount of work on contract management and procurement to make sure that we absolutely are getting value for money. We have done a lot of work

on managing civilianisation. Are police posts actually needed? Can we do things in a different way? There has been a huge amount of work on cutting waste. Much of that we have brought about ourselves in the justice system. One example is the argument that we put forward on taking back discretion. We have a target in the Policing Board's plan — and I will refer to the 4,000 discretionary disposals — rather than doing a big file of evidence, if the offence is a relatively less serious matter, we tell someone off there and then, use a fixed penalty ticket in the future, give a caution or use a restorative approach. That is a huge cost saving.

The gap at the moment is about £25 million. That gap still needs to be closed. The big debate for us and the Policing Board is: if we do not modernise, what is the plan? We can close this gap through a significant process of modernisation and strategic reserves, but only if I am given the freedom to do that.

Mr David Best (Police Service of Northern Ireland): Savings in the first year amounted to £22 million. We have bridged that gap and plan to spend within budget this year. Sorry, savings in the first year were £20 million, in the second year they were £22 million, and we have balanced the books for next year.

The more difficult years, as you said Chair, are years 3 and 4. The challenge was nearly £46 million in year 3 and £47 million to £48 million in year 4. We have reduced the gap in year 3 to £7 million and to £16 million in year 4. That is based on a range of plans. For example, there are £16 million of procurement savings through better contracts. That includes a range of reductions in movement of staff. We have contracted out a number of staff, which Joe Stewart will refer to, and got much better rates. That also involved re-engineering; there is a myriad of things that the Policing Board is interested in.

Our plan has been submitted to the Policing Board for tomorrow. Therefore, we have to be slightly careful about what we say at this Committee, because we respect that our primary reporting relationship is with the board. I am just giving you the overall figures. We have made very good progress, and we are planning not only to balance the remaining £23 million to £25 million but to build in what we call optimism bias, where we put a wee bit more into the system in case we do not deliver in some programmes and have to pull something out of the bag to ensure that we bridge the gap.

Chief Constable Baggott: I need to point out another dilemma that is not for today but will probably come down the track in a couple of years, namely the £245 million or £250 million extra. That money is keeping police officers in neighbourhoods. If I did not have that money, I would have to move police officers into areas where there is highest risk as regards our human rights compliance. I was really anxious that should we put 600 or 700 more police officers back on the street to prepare for this. That extra money has also kept police officers on the streets by enabling us to invest in other areas without having to do that. However, if that Treasury reserve money does not continue into year 4, that will be a significant issue that we need to have conversations about even now.

The Chairperson: Do you anticipate having to go back to the Treasury when that time comes? Looking to that period — you may touch on the existing terrorist threat — is there a need to go to the Treasury for further resources, or is what you have sufficient to deal with the problems?

Chief Constable Baggott: I try to be a relentless optimist. Would I want to go back to the Treasury for money when I might prefer to work in a totally devolved Administration with the scrutiny that that provides? The answer is that I would hope not to have to do that. Do I think that, in three years, we will be in a position of not having to confront paramilitaries of whatever persuasion? It would be foolish of me to say that. Therefore, we will probably still need some degree of funding, probably from the Executive, to deal with the security situation.

We often increase our footprint on the street because of information or need. We flex it according to the problem. I do not envisage us suddenly being able to switch off the Treasury reserve money in

three years. It would be absolutely fantastic if we could do that, because, frankly, I would much rather work with the Policing Board and not have to look both ways in relation to funding. However, I am not sure that that is realistic.

The Chairperson: You touched on flexibility in managing the budget and the one-year planning cycle. Do you encounter the difficulty with the Department that you have to hand back anything that is left over at the end of that year, or is the Department facilitating the type of programme that you want?

Will you also touch on the procurement side? You said that some business cases have taken more than a year. Can you give me an example of where there has been a policing need for something but the procurement practice has resulted in you not having it?

Chief Constable Baggott: David can give you an idea of the scale and number of business cases. The problem is that procurement has to go through so many places. We have a Policing Board, an internal audit, the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Justice Committee. Most places have a policing board that is much more hands on in relation to the use of money and scrutiny. I have that to a degree, because the Policing Board scrutinises the budget. You then have an internal audit committee that looks after the prudence and integrity of what you are doing. If I were to compare West Midlands Police or Greater Manchester Police to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, it would be like them having to go to the Home Office and then to the Treasury for approvals to spend. That does not happen elsewhere, but it happens here because of history.

The difficulty that I have with it is that, as an arm's-length body, we are not a Civil Service Department. My business is managing significant short- and long-term risk. Therefore, I need significant flexibility to spend money quickly on emerging need and to invest for the long term. In Leicestershire, for example, I built new custody facilities, new police stations, on a 25-year programme of capital borrowing and repayment. There was a lot more flexibility in how one did that.

The Department of Justice has been working really hard on this, and I give them credit for that. It is a difficult area. The rules are set in stone, and people want accountability in a recession. I am not sure that box-ticking is accountability. Accountability comes from having proper scrutiny of why you need something, whether it is effective, what the justification is and what the alternatives are. I am not sure that that is always an end-to-end process. We could have more discussions about that. Certainly, the level of dedication and the speed at which we get business cases through has improved. However, it should not take 18 months, for example, to get approval for a practical piece of kit for a police officer on the street. It should not take that long, and it will not in the future.

Mr Best: I will pick up on the carry-forward issue. We used to have a facility to carry forward £5 million or £6 million from one year to the next. That was very useful, particularly with regard to capital spend. We have lost that capability at the moment. There is £25 million, but it has been earmarked for years 3 and 4 to bridge a gap. I know that the Department has £10 million for this coming year, but we do not know whether we will get part of that.

I will use an example to illustrate that, if I may. We have been buying armoured vehicles, and we got a lot of money this year. We went through the business cases, which became a very complex, long, drawn-out process, but we got there. We are not going to spend all of that money in this year. Out of a very large sum of money, it looks like we will not spend a certain amount, and we might have to write a cheque for, perhaps, £2 million in April. We believe that we are fully justified in carrying that money forward, but at this point in time, we do not have that capability. We had it before, but we think there are constraints in DFP that limit that.

I strongly believe that we should not be spending up to the limit, because it discourages us from saving to carry forward. The term "strategic balance" that the Chief Constable is using is a very good one.

We have hundreds of business cases that go through the system, and that has become more complex since devolution. We think that that is because of the DFP process, although I would acknowledge that

we are making good progress and we have seen flexibility regarding some security-related expenditure particularly where, in some cases, we cannot wait. However, we think the process is quite drawn out.

I am more concerned about procurement and the time it takes for those procurement competitions to run. That is a bigger concern, although we have a plan of action with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). However, the length of time it takes to run our procurement process is a particular area of concern. I think we are starting to crack the issue of business cases, and that is new. We have a lot of learning to do and we have been putting a lot of effort into it, but, from where I am sitting, procurement is a bigger issue of concern than business cases.

The Chairperson: The HET's funding ceases in 2012-13. Will it have its work completed by then?

Chief Constable Baggott: No, it will not. The scale and volume of that work is still significant. We are currently preparing a case for the Justice Minister for an extension of funding, probably for around two years. I am particularly anxious for that because, first, a lot of victims have taken enormous comfort from the work of the HET, as it has provided clarity, and that is important.

Secondly, it is a legal requirement upon me. I am not standing aside from the legal requirements to make sure that there is effective investigation. We still have a significant number of cases. The largest estimate is that we would probably need around two years of funding to cover that. Also, we still have to do the work we are doing at the moment in support of the coroner in relation to a significant number of inquests. We have very strong legal responsibilities to support the coroner in carrying out his functions. A bid is still being prepared.

The Chairperson: How much do you anticipate will be necessary?

Chief Constable Baggott: It would be around £6 million a year, but we will work up the funding on that. It is a relatively small amount of money in relation to the budget, but, if I had to provide it from the existing finance, it would be the equivalent of around 120 police officers. It is useful to think of it in those terms, although we might not have to take police officers off the street. I do not want to make it appear as stark as being a matter of this or that, but it is helpful to talk about the equivalent. The money runs out next year.

The Chairperson: Yes; when I was reading through the papers, I picked up that there is no provision in the current budget.

Mr Best: There is no provision beyond next year.

The Chairperson: That bid has to be submitted and funding found for it.

The last issue I want to touch on before opening the questioning to members is that you mentioned modernising the workforce. We have talked about having associated staff or agency staff. Can you comment on why the police see the necessity of bringing in agency staff? I am aware that it happens across the public sector, but I would like you to address that issue. I am sure that others will pick up on it as well.

Chief Constable Baggott: I will lead on that, and Joe or David might like to come in. I understand just how controversial this area is. It has become controversial because we are very transparent on this. I have no problem with it whatsoever.

This did not start yesterday; it started 10 years ago when the Police Service was undergoing immense change. The number of police officers who have left in the past 10 years totals more than the current establishment. The sheer amount of churn in relation to skills and policing qualification is hugely significant. That was 10 years ago. It has been brought before the board on many occasions, and Joe can give you detail on that. It is not new, but I understand how controversial it is. I come to this matter rather late in the day. I can see why, using the human rights framework that I mentioned, people ask if it was legitimate. Actually, if you have a short-term need, which could be around tackling a serious crime, dealing with a coroner's inquest or with the HET, and you need specialist skills, the use of a short-term contract, if delivered through an agency, does not commit you to 35 years of wages. When I recruit a police officer, I have that police officer for 35 years. If I recruit a member of civil staff, there is employment legislation around that as well, so I can absolutely see the need for the use of a company to deliver, under a contract, solutions to short-term needs during a time of change.

The numbers are declining. This year — Joe will give you the figures — I think we have something like 399 agency staff. It was 804, and the numbers are coming down because I ask for long-term, four-year planning, because I ask for better governance, and because we have things in place to plan for the long term that simply were not here before the devolution of policing and justice powers.

There is a context to that. Is it practical? Well, in relation to switching off the need, it is cost-effective. Is it sensitive? Absolutely. Is there a need for a debate about it? There is, because in the next three years I have to close a budget gap that is the equivalent of 400 police officers. We could do that in an open way, understand the sensitivities and try to be realistic, but, actually, my job for the Policing Board is to keep people safe, deliver value for money and be effective. You many ask, "Why, Chief Constable, have you brought back retired officers?" I do not actually do that myself; it is done through the company, against need. If the legislation needs to change to say that you cannot do that, that is not up to me. That is a change in employment law, and I am not going to go there, because my job is to be utterly impartial. If I start commenting on the rights and wrongs of employment law, then I am getting drawn into politics as opposed to impartiality.

I keep saying this: if the law needs to change then the law will change. That is a matter for others, and I will be absolutely compliant with that. If we are not going to do that, we have to find an alternative, and that might mean more police officers being paid for. It might mean greater recruitment. It might mean carrying a huge amount of risk. It might mean saying to the coroner that he is going to have to wait for four or five years before we can train people to deal with the issues.

I think there are some very real issues, which are about accountability. I am grateful for this debate, because one of the things that I absolutely want is for people who work for the PSNI to be accountable to the people who pay our wages — the Policing Board. Joe has been doing some work on how, if we are going to have contracts in the future, we can, in a more formal way, hold people accountable to the code of ethics. I absolutely understand that.

In the next few years, we will need to discuss this issue with the Policing Board. We need to talk about accountability mechanisms. There will probably still remain a need for a limited number of police officers who have proven integrity to do things in relation to legacy issues. There are some skills that I need for the short term, which I cannot recruit over the long term.

We have to deal with this by looking forward rather than looking back. It has to be seen against the context of a diminishing budget, greater expectation and a real need to protect Northern Ireland. I am not sure that the public would be that forgiving of me if I were to take 200 or 300 police officers off the streets and started to worry about the politics rather than simply compliance with the law or need. I am not going to say, because it would be foolish of me, and I said that at the Policing Board, but there may be cases where the employment of people has not been justified. I do not know that, but, in an organisation of over 10,000 people, with a hugely delegated, devolved budget, in an organisation undergoing immense change, there may well be examples. However, the overall principle of managing a contract to deliver short-term need without committing yourself to long-term spend is a very sound one, albeit that I absolutely respect the arguments about accountability. Sorry, Joe, did I miss anything?

Mr Joe Stewart (Police Service of Northern Ireland): In support of the Chief Constable, Dave Jones and I, in what is known as resourcing, form jointly somebody on the human resources side and somebody on the operational side. Against the budget constraints, we had to try to build our resourcing models so that we could afford our resources in 2014-15 and have a good platform to go into 2015-16, and we took some time to do that. We were not taking a short-term view. We built that from the bottom up, based on the operational requirement to service the people of Northern Ireland from a policing point of view and to see what resources were left for administration and other jobs that did not require sworn police officers to execute them.

Against a reduced budget, that model will see a reduction in the number of police officers, although it will not see a reduction in the level of service to the community, because that is key. We are looking at the mixed economy of policing. In doing that, we are not doing anything differently from any of our colleagues in the rest of the United Kingdom who, faced with the same circumstances, are using civilians or unsworn people to do the things that do not require sworn officers at the front end to execute the sworn duties of constable and the other duties of police officers. As part of that mixed-economy model, we see a continuing need for short-term employment, a continuing need for some external employments and a continuing need for an expanded managed service. In expanding our managed services, we are doing exactly the same thing as most other public bodies and certainly other police services.

At the high level, we are looking at it as a business to see how we can support the people of Northern Ireland and how we can enhance our footprint, or certainly preserve it in Northern Ireland against a budget that has to lose £135 million over the next three years and in circumstances where 85% of our budget is based around people. That is the challenge that we both face.

Assistant Chief Constable Dave Jones (Police Service of Northern Ireland): I will go back to your original question, which was about protecting the front line. I suppose I am the advocate for protecting the front line, because the staff look to me to ensure that there are enough of them on a Friday or Saturday night to keep them safe. The plan that Joe and I and the representatives from the rest of the organisation had was to look at what we thought we could afford on 1 April 2015 and work back and do yearly plans to achieve that mix. The most expensive people we employ are police officers, followed by support staff and those on a managed contract. Hopefully, at this end, we persuade other people to pay for them, and we do have a few of those, including here.

The issue for us is whether we have the right operational capacity and capability to deliver what the public want us to deliver. Some of that is about having the right number of police officers in the right place at the right time, although it is also about freeing them up to do other things. Therefore, we have invested in technology, and we now have handheld mobile data devices for officers. Previously, it would have taken up to two weeks to get an intelligence form onto our system, and now it is done in seconds. Officers do not have to go back to the police station. At the moment, we reckon that we have freed up about an hour or an hour and a half per officer per shift to allow them to do the things that the community wants.

We are doing quite a lot of other stuff. We have looked at our management costs and pulled 240 ranks out of the organisation over the past few years, which was the equivalent of £10 million. It is a bit like a sausage factory. The sausage makers — the constables who provide the service day in, day out — are the last people to be cut. However, that does not mean that we cannot make them work more effectively and more efficiently.

Chief Constable Baggott: I have one or two things to add. First, I invited the Policing Board — not to try to catch people out or be clever but because it would be helpful — to visit comparative places internationally or in the UK or the South to find out how they manage the broad degree of policing responsibilities under the law from neighbourhood to roads policing and to response within a diminishing budget.

The Avon and Somerset Constabulary has outsourced hugely in partnership with, I think, the city council to IBM, which manages much of its services. Cleveland Police has a commercial relationship,

and Lincolnshire Police has just outsourced virtually everything except arrest to G4S. Surrey Police and the Cheshire Constabulary have entered into a commercial agreement with another external provider. Those forces are doing that because they are not committed to long-term employment costs, and the ability to remove people is, to be frank, a lot easier than it is under our complicated legislation. For example, if we do not want to work with someone anymore, it takes us years to remove them. I have to go through a discipline panel with an ACC and two superintendents, after which the case comes to me on appeal and then goes to the Police Appeals Tribunal. After that, someone will ask me why it took two or three years. It is because that is how long the process takes. In England and Wales, by the way, they reformed that six years ago; I was part of that. We are still a little bit behind, because we did not have the devolution of policing and justice powers. It is still an expensive process.

We need to spend a bit more time taking a step back and thinking about how we are going to close the gap and what is acceptable about the current practice. If it is not acceptable, what is the alternative, and how do we find a way around that? How do we improve accountability? That is critical for me. I am pretty comfortable with that; the difficulty is that, if we are not careful, the debate gets focused on the immediacy of detail as opposed to the public need. I will come back to that point, Chairperson. I am not sure that the public will be that forgiving if we remove significant numbers of people. Neither will the public be forgiving if we do not improve accountability, and the two issues go hand in hand.

Mr Lynch: I welcome you here today. I want to explore managed services, which Joe mentioned, a little more. It is mentioned in your documents. Could you explain what that is and who carries it out? I have a number of follow-up questions.

Mr Stewart: The revised contract for managed services goes out for tender now under the European Union procurement rules, as advised by the Central Procurement Directorate. Currently the bulk of those engaged in our managed services will provide security guarding for our sites. For example, the people who open and close the barriers in the Stormont Estate, inspect passes and so on will be part of our managed services contract. We also have limited numbers of people who monitor CCTV in place of police officers. They are licensed operators who watch CCTV and advise police officers if anything is going wrong. Under the current contract, we have a number of civilian detention officers. For example, as I understand it, all those who detain members of the public who are arrested in the new detention suite at Musgrave Street station are detention officers under the managed services contract. They are managed by a police sergeant who has the responsibility of ensuring compliance under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE).

In addition, we have a number of people who carry out driving duties. We have just added a limited number of people into call handling, station enquiry assistance and transport co-ordination. The transport co-ordinators are not replacing police officers; that has been a civilianised role for some time. They move vehicles to workshops for repairs and back again and make sure that they are fit for purpose in the stations. As direct employees leave on retirement, we are not replacing them. We are replacing them under managed services and buying an hourly rate. We are not buying people in numbers; we are buying hourly rates according to our particular requirements.

Our plan is to expand that, under the mixed economy of policing, to include fixed penalty processing, postal and internal courier services and some dispatch and call handling. In the past, our call handling was predominantly done by sworn officers. Those officers will not do that any longer but will be redeployed into jobs that require the services of a sworn officer. We are not creating anything new in that regard. We are following practice that is largely in place in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr Lynch: Those people are not recruited in the same way as other PSNI civilian staff. Is that right?

Mr Stewart: Under the contract, those individuals will be recruited and employed by whoever wins the contract and will act in accordance with our directions. The Chief Constable mentioned earlier that each of the bidders for any contracts have to be able to persuade the evaluation panel that they understand our business and its peculiarities and our oversight arrangements. Just in case it was not

specific enough, I am having a specific requirement written into future contracts that anyone supplied to work in our premises should comply with the code of ethics. That will provide an additional level of reassurance.

The contracts are managed by way of contract management meetings every couple of months. If there are any transgressions or anything that falls short of the standards that we expect, they are addressed in that way. I can assure you, as the Chief Constable already indicated, that it is addressed a lot more swiftly through the managed services contract than it would be if I were dealing with one of my direct employees.

Mr Lynch: Have any of the people who have been employed had severance or Patten-type pay offs?

Mr Stewart: On the managed services contract, I cannot say for sure, because I genuinely do not know. However, I would be amazed of there were not a number of people who left, either on compulsory severance or under voluntary severance under the Patten arrangements.

Mr Lynch: Finally, the resource contract will be subject to re-tendering this spring. Is that right?

Mr Stewart: Yes.

Mr Lynch: What is the value of that contract?

Mr Stewart: The contract currently runs at around £14 million per annum. That was the original contract. The contract that we have out now may run at the region of around £20 million per annum. It is hard to tell, because the number of hours that we buy depends on what our precise requirement is. That will be for a three-year term, and our advice under the government procurement agreement (GPA) is that, because it is such a large-scale contract, it should be for three years but renewable for a further four years. Therefore, in total, it could run for seven years at around £20 million a year, but there is no guarantee that it will. It simply gives us the flexibility of the option to run for that period if we are satisfied with the level of the service. It is advertised in the 'Official Journal of the European Union' and open for anyone to bid for if they so wish.

Mr Lynch: You mentioned financial accountability, budget management and cutting costs. In the Criminal Justice Inspection report of 2010, the inspectors decided to include expenditure figures for civilian recruitment contracts.
"The first contract for civilian recruitment services was awarded in 2002 and was estimated at around £1 million per annum. A variation to the original contracts was made in 2004 to include the assignment of agency workers to the PSNI, which resulted in a major escalation in costs…of £32 million".
You talked about cutting down on budgets and budget management. It seems that costs are exploding due to the use of agencies and what is known as management services.

Mr Stewart: In that respect, the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) report is somewhat misleading, because the first contract was for the recruitment of civilians, and that was recommended under the Patten report, which we have adhered to rigorously. All of our equipment for police officers and police staff is outsourced to an independent company to ensure that the community has confidence that we are doing it the right way. However, the figures that you referred to are the figures for temporary workers. That is their wage cost, and the money does not go to Grafton, which holds the contract. Grafton gets a percentage, which, we are told, is very competitive, on top of the wage rate as its profit markup for its activities in regard to that. That £32 million does not show an expansion from £1 million, because we are not comparing apples with apples; we are comparing apples with oranges.

So you will see that the civilian recruitment with Grafton has not been running at that sort of level, but those are the wage costs of the temporary workers who were engaged at that time.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Chief Constable, for your presentation, which has given the Committee a helpful insight to some of the issues that you have to grapple with as Chief Constable. I appreciate that the Policing Board is where you are held to account in a great deal more detail on some of the areas that we are looking at.

On the long-term objectives that you are setting, you use a number of words, including "modernising". You have talked about the downsides of the Patten arrangements and the various objectives that drive policing. I am concerned to know whether all of that is an alternative to the reality that policing is very expensive in Northern Ireland compared with the other policing bodies that you referred to, because of the current constraints that you are under.
Do you have a shopping list, as it were, of freedoms that you would like around financial matters, which would allow you to act more cost-effectively as a police service?

Chief Constable Baggott: I do not mean this as a shallow answer, so forgive me. However, there are two freedoms that I would particularly value. One is the freedom from police officers being the target. That is not a political point, but the comparative costs of policing are higher here because we are confronting a significant, severe paramilitary problem. The potential of policing to do good in neighbourhoods is not being realised because the money that we have to spend, which should be being spent on protecting the most vulnerable in our society, is being spent on equipment, deeply complex and lengthy operations, and huge expenses around technology, forensics and investigations. Frankly, that should be being spent on the future of our young people.

I am allowed to say that because my job is to make sure that policing takes us forward rather than back. People said, when I first arrived here, "Chief Constable, how could you possibly be doing community policing in a security situation?" My answer to that was, "How could I possibly not be doing that?"

Why do you think we put 700 police officers back on the street and in neighbourhoods at some significant risk? It is because their job is to keep people safe. However, the cost of doing that is not only at a high price to the officers themselves, but relates the cost of spending money that could be spent on better things. So the first freedom is that I just wish we could get people to buy into a forward-looking democracy.

My job is to make sure that policing operates only within the rule of law and that it is utterly accountable and transparent. I work to the Policing Board and to the Justice Committee, and we respect the institutions. I put my people, not simply into dealing with law enforcement, but into the heart of the most vulnerable areas, where we can protect and bring forward people's quality of life. I say that with complete integrity. The vast majority of PSNI officers, if not all of them, are absolutely signed up.

I will give you an example. I went to a city recently — I will not say which — where police officers had been attacked by a hand grenade. When I saw them, I asked what they wanted from me. I thought they were going to say more kit and more money. However, what they said was that they were working in the heart of the community where they were getting to know young people and their needs. They asked whether I had some money to pay for outreach projects. I think that that is pretty amazing stuff.

That is where I want to policing to be. However, I am spending a huge amount of money. I go cap in hand to the Treasury, through the Executive, to spend money on keeping people alive. That is why I get a little cross sometimes when we get to any debate that becomes too narrow and does not see the big picture. My big picture is about keeping people safe and developing Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland and respecting the institutions. Sometimes, I have to do that in certain ways that, in the short term, may be difficult. We have to work at that.

What freedoms would I like? I really would like to have — and I invite my colleagues to have their own views on this — a far greater freedom to manage my own resources, with the scrutiny of the Policing Board and with the assurance of the independent audit committee that sits over the budget management. I am not sure that I need the lengthy business case processes of procurement. We have been on the front foot of reform on this. I was not given the job of reducing the 57,000 files; we took that on willingly, and made the argument for progression. We had gone through a ruthless process of moving people out but, if the justice system itself could be reformed to produce speedier more effective justice through the system working together, it would save millions and millions of pounds.

The reason we have not been able to do that is that everyone hides behind independence as opposed to preserving their independence but sharing resources. We have not had a systems approach before, because for 10 years we followed a route map that was legitimate in the year 2002, but is costly, lengthy, unnecessary and in desperate need of reform. We now have a Justice Minister, for the first time, who can co-ordinate and bring together people with the victim at the heart of the system. Doing that will save millions. The 4,000 discretionary disposals that we have done this year have led to a confidence level in policing of 97%. I was told, when I arrived here, that I could not reform that system because confidence in policing would fall, but it has not. The justice system can be sped up dramatically, if we just get a bit more relaxed about independence.

I respect accountability. Our job is to present the facts. We are an organisation that should be impartial about the search for truth. The Public Prosecution Service (PPS), not Matt Baggott or the PSNI, decides whether to prosecute, and the courts then decide whether the evidence is there to convict. However, the system itself can work a lot better. Why should we not have joined-up witness care units? Why should my staff not work alongside the PPS to make sure that victims are updated on the case? That does not compromise the independence of the director. We have not been able to do that because the system has been driven into silos, and there has not been the political consensus to do that.

Assistant Chief Constable Jones: I will go back to your original point. We estimate that about 40% of our police main grant is spent on security-related issues. That is a significant amount of money bearing in mind the size of the PSNI budget and the wider Department of Justice budget. That happens because we run three fleets. We have an armoured Land Rover fleet, an armoured fleet and a soft-skin fleet. No other police service in the United Kingdom has that, and we are the only armed service in the United Kingdom. That comes with training costs, the need for equipment and absence from day-to-day work in the community. Our estate bears the scars of the estates strategy, and we are trying to manage that going forward. I would love to be in a position of having drop-in shopfronts or police offices anywhere across Northern Ireland, but we are not in that position.

We constantly try to manage the triumvirate of ops, HR and finance. All three have to be lined up in order to deliver effective efficiencies and savings, and, through the efficiency plan that David and I are trying to push forward, we are looking at everything to make sure that we can eke out some of those costs. Some of that is about trying to make sure that we are deploying people in the right way and employing the right people.

People keep referring to issues with temporary staff. We have tried to re-engineer the organisation, and temporary staff give you some breathing space. For example, we used to have over 400 police officers working in the case-building part of the organisation. We needed to reform that, and part of that involved working with the PPS and the rest of the criminal justice system and identifying the number of permanent staff that we needed and their skills set. However, you cannot stop business, so the temporary staff allowed business to continue as usual whilst we re-engineered the organisation.

Mr Dickson: The Chief Constable and the ACC described the balance between the cost to this community of delivering security and the cost of delivering ordinary policing, and that has been very clearly spelt out today. It is clearly a message that we need to get out into the community, and the people who, rightly, add their words of condemnation to events and issues as they happen need to take that next step with you and with us in the Assembly and drive the message home that that is a

real cost. It could be used on hospital beds, water and sewerage projects and better policing. It is all about the finance of Northern Ireland.

The estates strategy was referred to. The community raises a lot of concern about the loss of "my police station", particularly in rural areas. As a former member of a district policing partnership (DPP), I understand the police argument that the closure of stations that are usually buildings that are not fit for purpose anyway and are old, damp or too big or too small puts more officers on the ground to allow better community policing and all that. However, I do not think that that message is getting across. I will be going to a public meeting in the next couple of weeks to save a police station in my constituency.

Mr Weir: Presumably, Stewart, you are arguing for its closure?

Mr Dickson: No, I am saying how difficult it is for the police to get across the arguments as to why closures need to happen, and the public find it very difficult to understand those issues.

I will keep quiet after this, but I want to ask about one more area that I raised here last week. A criticism was directed at the police last week about the preparation and timeliness of files for the Public Prosecution Service. I know that you have been asked to comment on it, and I welcome your comments on that.

Chief Constable Baggott: Thanks very much. Your question about the estate is interesting. This is not the first time that Dave, I and other colleagues have lived through this. I have been through this in every command that I have had, and it is a hugely sensitive issue. Whether we like it or not, a building is hugely symbolic of people's feelings of safety. I could make the case that keeping buildings open is hugely expensive and constrains police officers, because they sit behind desks waiting for something to happen when people do not actually come into police stations. However, as you quite rightly said, there is an emotional argument. I popped into a shop recently to get some sweets and I was asked to sign a petition to the Chief Constable for the local police station to stay open. I thought that was quite interesting, and I did not know whether I should sign it or not, so I signed it is Dave's name. *[Laughter.]*
I assure you that we are incredibly aware of that issue and are sensitive to it. Putting 700 more police officers on the streets, which exceeded the target in year 1, was about making sure that we had genuine neighbourhood policing and sufficient police officers and that we were not dragged back into a security response.

The issue of policing commitments and focused policing with the community strategy makes people accountable. When we say that people will have neighbourhood policing, they will have it. It is not whether we feel like giving it to them, and the target of having people there for 80% of the time is a properly measured and accountable way of doing that. When you need to get through to our call management centre, you should be guaranteed, as far as possible, of a good response to an emergency for the one time in your life when you might need it. When I first arrived, I was accused of having made a rod for my own back by introducing policing commitments. Those commitments were described as being a bit of rhetoric, but they are not. Ringing 9,000 people and asking them whether we gave them a good service against our standard is not rhetoric, neither is making sure that the 700 police officers who respond in the neighbourhood are actually where they should be. We needed to have the commitments in place, and all of that needed to be done before we got into the estates issue that Dave has been working through very ably with colleagues.

I want police officers to communicate beyond district policing partnerships, although I absolutely respect district policing partnerships. For the first time last year, I wrote personally to every household, and that was backed up by a letter from the local district commanders. The feedback from that has been really good, and I want to see our police officers going to where people are rather than waiting for people to come to us. Whether it is in a GAA club or a church, we should go out and explain ourselves in a much more relaxed way.

The journey, if I can call it that, that we have been on has involved trying to make sure that the public understand that we mean business and guarantee it. We will have to close police stations; we cannot sustain the level of resource that we have tied up. However, we will do that in a sensitive and realistic way and have that local dialogue.

Colleagues in the South have a much bigger problem than I do in this area. Something in the region of 700 police stations there is just not sustainable. By the way, we have twice as many police stations here as a comparative area in the rest of the UK.

Mr Best: One could describe me as being politically naive. However, from a financial and value-for-money perspective, which I worry about, for the Chief Constable as a sub-accounting officer, I would point out that recent information and benchmarking — we shared it with the estates committee yesterday — shows that we have 70% more space than four comparative forces in GB. When you break that down into space for operational police officers, you see that the PSNI has double the amount of space of those in GB. So that is something that I am concerned about. In the context of reducing budgets, there are all sorts of arguments, but we have to take that into consideration in the overall debate.

Chief Constable Baggott: A question was asked about delay. I think that we have the opportunity to hold our colleagues accountable for what are the basics of filling in a good file. We did not have that until this year, and we have implemented a completely new and revised appraisal system under Joe's leadership. Basic file preparation is essential, and if someone cannot put a file together, they will not have much of a career in the police. We have not had the means to hold people to account for that before, but we do now.

The bigger issue for me is that there is too much stuff going into the system. If it does not make a difference, why would you expect someone to give a lot a quality to it? We need to pull as much as we can out of the formal system into street resolutions. We need to free up time to speed up the process, we need early incentivised guilty pleas and, through legislation, we need to not worry about committal trials followed by proper trials. That does not happen elsewhere. I think we can free up a lot of capability and capacity within the justice system if the limited number of necessary files are done to a high standard. It is about designing a system that is much more cost-effective. When you have to produce files as evidence, there should be some accountability to make sure that is done first time. There are some quite encouraging things in Michael Maguire's report about the way in which reform has been grasped and the progress we are making, but the big issue for me now is whether we can get the system to work over the next year or so, with David Ford's political leadership, as a cohesive unit as opposed to a series of unco-ordinated endeavours.

Mr Weir: Thank you, Chief Constable. ACC Jones said something that reminded of an old phrase used by an American politician: the two things you do not want to see up close are laws being made and sausages being made. I am not sure that we are exactly in the right position. As to the earlier discussion, making employment comparisons for Northern Ireland is like comparing apples and oranges, but I suppose some people want to see more apples employed and fewer oranges employed. That can sometimes be the problem. I will just try to get everything I want to ask in briefly.

Stewart Dickson touched on a couple of the issues that I wanted to raise. I think it is important that, as you move forward on estates, it is not simply a question of showing sensitivity in the way that you do things or of presenting a plan and saying that you are going to implement it more sensitively; it will actually be about having a wee bit of flexibility and going some way to meeting some of the concerns that are raised by members of the Policing Board, for example. That may mean adapting your plan and drawing back a bit from where you are.

Secondly, I will pick up a point that I was going to raise with Stewart. Chief Constable, you have the twin advantage of being immersed in the system here while seeing it through an outsider's pair of eyes. You mentioned some areas where you think improvements could be made, but one of the key concerns in a wider context is the speed of access to justice. I am just wondering whether, in addition

to what you said, you have any other observations about where you feel there should be changes to the system.

Finally, just to pick up on one of you earlier points about the financial situation: you understandably indicated that you did not really feel it was your place to say how legacy issues or historical issues should be dealt with, but there is a clear implication in what you said that there is a major financial burden on your organisation because of those broader legacy issues. You mentioned the HET, but overall, what do you see as the financial resource implications for the PSNI in dealing with that? Can you quantify the human resource implications in dealing with those legacy issues?

Chief Constable Baggott: Thanks very much. There are three things I would say about the justice issue. First, the way you deliver justice has to be proportionate. If you have a child doing something wrong for the first time, why would you put that child into a system that is hugely formal with huge amounts of paper preparation to get the same decision that will probably ultimately come back? It is not suitable. Why would we be spending huge amounts of money on fines and warrants, for example, when there may be a different way of doing this with other interventions?

Justice has to be proportionate, and although it is changing, it is very much a one-size-fits-all approach. I think that, for less serious offences, you should have tellings off, cautions or fixed penalties; restorative approaches for more serious offences; and for anything more serious than that, you might need to charge someone and put them before the court and let the system kick in. There has to be a series of proportionate interventions. That is absolutely human rights compliant. I think we need to be a bit clearer about who is responsible for what within the justice system, because I think, collectively, we are a bit lazy about that.

The Police Service does not make prosecutorial decisions, but you would think that we did, whether that is about the past, the present or the future. Our job is simply to present facts and follow the investigative route, but that is not clear, so when someone gets convicted or released, it is seen as a police problem. Actually, that is the way the system works. We present the facts, the Public Prosecution Service makes a decision based on public interest and the balance of evidence, and the courts weight that up, either through a jury or a judge. I do not think that we are clear enough on that, so individual roles get confused.

Thirdly, and this is another point of accountability, access to justice takes place only if you have earned trust. That onus is on the Chief Constable and the PSNI. We are still going through a process of having to investigate the most serious offences. Whatever people's political persuasion or concerns, if they look at the work that policing is doing at the moment, they will see that the outcome is a court appearance. We are absolutely committed, within the law and to the rule of law, to the criminal justice strategy. There have been interventions in the past two or three years where, quite frankly, a much more robust use of force could have been justified, given the amount of risk that was taken to make arrests and to bring people before the courts. However, that would not be about earned trust.

We go more than the extra mile in working through the justice system, but, I think, that absolutely has to be the case, because that is the rule of law. Earned trust is about having neighbourhood police officers and information. One thing that we have done is hold ourselves accountable for the confidence of people, wherever they come from and whatever their background. There was a huge emphasis on confidence building and accountability. Without confidence, we do not get witness statements, information or support. We are still in a process of earning trust. I absolutely understand that.

Sorry; what was your second question?

Mr Weir: I do not know whether ACC Jones will pick up on the estates issue. It was about the cost and the human resource side of it. Maybe they are not figures that can be plucked out of the air.

Mr Best: The combined cost of legacy and the HET comes to about £12 million.

Chief Constable Baggott: It is not only a financial cost; it is an opportunity cost.

Mr Weir: I understand that.

Chief Constable Baggott: Our major investigation teams are spending 50% of their time going back 10, 20 or 30 years, rather than dealing with people trafficking and organised crime in the here and now. That is a necessity. My personal view on that is that we probably have two or three years to go through as the investigative obligations under the Human Rights Act and the justice system works its way through. At that point, the bigger debates around reconciliation will probably take place. That is an international comparison with how it works elsewhere. My obligation is simply to make sure that we comply with the law and use our money wisely on that. However, I think there is a process to go through before we come out the other side.

Assistant Chief Constable Jones: There is a member of the Policing Board who sits on the estates committee, which is the internal strategic estates committee that David and I co-chair. A small working group from the board is working with us on the estates strategy. There is a lot of thinking along the lines of, "You have made your plan, so that is what you are going to have." There is constructive dialogue going on as we speak, hopefully, and lots of public meetings are taking place. I do not have a list that says that all of those are going to close.

Mr Weir: I appreciate that. I think the key element to that is that a lot of people can accept that the case is not strong enough for particular stations to stay open. I think a lot of people will be realistic on that point. There is a little bit of concern at times about what we, maybe, have seen from predecessors. We have accepted that some will close, and then they simply came back in a year or two's time and sought the closure of the remainder. It is important that it is not simply a question of how we sell this as well as we can to the people in the community, but that you reach a genuine consensus with representatives on the overall picture.

Assistant Chief Constable Jones: It is fine to be open and transparent in seeking a consensus. However, there is the background of the £135 million of savings that we have to find. If we do not find savings in certain parts of non-people areas, we can only look in people areas, because that is 85% of our costs. I fully accept that the other issue for us is that the situation might change, as we were saying earlier. In five years' time, we might be talking about there not being many police stations at all, because we go to community areas, community halls and drop-in centres. The world would be a different place. A lot of other services have gone down that line in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr B McCrea: It is great to be back on the same old ground.

Chief Constable Baggott: We missed you, Basil.

The Chairperson: Take him back on a free transfer. You are welcome to him.
[Laughter.]

Mr B McCrea: I take it that Peter Weir has not staged a walkout just because I am going to ask some questions. We have covered a fair bit of ground, and we do not need to go over it again, but tell me why we are still having trouble with files to the PPS.

Chief Constable Baggott: Why are we having trouble with files? It depends what you mean by the question. If you are asking whether we are producing too much paperwork for the PPS, I think the answer is yes, although we have now earned the right to pull some of that paperwork back out of the system and give officers back the discretion that, I think, most of the public want. So the amount of stuff going into the system is being reduced and it will be dramatically reduced further over the next few years.

Why do we have quality? I think it because we have not shone the spotlight on it sufficiently with regard to accountability. Unless you have an accountability mechanism that absolutely holds people to account, and, secondly, unless you have a purpose for producing a file, police officers wonder why they are doing it and whether there is any point in it, especially when 57,000 files are produced with a relatively small number ending up in prosecution. That is not a justification for that and not something that I want to see happen, but the reality is that you have to have accountability. I think we have accountability now in a different way. It is a combination of both. It is about making the system streamlined and fit for purpose, and producing paperwork only when you need it. Secondly, it is about holding people to account on quality. Huge progress has been made in both areas.

Mr B McCrea: Chief Constable, you said earlier that, if a constable or whoever cannot fill in a file, you could question what they are doing in the job. The Committee recently took evidence on avoidable delay. The issue that was brought up was that the most significant component of avoidable delay was the interface between the PSNI and the PPS. It is on the record in Hansard. I remember that we talked about that when I was on the Policing Board. There was an exchange with various senior officers and, I think, the then Director of Public Prosecutions. We do not seem to have made the progress that one might have hoped.

Chief Constable Baggott: That is probably a pessimistic view. Quite significant progress has been made by having a Justice Minister, through the accountability of the Committee and through the accountability that I am imposing on people. There is the argument that we cannot possibly work together because we are independent. However, we have shown that you can be independent and work together. Last year, the 4,000 discretionary disposals drove a coach and horses through some of arguments around some of the things that people thought would bring the system into disrepute but that actually enhanced confidence in it.

I absolutely accept that there is work to be done on this, and you have my commitment that we are doing that. However, I think we are actually in a much better position. Just to be clear: with regard to reform, a lot of meetings have been taking place quietly and privately under the Chatham House rule between agencies. Some of that we instigated, through bringing people together in the evenings and having very meaningful conversations about whether we can be independent but still work together as a system. So I am probably more encouraged.

Assistant Chief Constable Jones: These things do take a bit of time because we have a relatively young service. For the last while, every year, 400 experienced officers have left the system. The vast majority of files that go to the PPS are generally being put forward by officers with two to three years' service.

It is only fair to quote Dr Maguire, whose report stated:
"Considerable effort has been made since last year to address the problem."
File submission times have reduced over the past four years, and the report states:
"The evidence would point towards improved file quality by the PSNI".
We are nowhere near taking that as saying, "we're all right, then". A lot needs to be done, but as the chief said, there is a lot that we do that other services do not have to do, which is clogging up officers' time. Tape transcripts is a classic example. We interview people, and the tape recording could be hours long, with somebody saying nothing or, "No comment." Yet we still provide full transcripts. Somebody has to sit down and do that, and that is the police officer.

We are working quietly with the PPS on some in-built systems and processes, because it is a trust issue. It needs to have faith in what we are doing and we need to have faith in what it is doing. Over time, we are starting to see some product coming from that relationship.

Mr B McCrea: I am sorry if I sound a little pessimistic, but I was only going on the fact that, just recently, the Minister of Justice suggested the introduction of statutory time limits because it did not seem to be possible to resolve the issue of the interface with the PPS. He thought that was the only way to do it. I just wondered what the Chief Constable's view was on whether statutory time limits would be beneficial.

Chief Constable Baggott: There are two things. The first is on the way that the justice system works. It was designed 12 years ago. People are holding themselves accountable against a Criminal Justice Inspection review that took place, I think, 12 years ago, when holding the police to account was necessary to create political confidence. I absolutely understand that. However, you should not have to produce full-tape transcripts when what you need is a summary of what was said. We should not have to have full forensic investigation when a lump of cannabis is a lump of cannabis. We should use spectrometry in custody areas that tells you there and then whether a substance is cocaine. Historically, we have not been able to do that.

Mr B McCrea: I agree with that. If we can do all those good things, do we really need to look at statutory time limits?

Chief Constable Baggott: I am a supporter of statutory time limits with two caveats. One is make the system effective first. Otherwise, you will put people who are significantly dangerous back onto the streets. I am not sure that there would be much forgiveness from the public if we were to do that. It is fine when the system is effective and you can be properly held to account. The second is that a human rights test needs to be applied to any statutory time limit. If you are going to release someone because the process has not been followed, what is the degree of risk that you are applying to the public? We need to think carefully about that. However, as a way of holding public sector organisations to account, I think that statutory time limits have merit.

Mr B McCrea: I have one last quick question on that before I move onto a more positive question. Do you think that, at this stage, there is sufficient confidence in the system that we will not be releasing people and that we will meet the human rights test? In your assessment, is the criminal justice system able to meet the tests that you have just set?

Chief Constable Baggott: The leadership of the criminal justice system agencies is sufficiently reformist that, within the next year or two and with the political backing of the Executive and the Justice Minister, the system could rapidly come up to be fit for purpose. I would rather that it was a self reform than one imposed by statutory time limits. Do I think that we can do it? Yes, I do. Do I think that we need to ensure that we hold the different partners accountable to working together? It may be a job for the Committee to line us up, hold us to account and ask us, "How are you working together? What is the plan?" We could do away with some of the false notions of independence.

Mr B McCrea: We made the point. Presumably, we will look at it on an ongoing basis. As the Chair said, we may have a series of things. It is an interesting position.

I will move on. What is your feeling about the National Crime Agency? What interaction will your force have with it?

Chief Constable Baggott: It is probably too early to tell. First, the remit and scope of the National Crime Agency has yet to be decided, particularly as regards whether it moves beyond organised crime into what could be described as national security issues. That is a political decision still to be made. The National Crime Agency has, and probably will have, confiscation powers that I do not have. If we are not to use that agency, I will probably need to have those powers given to me to replace it.

Secondly, the benefit that the National Crime Agency has in tackling organised crime, particularly the work of the Organised Crime Task Force, is that it has an international reach that I do not have. It has information and contacts, and it works within the European jurisdiction and moves across borders. It has a far greater impact than I can have in Northern Ireland. Why is that important? I spoke at the beginning of today's session about how the global threat to the well-being of our communities comes from eastern Europe and how criminals there see us as a rather attractive marketplace. I need an international reach to deal with that effectively.

Mr B McCrea: It is a debate that has to take place. All the funds from fuel laundering or tobacco excise fraud, for example, end up with organised crime squads that operate in Northern Ireland. It is a debate that needs to be had, and it will have an impact on the architecture of policing in Northern Ireland. The Home Secretary indicated that things are moving forward. I think that the head has been appointed —

Assistant Chief Constable Jones: Keith Bristow.

Chief Constable Baggott: He has been over to see us.

Mr B McCrea: He has been over to see you. This is a fairly profound debate, given that, as you indicated, oversight arrangements and accountability mechanisms are perhaps more complete in Northern Ireland than elsewhere. When will that debate take place?

Chief Constable Baggott: The debate about who it will be accountable to is taking place in Whitehall now. I suspect that the accountability mechanism will be to the Home Secretary as part of the UK Law Enforcement Agency's remit. Of course, what we have here is an Organised Crime Task Force that is chaired by the Minister and involves the task force, customs, us and Garda Síochána working very effectively together and sharing the powers and assets.

I recently had a discussion with one of the Ministers about the impact of salmon poaching on local communities. There is a need to seize the assets of salmon poachers, but I do not have the powers to do so, because those are currently within the remit of Serious Organised Crime Agency. Its role is not just about people but about addressing the economic harm being caused to some of our rural and business communities.

Mr B McCrea: This is a debate that we have to have. I have three final points that you can take in whatever order you want. I am curious about why we are in budgetary difficulties, given that it was reported that we got a fairly comprehensive budget settlement at Hillsborough. When I was on the board, we had further discussions about it, because there had been an upturn in threats that we had not anticipated, and we are now running into the same issue again with the budget. There is a feeling — forgive me, Chief Constable — that some people are always asking for more money. We are in very straitened financial circumstances. Much of this, of course, is now devolved.
[Interruption.]
It was not that good a speech. I just want to make my other points. I want to understand why the budget has gone adrift again.

Secondly, we brought up the issue of the estates. I hesitate to qualify what my colleague Peter Weir said, after what he said to me on the way out, although he is not back yet. There is an issue with

estates. As Dave says, we have borne the scars of this. Does that not suggest that there is a better way? The issue raises huge angst, and we waste an awful lot of energy on it. It always seems to be a case of, "You will save half of them now, and we will get the other half in a couple of years' time".

Finally, can you give me some information on the World Police and Fire Games coming here? I understand that it is a really significant event, involving large numbers of people. There will obviously be issues with planning, not least for security, as well as accommodation and the input to the economy. Those are my final three points. You do not have to go into huge detail on them.

Chief Constable Baggott: I do not believe that the budget has gone adrift. I think that it has been managed incredibly effectively. If you look at the sheer scale of need —

Mr B McCrea: I must have misread what it says in this restricted document. I thought that it stated: *"the financial pressures on the policing budget are very real and likely to increase."*

Chief Constable Baggott: Absolutely; that does not mean that it has gone adrift. Forgive me, I probably misinterpreted what you said. The budget is being managed incredibly effectively and is focused on need. External scrutiny by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and others of how we are managing it is incredibly favourable and is getting better. I stand behind that because one of the great things that we have been able to do in the past couple of years is to really get into effective resource use. However, the budget pressures remain. Again — I have said this very publicly — the peace dividend, in respect of money, was taken a bit prematurely. We could not have sustained the level of local policing needed to preserve all the things I spoke about, such as the work on neighbourhood policing, protecting vulnerable communities, people trafficking, sex offender monitoring and dealing with the past, without the continuation of that Treasury money. The Treasury money came before the £250 million. It was a recognition of the fact that the security situation had deteriorated and that there was a danger that the PSNI would be drawn back into dealing simply with law enforcement and security rather than the broad spectrum of policing. I am grateful for that money and am hugely grateful for the cross-party support on that; it was a great piece of joint working. The budget has not gone adrift. However, it is, and will remain, challenging.

Mr B McCrea: Just to be clear: I did not mean to say —

Chief Constable Baggott: I understand that.

Mr B McCrea: What I am saying is that I thought that after Hillsborough there were some issues. I seem to remember going to meetings, with you and various other people, where we argued collectively for more money, which we got. However, we are now going through that again. I am out of the loop, because I am not on the board, so I do not know what the additional —

Chief Constable Baggott: I am not going for more money at the moment. What I am saying is that I do not think that, when we come to the next CSR period, I am going to fall off the precipice. If the Treasury were to suddenly withdraw £45 million a year and the Executive were to support that, that would be a huge amount of resources to be taken out of an organisation in a year, and I am not sure that we can do that. I am talking about how we can use the budget more flexibility to equalise and not see it as a three-year or four-year budget, which is an advantage in itself, but see it into the next five to 10 years. That is probably about flexible budget management.

I would not hesitate to go back and ask for more, but the Executive were incredibly influential in getting anything out of the Treasury in a recession. I do not know of an organisation in the UK that has got additional money. The Executive were able to do that because there was devolution and real plans for the future, and we worked very ably together on that. There was also the emergent security threat,

which has to be confronted and dealt with. I will not police that away; it will have to be about politics and persuasion. If I had to go back for more money, I would, but I am very mindful that the Executive have big choices to make around health, hospitals and education, and I would have to make the case very wisely indeed if I were to come back for more money. I am not doing that at the moment.

Mr B McCrea: You mentioned headcount. Are there any plans to reopen recruitment in the next month or two?

Mr Stewart: According to the resource plan that Dave and I have done in conjunction with the finance director, we have no intention of doing any recruitment until 2013 at the earliest. We have some police recruitment now. Because of the desire to reduce our reliance on associate or agency staff, we intend to recruit about 120 full-time police staff in the next 12 months. If there is a discussion about recruitment, it is on that basis.

To add to the budgetary point, Basil, the three of us are reasonably confident that we can meet the £135 million reduction. We still have £25 million to find, and we think that we have the means of doing that. Our big concern is the baseline post-2015, which is a £50 million reduction and is a real challenge for us, given that 85% of our costs are people costs. That is our main worry at this point.

Mr Best: At the start of the meeting, we pointed out that we have achieved £110 million of the required £135 million reduction and that we have plans to bridge the gap. If we were to have a flat budget in the first year of the new CSR, in our projections, we would have a shortfall of £27 million.

Mr B McCrea: David, I have never had a meeting with you yet where you have not said that you have saved millions and told us that you need more.

Mr Best: All I am saying is that we believe that we can achieve the savings of £135 million but that we cannot take our eyes off the new CSR period, and that is what we are planning for. On the subject of flexibility, we had around 800 associate staff and are now down to 400, and that is why we have been able to reduce our costs. Flexibility is a key issue.

The Chairperson: We will move on, because time is ticking on.

Mr A Maginness: I will be as quick as I can, Chair. I apologise for being late; I had to chair a meeting in Craigavon. Thank you for the good work that you have done so far. It seems that you are saying that you have a legal obligation to carry out the work of the HET, and I understand that, but surely it should be more than simply a legal obligation. It seems to me that HET is working well and has got through a tremendous volume of work. The net benefit to many families has been enormous. Perhaps I have misinterpreted what you said, but do you see that HET brings an added value?

Chief Constable Baggott: Forgive me; when I spoke about HET, I spoke about the victims first and then justice. That probably answers the concern. I absolutely have seen in the families' faces what clarity has meant to them after so many years. I know that not everyone engages with it, and I understand that there are concerns, but, overwhelmingly, the feedback is very good on the way in which the HET is trying to deal with hugely sensitive issues compassionately. I want that work to continue, and I am fully behind it. It is part of reconciliation.

Mr A Maginness: Yes. I agree entirely. I think it is a necessary element of the overall reconciliation process.

Chief Constable Baggott: Very much so.

Mr A Maginness: The other matter I would like to ask you about is the 4,000 disposals this year, which I think is very good. You said that you see it as being proportionate. It is also cost-effective, I would have thought, and it is also a smarter way of dealing with lower levels of misbehaviour and criminal activity.

Chief Constable Baggott: I think it is very cost-effective. It certainly improves confidence in policing. Whatever community you go to, people want things to be dealt with practically but with integrity.

Mr A Maginness: And quickly.

Chief Constable Baggott: Yes. There are cost-effective things in the system. Incentivising early pleas of guilty would save tens of millions of pounds. We need to work our way through how we can do that without breaking people's right to have a trial. I think there is a lot that could be done in the system to free up money.

Mr A Maginness: Have you any plans for non-judicial disposals? Do you think that they can be expanded in any way?

Chief Constable Baggott: I do. We have to, first of all, earn the confidence within our own organisation. After three months of putting the new policy in place, I did not see any. When I asked why we were not doing it, the answer was that people did not trust the organisation not to discipline us for not putting the file in. That is probably something to do with the self confidence of the organisation that had been taken away by over-regulation. We have come through that now, and people see that. We also have to have the consent and support of victims to do that. The thing that I do not want to see happening is for that to start applying to serious cases. One of the dangers of getting fixed penalty tickets is that, if we are not careful, we may start applying them incorrectly as a quick solution when the courts do have a role to play in persistent offending or more serious sorts of offending. We need to get that right, otherwise discretion will become discredited.

Mr A Maginness: I agree with you.

Mr McCartney: Thank you for your presentation. When you were making your opening remarks, and throughout your commentary, I was struck by a number of words. You used the words "openness", "transparency" and "accountability", which are obviously clearly linked to trust and confidence. I think that is fair commentary. In particular, the greater the community's trust and confidence in any statutory organisation, the greater its potential to deliver. I notice that, at times, if people raise a concern, there is a tendency to reduce it by saying that they do not see the bigger picture, but, from the community's point of view, it might be the big picture. Rehiring and retiring is part of that. It cannot be seen as just something to the side, small-picture stuff. When Mr Stuart was speaking, he stated that — I hope I get the quote right — we do it in the exact same way as other forces in Great Britain. I think that was the way you put it. When Sean asked you to explain something or to give your interpretation, you said that it was comparing apples with oranges, rather than apples with apples. When you said that retiring and rehiring is done in the same way as in Great Britain, is that comparing apples with apples or apples with oranges?

Mr Stewart: The process that we follow is broadly similar in terms of the much-talked-about workforce modernisation that has happened across the rest of the United Kingdom. We have not moved as fast

along that road as other services. Some services in the United Kingdom have moved too fast and are now reversing again, because they have taken too many sworn officers out of the mix and have too many non-sworn officers. When they are hit with the budget costs they find themselves in great difficulty. What I was referring to when I said it was comparing apples with oranges was the fact that the monetary amounts that your colleague referred to —

Mr McCartney: I am talking specifically about retiring and rehiring. In that context, are you comparing apples with apples or apples with oranges? It is a simple question.

Mr Stewart: I am comparing apples with apples and oranges with oranges in that many UK-based police forces rehire retired officers to do some of the non-sworn duties. You will hardly find a police service, across the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, that will not have researched bringing back retired officers to do unsworn duties because they have certain knowledge that the service requires to complete investigations but which it does not require sworn-status officers to do.

Mr McCartney: How many police forces do you know in Great Britain — England, Scotland and Wales — or anywhere in Europe that have gone through a Patten-style reform package?

Mr Stewart: None have gone through a Patten-style severance package.

Mr McCartney: Even more broadly than that, how many examples are there of a police service having gone through a Patten-style reform package to transform one organisation into a new one?

Mr Stewart: No one has had that experience but us.

Mr McCartney: Can you understand that when you make the statement that we do it the exact same way as other forces, it leads me to the conclusion that you are comparing apples with oranges?

Mr Stewart: I can understand your point.

Mr McCartney: It is not a matter of understanding my point. It is either a correct point or an incorrect point.

Mr Stewart: I stand by what I said. The process that we have used is the same as that used by every other United Kingdom police force. I agree with you that no other service has gone through a Patten-style reform package.

Mr McCartney: Has retiring and rehiring enhanced or relegated community confidence?

Chief Constable Baggott: That —

Mr McCartney: Let Mr Stewart answer.

Chief Constable Baggott: I think that is for me to answer. I have publicly stated that it has had an influence on confidence in that people have had concerns that somehow Patten is being unpicked.

That is why I have been very clear on the sensitivity of this and the issue of how we can make the contracts more accountable. To some degree, Joe is right and you are right. Joe is right in the sense that we have to comply with employment law. I do not have a choice and cannot refuse to allow people to come back. Only two weeks ago, at the launch of the human rights report, I was asked to comment on the fact that I have Special Branch officers returned. My answer was that I have to comply with employment law and that you are asking me to become involved in political policing. If the law needs to change, the law needs to change. If I can improve the accountability of those contracts within the existing law, I will do so as much as I can. To some degree, Joe is right about the necessity to act under the law.

Raymond, you are also right in the sense that the issue is very complex. I have not been discussing it publicly because it is even too complex for headlines. The Policing Board needs to talk about it with us quietly over a prolonged period of time to discuss why it was put in place, what the need is, what the concerns are, how accountability can be improved, the long-term position and whether there is any alternative to it because of the confidence issues. Those are complex issues, and I do not wish to be trite about them. To some degree, both sides of the debate are right. Somehow, we need to have a debate. The numbers of associate staff are dropping, but we have managed services on other functions that are not part of the criminal justice process, such as jailers. We are no different to other forces across the UK and in elsewhere in the world.

Mr McCartney: The people who you are hiring have received a Patten severance.

Chief Constable Baggott: If you were to ask me not to hire those people, you would be asking me to act unlawfully.

Mr McCartney: In your presentation, you said that, when you are policing, you do things that are legitimate, necessary and right, so you could say that it might be best that you do not rehire someone to deal with legacy issues who, perhaps, was part of creating a legacy. I think that that is an legitimate position to take when you are creating a specification for a job.

Chief Constable Baggott: Joe can answer this; you have to be really clear on what European employment law is on this, because I cannot step beyond that. If I were to create a lack of opportunity for someone based on their previous job, I suspect that I would be acting potentially unlawfully. Matching the skills to the post that is required has to come through the contract and the job description that is provided. Let me be clear: I am really anxious to move away from this. My job is to keep people safe, and it is to support current inquests and legacy issues. Sometimes, we need people with the specific skills to do that, otherwise the coroner would accuse me of not supporting that process. It is a complex issue, but, by the end of the year, we will move into a different phase. I will not say that we will not have some outsourced contracts, but, if we can build into that a greater and tighter form of accountability, I will be the first to grab that, within existing employment law.

Mr Stewart: Raymond, when the voluntary severance scheme was negotiated over 10 years ago, I was part of the negotiating team, in a different role. It was me who raised with government lawyers the issue of the appropriateness of people receiving significant sums of public funds and then potentially reapplying or being rehired. The legal advice given to me from central government in response to that query at the time was that, under European legislation, you could not, under any circumstances, prevent people from reapplying for a civilian-type position; that was the first piece of advice. The second piece of advice was that they thought that they could prevent people who had left the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) from reapplying to the PSNI for a period of five years. Those were the terms applied. Under the terms of the package, any officer taking severance from the Royal Ulster Constabulary was not permitted to reapply for a job as a constable with the Police Service of Northern Ireland for a period of five years. The lawyers believed that to be lawful, although there was a slight question mark over it. That is the legal advice that was given at the time. Even then, I was aware that

it would be perceived as an issue of public concern, from one side or the other, because of the use of funds and the reform issues that you referred to.

Mr McCartney: Some of the people who have been rehired are not subject to the ombudsman's accountability mechanisms. At the Policing Board meeting, you suggested that they were, but it transpires that they are not. The Chief Constable talked about openness and transparency. We were told that those people are accountable to the ombudsman, but it subsequently turns out that some of them are not. It is that type of statement that leads to the undermining of public and community confidence in not only the rehiring and retiring phenomenon but the whole structure of policing. We have to see that. When you, in your senior position, were in front of the Policing Board, you should have been in a position to give an answer that was not, in effect, misleading.

Mr Stewart: I do not believe that my response was misleading, and I do not think that I have been accurately referred to in that regard. What I did say was that there are certain people who are covered, under legislation, by the Police Ombudsman's regulations. For example, those involved in custody detention work and prisoner escort are covered by the Police Ombudsman's regulations. What I went on to say was that our expectation was that anybody working for us on a contracted basis would adhere to the highest standards of conduct, including the code of ethics, and would participate in investigations of the ombudsman when requested to do so. That was our expectation as a police service, and that is our expectation of our contractors; not that they will be working at a different level altogether or have a different standard of conduct from either police staff or police officers.

Mr McCartney: I am not talking about conduct; I am talking about being accountable to the ombudsman. "Being accountable to the ombudsman" has a different meaning from "conduct". I have the transcript in front of me. We were talking about associate PSNI staff — the retire/rehire staff. When you were asked whether you were saying that all the staff whom I mentioned earlier have to co-operate with the ombudsman, you answered, "Yes".

Mr Stewart: Yes.

Mr McCartney: It turns out that some of them do not. The ombudsman makes two recommendations in his report, which I am sure that you have seen. He believes that there are people who have been rehired, who are in front line services, along with other police officers, who are not accountable to the ombudsman. We have seen this played out in respect of public confidence in the ombudsman's office. This does not add to public confidence. Former members of the RUC with front line duties are not accountable to the ombudsman. However, at the Policing Board meeting, you said that they were.

Mr Stewart: What you read out is exactly what I have repeated, which is that we expected that they would be accountable to the ombudsman. If they are not prepared to co-operate, they will not be about the place. That is the point that I was trying to make. In respect of the managed service contract, if people do not adhere to our terms and conditions and expectations, we will simply have the managed service contractor remove them. It is as simple as that.

Mr McCartney: OK. If that is the case, why does the ombudsman need those two recommendations. He makes two recommendations that all people who are rehired should be subject to the ombudsman. If your statement is true, they would not be there unless they were. One of the two statements is wrong.

Mr Stewart: No. Not necessarily. I cannot answer the question about why the ombudsman made that recommendation. We as a command team —

Mr McCartney: He made it because, in his opinion, he does not believe that those people are accountable to him. He obviously made that statement for that reason.

Mr Stewart: Sorry; we as a command team have yet to consider and form a view on those particular recommendations from the ombudsman.

Mr McCartney: I will just read out, for the record, the two recommendations.
"In the public interest, any civilian staff operating directly in conjunction with Police Officers in the course of their policing functions should be brought within the remit of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland for the purposes of complaints against those personnel."
Recommendation 5 is critical:
"The Police Ombudsman should be given statutory power to recommend comparable disciplinary sanctions for designated civilians to those permitted for police officers."
That is a very clear statement. It says that those people are not accountable to the ombudsman.

Chief Constable Baggott: That is the difference between a legislative change that would bring police staff and contracted staff within the remit of the Police Ombudsman's investigative functions and duties. I put that back on your toes, Raymond, because that is a matter for the legislature here. It is not a matter for the Chief Constable. I respect the ombudsman's decision on that.

With regard to how we can manage the contract that I run through a private company, we have an expectation that people will comply with our code of ethics. I would like to build that more formally into the contract arrangements. As to people's conduct and how we can deal with them if they do not fulfil the expectation of complying with investigations, that is something that I would be very anxious to tighten.

The issue about whether the ombudsman can investigate somebody is a matter for the law change. If somebody breaks the law, whether they are police staff, a contracted member or a PSNI officer, they will be investigated with the full rule of law. There is no dispensation and no amnesty. People will be subject to a criminal investigation whether they are removed from the contract or not.

Mr McCartney: I am not saying or suggesting that. However, there is a history of retired RUC personnel not co-operating with the ombudsman. They are now being rehired into the PSNI and they find themselves in the exact same position, which is that they do not have to co-operate if they do not wish to. When a senior member of your staff was asked whether he was saying that all the staff that I mentioned earlier have to co-operate with the ombudsman, he said yes. I would have left that Policing Board meeting feeling that all those staff were accountable to the ombudsman, but it turns out that they are not.

Chief Constable Baggott: Let me deal with that. If there is a lack of clarity, I will apologise —

Mr McCartney: But there is no lack of clarity. To give him his dues, the word yes cannot be any clearer. There is no room for interpretation of the word yes.

Chief Constable Baggott: In fairness, Raymond, there was a much broader debate around this at the Policing Board where I clarified my views, and Joe has clarified his. What you have, in effect, done is taken a single line out. Let me be clear, if there is a lack of —

Mr McCartney: No, I have not taken a single line out, in fairness —

Chief Constable Baggott: Let me deal with it. I would like to clarify the position —

Mr McCartney: Allow me. I read out other commentary and I read the lead-in. I spoke to my colleagues on the Policing Board, who came away from that meeting and they were —

Chief Constable Baggott: Can I clarify my position on that as Chief Constable, and Joe has attempted his? If there was confusion round the words, that is a matter of apology. I am not afraid to say that on behalf of the organisation. However, what we are talking about here is an expectation in the organisation that people will co-operate with the ombudsman's investigations. That is my expectation as Chief Constable, and I know that it is the expectation of the members of the command team. Whether there is a legal right to force somebody to co-operate with an ombudsman's inquiry is a completely separate matter. That is a matter for the Human Rights Act and it is a matter of people's human rights. If we get into the debate of compellability, you then move into the question of the right of silence. It is not just about compellability; it is a right of silence. That is a debate between yourselves to achieve a political consensus around whether you should compel one group of people or another to co-operate with investigations. The compellability issue is wrapped up around human rights.

If I can tighten the contracts to make people accountable for the code of ethics, I would certainly like to do that. However, I am not sure that even the code of ethics will deal with a legal duty to co-operate with any investigation, because you are moving into much broader issues around the Human Rights Act and compliance and responsibilities.

Mr McCartney: I have a final point. A retired and rehired person was interviewed on the BBC. He was asked whether he was accountable to the Police Ombudsman, and he said that he was accountable to the company that employed him and only to it. I think that that is a sad state of affairs.

Chief Constable Baggott: I do not think that I am in huge disagreement with you around the fact that we have spoken about how we can improve the accountability of the code of ethics within the contracts, and that is something that we have been talking to the Policing Board about. Is it a sad state of affairs that I can end a contract within a day, rather than going through a complicated year-long disciplinary process? I think that there is an advantage in that. The reassurance on that is that, if someone commits criminal offences, it does not matter whether it is by an ombudsman or not; they will be investigated and brought before the courts.

Mr McCartney: It does not have to be a criminal offence. If someone is involved in a straightforward complaint to the ombudsman, and there is a witness who says that they will not co-operate, I think that that person should not be in your organisation. That is my position.

Chief Constable Baggott: To some degree, there is much more common ground than conflict between the political parties and ourselves on this matter. I do not think that we are, necessarily, speaking off the same page on this one. Thank you for the question; I appreciate it.

Mr Wells: Mr Baggott, you said that you are a relentless optimist. Is that based on the fact that you have been a Crystal Palace supporter for 30 years?

Chief Constable Baggott: Having seen Arsenal being taken apart last night, I am pleased that we did not get to the cup final.

Mr Wells: Following on with the questioning: I think that there is a public confidence issue here. It gives me, and others, a great deal of confidence that the skills that people had built up in the old RUC over many years can be reused, on a flexible basis, through your recruitment exercise. Is there the slightest bit of evidence to indicate that there have been any problems with the quality of work provided by those who have been brought in as civilian staff or their accountability to your officers? Have there been any problems on the ground?

Chief Constable Baggott: I will answer that in two ways. If I answer it in a shallow way, I am ignoring the confidence and accountability issues that have been, quite rightly, put before me —

Mr Wells: By a small number of people.

Chief Constable Baggott: But, they are very real issues. I think that there is a complex issue involved. Nobody wants to see the Patten process being broken. Nobody wants to see confidence being undermined. However, at the same time, we have to close the budget gap and be up to date with modern business practice. So, the issue is complex, and I hope that no one around the table feels that I have been anything other than respectful in dealing with it. I understand the complexity of the issue, but we have to be pragmatic. There are plans in place to reduce the number of associate staff, and, hopefully, we can build greater accountability into their contracts. It may be something that we can look forward on.

Do I have evidence that the people involved have been working without integrity? No. They are doing a number of specific jobs at the moment. They are acting under the authority of other people and their roles are clearly defined. If there were any evidence of lack of integrity, they would not be working for the PSNI. If criminal matters were involved, they would be investigated.

Mr Wells: What proportion of the officers serving with the PSNI at the moment are former Royal Ulster Constabulary officers?

Chief Constable Baggott: I think that we now have more colleagues who are PSNI and who have joined in the past 10 years than we have former RUC colleagues. The balance of the organisation has shifted.

Mr Wells: So, you could say that the balance up until recently has been about half and half.

Mr Stewart: Over 5,000 of the service's complement of 7,250 are people who have been recruited in the past 10 years.

Mr Wells: Equally, I will ask whether there has been the slightest hint of any variation in the quality of service or in accountability by those who are former RUC officers and those who come under the new dispensation.

Chief Constable Baggott: If you look at the complaints profile, you will see that a lot of the issues regarding behaviour relate to younger officers, junior service officers.

Mr Wells: So, the fears of re-engaging former RUC officers as civilian staff, given the controls that you have outlined, are not justified. There is no evidence of any problems in reality.

Chief Constable Baggott: I think that it is more complex. There are confidence issues, and a process called Patten that we have gone through, and we have to be cognisant of that because that has led us to where we are now. However, you are right as to whether I have evidence of malpractice. If I get such evidence, we will investigate it.

As regards outcomes across Northern Ireland, confidence is as high as it has been for many years. Crime is falling, serious crime is falling, and we are making real inroads in protecting the most vulnerable. I want to come back to that point because that is what we are about. It is about keeping people safe and raising confidence in policing while providing value for money. If I have to do things to try to improve accountability to develop even greater confidence, I am happy to do so. However, I will not operate beyond existing law. I do not have the gift, nor do I want the gift, of making choices that are ultra vires or outside current law. If the law needs to be changed, that is a debate that needs to be had within the Executive. My job is to be impartial on this.

Mr Wells: To be positive: I have had direct experience of your new system for keeping victims informed, and it has worked extremely well. Indeed, in one part of south Down, in an area in which the PSNI is not the most popular organisation, it has developed greater confidence amongst the community on ordinary crime — I am talking about burglaries, car crime, etc. There seems to be good news on the way as far as that is concerned, and I hope that that continues. The victims who I have been involved with were very pleasantly surprised.

On a totally different issue, the Minster of Justice, in response a to question from me in the Assembly, produced the remarkable statistic that 41% of all the arrests in Northern Ireland are drink-related or as the result of the abuse of alcohol. That is absolutely shocking when you think about it, and it explains why you as a force are so much busier at weekends and during festive periods than you are between Monday and Thursday. Given that, has the PSNI at any level, including you as Chief Constable, taken any view on unit pricing of alcohol? The Executive seem to be developing a strategy to try to make cheap drink less available, particularly at supermarkets. Cheap drink leads young people to be fuelled before they even get to nightclubs, which gives your officers a real headache with activities after the pubs and clubs close. Have you taken or will you take a view on that?

Chief Constable Baggott: I have a personal view, and, forgive me, I have not talked to colleagues about it. I think alcohol is one of the greatest threats to the future of young people. I would certainly support a higher degree of pricing, because people forget that alcohol is a deadly drug that is highly addictive. I do not know whether people round the table grew up with cider and beer, but, in the past 10 or 20 years, the difference has been the move from those to vodka and alcopops and a higher level of spirits. Drinking habits, the quality and the accessibility have changed. I would support pricing.

We need to be more joined up about how we tackle the big threats to our society beyond the politics. Forgive me, I am not making a political comment here, but, earlier, I spoke about disadvantaged neighbourhoods. We should make sure that the prioritisation of resources into the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods is based on the evidence of need. If we could do that and have long-term improvement plans of between five and 10 years, I think neighbourhoods and young people's opportunities would improve dramatically. It cannot be right that there are still areas, whether loyalist or republican, in which, where there is a police presence, there is almost an instinctive need to throw a petrol bomb at a police car. That is because there is not a joined-up plan to resolve health inequalities, social inequalities, transport inequalities, environmental inequalities and housing inequalities, and the same applies to policing.

I apply the same to alcohol. If we had a joined-up approach, probably led by health, where you would look at enforcement, pricing and the information and analysis of where the problems are and get the industry involved, I am absolutely sure that we could reduce the number of rapes dramatically, because alcohol and serious crime go together. We could reduce the number of road deaths even further, and we would certainly save tens of millions of pounds from a health bill that, undoubtedly, will cripple us in about 10 years' time if we do not do that.

Ms J McCann: You are very welcome. I will pick up on a couple of points, because most of the questions have already been answered. You must have mentioned accountability about 100 times during your presentation, so, obviously, you see that as a very important aspect of policing. I will pick up some of the points that my colleague Raymond brought up. Seán and Raymond raised the concern that there is not the same accountability for PSNI officers that there is for the civilian staff who have been rehired after having retired. We need a bit of clarity around that accountability, and we need to see where that accountability lies.

The BBC covered a story about someone who said clearly that he had received a lump sum payment of some £180,000 and a pension of £28,000 a year. He came back into a job and said clearly on the BBC that he was accountable to the company that employed him and only to it. Therefore, he was saying that he is not accountable to the Policing Board or the Police Ombudsman. I would like some clarity on that, particularly from you, Mr Stewart, because you were involved in that. As has been said, accountability is very important for public confidence, particularly when legacy issues are being investigated. It is very important, in this new dispensation of policing, that everybody in the community feels that they are a part of that and that their views are taken on board.

A very senior person now in the PSNI who was retired and rehired is advising on legacy issues, and he has publicly criticised the previous ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan's, definition of collusion. That type of thing does very little for public confidence. What are your comments on that?

I am particularly concerned about where accountability lies for those ex-RUC people who had retired and have now come back in. I cannot remember the phrase that you used to my colleague Seán, but you said that they are civilian staff. Where does that sit? Who are those people accountable to? Mr Stewart, you told the Policing Board something different. We need to clarify who is right. Is it the person who said it in the BBC report or is it you through what you said to the Policing Board? Can we have some clarity on that issue, please?

Chief Constable Baggott: Forgive me, Jennifer, I am not quite sure about your last point. You asked me three.

Ms J McCann: I asked only two. It was about the accountability of the people who retired and have been rehired. The second question was about the senior officer advising on the legacy issues, who publicly criticised Nuala O'Loan's definition of collusion.

Chief Constable Baggott: Thank you very much indeed. I will come to the latter point in a minute, because you are talking about a letter that I think was leaked into the public domain. Therefore, I am not sure whether it is appropriate to go into the detail of that letter. However, I will talk about the principle of it.

I need to clarify the first issue. Everybody who works for the PSNI, be they police staff, PSNI warranted officers or contracted staff, is accountable under the criminal law. If anybody commits offences, they will be investigated. Some of the figures that you have seen in the public domain recently about the number of PSNI officers who have been brought to account — in fact, some of the criticism is about the time that it is taking, which is not in my gift. You will see that we take a very robust approach to anybody who breaks the criminal law. There is no amnesty, no immunity, and no get-out-of-jail card for people — whoever they are — who break the law, and that needs to be clarified.

Ms J McCann: Can I just interject there? Are they accountable to the Police Ombudsman?

Chief Constable Baggott: There is a bit of confusion. You say, "accountable to the Police Ombudsman", but the ombudsman investigates matters. The ombudsman is not the law. You asked

whether those who committed a misconduct offence were investigated by the ombudsman. The answer to that is no. The answer to that is a contract. They can be removed under a contractual arrangement, which is far quicker. They can be dismissed within days, rather than weeks or months. So the counterargument as regards standards and ethics is that sometimes it is better to work through a private sector contract rather than have a lengthy, convoluted process of ombudsman's investigation. I will come back to that point.

I need to keep saying this: everybody is accountable to the rule of law. A breach of discipline, misconduct or behaviour that we did not like can be dealt with by ending the contract and removing the person, which is quicker and neater than an ombudsman's investigation. The ombudsman investigates. Nobody has a compellability under law to co-operate with an ombudsman's investigation. That can be changed. If you want to change that, you can change it. However, I suspect that the human rights of individuals will be a significant debate for the Executive. You enter into a whole range of European law. However, as Chief Constable, it is not my job to discuss that.

We need to be a bit careful as regards your second issue about a senior colleague. We are straying into an area. Letters written to the ombudsman on behalf of the PSNI in relation to draft reports where there may be a disagreement on the factual accuracy, the interpretation or the organisational response are quite legitimate. They comply with the principles laid down by Lord Chief Justice Salmon, which state that, if an organisation or individual is to be criticised, there is a right of reply. I would be very disappointed if we were not able to robustly challenge the ombusdman on different issues, either in terms of tone, fact or evidence. We would be in a much sorrier place if we thought the ombusdman or the Chief Constable was always right. Occasionally, we will have disagreements on that, but it is important to have the ability to challenge, be critical and, basically, ask, "Are you absolutely sure?" That is absolutely right. We do not write the ombudsman's final reports, but we have a right, under Lord Chief Justice Salmon's principles, to challenge, and that letter was written on behalf of the organisation.

Secondly, I think we need to be careful, because if you start questioning someone's integrity because they have written a letter or are in a senior position in an organisation without having any evidence of a breach of the criminal or disciplinary code, you are getting very much into the area of libel. I am nervous about this debate. I am very happy to have a debate about people's accountability and how we can enhance that, but I am very nervous when I am getting names of former police officers because of who they are or the job they have done, as opposed to anything they may have done wrong.

Ms J McCann: OK. Can I pick up on another point then? The five-year review of the Police Ombudsman was laid before the Assembly and then brought before this Committee, as you know. Paragraph 5·5 states:
"no such regulations exist in relation to…other civilian staff operating directly in conjunction with Police Officers in the course of their policing functions. In certain circumstances actions by such staff could have a direct effect on the exercise of a police duty or the conduct of a police enquiry."
That is very clearly saying that, at the moment, there is no such accountability. It strikes me that you have spent the past several hours talking about how important accountability is and everything else, but, in my view, there are areas that need a bit of clarification. It is very clear that, if the Police Ombudsman's report is saying this very clearly, there is no clarity on where the accountability lies in relation to the civilian staff who are operating within the PSNI currently and who have been retired and rehired, specifically because of public confidence.

Chief Constable Baggott: Well, I think I have just explained that to you, to be honest. The accountability, for everybody, is under the criminal law and the rule of law, and you have my absolute assurance that people who break the law or about whom there are allegations about breaches of criminal law will be investigated. Those facts will be presented to the Public Prosecution Service, which will make an independent decision about prosecution. The area on which we have common ground is around improving the system, and the reason why we have these reports is to challenge the system. Is there a political consensus or desire to change the legislation to bring both police and contracted staff under the remit of ombudsman's investigations? Forgive me for saying this, but that is not for me. I am the impartial Chief Constable; I operate within the law. These are political —

Ms J McCann: Can I ask Mr Stewart the same question?

Chief Constable Baggott: I will answer this, because I am the Chief Constable.

Ms J McCann: No. If you are saying it is not for you, maybe it a question that should be directed to Mr Stewart.

Chief Constable Baggott: It should not, because I am the Chief Constable, and I am making quite clear that my job is to apply the law and to be impartial. If changes need to be made to the law, that is a matter for legislation. Let me be very clear: if we can support and enhance accountability, I would be very happy to enter into that debate. However, I do not think it is right to keep putting pressure in relation to rehiring on the Chief Constable. What, in effect, you are in danger of doing is asking me to become involved in political policing by excluding people on the grounds of their background from an organisation that absolutely has to be compliant with European law. I have great sympathy with this debate, because I understand how complex it is. However, it is not something that you can hold me, or Joe Stewart, personally accountable for. If there was confusion in relation to an answer given at the Policing Board, I will be very clear about that: we can clarify that answer, and I apologise for that, and I know that Joe would hold with me on that. I cannot get involved in discussions that are beyond the law. It is not something that I want to do, because I want to be impartial.

Mr Eastwood: I had not intended to speak about this issue, given that it is largely one for the Policing Board; however, it has come up. You talked a lot about public confidence, and there has been talk about that from this side of the table and from yours. I know that you said that, because of employment law and European law, you cannot prevent people applying. However, surely, the issue of public confidence is not about preventing people applying; it is about actively seeking former members of the RUC. That is where the fault line is, and I think that that has been missed. Your appointed contractor went out and actively sought former members of the RUC. We heard through the media that many of them had no intention of reapplying to be involved in the Police Service. I think that that is where a lot of the issues of public confidence have come from.

Chief Constable Baggott: Again, let me be very clear about that: I said at the Policing Board that, if I have evidence of people leaving a job on the Friday and returning to the same job on the Monday, that does not feel good. It may be lawful, but it does not feel good.

I am sure that much of what has happened over the past 10 years is justified as regards the contract itself, its value for money and the need to deal with an organisation that is under immense change — and we should not lose sight of that. The numbers have come down significantly and they will reduce even further over the next year, and we will work on the accountability issues as far as we can.

I have been very clear in saying that I am not sure that we could stand over every case. Where cases are not justified in an organisation of great change, I will not sit here and defend them.

Mr S Anderson: Chief Constable, I have listened to this debate and where it has been going. I welcome the fact that you have given some clarification as to where you stand, as Chief Constable, in the employment of former RUC officers. I have to say that this is another opportunity to attack those officers. These men and women stood in defence of this country of ours against terrorism for 30-plus years. They are respectable, decent people, and they have every right to apply for employment whether or not they take a package. We are going to see something like this coming into the Prison Service in the very near future. I will leave the matter today with those comments.

Basil went ahead of me on the additional security budget that you talked about — £245 million over the four years. There was a comment that, if that money does not come forward again, it would maybe cause a significant risk to the service. Can you tell us where the risk would be if the money were not forthcoming? Did I pick up, in your answer to Basil, that you are not thinking about additional funds at the moment?

Chief Constable Baggott: I think that the risks would be twofold. First, I would have to prioritise where people are working against the article 2 imperative to protect life. Unfortunately, when it comes to attempts at mass murder, or the murder of people, that is where you have to put your resources. I suspect that that would inevitably result in me diminishing neighbourhood policing, which is something that I would fight to keep. To some degree, that money has been quite important in sustaining that level. Secondly, we use the money to deal with threats as they emerge. Sometimes, that involves the wise use of overtime; at other times it is about keeping people on the streets. I would be very nervous about not having the ability to step up and have an overt presence and do the things that we have to do to deal with emerging or very real threats.

There would be a very real risk to policing in the community and to people's safety if we are unable to sustain that. I do not want to start getting into a debate. We are not at that place; we are not at the precipice. This meeting, of itself, and the fact that we have a devolved Administration that is prepared to support policing is very encouraging. We are having debates now that we have never had before. We had a conference before Christmas where we had everybody chairing seminars on equality — I am sorry to use the word again — accountability, vulnerability and disadvantage. I came here in 2007 to the first conference and there was nowhere near that consensus. Over the next two or three years, I think that we will develop even greater consensus about the things that matter.
Some of that debate needs to be had quietly and privately rather than in the full glare of the media, and I think we could do more of that together. However, I think that it is right that I flag up the risks and make the case for greater budgetary freedom and for developing greater trust in the process. That will mean that we do not get to the point in 2014-15 where we are suddenly wondering where we will be able to lose 500 police officers, which we simply will not be able to.

Mr S Anderson: You talked about neighbourhood policing. ACC Jones is with us today, and he is tasked with rural policing. I do not want to go into specifics, but rural crime is a big issue at the moment. Will neighbourhood policing and rural policing suffer an impact? Rural crime is escalating at the moment, and it is all high-powered stuff with criminal gangs involved. Will that impact on the policing of rural areas? My colleague Stewart talked about police station closures, and I am a wee bit concerned about where budgets will be allocated for rural areas.

Assistant Chief Constable Jones: Every day we deal with risk, and the big process that we have been going through over the past couple of years is about putting our resources where the risk is. That shifts and moves. For example, who would have thought that we would have been dealing with modern-day slavery in the 21st century? We are having to be dynamic with some of those risks.

The situation with rural crime is worrying, and there have been various meetings about it, particularly in the north-east of the country. There is a problem with rural crime across the United Kingdom, and I have had meetings with the National Farmers' Union.

Rural crime bucks the trend, probably because it is seen as the next easy option. The majority of the extra 700 police officers went to the four rural districts that I am responsible for. I hasten to add that that was nothing to do with the fact that I ran the project. Rather, it was a recognition that it is not always about policing big cities and that we should ensure that local communities have the ability to contact the police in a way that helps them. We are looking closely at how we can develop that rural network, and we will look at things that colleagues across the water have done.

The other thing that I mentioned before is that the investment in modern technology means that our officers have an extra hour per shift to spend in the community. I do not want to rehash the conversation, it is something that I could talk about for hours, but buildings do not deliver policing;

police officers deliver policing. They need to be in the community to deliver that policing, and we are giving them the ability to do that. Not only are we giving them the modern technology and allowing them to do the vast majority of checks in the community rather than in police stations — bizarrely, somewhere in the region of 12 million e-mails go across that system when officers would have previously had to go back to the police station — but the public also access us in a far different way than ever before. We are trying to reflect those changes in society.

I understand the concerns about rural crime, and I have had previous meetings about it at a senior level. There are things that we can do, and we have, for example, linked in with the National Farmers' Union. However, the allocation of resources is, like in any large-scale organisation, a matter of some heated debate and discussion among colleagues, and other colleagues and I ask for resources at the same time. That is why we came up with the resource-to-risk process with the basic point of placing the focus in the community, through neighbourhood policing in particular, and at the serious end of the business. If you do not get the serious end of the business right, it will have a huge impact on community confidence. We have seen that in other police services where they got the balance wrong and gave all of their serious and organised crime detectives a uniform and put them into neighbourhood policing. As a result of that, gun crime and organised crime got out of control. That is not where we want to be, and we must achieve that balance.

Chief Constable Baggott: I want to comment on two things that Dave said. First, the advance in technology in the past couple of years has really put us on the front foot in neighbourhood policing. We now have police stations in police cars with mobile data and data transfer that allows us more time and the ability to deploy resources more effectively. Technology is helping us to sustain the policing in the community that everybody signs up to.

Secondly, three weeks ago we charged an individual with the theft and exporting of tractor or plant equipment to Lithuania. Returning to the point about the budget, I cannot afford not to police organised crime, but I also cannot afford not to police neighbourhoods. I have got to police the roads. We have to have sufficient back-up, with armed response to critical incidents. We have to deal with child abuse, historical enquiries, public protection units and rape cases. That is where technology, budgetary freedom and more focused partnerships are starting to give policing a greater potential than it has ever had in the past.

I am nervous, however, that, over the next three or four years, we may drop a piece of policing because, somehow, we have not been able to manage the totality of it within the budget. All of it keeps people safe, and that is where we have to keep the focus.

The Chairperson: No other member has indicated that he wants to speak, so I thank the Chief Constable —

Chief Constable Baggott: You promised me an hour and a half.
[Laughter.]
That will be the last time I trust the Chairman of the Justice Committee.

The Chairperson: I will have to work harder to build up trust.
[Laughter.]

Chief Constable Baggott: I thank you. It was a very robust scrutiny. I genuinely think that that is a huge sign of optimism for the future. We may not always agree on things, but the extent of common ground vastly outweighs any degree of controversy; and, even where there is controversy, we will work our way through it. You have my utter reassurance that we will continue to work within the rule of law and we will concentrate on keeping people safe, whoever they are. If we can move away, over time, to

a far greater degree of normal policing — and by that I mean, doing away with the security apparatus — no one will be more delighted than me and my colleagues around the table.

The Chairperson: Thank you for your time.