An update from
Police Service Northern Ireland

September 2012

Responding to serious public disorder
Although the majority of the summer months passed over peacefully with only a few incidents of isolated but serious public disorder, the beginning of September once again witnessed tensions and frustrations spill over into violence in our community.

Speaking at the Policing Board on Thursday 6th September, the Chief Constable repeated his desire to see a more collective, long-term plan across a range of agencies to increase the resilience of those communities that suffer the most.

The Chief Constable sees the Police Service as one partner in a collective approach to the causes of violence. Keeping communities safe requires a joined up, coordinated plan which increases the resilience of local communities and addresses concerns arising from a range of issues, such as isolation, vulnerability, a lack of opportunity, sectarianism, racism or anti social behaviour – many of which are beyond the remit of policing alone.

Resources are not finite and at a time of reduced budgets decisions have to be made regarding their allocation across an ever expanding need of policing issues. There is now a greater need than ever for agencies to work in partnership to tackle underlying social issues. The Police Service has a role to play and will continue to work with the Justice Minister, the wider Executive; public agencies and the private and voluntary sectors for a strategic long term plan.

Public disorder investigation update
Investigations are ongoing in relation to the public disorder which took place on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th of September in North Belfast. At the time of publication, the latest details on arrests are:

2nd September 2012:
• 1 person arrested and charged
• Age 17 years old

3rd September 2012:
• 7 people arrested (5 charged; 1 released pending report; 1 released on bail pending further enquiries)
• Ages of those arrested ranged from 15 years old to 45 years old

4th September 2012:
• 6 people arrested (1 charged; 5 released on bail pending further inquiries)
• Ages ranged from 15 years old – 23 years old

Charges included: riotous assembly; provocative conduct; resisting arrest; assault on police; possession of an offensive weapon; assault occasioning actual bodily harm.

Investigation of sexual violence
Investigation of all sexual violence is one of the most important roles for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Sexual violence and abuse has a devastating impact on victims regardless of age, as well as their friends, families and wider society. These crimes violate the basic right of all men, women and children who should be treated with dignity and respect and to live without fear. The Police Service respects and responds to the most vulnerable in our society who, along with partner agencies, aim to address significant risk around the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

Rape Crime Unit
The Rape Crime Unit was established in April 2008 following a period of consultation within the organisation, external consultation with other stakeholders in line with best practice and current developments nationally. The function of the Rape Crime Unit is to provide a professional service to the victims of serious sexual assault including rape, and to conduct a thorough and professional investigation. The investigation of rape presents unique challenges to investigators. These challenges manifest themselves in the complex nature of rape and in dealing with victims of serious sexual assault. The role of all staff in these investigations is both demanding and rewarding. Staff require specific skills and competencies in order to perform the role effectively. The RCU provides an on-call response day and night, across Northern Ireland. There are three RCUs, located at Ladas Drive, Belfast, Mahon Road, Portadown and Ballymena.

Detectives attached to the RCU investigate all stranger rapes, association rapes and serious sexual assault as defined by the Association of Chief Police Officer guidelines. All officers within the units are trained to a high level in a number of specialist areas.

Child Internet Protection Team
The Child Internet Protection Team (CIPT) takes the Service’s lead on intelligence led operations against those who utilise the internet and other technologies to offend against children or other vulnerable persons. Intelligence and the growth of Information
Technology have seen the area of internet offending increase significantly.

The role of the CIPT is to exploit intelligence and conduct investigations into those matters identified by National and International Law Enforcement agencies including the Police Service, Child Exploitation and On-line Protection, Federal Bureau of Investigation and Interpol. This intelligence may indicate a person within Northern Ireland has been engaged in a criminal offence of the internet or has displayed behaviour that indicates they may have a sexual interest in children.

CIPT investigates other crimes such as sexual conduct towards a child, meeting a child following sexual grooming and have conducted a number of successful investigations to identify victims whose images have been posted on the Internet. The detection of offenders in this area of work often prevents a contact sexual offence taking place. To effectively use the resources available the team focuses on the most serious cases, developing methods of detection and sources of intelligence.

Public Protection Unit
The Public Protection Units (PPU) was established in April 2008 following a period of consultation within the organisation, external consultation with other stakeholders and in line with current developments nationally and good practice.

Public Protection Units are established in every District Command Unit. They specialise in child protection, domestic abuse, sexual and violent offender management and missing and vulnerable persons. PPUs also help to establish links that identify criminal or other behaviour that could lead to, for example, a serious domestic assault or child abuse. They also provide specialist knowledge and investigative skills to prevent and detect crime and assist other front line officers. A key objective is the early identification of incidents, which could lead to more serious crime. Child abuse investigation teams within PPUs deal with all child protection issues except cases or rape against children committed by strangers. This is investigated by the Rape Crime Unit.

Sexual Assault Referral Centre
A Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) is being built at Antrim Area Hospital for adults and children who have been raped or sexually assaulted. This is a Ministerial priority for the Inter Ministerial Group of Domestic and Sexual Violence and the single most significant outcome from the Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy. Capital investment has been committed by Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Police Service. Building work commenced in October 2011, with the centre due to become operational from early 2013.

The SARC is a facility where both female and male victims (including children) of rape and serious sexual assault can receive medical care, counselling and have the opportunity, if they choose, to assist the police investigation, including undergoing a forensic examination. A SARC can contribute to and enhance criminal investigation while at the same time enabling health providers and support workers to access victims in an appropriate environment. This takes place within a supportive framework and rapid response time-frame.
**Civility and professionalism of police**

Everyone in Northern Ireland, no matter what community, have constitutional rights. Police officers have a fundamental duty to respect human rights and are expected to work with effectiveness, efficiency, fairness, impartiality and integrity between one another within the Police Service, with those from partnership and other agencies and with individuals and groups within society.

Effective policing means protecting human rights and there should be no conflict between the two. The Police Service’s Code of Ethics clearly identifies what behaviours are acceptable for officers; it provides an ethical framework for their decisions and actions.

**Falling below Code of Ethics standards**

All police officers are expected to adhere to the highest standards of behaviour that are outlined in the Police Service’s Code of Ethics. Where any Police Officer fails to do so they can expect to be subject to a robust and thorough investigation by either the S4- Anti Corruption and Vetting Unit or S5 - Discipline (together, previously known as the Professional Standards Department), both coming under the remit of the newly formed Service Improvement Department.

Dependent on the nature of the allegation, a number of actions can be taken, including starting a criminal investigation, a misconduct investigation or both a criminal and misconduct investigation. However, where there has been a grave allegation of criminal behaviour or inappropriate conduct by an officer, the officer can be suspended from duty pending the outcome of an investigation.

**Suspension**

The decision to suspend an officer from duty is not taken lightly but only after detailed consideration of the information available at the time, against set criteria. This includes:

- the nature and seriousness of the alleged action of the individual;
- the strength of evidence;
- the public interest;
- the reputation of the Police Service;
- the potential impact on public confidence.

When officers are suspended, this is often ‘on full pay’; an act that is dictated and applied using existing statutory police regulations (Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2005).

There are two exceptions to officers being suspended on full pay:

1. If a police officer has been remanded in custody or gaoled.
2. If a Police Officers whereabouts are unknown to the Chief Constable.

A supplementary issue to the fact that officers are suspended on full pay is the length of
time that suspensions, generally, take to progress to conclusion. It is acknowledged that
average suspension lengths can appear to be prolonged. Part of the reason for this is
contained in the law surrounding Police Conduct Regulations 2000, that state where an
officer is suspended at the start of a criminal investigation, the criminal investigation
(which includes any appearance at Court and any subsequent appeal against conviction
or sentence) must all take place before any misconduct investigation is progressed.

The Police Service takes its responsibility to the public extremely seriously and officers’
behaviour and actions are therefore held to a very high level of accountability both on
and off duty. At present, new Police Misconduct regulations are currently being
developed by the Department of Justice for Northern Ireland. One of the key features
will be that misconduct procedures will not usually have to await the outcome of related
criminal proceedings. This means that as soon as these new regulations are in place,
lengthy suspensions should reduce considerably.

Distraction Burglaries
As the summer is closing to an end and with days and daylight hours becoming shorter it
is a timely reminder for householders to exercise caution following a number of recent
distraction burglaries involving bogus callers.

To assist in preventing this type of crime please find below is a quick ‘crime prevention’
checklist:

- Think before opening the door – Use the chain and spy hole or look out of the
  window to see if the caller is known you. Make sure your back doors and windows
  are locked.

- Ask callers for proof of identity. Genuine callers should carry a photographic
  identification card. Check this carefully. If you are unsure, telephone Quick Check
  on the 24/7 freephone 0800 013 22 90.

- Quick Check has direct lines to the main utility suppliers (gas, water, electricity
  etc) and will quickly confirm if the caller works for them. If the answer is
  'No', Quick Check will contact the police.

- Beware of callers who attempt to distract you by claiming that they have seen
  something unusual in your rear garden or somewhere that may encourage you to
  leave your house - they may have an accomplice who is waiting to act upon this
  distraction.

- If you are not convinced of the identity of the caller, don’t let them in. Ask the
  caller to come back later and arrange for a friend, relative or neighbour to be with
  you when they return.

- If you receive a phone call from an unknown caller and they request your details,
  don’t disclose them. Instead ask the caller for their details and tell them you will
phone them back. If you are in any way suspicious – seek further advice.

Anyone who would like further crime prevention advice on this or any other subject should contact their local police on 0845 600 8000 and ask to speak to a Crime Prevention Officer.