



Northern Ireland Audit Office

MEDIA RELEASE

Reducing costs in the PSNI

Police services across the UK have experienced a decade of reduced funding. The PSNI's budget has fallen by more than £200 million in real terms, while demand has increased and the nature of crime has changed significantly. If the PSNI is to continue to manage in these circumstances, it has to adopt a more strategic approach to reducing costs. This is the conclusion of a report published today (Tuesday 21 April) by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Kieran Donnelly.

Mr Donnelly said, *'Despite significant cuts; a reducing headcount; and increasing demands crime outcome rates and confidence in the PSNI have remained stable. However, the focus on short term cost reductions means that it has been storing up problems for the future. Staff absence is at an all-time high and there is a backlog of building maintenance which will need £27 million to deal with. It is essential that PSNI manages its budget in a long term strategic way to address the issues that have been created as a result of top-slicing budgets over the last nine years'*.

In a bid to manage costs, the PSNI introduced a methodology called Priority Based Resourcing, (PBR). It was intended that this would identify quick wins to help ease financial pressures and result in a new approach to allocating resources in the longer term.

PBR did not, however, deliver the anticipated strategic change and the focus turned very quickly to reducing headcount. The number of police officers fell by 7% and staff numbers by 5%. Officers have come under pressure to maintain services: staff absence has increased from an average of 8 days in 2010-11 to 14 days in 2018-19. At the same time the number of officers on restricted duties has more than doubled.

The PSNI plans to implement a new efficiency programme with a different approach. It recognises the need to learn from the experience gained during 2015 to 2019.

Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. The purpose of this review is to assess the effectiveness of Priority Based Resourcing as a sustainable cost reduction process. The report provides an assessment on the quality of that process, but does not provide a comprehensive assessment on the current overall sustainability of policing in Northern Ireland.
3. The report is available on the Audit Office website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk. The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on Tuesday 28 April 2020.
4. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Neil Gray (028 9025 4345) or Suzanne Walsh (028 9025 1003).