



26.09.09 Briefing note Police Federation for Northern Ireland

Background: the PFNI represents 9,000 officers from the rank of constable to chief inspector; 950 of the officers are part-time. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is armed for its own protection and is currently under severe threat from dissident republican terrorists. Over the past year if every attack had succeeded to its maximum destruction over 40 officers would have been killed. Attacks on officers, some of whom were off-duty include car booby traps, shootings, rocket propelled grenades and blast bombs.

1. International Policing experience

The PSNI had some 80 officers deployed in Bosnia. The officers were valued because of their experience of policing divided communities gained over the past 30 years. A few senior ex-PSNI officers are currently in Iraq. Regrettably all overseas deployments were recalled as they were required for Northern Ireland service. We see this as a lost opportunity to showcase the excellence of the PSNI. We also feel that the officers brought useful experience back to the service.

The other issues raised under this heading therefore do not require comment.

2. Affiliate Report

Less lethal options

The Chief Constable of the PSNI was obliged to decide unilaterally on a first distribution of 12 tasers. One has already been fired to good effect. However the Chief Constable's decision is being challenged in the courts by lawyers acting for an unnamed child, a device to get legal aid for the case. The Federation would like tasers on general issue but are mindful of the potential undermining of our argument to retain personal weapons.

2 Tier policing/civilianisation

The PSNI does not operate a formal 2-tier policing system. As well as 7,500 regular officers the PSNI also employs 280 full-time reserve officers whose service is being phased out. They were originally part of a reserve force of 3,500 officers were recruited for security duties but gradually they took on the full range of police duties although they were never offered a rank structure. The force still has 950 part-time officers who would work only a few hours a week largely providing a neighbourhood/community presence.

A decision to recruit 400 Police Community Support Officers (as in the rest of the UK) was reversed by the Policing Board through lack of money. The Federation view is that Northern Ireland would not be safe in many areas for PCSOs to operate. (TV licensing evasion is rife in Northern Ireland and until very recently traffic wardens had been unable to operate in parts of West Belfast.

Other areas of concern

There is a serious proposal to downsize the PSNI to 6,028 commencing in 2010. Given the downsizing to date from 13,500 to 7,500 regular officers we see serious difficulties in loss of corporate memory and diminished career opportunities deterring recruitment.

We have also just commented publicly on a landmark health and safety report which criticised the PSNI handling of a riot by the delay in authorising the firing of impact rounds until injuries were sustained (105 injured, 5 subsequently discharged from the force through injury and 12 suffering from PTSD). The report questioned the understanding of management as to what their health and safety obligations were.

Policing and criminal justice powers are due to be devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive (as the Government is known). The Federation fears the eventual loss of national pay bargaining and the introduction of regionalisation of police pay driven down by local market forces.

A vital court decision is due shortly on our PTSD claim taken as a class action on behalf of 5,000 serving and retired officers.

Proposed change to the rules for injury on duty will exclude travel to and from work or training.

Prepared
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