



Department of  
**Justice**

---

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

---

Männystrie O tha Laa

---

[www.justice-ni.gov.uk](http://www.justice-ni.gov.uk)

**INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE  
NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING  
BOARD – DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSE**

## **FOREWORD**

In September 2024, I commissioned an Independent Review of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

At the time, I made clear that the Review would examine the Board's statutory functions and the extent to which it holds the Police Service of Northern Ireland to account, alongside its wider roles, responsibilities and working practices. I also committed that the exercise would be tightly focused and delivered in a timely manner. The Review has now concluded.

I want to place on record my sincere thanks to Paul Sweeney, Independent Reviewer, and Dr John Topping, Independent Expert Adviser, for the thoroughness, professionalism and clarity they brought to this work. They engaged widely, listened carefully and have produced a thoughtful and balanced report that makes a constructive contribution to the future of policing governance in Northern Ireland.

This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of both the Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. These institutions were created to deliver a new beginning for policing and accountability. Over the past quarter century, they have played a vital role in embedding policing by consent and strengthening public confidence across our communities. It is right, therefore, that we take time to reflect on how those arrangements are working today and how they can continue to evolve.

The Review confirms strong support for the continuation of the Board in its current statutory form. It does not recommend structural reform. Instead, it identifies practical measures to enhance the Board's effectiveness and standing, clarify roles, strengthen strategic focus and reinforce good governance.

In considering the recommendations, I have been guided by a number of principles: respect for independence and the need for proportionality in the current fiscal context. Not every recommendation will require legislative change or new structures; in many cases, improvement can, and should, be delivered within the existing framework.

Accordingly, I have adopted a proportionate approach to implementation. A number of recommendations have been accepted, or accepted in principle, and will be progressed by the Board and the PSNI as appropriate. Monitoring will take place through established sponsor arrangements and Tripartite engagement, ensuring oversight remains strategic and outcome-focused rather than adding unnecessary layers of governance.

The status assigned to each recommendation, together with the Department's rationale, is set out in the table at **Appendix A**. A small number of recommendations require further consideration in light of legislative or resource implications. Only one recommendation has been rejected outright, where legislative change to appointment arrangements was not considered necessary. In all other respects, the response seeks to support steady and cumulative improvement within the existing statutory framework.

The Review should not be seen as an end point, but as part of the continuing evolution of policing governance in Northern Ireland - consolidating strengths, addressing areas for improvement and ensuring that the institutions established almost 25 years ago remain resilient, credible and fit for the future.

**Naomi Long MLA**  
**Minister of Justice**

**INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD: DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Department has carefully considered each of the Review’s recommendations in light of the statutory framework, principles of operational independence, proportionality, resource implications and existing oversight arrangements. The position set out below reflects that assessment.

No	Strategic Theme	Recommendation	Accept/ Accept in Principle/ Partially Accept/ Not Accepted/To be considered further	DoJ comment
1	Continuation of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.	Virtually unanimous support for the continuation of the NIPB in its current form. However, there is scope to enhance the effectiveness and standing of the Board.	<b>ACCEPT</b>	The Department welcomes the Review’s finding of strong support for the continuation of the Board in its current statutory form.
2	The Culture of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.	The real or perceived dominant political culture of the Board is impeding the maturation of collective responsibility, cohesion, common purpose and corpocracy within the Board.	<b>ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE</b>	The Department recognises the importance of collective responsibility, cohesion and effective corporate governance. While fully acknowledging the commitment and contribution of both independent and political members, there is merit in the Board reflecting on its internal culture and operating practices where this would enhance effectiveness and public confidence.  Matters of internal governance remain within the Board’s statutory independence.

3	Appointment of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson	<p>The positions of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson should be subject to a bespoke public appointment process.</p> <p>The appointments should be made by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly with the Justice Minister.</p>	<p><b>TO BE CONSIDERED FURTHER.</b></p> <p><b>NOT ACCEPTED</b></p>	<p>Any change to the appointment process would require amendment to primary legislation. Given the constraints of the current mandate, it is not feasible to progress such changes at this time. The Department remains open to reviewing the appointment process for the Chair and Vice Chair in the future to ensure transparency and public confidence.</p> <p>Under the existing statutory framework, the Justice Minister appoints independent Board members following consultation with the First Minister and deputy First Minister. This provides appropriate Executive involvement while maintaining clear ministerial accountability.</p> <p>The Department does not consider that the First Minister and deputy First Minister should have a joint appointing role in respect of the Chair and Vice Chair. Regardless of whether alternative appointment mechanisms are considered in future, the Department's position is that responsibility for appointment should rest with the Minister of Justice.</p>
4	The modus operandi of the Northern Ireland Policing Board	The Board has an excessive workload. This level of intensity is often at the expense of sustained follow-up, strategic focus and direction, and achieving tangible outcomes. The Board needs to shift towards a leaner and smarter operating model of "less is more".	<b>ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE</b>	<p>Recommendations 4 and 5 have been considered together.</p> <p>The Board is responsible for determining how it organises and discharges its statutory functions. The issues highlighted – including delivery of the Policing Plan, the sustainability of the PSNI service operating model and the transformation programme – are clearly central to the Board's oversight responsibilities. The Department would expect these matters to remain key areas of focus.</p>
5	The modus operandi of the Northern Ireland Policing Board	The Board needs to focus on strategic issues rather than day-to-day operations. It should have a relentless strategic focus on:	<b>ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE</b>	The Department also supports proportionate and streamlined governance arrangements. In that context, the Board and the PSNI should consider how their respective structures and reporting arrangements align, in order to promote clarity, reduce duplication and support effective and streamlined oversight.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery of the Policing Plan and related performance framework;</li> <li>• The PSNI service operating model and related budget.</li> <li>• The PSNI transformation programme.</li> <li>• A small number of strategic thematic issues.</li> </ul>		
6	The Definition and Management of Organisational Boundaries and Respective Roles and Functions. Drawing on Recent Experience, Including but not Limited to, the Scofield Judgement.	Incidents such as those addressed in the Scofield judgement are perceived to 'repoliticise policing'. To mitigate the impact of any future high profile public incidents, no Board Member or employee should insert their presence in a real time police critical incident or 'red flag' operation, ongoing investigations, or extant judicial proceedings. Board Members hold the Chief Constable to account "after the fact".	<b>ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE</b>	<p>Recommendations 6 and 7 have been considered together.</p> <p>The Department supports clear delineation between oversight and operational policing.</p>
7	The Definition and Management of Organisational Boundaries and Respective Roles and Functions. Drawing on Recent Experience, Including but not Limited to, the Scofield Judgement.	To safeguard the principle of the operational independence of the Chief Constable and ensure there is clarity, mutual understanding and respect for roles, responsibilities and boundaries, the Board, working together with the Chief Constable should formulate a "Policing Protocol".	<b>TO BE CONSIDERED FURTHER</b>	<p>The Department considers that the statutory framework already provides clarity regarding roles and operational independence. Introducing a formal Protocol would likely require legislative underpinning and is not considered proportionate at this stage, particularly given capacity constraints.</p> <p>Dialogue on roles and boundaries can continue within existing statutory and governance arrangements and may be further developed as part of the Partnership Agreement process.</p>

8	Tripartite Arrangements.	The tripartite of the NIPB, the PSNI, and the DOJ should be subject to a new Partnership Agreement Framework.	<b>ACCEPT</b>	<p>The Department agrees that the development of a Partnership Agreement would strengthen clarity of roles, expectations and collaborative working arrangements.</p> <p>Work is ongoing through Tripartite engagement to progress this and is expected to conclude during 2026.</p>
9	Tripartite Arrangements.	The Board should redefine its relationship with the PSNI SET to engender a more mature relationship based on mutual respect, openness, transparency and purpose. An executive/non-executive model where the Board constructively challenges and supports the Service Executive Team.	<b>ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE</b>	The Department supports constructive challenge and mature working relationships between the Board and the PSNI Service Executive Team. The precise model of engagement is a matter for the Board and the Chief Constable.
10	Tripartite Arrangements.	To enhance the Board's capacity to ensure that policing is delivered in an efficient and effective manner, the Board should appoint an independent validator to assess the efficacy of the PSNI service operating model and transformation programme.	<b>TO BE CONSIDERED FURTHER.</b>	<p>The PSNI is already subject to robust and independent scrutiny through statutory inspection bodies and audit arrangements. Introducing an additional independent validator would risk duplication and impose further resource pressures without clear evidence of added benefit.</p> <p>The Department does not consider this proportionate at present.</p>
11	Tripartite Arrangements.	In the medium-term, the NIPB in conjunction with the Chief Constable, should commission an independent assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the PSNI,	<b>TO BE CONSIDERED FURTHER</b>	<p>Existing statutory inspection and oversight mechanisms, including the Board, provide appropriate assurance regarding efficiency and effectiveness.</p> <p>Such an assessment would also require the support and cooperation of the Tripartite partners. At a time when the</p>

		taking into account the particular policing context of Northern Ireland.		PSNI is focused on rebuilding workforce levels, the Department does not consider that initiating a further independent review of this nature is necessary or proportionate at this time.
12	The Scope to Rationalise Scrutiny Arrangements.	There should be a rationalisation of the outstanding recommendations from previous scrutiny reports on the PSNI. This will ensure that oversight and inspection of the PSNI is minimised to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication of effort.	<b>TO BE CONSIDERED FURTHER</b>	<p>The Department recognises the importance of minimising duplication and ensuring that oversight and inspection arrangements are streamlined and outcome focused.</p> <p>There are established independent inspection and audit bodies with statutory roles in scrutinising policing in Northern Ireland. Any consideration of rationalisation of outstanding recommendations requires collaborative engagement with the relevant bodies.</p>
13	Administration of the PSNI Injury on Duty Scheme and Related Regulations.	There needs to be a prioritisation of the necessary legislative amendments to enable the administration of the injury on duty and ill health retirement schemes to transfer from the NIPB to the PSNI.	<b>ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE</b>	The Department acknowledges the rationale for transferring these administrative functions to the PSNI. Implementation would require legislative amendment and detailed operational planning. Progress will depend on continued and sustained tripartite working on the issues to be considered.
14	The role of the Northern Ireland Policing Board as an Employer.	In fulfilment of their role as an employer, the NIPB should formulate a scheme of delegation detailing the employment arrangements between the Board and the Chief Constable, along with the employment arrangements delegated to the Chief Constable in respect of the PSNI Service Executive Team.	<b>ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE</b>	Clarification of delegated employment responsibilities between the Board and the Chief Constable is consistent with good governance practice. The Department notes that existing arrangements function effectively but supports further clarity where required. The Department will engage as appropriate to ensure consistency with the statutory framework and wider policing governance arrangements.

15	Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Policing Board: Grading the Post.	The post of Chief Executive of the NIPB should be reinstated to the original Grade 3 level equivalent in the NI Civil Service.	<b>ACCEPT IN PRINCIPLE</b>	The grading of the Chief Executive is a matter for the Board within applicable public sector pay policy and affordability constraints.
16	Advocacy and Support for Policing: The Role of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.	All sections of society have an important role to play in maintaining and intensifying public support for policing. The NIPB should assert its good authority in advocating and supporting policing with the community, especially within communities where trust in policing has been historically low.	<b>ACCEPT</b>	<p>The Department agrees that the Board has an important role in advocating for and supporting policing across all sections of society, particularly in communities where trust in policing has historically been low.</p> <p>It is recognised that strengthening public confidence in policing is a shared responsibility. While roles are distinct within the statutory framework, the Department, the Board and the PSNI each have clear responsibilities in promoting accountability, transparency and community confidence. The Board's advocacy function is an important element of that wider leadership responsibility.</p>
17	Northern Ireland Policing Board Confidentiality.	Observing confidentiality within the NIPB is of paramount importance.	<b>ACCEPT</b>	<p>Maintaining confidentiality within the Policing Board is essential to effective governance and to sustaining trust between oversight and operational partners.</p> <p>The Department recognises that the Code of Conduct is a matter for the Board. Should the Board undertake a review of its Code of Conduct, the Department is committed to working constructively with the Board to support clarity, transparency and public confidence.</p>
18	Northern Ireland Policing Board Development.	The Policing Board needs to schedule time to pause and reflect – to 'look up and out' and to 're-set and re-boot'. In keeping with good practice, this will require a greater emphasis on Board development processes and self-assessment.	<b>ACCEPT</b>	The Department supports periodic reflection, development and self-assessment as elements of good governance practice. While development activity falls primarily within the Board's statutory remit, the Department considers that this work should be supported through the Partnership Agreement framework and ongoing Tripartite engagement.

