

Policing the future

As the Police Oversight Commissioner prepares his last report into the Patten recommendations, the time would seem ripe for an analysis of how policing change has been handled in Northern Ireland – what has been achieved and what remains to be done. The decision by the Policing Board and the PSNI to hold a major policing conference 20-22 February is therefore very timely, and its title “Policing the Future” is both exciting and very challenging.

However, there are some problems in the organising of the event to date, and which point to even more substantive issues needing to be addressed. Patten said *“policing is a matter for the whole community, not something that the community leaves to the police to do...policing should be a collective community responsibility”* (para 1.16). As one of the symbols of this underlying concept, Patten said, when proposing the creation of the civic oversight body, *“the title Policing Board is deliberate. We see the role of the new body going beyond supervision of the police service itself, extending to the wider issues of policing and the contributions that people and organisations other than the police can make towards public safety”* (para 6.10).

Given this context, the initial conference planning left a lot to be desired. Firstly, the registration fee was set at £600+VAT. There were reductions for community and voluntary sector groups, and for early registration, but the very cheapest rate would still have amounted to more than £300. This was clearly prohibitive for most community and voluntary groups. Surely the organisers realised that it would be difficult for anyone other than public sector agencies (registration fees paid thanks to the tax-payer), and foreign dignitaries, to be willing or able to pay such fees. Thankfully, the absence of registrations, and complaints from groups like CAJ, have led the Board to open up a number of free places in the last few days. Unfortunately, the wrong signals had already been given about the priority accorded to community involvement.

Of course, international conferences do tend to run up costs, and it may seem difficult to get the balance right between external speakers and local participation. However, the “international” nature of this conference seemed to amount essentially to extensive representation from senior US police chiefs. There was little or no representation from Canada or Europe. The police

experience of the Council of Europe or the UN was also entirely missing initially. Improvements in the early line-up are underway, but why did the early planning allow the US policing experience to predominate over any other insights?

It is obviously within the rights of the PSNI and Policing Board to organise an event for police chiefs to talk to each other. What is problematic is the hybrid conference that was on offer. Billed as international - but very US-centric; Billed as “policing” the future, it essentially focused on “the police” of the future. It seems to want to involve the community, but set a prohibitive registration fee, and had very little community representation amongst the speakers.

A fundamental flaw in the planning was the failure to engage with the community. Thankfully, that oversight is now being actively addressed, but it is difficult to know if they damage can be rectified at this late stage. More worrying is the fact that so long into the implementation of Patten, a key building block of “policing with the community” is still not naturally embedded with either the PSNI or the Policing Board.

This Just News edition is entirely focused on policing and some of the remaining challenges. It also is timely since it may prove a useful contribution to the conference debates, and certainly raises issues that CAJ will, if given the opportunity, pursue at the event, in fringe meetings, and in subsequent follow-up events. For example, why is training still so problematic? Why are nearly three times as many Catholic recruits as Protestant recruits leaving the PSNI? What is the future learning from the Police Ombudsman’s recent revelations about collusion? What is the experience of those on the ground on both sides of the community?

These are all topics that need to be addressed in any debate billed as “policing the future”.

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Policing from a con

The editorial team asked a number of community groups to write short commentaries about their experiences of policing. Tight printing deadlines made it difficult for some to contribute but we have included below an article by a community worker in the Lisburn area, and two community workers in north Belfast.

Policing from a loyalist community worker's perspective

Hard fought civil liberties can easily be eroded through the state's lack of accountability. Society is based upon sets of rules and laws that all are expected to live by, and which ensure that everyone's rights are protected. Most people believe that democracies require a police force to protect the majority against those who would infringe upon the working rules and laws of society. Police forces themselves are subject to the law, or should be, and therefore they should be monitored very closely to protect the rights of all individuals and guard against injustices.

Northern Ireland emerging from over thirty years of conflict has witnessed more than its fair share of police personnel abusing their power. The latest Police Ombudsman's report linking RUC personnel to collusion in murders is possibly one of the worst official criticisms to be levelled against that force. Can the mistakes of the past be made again? Can the excesses of a police force once more see justice denied and the rights of individuals negated?

The experiences of some areas of Northern Ireland suggest that the mistakes of the past can be re-visited unless there is continuous monitoring of police activities. Let us just take the example of what is happening in disadvantaged areas in the City of Lisburn.

Last year women from housing estates across Lisburn united in a stand against the drug dealers who were openly terrorising them in their areas. As a result of the high media profile campaign, Lisburn District Command Unit was forced to address the community's needs, and for the first time many of us experienced a more progressive style of policing which addressed community concerns in a genuine, thoughtful and holistic way.

Police tactics for seeking information

However it appeared that some officers had difficulty accepting this new policing style. Since last March, there has been an unprecedented number of approaches made

to people seeking general information about their communities. Most of these approaches involved offers of dropping charges (for example, charges relating to driving offences), in return for general information. Other approaches involved offering visibly large forms of cash (although this was subsequently denied by the officers to the Police Ombudsman). Most worrying is the increase in approaches to vulnerable adults and to children to become informers.

House Raids

Another draconian measure that is apparently on the increase in recent months in these same disadvantaged areas is the return to early morning house raids. These are now quite common and occur before five o'clock in the morning. One example of this happened to two Eastern European men who had been victims of a racist attack.

Community representatives had been supporting them following the attack and had expressed concern that the police had not arranged to take a statement. The following day when a solicitor was arranged to accompany them to Lisburn Police Station to make their witness statements, it was discovered that they had been arrested at five o'clock that very morning. They were questioned some ten hours later and then released on their own bail. Later all charges were dropped.

The question arises – are these early morning raids against the most vulnerable in our community – aimed at improving community safety – or is it an abuse of power?

New Challenges

The increase in powers given to the police by the Blair government – has presented new challenges to those working in the community.

The acceptance of the concept of "support for the police" raises particular concerns within the loyalist community in which I work, since there is almost a sense that we should support the police even when there are abuses of power. Or alternatively – and this was experienced when I asked for help for the two arrested migrant workers - I am told that the police would not have acted without good cause. There seems to be a willingness in some sections of the community to support the police – right or wrong – taking no cognisance of the human temptation to abuse power.

We believe that as police powers grow – so accountability mechanisms should be strengthened. The Police

Community perspective

Ombudsman has made progress in this regard – but her powers are limited in addressing the concerns in our communities. We all hope for better relationships with the PSNI – but know that our liberty is becoming ever more fragile. Increasing state/police power over individuals leaves us the question- how do we ensure that powers are not abused by the police simply because they believe they can!

Fiona McCausland
Old Warren Partnership

From bitter experience to getting policing right - policing from a North Belfast perspective

Patten was the minimum threshold that was acceptable to the nationalist community in terms of delivering a new beginning to policing. The political interference of Direct Rule minister Peter Mandelson and his subsequent gutting of the Patten recommendations set the scene for protracted negotiations. The negotiations continued so that policing could be got right: got right in terms of accountability, human rights culture, representativeness, time scale for devolution of powers and the modalities of the ministerial office.

Emotional debate

The institutional operation of collusion and state murder within the RUC, as recently confirmed in the Police Ombudsman report, gives a small insight into the experiences that many bring to any informed discussion. This is an indication of the emotional import to the debate. The public consultations and the level of debate across the island recently only serve to reinforce this assessment. In the absence of the Police Ombudsman Office, one wonders would the McCord Report have gone the same way as the Stalker and Sampson reports?

Catholic attitudes to policing were informed by bitter memories of shoot to kill, torture, the indiscriminate use of plastic bullets to kill children, and daily harassment. The RUC ambivalence in investigating Catholic deaths also runs deep. For many nationalists, the RUC was simply the armed wing of unionism. It is these experiences that have informed how many nationalists view policing, and why we have been prepared to wait so that it can be got right.

Political policing

Political policing was what nationalists experienced. That explains why MI5 and Special Branch have had to be cleansed if civic policing is to be delivered. Their involvement in political policing contaminated nationalist confidence in policing. As a consequence, the experience and delivery of policing suffered.

For nationalists, policing was shorthand for the RUC, MI5 and Special Branch. More importantly this explains why the creation of a new beginning to policing was so important. It is essential to build confidence that this brutal legacy is acknowledged.

Only now are people beginning to think and ask what is possible in terms of policing and community safety. Only now are people beginning to think what could be possible if policing is locally accountable and impartial. Only now is the challenge of giving consent to new policing structures firmly before the Catholic community.

Challenge to the community

There is now a growing realisation that policing will only be as accountable, as we, the community, make it. We, in the community and civil society, must work to ensure that the kind of representative, civic and unarmed policing service that is so desired is delivered. Equally important will be the involvement and active engagement of local people to ensure fair and impartial policing.

Invariably this will mean participating as full and active members in the District Policing Partnerships and the Northern Ireland Policing Board when an Executive is formed.

It now seems that the political threshold has been reached on policing, yet reservations remain. There will be no simple answers. There will be no instant transformation. But there is now evidence of qualitative and seismic changes in nationalist and republican attitudes as to their approach to future policing arrangements.

It is clear that the only way to build effective, accountable and representative policing is to do it from the inside. Standing outside is simply no longer an option.

John Loughran
Irene Sherry

The Secretary of State Peter Hain said that “the Police Ombudsman has today shone a light on a dark and murky period in the history of Northern Ireland”. He was commenting on the Ombudsman’s investigation into the murder of Raymond McCord Jnr, published on 22 January 2007.

The report is shocking, though its contents can hardly have come as a shock to either the Secretary of State or the Chief Constable. As CAJ remarked in its press release - collusion has been documented time and time again. The key difference with this report was the fact that it came from an “insider”, and has therefore had to be treated seriously by all those in a position to bring about change.

It is useful to recall that the response from this Secretary of State and Chief Constable Orde is a world away from the reactions only a few years ago to a similarly contentious report that the Police Ombudsman issued in the wake of the Omagh tragedy.

Just over five years ago, in December 2001, the then Chief Constable uttered a strong rebuttal of the Ombudsman’s Omagh investigation findings. Sir Ronnie Flanagan, currently Chief Inspector of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, claimed at the time that, if the findings were proved accurate, “*I would not only resign; I would publicly commit suicide*”. His frontal attack on the *bona fides* of the Ombudsman was mirrored in comments by local politicians, members of the Policing Board and others.

Prime Minister Tony Blair made it clear where his loyalties lay at the time. Despite the fact that the Ombudsman was relatively new to a post, specially created post-Agreement, and was under intense personal and professional attack, the Prime Minister’s spokesperson made it clear that “*Sir Ronnie has the prime minister’s full support*”. Support for the Ombudsman from the same spokesperson was much more lukewarm – “*the ombudsman has done her duty*”.

As indicated, 2007 saw very different reactions from the current Chief Constable and political leadership, suggesting hopefully that serious and well-founded criticism might be dealt with more honestly and openly. Peter Hain asserted that the serious failings exposed within Special Branch “*cannot be justified and no one should attempt to justify them... they should never have happened... (and)... one of the immense challenges for the future is how to address the dreadful legacy of a poisonous past.*”

Poisonous past

So, before discussing the future, what does the McCord report say about our “poisonous past”? The Ombudsman’s investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Raymond McCord Jnr was reportedly one of the most complex ever undertaken by Mrs O’Loan’s office. It

“A dark and murky period in the history of Northern Ireland” will the future be different?

involved interviewing more than 100 serving and retired police officers, 24 of them ‘under caution’, and the recovery of more than 10,000 items of police documentation. On the basis of a complaint about one single murder, and possible police collusion in that murder, the Ombudsman was led to the conclusion that police informants were linked to: the murders of ten people; and 72 instances of other crime including ten attempted murders, ten ‘punishment’ shootings, 13 ‘punishment’ attacks, a bomb attack in Monaghan, 17 instances of drug dealing, and additional criminality, including criminal damage, extortion and intimidation.

Less “reliable and probably true” information linked the key police informer to an additional five murders.

In uncovering this horrendous catalogue of criminal behaviour on the part of police informers, the Ombudsman determined that:

- over £80,000 of tax-payers’ money was paid to a key informant linked to much of this criminal activity;
- there was a pattern of work by certain officers within Special Branch designed to ensure that “informant 1” and his associates were protected from the law;
- police informants who had committed crimes were protected from the police investigating those crimes;
- informants were reportedly ‘babysat’ through police interviews to help them avoid incriminating themselves;
- false notes were created, searches of houses to locate arms were blocked for no valid reason, and misleading information was prepared for the DPP.

Collusion at the highest level

Mrs O’Loan concluded that her investigation had established collusion between certain officers within Special Branch and a UVF unit in North Belfast and Newtownabbey. She also concluded that the problems were systemic “*It would be easy to blame the junior officers’ conduct in dealing with various informants and indeed they are not blameless. However, they could not have operated as they did without the knowledge and support at the highest levels of the RUC and the PSNI*”. The Ombudsman said she believed that “*a culture of subservience to Special Branch had developed within the RUC which had created a form of dysfunction*”. A whole chapter of the report is dedicated to the issue of collusion, and in 32 separate bullet points she catalogues in detail specific examples of behaviour that she has found to be collusive.

“Curky history” - Different from the past?

Shocking examples include:

- not informing local police of an anticipated attack and not taking any action to prevent the attack;
- providing at least four misleading and inaccurate confidential documents to officers of the court with a view to protecting informants;
- withholding intelligence from police colleagues including the names of alleged suspects which could have been used to attempt to prevent and detect crime;
- completing false and misleading authorisations for the purposes of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act; and
- cancelling the “wanted” status of murder suspects.

Never again?

Of course it is important to understand better our “poisonous past”, and this investigation meant that people like Raymond McCord Snr. and several other families (perhaps quite inadvertently) learnt something of the circumstances surrounding the deaths of their loved ones.

But a key goal in examining the past must surely be to learn lessons for the future. Can we be sure that in the words of Peter Hain again “*policing in NI has changed radically (and) new robust systems are in place to ensure that the failures of the past will not and cannot be repeated*”? We can certainly hope so, but there are some causes for concern.

To state the obvious firstly - this was *one* investigation into *one* murder, and yet it uncovered a web of deceit, illegality, and mis-management. How much more is there still to be revealed, so that families can learn what actually happened to their loved ones, and so that people in Northern Ireland can learn what actions were carried out in their name?

Another worry is the potential limitation imposed on OPONI’s work. Had these charges of collusion been laid, for example, against the army or military intelligence personnel, the office’s power of review would have been inapplicable. She is limited in what cooperation she can require of retired police officers and, in this instance, the investigators found many retired police less than forthcoming. What does this bode for the future?

We are told that there has been a complete overhaul of informants and this is of course welcome. Yet, as recently as the review in 2003, 12% of informants had to be dropped

because of their involvement in serious crime. Were these informants – and perhaps more importantly, their police handlers – charged? Are their handlers, who are being paid to uphold the rule of law, still employed by the PSNI, and still interpreting the law by their own lights? In this regard, the public defence of Special Branch exceptionalism by its former head, Chris Albiston, was very revealing. Instead of refuting the Ombudsman’s claims that Special Branch had disregarded/re-interpreted the legal framework laid down for the handling of informers, Mr Albiston confirmed in a piece in the Newsletter that the police had not followed UK-wide guidelines introduced in 1997 – “*the systems you use in one place will not be appropriate in the other place. Don’t forget we were working with a security intelligence service, MI5, throughout the UK, which was not part of the police structure*”.

Nor can we seek reassurance from the fact that all the senior police officers in post during these years will have moved on. Sir Ronnie Flanagan, though long retired from the RUC/PSNI, currently holds an extremely senior police oversight role which includes policing in Northern Ireland. Some have called for his resignation; others have called for him to be sacked from his position; It is not clear who is in a position to hold him to account for any alleged wrongdoing or mis-management during his tenure in Special Branch or as Chief Constable.

According to the Ombudsman’s report, “*others, including serving officers, gave evasive, contradictory, and on occasion farcical answers to questions. On occasion those answers indicated either a significant failure to understand the law, or contempt for the law. On other occasions the investigation demonstrated conclusively that what an officer had told the Police Ombudsman’s investigators was completely untrue*”. Surely if any serving officer is giving evasive answers to an officer of the law, fails to understand the law, shows contempt for it, or tells lies to a police investigator, they should not remain in office?

Last but not least, it should not be forgotten that this report does not examine police action or inaction in the 70s and the 80s when violent conflict was at its height, but rather the 90s and early years of this century. This is part, definitely, of a “poisonous” past, but the “past” is really not long ago.

And a different future?

Major changes have occurred, but we have a way to go. If this report teaches anything it teaches that the move to leave “national security” issues to an unaccountable MI5 cannot be allowed; and the protection of our liberties cannot be left to the protection of toothless watchdog bodies like the Surveillance Commissioner. CAJ is at one with the Ombudsman’s final request that “*in the arrangements for the future strategic management of national security issues in NI, there will be accountability mechanisms which are effective, and which are capable of ensuring that what has happened here does not recur*”.

Some reflections on PSNI Training, Education and Development

In 1999, Patten argued that the training, education and development of police officers and civilian staff was 'critical' to the success of the 'radical transformation' proposed for policing in Northern Ireland. Of the Commission's 175 recommendations, 35 concerned training directly, and many others had training implications.

Patten articulated the need for a Training, Education and Development strategy, geared towards the provision of 'a police service dedicated to the protection of human rights and respect for human dignity... accountable, responsive, communicative and transparent... [decentralised and] based on partnerships with the community...'

Detailed prescriptions for training were not given – but human rights and partnership with the community were key messages to be mainstreamed throughout the process.

The most recent Oversight Commissioner report, while happy to sign off on 'administrative compliance' relating to most of its 772 Patten performance indicators, still identifies training as a source of ongoing concern. The Policing Board's human rights monitoring report also signals unsatisfactory progress in this area.

So where are the problems and why has this area proven so difficult to resolve?

Firstly, it should be acknowledged that the PSNI has tried hard in this arena. There has been much investment in terms of time and resources to try and ensure the delivery of the best training in the world. Moreover, training has been subject to independent scrutiny above and beyond the main designated oversight bodies.

The Office of the Police Ombudsman has made training recommendations based on shortcomings observed – thus making a link between what training claims to offer and what is actually delivered on the ground. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has also carried out some very valuable work, observing and evaluating key learning events. These evaluations, for all the changes and improvements noted and commended, have exposed a continuing failure to really get to grips with what it means to mainstream human rights and utilise community experience and expertise to the full.

Failures can be traced back to the decision to develop the initial Training, Education and Development strategy

completely in-house, evidencing almost total disregard for what the involvement of different communities and constituencies might usefully bring to such a process. Practical difficulties have also dogged training - changes in personnel, the promised state-of-the-art college not materialising etc. – but arguably, too much is being expected of police trainers, too much of an eye is being had to 'administrative compliance' as the goal to be secured.

This means too little investment has been made in bringing alienated or marginalised communities and groups on board as real and valued players.

The legacy of the past casts a cloud over much of the blue skies thinking that has been done in this area. Training has been reformed, but the rubicon has not yet been crossed that will allow transformation to occur. Transformation is too tied to a modernising, professionalizing, managerial agenda. The fact of FBI engagement, refurbished classrooms, new equipment and problem solving models has come to obscure the fact that, actually, some prior difficult conversations need to be had. Much work has to be done on getting to grips with why human rights is so difficult to embed in Northern Ireland's post conflict policing reality. Where the wrongs of the policing past remain unacknowledged, and the privileged narrative of one view of past policing are deemed sacrosanct in certain quarters, training is unlikely to sufficiently challenge and impact on deep-seated problematic aspects of police culture going forward.

And so, the PSNI has recently gone back to the drawing board, again, on training. Among other things, another human rights lawyer has been appointed with a focus specifically on human rights training. External consultants have been engaged. Substantial financial investment is directed at police trainers. The Learning Advisory Council is in the process of reinventing itself following a review, and PSNI is currently tendering for an independent human rights training evaluation.

All of these are important initiatives. But words like sectarianism, sexism, racism, class, and past human rights abuse need to be worked through, in real partnership with civil society, to inform the totality of training design and delivery. Until then, no amount of human rights powerpoint presentations, or roleplay activities, will be sufficient to effect transformation of thinking and behaviour from the classroom to the canteen, and on the ground.

Mary O'Rawe
Transitional Justice Institute

Turnover or Turn Around?

At the very time that significant political focus is on whether or not, or when, Sinn Fein will join the Policing Board and other over-arching policing institutions, substantial questions have arisen about the extent and depth of international and cultural change at basic recruit level.

The Patten Commission argued for major change in the police. The Commission noted that the Agreement called for a police service that was “*representative of the society it polices*” and explicitly recognised that “*the RUC is not representative*”. They argued that more Catholics, especially nationalist Catholics were needed if the police was to be efficient and effective, “*it is not just a matter of fairness, although that too is important*”. While some limited references were made to the need for the recruitment of more women, gays, and members of ethnic minority communities, the primary focus was on securing greater Catholic (and indirectly greater nationalist/ republican) representation amongst the new recruits.

The 50:50 quota system was introduced to specifically tackle this problem, and was one of the Commission’s more contentious proposals. A new recruiting system is now however reasonably well established and operational. Patten had asked for it to be time-limited, and in this spirit it was initially introduced for a three-year stint, and has been renewed twice since. The quota system is clearly having an important impact since the proportion of Catholics has been steadily on the rise (the current figure is supposedly 20%). No attempt seems to be being made however to determine what proportion, if any, of these Catholic recruits are nationalists or republicans, though tackling the under-representation of political opinion (rather than religious belief per se) was presumably the primary goal.

Given the controversy that the 50:50 quota created, and continues to create, it may be worth noting that

- it was always intended to be a relatively time-limited tactic rather than a long-term solution;
- it was introduced as a somewhat exceptional measure, in recognition of how imbalanced the then workforce was;
- and the “merit” principle was safeguarded.

Patten had also noted that Catholics constitute at least 50% of the age cohort that might join as new recruits. That being so, and all other things being equal, a 50:50 recruitment pattern should in fact not require active intervention; the

fact that any quota is needed reflects the legacy of past problems.

However, changing a workforce’s composition does not rely solely on recruitment measures. One of Patten’s failings was to focus on recruitment and largely disregard issues of retention, promotion, statements of welcome and the stability of the quota group. So for example the Patten report contained one or two recommendations about child-friendly policies, which might make the work more attractive to people (especially women) with child-caring responsibilities, but these concerns did not figure large in the report. Yet there is little point in investing resources in recruiting under-represented groups if their turnover is high.

In recent NIO correspondence, CAJ was informed that of the 99 new police recruits who have left since 2001; 72 are Catholics, 26 Protestants and 1 non-determined (ie nearly three Catholics to every one Protestant have abandoned their jobs). It is more difficult to assess what is happening in gender terms. 66 men and 33 women left; without

information on overall recruitment rates broken down on gender grounds, the significance of departing new recruits is however difficult to determine.

A turnover of this dimension in terms of Catholics recruits is, on the face of it, very worrying.

99 police officers appointed since 4th November 2001 have left; of these 99, 26 are Protestant, 72 are Catholic and 1 non-determined

These concerns about the recruitment and retention of Northern Ireland Catholics to the PSNI were heightened by recent media reports that implied that a number of the “Catholic” recruits may have been recruited from the new Polish workers coming to Northern Ireland seeking employment. In principle, this diversification of the police in terms of nationality, language skills, and cultural background is very welcome. The recruitment of Polish Catholics, if this is what is happening, has however, little to do with Patten’s concerns that “*the main problem facing policing in Northern Ireland has been the political divide between Protestants/Unionists and Catholics/Nationalists and the identification of the police with unionism and the British state in the minds of many nationalists*”.

Turn-around at the ‘top’ may hold out some hope for a future where all of NI’s communities engage with policing. However, excessive turnover at the recruit level is worrying.

In practice, if under-represented groups are not recruited and retained, it will be impossible to comply with the Agreement’s promise of “a new beginning to policing in NI with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole”.

Civil Liberties Diary

January 4 Figures from the NI Prison Service show that the number of foreign nationals in Northern Ireland's jails has risen from 38 at the end of 2005 to 48 now.

January 8 NI Human Rights Commission launches a major initiative to help tens of thousands of migrant workers secure their rights amid reports of exploitation, racism and discrimination. The rights based guides have been produced by the NIHRC, the Law Centre of Northern Ireland and the ANIMATE project.

Northern Ireland Commissioner for Public Appointments, Felicity Huston, releases her annual report. Women are totally under-represented on public bodies in Northern Ireland and their numbers have gone down not up, despite a decade long drive to improve the situation.

January 9 Parents of murdered RIR member Cyril Smith hand over a petition demanding an inquiry into his death. It is alleged that information about his murder was withheld by the security forces to protect an IRA informer.

January 10 House of Lords upholds new laws outlawing businesses in Northern Ireland from discriminating against homosexuals.

January 11 The conduct of two PSNI officers involved in the Omagh bomb trial are to be investigated by the Police Ombudsman after both admitted under cross-examination that they had "beefed up" their original statements to suggest that specialist forensic precautions had been taken at an explosives find when they had not.

The Assets Recovery Agency is to merge with the Serious Organised Crime Agency.

Tony Blair announces that the intelligence agency MI5 and the PSNI will be completely distinct and entirely

separate bodies, and that policing was the responsibility solely of the PSNI, and that the security service would have no role in civic policing.

January 12 Figures released show that nearly 1 in 8 current applicants to the PSNI are of Polish nationality.

The Independent Monitoring Board recommends that a separate women's jail be built in Northern Ireland and a plan be developed for its long term accommodation needs. Management of prisoners with mental health problems at Maghaberry and their return to society was also an area of "concern".

January 16 Chief Inspector of Justice Kit Chivers criticises the PSNI record on dealing with hate crime and calls for improvements in reporting procedures.

January 20 Delegates at the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis vote to support policing in Northern Ireland.

January 25 Report is issued by Bertha McDougall on her findings as Interim Victims Commissioner in which she urges the setting up of a victims fund; more compensation for those bereaved before 1988; the establishment of a victims forum.

January 26 Report by MPs on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee says there is "no place" for neighbourhood restorative justice schemes which refuse to co-operate with the police.

January 22 Report by Police Ombudsman into the murder of Raymond McCord Jnr. and a number of other related deaths found the Special Branch had colluded with the UVF in a range of criminal activities, including murder and attempted murder, and that the police "could not have operated as they did without the knowledge and support at the highest levels of the RUC and PSNI".

January 24 Former Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan, and current Chief Inspector of Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary, dismissed calls for his resignation/sacking from HMIC in the wake of the Ombudsman's damning report about Special Branch collusion. Despite being Chief Constable at the time, and a formerly in Special Branch, Sir Ronnie Flanagan said he had "no knowledge" of the activities alleged by the Ombudsman.

Compiled by Mark Bassett from various newspapers.

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