



AN INSPECTION OF **AIRPORT AND HARBOUR POLICING IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

THE BELFAST INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT CONSTABULARY AND
THE BELFAST HARBOUR POLICE

OCTOBER 2025

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
DfT	Department for Transport
DoJ	Department of Justice
HMICFRS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services (in England and Wales)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
Niche™ Records Management System	The Police Service of Northern Ireland's Record Management System developed by Niche™ Technology Inc.
NIPB	Northern Ireland Policing Board
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
OPONI	Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
PEEL	Police Efficiency, Effectiveness and Legitimacy inspections carried out by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services
PPS	Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
UK	United Kingdom

CHIEF INSPECTOR'S FOREWORD

Northern Ireland's airports and harbours are key entry and exit points for visitors and our citizens leaving and returning home. It is vital that everyone using them are safe and feel safe, risks are well managed and the policing arrangements for them provide efficient and effective services.

This inspection reviewed the policing services provided at Belfast Harbour Estate and George Best Belfast City Airport by Belfast Harbour Police and at Belfast International Airport by Belfast International Airport Constabulary as well as their links with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It also recognises the wide range of stakeholders, including other National law enforcement partners, involved in providing services to protect our border, deter and detect crime and keep us safe.

This was the first time Belfast International Airport Constabulary was inspected by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland however Belfast Harbour Police have been inspected before. While recognising the different models of provision and how they are funded as well as the constantly changing operating environment; there are quality standards and shared policing priorities we would expect to see reflected in strategic planning and transparent reporting on the outcomes achieved.

What was also common to all services was the need for tight and trusted partnerships, particularly with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, to ensure modern policing standards and shared issues throughout our community benefit from a cohesive and quality police response.

Belfast Harbour Estate has changed beyond all recognition in the last decade and is realising its potential as a key strategic asset for Northern Ireland as a port and centre of commerce as well as a place to live, work and socialise. Its ongoing and ambitious development is reflected in the Harbour Commissioner's vision and strategy that recognises how important it is that people are safe and includes investment in a new Harbour Police station to provide an improved visible presence in the community Belfast Harbour Police serve.

Belfast International Airport has also benefitted from recent investment and improvements to its facilities and outside space that reflect its place as a vital gateway to and from Northern Ireland for business and tourism.

The Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government 'Safer Communities' and 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' priorities apply to everywhere in our community; the effective prevention and investigation of crime and confidence in policing is a shared responsibility and informed by all those with and who use policing powers, including in our airports and harbours.

The Strategic and Operational Recommendations in this report aim to improve current service delivery; of particular importance is the need for a fundamental review of airport policing with all relevant organisations and parties involved. In the meantime, the implementation of the other recommendations will improve the current model of service provision.

Of course, there are many other ports and airports in Northern Ireland that also require risk mitigation, law enforcement and an effective police response when it is needed; I hope this Inspection Report and its recommendations help inform how effective policing services are planned and delivered in those significant infrastructure, transport and commerce hubs too.

My thanks to the Vinci management team at Belfast International Airport and Belfast International Airport Constabulary, George Best Belfast City Airport management, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Belfast Harbour Police, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the range of stakeholders who engaged with Inspectors and supported this inspection.

The Lead Inspector was Dr Claire Feehan, supported by Inspector David MacAnulty, and I am grateful for their work.



Jacqui Durkin

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice
in Northern Ireland

October 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The policing of Northern Ireland’s airports and harbours is crucial to maintaining national security, preventing criminal activity and keeping Northern Ireland safe. As key entry points into Northern Ireland they are vulnerable to trafficking, smuggling, and potential terrorist threats, as well as general criminality, making vigilant and effective law enforcement essential.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland was responsible for policing all of Northern Ireland, including its airports and harbours. However, the presence of two privately funded Police Services had produced complex policing arrangements with the policing of Belfast International Airport by the Belfast International Airport Constabulary, and the policing of Belfast Harbour Estate, including George Best Belfast City Airport, by the Belfast Harbour Police. It is recommended that a Memorandum of Understanding between each private Police Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland is agreed and signed to provide clarity in roles and responsibilities as well as access to training, support and assistance to help ensure consistent policing standards regardless of location or funding.

Inspectors had concerns about the unnecessary risks posed to Officers and to the public when Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police Officers operated outside of their geographical limits, for example when transporting a detainee to a Police Service of Northern Ireland custody facility.

The Department of Justice needs to review and plan for the necessary legislative change required to extend the jurisdiction of the Belfast International Airport Constabulary and the Belfast Harbour Police in the next Northern Ireland Assembly mandate.

Policing at Northern Ireland’s airports

The Aviation Security Act 1982, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2009, established a security planning framework covering all relevant United Kingdom airports to oversee and govern security planning; this included Northern Ireland’s three commercial airports. Inspectors were not assured that the security planning framework was working effectively in Northern Ireland to provide the necessary co-ordinated and risk-based police presence at Northern Ireland’s airports that effectively deters, detects and responds to crime and threats to aviation security. It is therefore recommended that the Police Service of Northern Ireland undertakes a fundamental review of policing at all Northern Ireland’s airports to inform the security planning framework.

This must include consultation with all relevant local and national Government Departments and agencies. The dispute mechanism should be activated if unanimous agreement about the policing requirements at any of Northern Ireland's airports cannot be reached.

Inspectors had serious concerns about the policing of Belfast International Airport by the Belfast International Airport Constabulary, particularly the lack of appropriate leadership, governance and accountability arrangements and concerns about training, performance management and the supervision of the investigation of crime. It is recommended that the Belfast International Airport Constabulary urgently review its rank structure to provide much needed dedicated policing experienced leadership. A vision, strategy and policing plan were needed for Belfast International Airport Constabulary to direct policing at Belfast International Airport, and this should align with key Police Service of Northern Ireland policing priorities.¹ Continuous training for Police Officers, which was essential to maintain up-to-date skills, adapt to evolving threats and legal standards, and ensure effective, ethical and safe policing practices, was also required and the necessary funding should be provided.

Policing at Belfast Harbour Estate

There was no equivalent security planning framework governing the policing of harbours and so a close working relationship between the Belfast Harbour Police and the Police Service of Northern Ireland was essential.

The Belfast Harbour Police were reported as a trusted partner by the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the professional relationship as mutually beneficial, however an agreed and signed Memorandum of Understanding would formalise this relationship and ensure that criminal incidents were investigated by the most appropriate Police Service depending on the skills and expertise required.

The focus on neighbourhood policing by Belfast Harbour Police was positive, reflected the low level of reactive policing demand and was well received by local stakeholders for the level of police visibility across Belfast Harbour Estate. The Belfast Harbour Police had a Criminal Justice Unit who were responsible for the management of criminal incidents and follow-up activities, centralising the specialist skillset. However, Inspectors were concerned that a culture had embedded within the Belfast Harbour Police that had discouraged Officers from maintaining an investigative mindset, resulting in a loss of skills. The Belfast Harbour Police would benefit from assessing the effectiveness of this model.

Joint areas of focus

Both the Belfast International Airport Constabulary and the Belfast Harbour Police needed to explore and implement systems for digital preparation and submission of criminal case files to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland. There was also a need for both Police Services to ensure annual training on the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 as well as on the Victims and Witness Charters and the entitlements within each.

1 Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB), *The Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2025 – 2030 & Annual Performance Plan 2025/26, April 2025*, available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2025-04/Policing%20Plan%202025-30%20and%20Annual%20Performance%20Plan%2025-26.pdf>.

Although not public authorities with statutory duties to publish data in the same way as the Police Service of Northern Ireland, both private Police Services operated with significant powers, including of arrest and detention, and so transparency about their activities was vital to public trust and confidence in policing in Northern Ireland. Both should take steps to collate and publish data annually on their policing activities. This should include monitoring and reporting on timeliness of case file progression to file submission to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland for decisions on prosecution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

Within 18 months of report publication, the Police Service of Northern Ireland should lead and complete, in partnership with Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police, a fundamental review of the policing of Northern Ireland's airports and produce a report with any required recommendations. The review should include input from and consultation with airport policing funders, relevant airport partners and statutory organisations. The review report should be made available to all key stakeholders.

Paragraph 2.10

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of report publication, Belfast International Airport Constabulary should develop a vision, strategy and policing plan to direct policing at Belfast International Airport. This should include actions to improve governance and accountability measures and align with Police Service of Northern Ireland Policing Plan priorities.

Paragraph 2.15

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

The Belfast Harbour Police should ensure that there is strategic alignment between their policing priorities and the policing priorities of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 2.16

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 4

The Department of Justice should take steps to prepare for the required legislative change to extend the jurisdiction of Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police in the next Northern Ireland Assembly mandate's legislative programme.

Paragraph 2.22

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 5

Within six months of report publication, Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police, in collaboration with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, should agree and sign a Memorandum of Understanding detailing:

- the roles and responsibilities for dealing with key high-risk crime types;
- access to Police Service of Northern Ireland systems and custody facilities;
- access to Police Service of Northern Ireland training; and
- access to support and assistance from the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 2.34

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within six months of report publication, Belfast International Airport Constabulary should review the effectiveness of their rank structure and put in place measures to ensure effective leadership and accountability.

Paragraph 3.2

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police, in conjunction with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, should explore and implement the digitisation and transfer of criminal case files. Technology should also ensure the recording of key decision-making processes and rationale, provide live updates of case status and track issues that arise during a case.

Paragraph 3.22

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 3

Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police should ensure that training on the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 and the Victim and Witness Charters is provided annually to all Officers and staff.

Paragraph 3.29

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 4

Within six months of report publication, Belfast International Airport Constabulary should complete a training needs analysis of its workforce and establish an annual training schedule and action implementation. This should be developed in collaboration with the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 3.33

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 5

Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police should collate and publish data annually on their policing activities. This should include monitoring and reporting of timeliness targets from the report of a criminal incident to file submission to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and decisions on prosecution.

Paragraph 4.29

Areas for Improvement identified by Inspectors are also included within the Inspection Report.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Northern Ireland’s airports and harbours are crucial national infrastructure that are vital to Northern Ireland’s economy, trade and connectivity. They enable business growth, create and sustain jobs, support tourism and education and ensure vital supply chains remain intact. Effective policing of airports and harbours is therefore essential to safeguard national security, protect public safety, combat crime and ensure economic stability, reflecting the fundamental duty of policing – to protect life and property, preserve order and prevent crime.
- 1.2 There were four main ports² in Northern Ireland, including Larne Port, Warrenpoint Harbour, Foyle Port, and Northern Ireland’s largest and busiest port, Belfast Harbour. Situated in the 2,000-acre Belfast Harbour Estate that incorporated George Best Belfast City Airport (Belfast City Airport) and extended to the Holywood Exchange retail park, Belfast Harbour supported a growing and increasingly diverse residential population and was home to over 750 businesses. Located centrally in Belfast, the Harbour Estate covered approximately 20% of the Belfast City policing district. In 2023, Belfast Harbour handled around 24 million tonnes of trade, supported 1.7 million passenger ferry travellers and welcomed 158 cruise ships. As a Trust Port³ with no shareholders or owners, all profits were reinvested back into the Port for the benefit of its stakeholders.⁴ The Harbour Estate was governed and controlled by the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. A map of Belfast Harbour Estate is provided at Appendix 1.
- 1.3 Northern Ireland had three main commercial airports that provided domestic and international flights; City of Derry Airport was a small regional airport providing connectivity to Northern Ireland’s northwest region; Belfast City Airport was a growing airport located within the Belfast Harbour Estate; and Belfast International Airport which was Northern Ireland’s largest airport, and in 2024 was the 10th largest airport in the United Kingdom (UK), handling 6.75 million passengers.⁵ Bought by Vinci Airports in 2018, a private unlimited company that operated more than 70 airports across 14 countries, Belfast International Airport was situated approximately 18 miles northwest of Belfast and was in the Antrim and Newtownabbey policing district. A map of Belfast International Airport is provided at Appendix 2.

2 The terms ‘harbour’ and ‘port’ are used interchangeably throughout this Inspection Report, however there is a distinction; the word ‘harbour’ refers to any sheltered body of water where a boat/ship could moor/anchor, while ‘port’ refers to an installation built around a harbour with facilities for loading and unloading vessels.

3 Trust Ports are independent statutory bodies, governed and controlled by a local independent board.

4 *Belfast Harbour, 2023, Corporate*, available at <https://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/corporate/>.

5 *Vinci, Vinci Airports – Traffic as of December 31 2024, 16 January 2025*, available at [vinci-airports--traffic-as-december-31-2024%20\(1\)](https://www.vinci-airports.com/en/traffic-as-of-december-31-2024%20(1)).

- 1.4 As Northern Ireland's territorial Police Service, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) had responsibility for policing all of Northern Ireland, including all its airports and harbours, with several key functions including emergency planning, the prevention and investigation of terrorist activity and responding to criminal incidents. However, in addition to the PSNI, the policing of Northern Ireland's two largest airports (Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport) and Belfast Harbour was supplemented by two private Police Services. The Belfast Harbour Commissioners privately funded the Belfast Harbour Police (the Harbour Police) to police the Harbour Estate, and the Belfast International Airport Authority funded the policing of Belfast International Airport through the Belfast International Airport Constabulary (the Airport Police). The policing of Belfast City Airport was undertaken by the PSNI and the Harbour Police. The focus of this inspection was the policing of Belfast Harbour and Belfast International Airport.
- 1.5 The private funding of both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police meant that they were private employees, accountable to commercial operators and not maintained under police regulations. Each held a role in supporting the commercial development of their respective jurisdiction. The decision to privately fund these Services was at the sole discretion of each business. The policing arrangements in place at Northern Ireland's airports and harbours are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: PSNI, Airport Police and Harbour Police jurisdiction



THE AIRPORT POLICE

- 1.6 Prior to the privatisation of Belfast International Airport in 1994, policing at the airport had been provided from June 1971-1994 by the Northern Ireland Airports Constabulary and before then by the Civil Aviation Constabulary. The Airports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994⁶ (the 1994 Order) provided for the privatisation of Belfast International Airport, enabled the appointment of Airport Police Officers as a private Police Service employed and controlled by the airport operator. This remained the legislative basis underpinning the policing of Belfast International Airport by the Airport Police.
- 1.7 The size and structure of the Airport Police varied over the years, peaking in the late 1980s with approximately 90 Police Officers including a Chief Inspector, Inspector, eight Sergeants, 20 Constables and 50 auxiliary Constables. In 2025 the Airport Police consisted of six Sergeants and 12 Constables policing a 1,000-acre site. This site comprised a secured airfield (accessible through security checkpoints managed by a security contractor), a single passenger terminal, bespoke cargo handling facilities and car parks. Crime levels at Belfast International Airport were low and the type of criminal incidents recorded were typically low-level. In 2024 Airport Police Officers dealt with 337 criminal incidents including:
- 250 'general offences' (74%) such as theft, assault, criminal damage and making off without payment;
 - 58 disruptive passenger offences (17%);
 - 23 road traffic collisions (7%); and
 - six aviation offences (2%).
- 1.8 A further 1,747 non-crime incidents were also dealt with by the Airport Police including 644 incidents of assisting other agencies (37%) including airport security, Border Force, Home Office Immigration Enforcement division, HM Revenue & Customs and the PSNI. The Airport Police assisted the PSNI on 224 occasions in 2024, providing Closed Circuit Television downloads, prisoner escorts and missing person enquiries.

THE HARBOUR POLICE

- 1.9 Established in 1847 following the enactment of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847⁷ (the 1847 Act), the Harbour Police were one of the oldest Police Services across the UK and Ireland. Harbour Police Officers continued to be appointed under the 1847 Act. One of nine independent Ports Police forces in the UK, Harbour Police Officers had police powers and powers granted under harbour byelaws. The extent of their jurisdiction was constrained to the Belfast Harbour Estate plus one mile, including Belfast Lough.

6 *Legislation.gov.uk, The Airports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994*, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1994/426/contents>.

7 *Legislation.gov.uk, Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847*, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/10-11/27/contents>.

1.10 In 2025 the Harbour Police was led by a Chief Officer and an Inspector. There were eight Sergeants and 30 Constables, supported by 10 administrative and control room staff. As at Belfast International Airport, the number of recorded crimes within the Harbour Estate was low. In 2024 the Harbour Police responded to 319 criminal incidents, including:

- 149 theft offences (47%);
- 70 violence against the person and sexual offences (22%);
- 50 drug offences (16%); and
- 25 criminal damage offences (8%).

The Harbour Police also dealt with 2,214 non-criminal incidents including water safety, road traffic and alarm activation incidents.

RELEVANT REVIEWS AND INSPECTIONS

1.11 Both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police were included within Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland's (CJI) statutory remit, as set under the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002⁸ and amended under Section 45 of the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007.⁹ CJI previously inspected the Harbour Police in 2008,¹⁰ and made 13 recommendations aimed at:

- improving internal and external communication to advance transparency and accountability;
- improved Police Officer learning and development opportunities;
- improved data recording and monitoring;
- the development of formalised agreements and structures with the PSNI to ensure continued professionalisation of the Harbour Police;
- the development of a community policing model; and
- legislative change to ensure that the Harbour Police operated with full constabulary powers, in certain circumstances, outside of the boundaries of the Belfast Harbour Estate.

1.12 A 2010 CJI Follow-Up Review¹¹ assessed seven recommendations as achieved and six as partly achieved. Further work was required to develop and agree an overarching protocol with the PSNI to assist with information sharing and more effective engagement. The necessary legislative amendment to solve the jurisdictional issue had been passed in England and Wales, however a similar provision had not been enacted in Northern Ireland.

8 *Legislation.gov.uk, Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002* available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/26/contents>.

9 *Legislation.gov.uk, Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007* available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/6/contents>.

10 *CJI, 2008, Belfast Harbour Police, An Inspection of the Belfast Harbour Police, May 2008*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/an-inspection-of-the-belfast-harbour-police/>

11 *CJI, Belfast Harbour Police, A Follow-up review of inspection recommendations, May 2010*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/a-follow-up-review-of-inspection-recommendations-3/>

- 1.13 Neither the Airport Police nor the Harbour Police were under the remit of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and so neither had been formally inspected by them. To address this accountability gap, the Harbour Police had privately commissioned police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections,¹² most recently in 2022¹³ that was undertaken by two retired PSNI Officers. This inspection assessed the Harbour Police as 'good' at engaging with the people it serves, preventing and deterring crime and anti-social behaviour and vulnerability, and in building and developing its workforce. An 'adequate' assessment was made of how they encouraged an ethical and inclusive workplace. The inspection report made 44 recommendations including the need for a formal engagement strategy; an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Sector policing arrangements and resource allocation; the establishment of an enforcement agency stakeholder forum; and engagement with the PSNI's neighbourhood training faculty.
- 1.14 This was the first CJI inspection of the Airport Police. There had been no other internal or external assessment or review of their operations.

AIRPORT SECURITY AND THE POLICING OF UK AND REPUBLIC OF IRELAND AIRPORTS

- 1.15 UK Airport Security was regulated and approved by the UK Civil Aviation Authority. The Aviation Security Act 1982¹⁴ (the 1982 Act), as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2009,¹⁵ provided a framework for airport security planning (see Appendix 3), placing a duty on airport operators to establish a Risk Advisory Group and Security Executive Group to prepare for and oversee airport security, including policing. Membership included relevant airport officials and the Chief Officer of police (or nominated individual) for the relevant police area. In addition, each airport was to develop a Risk Report and agree an Airport Security Plan, based on an agreed Multi-Agency Threat and Risk Assessment.¹⁶ These security planning measures applied to 43 UK airports across 30 police forces, including Belfast International Airport, Belfast City Airport and City of Derry Airport.
- 1.16 Part 3 of the 1982 Act (as amended) imposed a requirement on UK airports to develop a Police Services Agreement, where it was agreed in the Airport Security Plan that a 'dedicated policing presence' was required. This was defined as a '*clearly defined police presence agreed by the SEG [Security Executive Group], either permanently based at the airport, or attending for an agreed amount of*

12 PEEL inspections are His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services inspections of police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL), that assessed the performance of the 43 police forces in England and Wales and the PSNI.

13 Knox, P. & Davidson, A., *Peel Inspection, Belfast Harbour Police 2022*, unpublished.

14 [Legislation.gov.uk, Aviation Security Act 1982](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1982/36/contents), available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1982/36/contents>.

15 [Legislation.gov.uk, Policing and Crime Act 2009](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/26/contents), available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/26/contents>.

16 MATRA was the Multi-Agency Threat and Risk Assessment methodology that was used at many airports to assess risk.

time (for example at a particular time of day or for a specified number of hours) carrying out particular duties that are identified in the ASP [Airport Security Plan] and captured in the PSA [Police Services Agreement].¹⁷ A Police Services Agreement was an agreement that stipulated the level of policing to be provided, what, if any, payment was to be made by the airport operator and any accommodation and facilities the police provision would require. This placed the duty for the cost of policing airports with the airport operator, a practice that continued across all relevant¹⁸ UK airports. If the agreed Airport Security Plan did not identify the need for a dedicated police presence, there was no requirement for a Police Services Agreement and therefore no associated cost required.

1.17 The 1982 Act (as amended) included the following dispute resolution process¹⁹ aimed at resolving disagreement about the Airport Security Plan or the Police Services Agreement:

- **Stage 1: Objecting to an individual measure proposed on the Airport Security Plan.** Where a party not represented on the Security Executive Group was directly impacted by a security measure proposed by the Security Executive Group, the party concerned could trigger an objection mechanism. If this objection could not be resolved locally, the airport operator representative must refer the matter for resolution to the relevant minister. Within Northern Ireland this was the Minister for Infrastructure or, if the objection was about policing, the Minister of Justice.
- **Stage 2: Initial dispute resolution for Airport Security Plans and Police Services Agreement.** If agreement to the terms, variance arrangements or implementation of either the Airport Security Plan or the Police Services Agreement could not be reached, any party required to agree the documents could write to the UK Secretary of State for Transport (Secretary of State) for assistance. The Secretary of State could also initiate a review if deemed necessary. The Secretary of State would require the parties to take steps to try and resolve the dispute and may involve assistance from relevant representative bodies.
- **Stage 3: Final dispute resolution for Airport Security Plans and Police Services Agreement.** The Secretary of State could decide if a dispute should proceed straight to the final stage based on the circumstances of the case. The Secretary of State could make a formal and binding determination about the Airport Security Plan or the Police Services Agreement through consideration of the evidence presented. Each relevant party must have an opportunity to make representations on the matter.

17 Home Office and Department for Transport (DfT), *Airport Security Planning Guidance*, January 2010, unpublished.

18 Relevant airports were airports identified by the Secretary of State for Transport that required enhanced security measures and that were referred to as 'designated aerodromes' under the 1982 Act.

19 [Legislation.gov.uk, Aviation Security Act 1982](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1982/36/contents), available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1982/36/contents>.

- 1.18 The Policing of Aerodromes (Belfast International Airport) Order 2012²⁰ (the 2012 Order) exempted Belfast International Airport from Part 3 of the 1982 Act (as amended) in relation to the development of a Police Services Agreement. This had the effect of preserving the policing arrangements as provided by the Airport Police and set Belfast International Airport apart from its UK competitors as the only UK airport with a dedicated private Police Service. The 2012 Order explanatory note stated that *'[T]he use of a private force at the airport, under sole control of the airport operator, reflects the historic and specific policing requirements in NI [Northern Ireland] resulting from the threat from paramilitary organisations.'*
- 1.19 Despite the shared *'historic and specific policing requirements'*, a similar exemption for Belfast City Airport and City of Derry Airport did not exist and so the requirements of Part 3 of the 1982 Act (as amended) did apply. This resulted in differing legislative requirements for the policing arrangements at Northern Ireland's airports.
- 1.20 The Home Office and the Department for Transport (DfT) developed guidance²¹ in 2010 (the 2010 guidance) for all UK airport security stakeholders on the requirements of the 1982 Act (as amended). The 2010 guidance noted that specialist knowledge was required for many aspects of airport policing and set out the strategic aims of airport policing as:
- *'To work with the airport operator and other stakeholders to help create a safe and secure environment for all those using or employed at the airport;*
 - *To fulfil responsibilities as Category 1 responders as defined within the Civil Contingencies Act 2004²²;*
 - *To uphold the law, prevent, detect and disrupt criminal acts providing the full range of general police duties with an emphasis upon terrorism and serious and organised crime were defined within the Risk Report; and*
 - *To collaborate with all airport stakeholders to deliver an efficient and high standard of service.'*
- 1.21 A National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Aviation Security and Airport Policing portfolio was established to support UK police in meeting the requirements of the 1982 Act, to deliver consistency in the application of the 2010 guidance, ensure effective practice and learning, identify the necessary skills and capabilities for policing at UK airports and support intelligence sharing and the effective methods and technologies to counter terrorism threats and support crime investigation.²³ A Tasking and Delivery Group, attended by the PSNI Aviation Security and Airport Policing Commander, had been established in 2023-24 to review and update the 2010 guidance with the aim of improving compliance across all relevant UK airports.

20 [Legislation.gov.uk, The Policing of Aerodromes \(Belfast International Airport\) Order 2012](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/837/pdfs/ukxi_20120837_en.pdf), available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/837/pdfs/ukxi_20120837_en.pdf.

21 Home Office & DfT, *Airport Security Planning Guidance, January 2010*, unpublished.

22 [Legislation.gov.uk, Civil Contingencies Act 2004, 18 November 2004](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents), available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents>.

23 NPCC, *Aviation Security & Airport Policing Delivery Plan 2023-2025*, NPCC presentation, unpublished.

1.22 Although unique in the UK, the policing of Belfast International Airport had similarities with airport policing in the Republic of Ireland where State-owned airports employed a private police force independent from An Garda Síochána.²⁴ In Dublin and Cork Airports this was provided by the Airport Police Service.²⁵ The Dublin Airport Police Service had full police powers within the airport and was led by a Chief Airport Officer alongside three Inspectors, 13 Sergeants and approximately 88 Constables supported by a canine unit. However, unlike at Belfast International Airport, the territorial police force, An Garda Síochána, had a dedicated police presence including a police station with detention facilities. This produced a close working relationship between the two police forces, and while the Airport Police Service had responsibility for responding to incidents, and had powers to arrest and detain, the investigation and processing of criminal cases was the responsibility of An Garda Síochána. The primary focus for the Airport Police Service was in fulfilling their regulatory requirements, as set under European Union law, to patrol and provide surveillance of the airport and its boundaries.

SECURITY PLANNING AND THE POLICING OF UK AND REPUBLIC OF IRELAND HARBOURS

1.23 UK port security planning was set out in The Port Security Regulations 2009²⁶ (the 2009 Regulations). The key requirements included the establishment of Port Security Authorities, the designation of a Port Facility Security Officer and the need for a port security assessment and security plan. This was to ensure compliance with the International Ship and Port Security code.²⁷ Although not a requirement, the role of the Port Facility Security Officer could be undertaken by a Port Police Officer, as was the case in Belfast Harbour.

1.24 The role of policing in port security planning, as detailed in the 2009 Regulations, required the Port Security Authority to liaise and co-operate with UK control authorities, that included 'any police service that has an interest in the port concerned'. This required the involvement of local Police Services in security training/planning exercises. Unlike at relevant UK airports, there were no statutory provisions requiring a Police Services Agreement equivalent that detailed the policing arrangements at UK ports. Each Port Authority was free to decide on the policing model, which at nine ports included the use of a dedicated Port Police force. The policing of these ports was a shared endeavour between the local police force and the Port Police force, with day-to-day policing largely undertaken by the Port Police force.

24 The national police force in the Republic of Ireland.

25 *Dublin Airport, Airport Police, About the Airport Police Service*, available at [https://www.dublinairport.com/at-the-airport/advice-helpful-services/airport-police#:~:text=The%20Airport%20Police%20Service%20\(APS,from%20unlawful%20acts%20of%20interference.](https://www.dublinairport.com/at-the-airport/advice-helpful-services/airport-police#:~:text=The%20Airport%20Police%20Service%20(APS,from%20unlawful%20acts%20of%20interference.)

26 *Legislation.gov.uk, The Port Security Regulations 2009*, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2009/2048>.

27 The International Ship and Port Security code was an international code detailing maritime and port security-related requirements that port authorities must adhere to. See <https://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/Pages/SOLAS-XI-2%20ISPS%20Code.aspx>.

- 1.25 A 2008 DfT review (the 2008 DfT Review) of UK port policing²⁸ (that included the Harbour Police) reported that *'[P]ort police forces should continue to play an important role in maintaining the safety and security of port estates... and that [D]espite their somewhat curious independent status, they have not become an historical anomaly but have modernised to emulate Home Office forces'*. This report noted that while Port Police forces do not exist to provide policing of UK borders, they had an important role in maintaining safety and security and were empowered to deal with broadly the same types of issues as local police forces albeit limited by the extent of their jurisdiction. The report made nine recommendations including that port police forces *'deserve the full support of port management and of local police forces'*, that they should have a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the local police force, undertake activities to ensure standardisation with police standards where possible, and the need for legislative change to widen their jurisdiction.
- 1.26 Although Belfast Harbour was one of nine UK ports to employ a private Port Police service, the uniqueness of the Harbour Estate, including its size and proximity to Belfast City Centre, its diverse commercial environment and the presence of a residential population, set Belfast Harbour and the work of the Harbour Police apart from their UK counterparts. Of the remaining eight Port Police forces, the Port of Dover Police provided the closest comparator. Just as with the Harbour Police, Port of Dover Police Officers were appointed under the 1847 Act and were funded by the Dover Harbour Board. At the time of the inspection fieldwork the force consisted of one Chief Inspector, one Inspector, four Sergeants, 23 Constables and two civilian support staff. Port of Dover Police operated a community policing model, with community engagement a core activity across five dedicated policing areas, each with a specialised patrol plan. As with the Harbour Police, the Port of Dover Police utilised the Kent Police custody facilities, requiring a close working relationship. An MoU with Kent Police had been in place since 2009 and was under review at the time of the inspection fieldwork.
- 1.27 Similarly to the policing arrangements at state owned airports in the Republic of Ireland, the policing of harbours and ports was a shared endeavour between a very small, specialised private police force operating at Dublin Port (Dublin Harbour Police) and Dún Laoghaire Harbour (Dún Laoghaire Harbour Police), and dedicated policing provided by An Garda Síochána. This included a dedicated police station and detention facilities at Dublin Port. The main duties of the harbour police were the enforcement of byelaws and the regulation of the harbour as well as a role in emergency planning, however the processing and investigation of criminal incidents remained the responsibility of An Garda Síochána.

²⁸ Department for Transport, 2008, *Accountability and Standards of the Port Police Forces*, available at <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20081022215637/http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/shippingports/ports/accountabilityreview>.

THIS INSPECTION

- 1.28 Although an inspection of two separate and independent Police Services, the Harbour Police and the Airport Police, similarities in their respective commercial operating environments enabled a thematic exploration of the policing of Northern Ireland's key airport and harbour infrastructure.
- 1.29 The Harbour Police and the Airport Police completed a self-assessment prior to fieldwork, that gave the organisations an early opportunity to appraise their own performance across a range of key areas. This was useful in identifying key risks and challenges and assisted Inspectors with fieldwork planning. Fieldwork took place during January and February 2025 and included three days onsite at Belfast International Airport and three days with the Harbour Police at the Belfast Harbour Estate. Focus groups were conducted with Airport Police and Harbour Police Constables and Sergeants, and with Harbour Police administrative and control room staff. Interviews were held with the Belfast International Airport Chief Operating Officer, the Harbour Police Inspector and Chief Officer and senior members of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. The Inspection Team met with the PSNI Aviation Security and Airport Policing Commander and the Maritime Commander. The Belfast City Airport Operations Manager and Head of Security were also interviewed, as well as a wide range of key stakeholders from across the two sites and from organisations who work with the Airport Police and the Harbour Police. A small number of Harbour Police and Airport Police investigation case files were also dip sampled and reviewed.
- 1.30 Information collated during fieldwork was augmented and triangulated against the details from the case file review, information supplied as part of the self-assessment process and desktop research. The full methodology for this inspection is contained in Appendix 5 and Terms of Reference are provided in Appendix 6.

CHAPTER 2: STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

POLICING ARRANGEMENTS

- 2.1 The presence of multiple Police Services and law enforcement agencies operating within Northern Ireland’s airports and harbours had produced a complex policing landscape that raised questions about authority, accountability, differing operational priorities and policing standards within a single jurisdiction. Competing commercial priorities further complicated the issue. If not transparent and effectively managed, these policing arrangements could have implications for public safety and trust and confidence in policing across Northern Ireland.
- 2.2 As noted in Chapter 1, as the territorial Police Service of Northern Ireland, the PSNI retained responsibility for policing all Northern Ireland’s airports and harbours, irrespective of the local arrangements in place. The PSNI had a Maritime Commander and an Aviation Security and Airport Policing Commander role however, these were not dedicated policing roles but rather undertaken in addition to other duties. In 2024 the PSNI appointed Nominated Airport Policing Officers, at Inspector and Chief Inspector rank, within each of the relevant police districts to provide local oversight. This was a positive move that would further professionalise the PSNI’s airport policing function and help ensure national obligations were met in policing UK airports.
- 2.3 The PSNI held the following roles at Northern Ireland’s airports and harbours:
- involvement in the statutory security planning processes, including assessment of risk, harm and threat at airports, as specified under the 1982 Act (as amended) and emergency planning events at Belfast Harbour;
 - delivery of compliance with the Civil Contingencies Act 2004²⁹, including responsibility for command of all major incidents;³⁰
 - in the fulfilment of their statutory duties under the Terrorism Act 2000,³¹ the PSNI’s Ports Team,³² who were based at Northern Ireland’s airports and harbours, worked collaboratively with UK intelligence agencies to prevent, deter and investigate terrorist activity. This team also assisted Officers throughout Northern Ireland with serious crime investigations such as modern slavery and human trafficking;

29 [Legislation.gov.uk, Civil Contingencies Act 2004, 18 November 2004](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents), available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents>.

30 The College of Policing defined a ‘major incident’ as ‘[A]n event or situation, with a range of serious consequences, which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agencies.’

31 [Legislation.gov.uk, Terrorism Act 2000](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/contents), available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/contents>.

32 [PSNI, Air and Sea Ports](https://www.psnipolice.uk/safety-and-support/advice-and-information/air-and-sea-ports#:~:text=Police%20Service%20of%20Northern%20Ireland%20Small%20Ports%20Team&text=The%20Ports%20Team%20assists%20front,high%20risk%20missing%20person%20enquiries.), available at <https://www.psnipolice.uk/safety-and-support/advice-and-information/air-and-sea-ports#:~:text=Police%20Service%20of%20Northern%20Ireland%20Small%20Ports%20Team&text=The%20Ports%20Team%20assists%20front,high%20risk%20missing%20person%20enquiries.>

- this was bolstered by a Small Ports Unit³³ that monitored and managed Northern Ireland's smaller airports and harbours, dealing with reports of unusual or suspicious activity;
- when required, PSNI Local Response Policing Teams³⁴ were deployed to respond to incidents at Northern Ireland's airports and harbours in support of the Airport Police and Harbour Police; and
- deployment of specialist resources such as search, public order, roads policing and firearms policing in support of the Airport Police and Harbour Police.

2.4 These activities were undertaken alongside the day-to-day policing role of the Airport Police at Belfast International Airport and the Harbour Police at Belfast Harbour Estate and Belfast City Airport. Inspectors requested data on the scale of PSNI involvement in the day-to-day policing of Northern Ireland's airports and harbours, however this information was not available. The search for the data identified an issue with the recording of incidents, including major incidents, at Northern Ireland's airports and harbours and the PSNI had initiated a project to implement a fix to ensure accurate recording and monitoring.

As an Area for Improvement, within three months from report publication, the Police Service of Northern Ireland should accurately record and monitor the scale of its involvement in the day-to-day policing of Northern Ireland's airports and harbours.

2.5 The airport security planning framework, as detailed in the 1982 Act (as amended), was a complex process that attempted to establish collaborative procedures that accounted for local need, within an environment with often different competing priorities, including commercial interests. The difficulties this presented were not unique to Northern Ireland, however the process was further complicated by the 2012 Order and the role of the Airport Police at Belfast International Airport and the Harbour Police at Belfast City Airport.

2.6 Inspectors did not assess compliance with the framework in Northern Ireland, or its effectiveness, due to restrictions on CJI's remit, as limited to the PSNI, the Airport Police and the Harbour Police, as well as the commercial sensitivities involved. However, Inspectors were told that the impetus for the joint NPCC and DfT review of the 2010 guidance was based on a need to improve national compliance with the framework; this included Northern Ireland. Inspectors heard different, and often contradictory, views on compliance at Northern Ireland's airports. At the time of the inspection fieldwork, Belfast International Airport management told Inspectors that the Security Executive Group had not met since 2022. Given its central role in formalising the Airport Security Plan and providing senior level oversight of airport security, including policing, Inspectors were greatly concerned by this

33 PSNI, *Police Small Ports Unit*, available at <https://www.psnipolice.uk/police-small-ports-unit>.

34 Local Response Policing Teams respond to calls, conduct investigations, and deal with community problems. See <https://www.psnipolice.uk/about-us/our-departments/local-policing#:~:text=Each%20District%20has%20dedicated%20Local,Ireland%20there%20are%2026%20LPRTs..>

and its implications for meaningful discussion and agreement regarding policing requirements. Following Inspection fieldwork and feedback to Belfast International Airport management from Inspectors about non-compliance, Inspectors were told that plans to re-establish it were underway. This was positive; however, it was imperative that any other lapses in compliance at any of Northern Ireland's airports were addressed with haste. The PSNI had a key role in ensuring compliance and this should include ensuring appropriate senior level PSNI representation at each Risk Advisory Group and Senior Executive Group.

- 2.7 At the time of Inspection fieldwork, none of Northern Ireland's main airports had a Police Services Agreement in place with the PSNI. This meant that there was no cost recovery for PSNI involvement in policing any of Northern Ireland's airports. The intention of Part 3 of the 1982 Act (as amended) was based on 100% cost recovery in cases where agreement on a dedicated policing presence was reached, and a Police Services Agreement was established. Belfast International Airport was exempt from this aspect of the security planning framework because of the 2012 Order and the presence of the Airport Police. Inspectors were told that the absence of a Police Services Agreement at Belfast City Airport and City of Derry Airport was based on unanimous agreement at each Security Executive Group, and through the Airport Security Plan process of which the PSNI were a part, and that there was no requirement for a dedicated policing presence. Belfast City Airport told Inspectors that this agreement was partly based on their proximity to Belfast City Centre and to local PSNI stations, as well as the daily patrol provided by the Harbour Police, which at the time was agreed was sufficient mitigation to the risk, harm and threat identified.
- 2.8 The PSNI told Inspectors that they were not fully satisfied that the Risk Report and Airport Security Plan processes were operating effectively or adequately addressing the risk, harm and threat at each of Northern Ireland's airports. They believed that there was a need for a greater focus on emerging areas such as the threat posed by Artificial Intelligence enabled cyber threats, the threat from interventions of state actors,³⁵ and broader consideration of the impact of the Common Travel Area.³⁶ In addition, the PSNI were not fully assured about the role of the Airport Police and the Harbour Police in mitigating the risk, harm and threat due to a lack of PSNI oversight and governance and their ability to provide the necessary skills and capabilities in key areas such as armed patrols or the establishment of the necessary command structures during an emergency. Inspectors shared these concerns that were particularly evident at Belfast International Airport where the size and structure of the Airport Police, and their non designation as a Home Office Police Force, prevented their capacity to establish a bronze command³⁷ to provide the necessary direction during emergency or major incidents, with the bronze and silver command structure automatically defaulting to the PSNI.

35 State actors refer to hostile activities by foreign states seeking to undermine or threaten the safety and interests of the UK.

36 The Common Travel Area was an agreement between the UK, Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man that allowed citizens from the areas to move freely between them without needing a passport or routine immigration control.

37 'The bronze commander is responsible for the command of a group of resources and carrying out functional or geographical responsibilities related to the tactical plan.' See <https://www.college.police.uk/app/operations/command-and-control/command-structures>.

On these occasions the Airport Police provided assistance to the PSNI and operated under the PSNI command in accordance with established bronze/silver protocols. However, Inspectors were also concerned about Airport Police and Harbour Police Officer resilience, with low number of Officers often on duty, and the implications this had for meaningful risk and threat mitigation.

- 2.9 As Northern Ireland's territorial Police Service with the job of protecting life and property in Northern Ireland, upholding the law and preventing crime, there was an onus on the PSNI to assure themselves that the policing arrangements at Northern Ireland's airports were operating efficiently, effectively and to agreed national standards.³⁸ There was a need for a fundamental review of the policing of Northern Ireland's airports based on an up-to-date, evidenced based assessment of the risk, harm and threat at each airport as well as the required policing resource, skills and expertise needed to sufficiently and effectively mitigate the risks involved. This was essential to ensure that the PSNI were fulfilling their statutory responsibilities in keeping Northern Ireland safe. There was an obligation on the PSNI to ensure that this information, and any implications this had on the policing requirements at Northern Ireland's airports, were raised at each Risk Advisory Group and Security Executive Group and used to inform Airport Security Plans. If unanimous agreement could not be reached based on this information, it was imperative that the appropriate dispute mechanisms provided for within the security planning framework in the 1982 Act (as amended) were activated.
- 2.10 The outworkings of this review may have particular implications for Belfast International Airport due to the role of the Airport Police in addition to the PSNI. It was therefore important that this review includes a comprehensive strategic assessment of the role of the Airport Police, considering all available options, with the aim of securing effective policing and ensuring appropriate oversight, accountability and standards in policing at Northern Ireland's busiest airport.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

Within 18 months of report publication, the Police Service of Northern Ireland should lead and complete, in partnership with Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police, a fundamental review of the policing of Northern Ireland's airports and produce a report with any required recommendations. The review should include input from and consultation with airport policing funders, relevant airport partners and statutory organisations. The review report should be made available to all key stakeholders.

³⁸ National policing standards in the UK refers to the framework of policies, procedures and guidelines set by the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council to ensure consistency, professionalism and accountability across all UK police forces.

- 2.11 Strategic Recommendation 1 is a longer-term recommendation with potential fundamental implications for the future of policing at Northern Ireland's airports. However, there were several areas that required more urgent attention by the Airport Police, in the short-term, to improve the effectiveness of policing at Belfast International Airport. These recommendations are outlined throughout the remainder of this Inspection Report.
- 2.12 Unlike at Northern Ireland's airports, there was no statutory security framework that outlined the policing requirements at Northern Ireland's harbours. As such, the policing of harbours was largely undertaken by the PSNI in the roles previously outlined, alongside the day-to-day policing of Belfast Harbour Estate by the Harbour Police. Both the PSNI and the Harbour Police reported that the policing arrangements at Belfast Harbour were operating effectively, and Inspectors were satisfied with the arrangements in place. However, several recommendations have been made to the Harbour Police throughout the remainder of this Inspection Report to further formalise and improve these arrangements.

STRATEGY

- 2.13 The Harbour Commissioners demonstrated a strong commitment to the Harbour Police and clearly recognised their value in maintaining safety and in attracting inward investment. There was a clear and well understood link between the vision and strategy for Belfast Harbour and the role of the Harbour Police. Strategic goal three of the *Belfast Harbour Strategy 2025-29*³⁹ 'Create vibrant places to live and work' referenced the role of the Harbour Police in maintaining safety across Belfast Harbour, as delivered through a community policing model that went 'beyond traditional policing.' The Harbour Police Policing Strategy 2019-2022 (the Policing Strategy) clearly reflected this through its vision 'To provide a best in class connected community policing service helping make Belfast Harbour an attractive and safe place to live, work, invest and visit.'⁴⁰ This ethos and its impact on service delivery was well known across the Service. The Policing Strategy included four strategic themes including 'stakeholder and public confidence', 'compliance', 'organisational development and effectiveness' and 'supporting the business'. These four strategic themes formed the basis of the Harbour Police Policing Plan 2019-2023⁴¹ (the Policing Plan) alongside 17 policing goals (See Appendix 4). This strategic framework was in line with expected standards.
- 2.14 The Policing Strategy and the Policing Plan had been positive in setting direction for the Harbour Police over several years and driving change in key areas. However, at the time of Inspection fieldwork both were out-of-date (the Policing Plan had been 'rolled over' to 2024 and 2025) and needed updating to reflect not only the new

39 *Belfast Harbour, Belfast Harbour Strategy 2025-2029 Advance Regional Prosperity, January 2025*, available at <https://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/strategy/>.

40 *Belfast Harbour, Policing Strategy 2019-2022, May 2019*, unpublished.

41 *BHP, Policing Plan 2019-2023*, unpublished.

2025-2029 Belfast Harbour strategy and vision to 'Advance Regional Prosperity', but also the changing dynamics of a growing Harbour Estate that would inevitably have implications for policing priorities. At draft Report stage, Inspectors were advised that a 2025-2030 Policing Plan was to be introduced before the end of 2025.

- 2.15 Policing at Belfast International Airport, as undertaken by the Airport Police, was not prioritised in the same way as it was at Belfast Harbour and Inspectors assessed that this was reflective of the differing commercial environment and the complex policing arrangements in place. Belfast International Airport leadership reported four strategic pillars driving their 2024 Business Plan,⁴² these included 'leadership, people and culture', 'rebuilding our brand through improved passenger experience', 'infrastructure' and 'financial performance'. The lack of a strategic pillar relating to safety and security, under which policing would feature, was an omission that had exacerbated uncertainty about the strategic position of the Airport Police within Belfast International Airport and a lack of clarity about their core policing role. This was further compounded by a lack of any internal Airport Police strategy guiding the vision and direction of policing at Belfast International Airport or a Policing Plan that set key priorities for delivery. A Patrol Strategy⁴³ had been created in November 2024 that referenced the Airport Police's vision to 'Police the airport in co-operation with the community and with the aim of securing their support', however at the time of inspection fieldwork knowledge of this strategy was limited and it appeared to have had little operational impact. There was a need for much greater strategic grip and direction at the Airport Police, and Officers required clarity in their policing role and an understanding of how this aligned with organisational goals as well as with wider policing priorities in Northern Ireland.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of publication, Belfast International Airport Constabulary should develop a vision, strategy and policing plan to direct policing at Belfast International Airport. This should include actions to improve governance and accountability measures and align with Police Service of Northern Ireland Policing Plan priorities.

- 2.16 Although the Harbour Police had a detailed Policing Plan in place, there was no alignment between it and key national policing priorities as set by the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) and the PSNI.⁴⁴ Inspectors assessed that this was a significant oversight. Such alignment would not only ensure that key priority areas such as domestic abuse, child criminal exploitation, child sexual abuse and exploitation, ending violence against women and girls and human trafficking were

42 BIA, 2024 Business Plan and objectives, Staff Briefing, April 2024, unpublished.

43 Airport Police, Belfast International Airport Patrol Strategy 2024 / 2025, 19 November 2024, unpublished.

44 NIPB, The Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2025-2030 & Annual Performance Plan 2025/26, April 2025, available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/files/nipolicingboard/2025-04/Policing%20Plan%202025-30%20and%20Annual%20Performance%20Plan%2025-26.pdf>.

also priorities for the Harbour Police, but it would also enhance public safety, operational efficiency and co-operation ensuring a safer Northern Ireland for citizens and visitors.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

Belfast Harbour Police should ensure that there is strategic alignment between their policing priorities and the policing priorities of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

LEGISLATION AND POWERS

2.17 As outlined in Chapter 1, the designation of powers to the Airport Police and the Harbour Police came from the 1994 Order and the 1847 Act respectively. As private employees, Airport Police and Harbour Police Officers were not maintained under Police Regulations⁴⁵ in the same way as PSNI Officers and just as the 1994 Order and 1847 Act enabled their employment, so too it enabled their dismissal by the airport operator or the port authority. Both the 1994 Order and the 1847 Act provided for those employed in the role to have the powers, privileges and responsibilities of a Constable, empowering them to deal with broadly the same type of criminal issues as PSNI Officers. Both had PACE⁴⁶ powers and knowledge of the extent of these powers was good. Each private Police Service also had responsibility for enforcing relevant byelaws^{47, 48} that regulated the use and operation of their respective areas and the conduct of persons within. These byelaws were dated and not frequently used.

2.18 There was no established process within either Service to update and train Officers on relevant legislative changes that impacted on their powers. For example, the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021⁴⁹ created a new offence and introduced new police powers to tackle domestic abuse in Northern Ireland. Knowledge of these powers and how they applied to Airport Police and Harbour Police Officers was lacking. This was an issue CJI reported on in the 2008 Harbour Police inspection noting that '*BHP [Belfast Harbour Police] has no access to any formal system of legislative updates.*'⁵⁰

45 PSNI Police Regulations were set out in the Police Service of Northern Ireland Regulations 2005. They detailed the main terms and conditions of PSNI Officers.

46 The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 (PACE) codes of practice regulate police powers and protect public rights in Northern Ireland. The codes of practice cover; stop and search; arrest; detention; investigation; identification; and interviewing detainees.

47 Belfast Harbour Byelaws can be viewed at the Harbour Office by arrangement.

48 *Belfast International Airport Byelaws*, available at <https://www.belfastairport.com/media/1349/byelaws.pdf>.

49 *Legislation.gov.uk, Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2>.

50 *CJI, 2008, Belfast Harbour Police, An Inspection of the Belfast Harbour Police, May 2008*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/an-inspection-of-the-belfast-harbour-police/>

The 2022 Harbour Police commissioned PEEL inspection also noted that *'there is a significant gap in the provision of regular continuous professional development... Officers would benefit from scheduled monthly inputs on...legislation changes.'*⁵¹

This inspection has again highlighted a gap in knowledge about relevant legislative changes. The implementation of Strategic Recommendation 5 should include an agreement with the PSNI about timely access to information on relevant legislative changes as necessary for both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police.

- 2.19 Both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police operated solely within their respective boundaries with restrictions on the extent of their jurisdiction. As noted in Chapter 1, the 1847 Act empowered the Harbour Police to police the entirety of the Belfast Harbour Estate and one mile beyond, while the Airport Police's powers were limited to the airport boundary. However, both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police had occasion to operate outside of their respective boundaries, including when transporting a detainee to a PSNI custody facility. There were also occasions where the PSNI requested assistance from the Airport Police or the Harbour Police in areas outside of their jurisdiction, often instead of a PSNI resource and/or due to their proximity. Concern about the loss of Police powers did not apply in cases of mental ill health due to the provisions within the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986⁵² that granted Police authority to remove individuals to a place of safety under specified conditions, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries.
- 2.20 Both Airport Police and Harbour Police Officers were concerned about the potential for being held liable for action taken in carrying out their duties beyond their jurisdiction. Inspectors shared this concern and believed that the situation put both the Officers and members of the public at unnecessary risk. Furthermore, such strict geographical limitations had inevitable implications for the full and proper investigation of crimes committed within Belfast International Airport or Belfast Harbour Estate.
- 2.21 The 2008 DfT Review recommended that the DfT should *'explore means of changing the legislation to widen the jurisdiction prescribed in current legislation for members of port police forces to operate outside their ports.'*⁵³ The Marine Navigation Act 2013⁵⁴ subsequently extended the jurisdiction of Port Police Officers in England and Wales to operate outside of their port area, with the consent of the Chief Officer of police for the local area in the following circumstances:
- the prevention of the commission of offences in the port area;
 - the detection or investigation of offences committed in the port area;

51 Knox, P. & Davidson, A., *Peel Inspection, Belfast Harbour Police 2022*, unpublished.

52 [Legislation.gov.uk, The Mental Health \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1986](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1986/595/contents), available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1986/595/contents>.

53 *Department for Transport, 2008, Accountability and Standards of the Port Police Forces*, available at <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20081022215637/http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/shippingports/ports/accountabilityreview>.

54 [Legislation.gov.uk, Marine Navigation Act 2013](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/23/contents), available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/23/contents>.

- the apprehension or prosecution of offenders in respect of offences committed in the port area;
- the preservation of the peace in the port area;
- the apprehension of offenders within the port area in respect of offences committed outside that area and the transport of them to police stations outside that area; and
- the regulation of traffic in the port area.

2.22 A similar extension was not enacted in Northern Ireland leaving the Harbour Police adrift from their English and Welsh counterparts. Moreover, the uniqueness of the Airport Police, as the only private airport police in the UK, had an isolating effect with no clear legislative avenue to pursue. The Airport Police had not been proactively seeking a legislative change, despite similar restrictions and concerns, however the Harbour Police had been advocating for change and at the time of Inspection fieldwork they had reached an agreed position with the Department of Justice (DoJ). The DoJ reported that due to the shortened mandate of the current Northern Ireland Assembly, a suitable legislative avenue was not available, and the identification of relevant legislation would therefore wait until the next mandate.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 4

The Department of Justice should take steps to prepare for the required legislative change to extend the jurisdiction of Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police in the next Northern Ireland Assembly mandate's legislative programme.

GOVERNANCE

2.23 As private Police Services, the Airport Police and the Harbour Police were not subject to the same external oversight and accountability measures as the PSNI. For example, the NIPB, who were responsible for securing 'an effective and efficient local police service,'⁵⁵ had no oversight function of either. Complaints about the conduct of Airport Police and Harbour Police Officers were, however, subject to investigation by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (OPONI). During 2023-24 the OPONI received one complaint about the Airport Police and two about the Harbour Police; this was in line with the average number of complaints received each year since 2011-12, at two complaints for each Service.⁵⁶

55 NIPB, *Our Work*, available at <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/our-work>.

56 OPONI, *Annual Statistical Bulletin and accompanying spreadsheet 2023/24*, 6 June 2024, available at <https://www.policeombudsman.org/publications/annual-statistical-bulletin-2023-24>.

- 2.24 The 2008 DfT Review of UK port policing recommended that '*[P]ort authorities should consider involving persons from outside the port authority in their monitoring role for the port police.*' To fill this external accountability gap, the Harbour Police established the Police Advisory Committee to advise them, and the Harbour Commissioners, on policing matters. Membership of the Police Advisory Committee included the Harbour Police Chief Officer, two senior ex-PSNI Officers and members of the Harbour Commissioner Senior Executive Team and Board. This provided the Harbour Commissioners with a strategic and operational insight into policing matters. This was a positive development and was working well. The Police Advisory Committee met twice per year, and the Harbour Police Chief Officer presented a detailed policing report at each meeting. Inspectors were told that the advice and guidance offered at the Police Advisory Committee was readily accepted.
- 2.25 A multi-layered approach to internal Harbour Police accountability was in place and this provided several checks and balances on policing activities across a range of levels. These included bi-monthly reporting to the Belfast Harbour Board, quarterly Senior Management Team meetings, quarterly Sector review meetings and weekly pacesetter meetings. Daily planning meetings and daily team briefings were also used to task Police Officers for the shift ahead; this was based on the Patrol Strategy, pre-planned engagement activities and follow-up investigative activities from the 'live' case list.
- 2.26 Other than inclusion in CJI's statutory remit, there was no external oversight of the Airport Police, and no Police Advisory Committee equivalent had been established to fill this gap. Inspectors believed that this would be beneficial. The Belfast International Airport Chief Operating Officer, who was responsible for the Airport Police, reported to the Belfast International Airport Board. Inspectors were advised that the Board met two to three times per year. The Chief Operating Officer provided key performance indicator updates to the Chairman of the Board during the monthly meeting with the Airport Executive Committee. These updates included an assessment of risks and threat levels specific to the Airport Police, Airport Police resourcing, sickness levels, overtime and number of incidents.
- 2.27 The Airport Police also had insufficient internal oversight and accountability arrangements. The Chief Operating Officer undertook a weekly informal 'catch-up' with Officers on a Friday afternoon, and Inspectors were advised at draft Report stage that individual meetings between the Chief Operating Officer and the duty Sergeant were arranged, when required. Six Sergeants' meetings had been held since the beginning of 2022; at the time of the Inspection fieldwork there had not been a Sergeants' meeting for 10 months. There was an informal handover of duties from the outgoing to incoming duty Sergeant, and on occasion this did direct tasking related to ongoing activities. However, Inspectors were told that this process was ineffective and often Officers took time at the beginning of their shift to read the activity log on 'Noggin'⁵⁷ to get an understanding of the previous shift and any outstanding actions.

57 'Noggin' was the Airport Police digital information system.

- 2.28 Inspectors were concerned by the lack of effective governance within the Airport Police that had resulted in a lack of accountability and transparency in decision-making. Strategic Recommendation 2 and the requirement for the development of greater strategic vision and direction within the Airport Police must therefore also address this governance vacuum.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

- 2.29 The Harbour Police and the PSNI had a strong and mature professional relationship that had developed over many years. Inspectors were greatly encouraged by the degree of interoperability between the two with the Harbour Police having access to the PSNI radio system, the PSNI's Niche™ Records Management System (without editing privileges), attending the PSNI's Belfast monthly Tactical Tasking and Co-ordination Group and the degree of mutual support and engagement that occurred. Agreement on Harbour Police access to PSNI systems had evolved over time and relied on the assurances provided by the Harbour Police regarding training standards, appropriate monitoring and oversight and police vetting.
- 2.30 The Harbour Police were reported as a trusted partner by the PSNI and the professional relationship as mutually beneficial, with the PSNI requesting assistance from the Harbour Police to low-level incidents at Belfast City Airport and the Harbour Police taking responsibility for planning and policing operations around key leisure events such as those at the Belfast SSE Arena. The Harbour Police relied on the support and assistance of the PSNI when their own capacity and capabilities were stretched, for example in dealing with a serious incident, or in providing support during operations linked to an investigation. This reliance was particularly evident at night when the Harbour Police's resources reduced from a minimum strength of eight Officers between 10:30am and 4:00pm, peak high visibility hours, to four Officers between 9:00pm and 7:00am. Inspectors heard concerns about resourcing challenges at night, with particular concern noted about the impact of Officers held with a detainee at hospital on available Harbour Police resources. Inspectors were told at draft Report stage that the minimum strength for the nightshift had increased to five Officers, which was positive (see Chapter 3).
- 2.31 The Harbour Police had several MoUs in place with the PSNI that covered agreement in areas such as the access to the Niche™ Records Management System. However, they had been trying to agree an overarching MoU signed with the PSNI for several years and this had, to date, been unsuccessful despite an acknowledgement by the PSNI of the need for one. Inspectors were told that this was due to the turnover of responsible Police Officers within the PSNI.

- 2.32 Partnership working between the Airport Police and the PSNI was less well developed but was showing early signs of improvement. Inspectors were told that the PSNI Aviation Security and Airport Policing Commander was an active participant at the Belfast International Airport Risk Advisory Group and Security Executive Group and had recently been providing advice and guidance on key areas, including in the development of the Airport Police Patrol Strategy and the need for a Protest Strategy. Day-to-day interaction with the PSNI was reported as helpful, but the response was noted as sporadic depending on PSNI resourcing. Interaction with the local PSNI district had reduced since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Airport Police were keen to re-set these relations. There was no MoU in place between the Airport Police and the PSNI and the Airport Police did not have access to the same PSNI systems that had proved beneficial to the Harbour Police, for example the Niche™ Records Management System. Inspectors were told that although Airport Police Officers did have access to PSNI radios, these were to be used in emergency situations only as the dedicated radio channel was not monitored. This caused problems for the Airport Police who were reliant on mobile telephone numbers or the 101 system when contacting the PSNI. The presence of the PSNI's Ports Team at the airport provided additional reassurance to the Airport Police and access to PSNI resource and knowledge when needed.
- 2.33 Inspectors were greatly concerned about the lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities held by the Airport Police, the Harbour Police and the PSNI, particularly in relation to high-risk crime types that occurred within Belfast International Airport and Belfast Harbour Estate, for example rape, serious sexual assault and domestic incidents. There was an understanding that the Airport Police and the Harbour Police provided the first response to incidents due to their proximity, however there was no clarity on responsibility for the investigation. This was generally decided on a case-by-case basis, introducing uncertainty during the most time-critical part of an investigation. An example identified by Inspectors during a case file review for CJI's inspection of child criminal exploitation⁵⁸ underlined the seriousness of the issue, where an alleged child sexual exploitation case was passed by the PSNI to the Harbour Police for investigation due to the reported incident occurring within Belfast Harbour Estate, despite the suspects not residing within Belfast Harbour and the associated risks and safeguarding issues. Responsibility for this case was subsequently returned to the PSNI after assurances provided to CJI Inspectors did not alleviate concerns.
- 2.34 The 2022 Harbour Police PEEL inspection report made the following recommendation: *'the BHP [Belfast Harbour Police] should immediately move to develop a call allocation policy and associated MOU in consultation with PSNI. This should, at a minimum, outline who attends what, where and when, authorisation levels within each organisation for derogation and responsibilities for sustained public protection in such areas where significant threat and harm are at issue.'*

58 To be published in 2025-26.

The need for a MoU between Port Police forces and the local police force was also recommended within the 2008 DfT Review. As both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police move to align with key PSNI policing priorities (Strategic Recommendations 2 and 3), and as the policing needs grow in scale, scope and complexity, the need for greater clarity in responsibility for investigating high-risk crime types will increase. This recommendation should be progressed at pace.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 5

Within six months of report publication, Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police, in collaboration with the Police Service of Northern Ireland, should agree and sign a Memorandum of Understanding detailing:

- the roles and responsibilities for dealing with key high-risk crime types;
- access to Police Service of Northern Ireland systems and custody facilities;
- access to Police Service of Northern Ireland training; and
- access to support and assistance from the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

- 2.35 Several other enforcement agencies operated at Belfast International Airport and Belfast Harbour, these included UK Border Force, UK Immigration enforcement, His Majesty's Revenue & Customs, the Driver and Vehicle Agency Northern Ireland and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Inspectors were told that there was more engagement between these agencies and the Harbour Police than there was with the Airport Police, however this reflected the nature of the work and the enforcement operations taking place at Belfast Harbour relative to the Belfast International Airport. Feedback from these agencies was largely positive about the level of engagement and collaboration with both organisations.
- 2.36 In 2023, the Harbour Police established the Belfast Harbour Joint Agency Group as a *'forum to build relationships, communication, and co-ordination between enforcement agencies, to ensure that there is an appropriate level of preparedness to enhance safety, security, and co-ordination of the joint and general operations within the Belfast Harbour Estate.'*⁵⁹ Member bodies reflected positively on the opportunities the Joint Agency Group provided, particularly in building relationships, sharing information and co-ordinating activities. Members reported that the Group, chaired by the Harbour Police Inspector, was well structured and outcome focussed. A similar group did not exist at Belfast International Airport, and despite positive working relationships with other enforcement agencies, the opportunity for cross agency working and collaboration was limited.

59 Belfast Harbour Joint Agency Group, *Terms of Reference*, October 2024, unpublished.

- 2.37 Both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police submitted their criminal case files to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) for a decision on prosecution, however interaction with the PPS was relatively limited due to the low number of case files submitted. Both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police reported the PPS as helpful partners and noted that they would frequently seek advice from them during case preparation. As reported in CJI's 2025 *'Inspection of offence investigation and criminal case processing by Northern Ireland Departments and Organisations'*⁶⁰ there was a need to standardise the criminal case files submitted to the PPS from organisations other than the PSNI, and to centralise learning with the PPS. Both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police could also benefit from this process. Further discussion on criminal case file investigation and processing is provided in Chapter 3.
- 2.38 A professional relationship between the Airport Police and the Harbour Police was at an early stage and initial meetings had been held. This was a positive step. Inspectors believed that this was an important strategic connection for both Services who, although independent of each other, had several key commonalities and shared areas of concern. Continued growth of this connection was vital as both Services continued to develop, grow and learn.

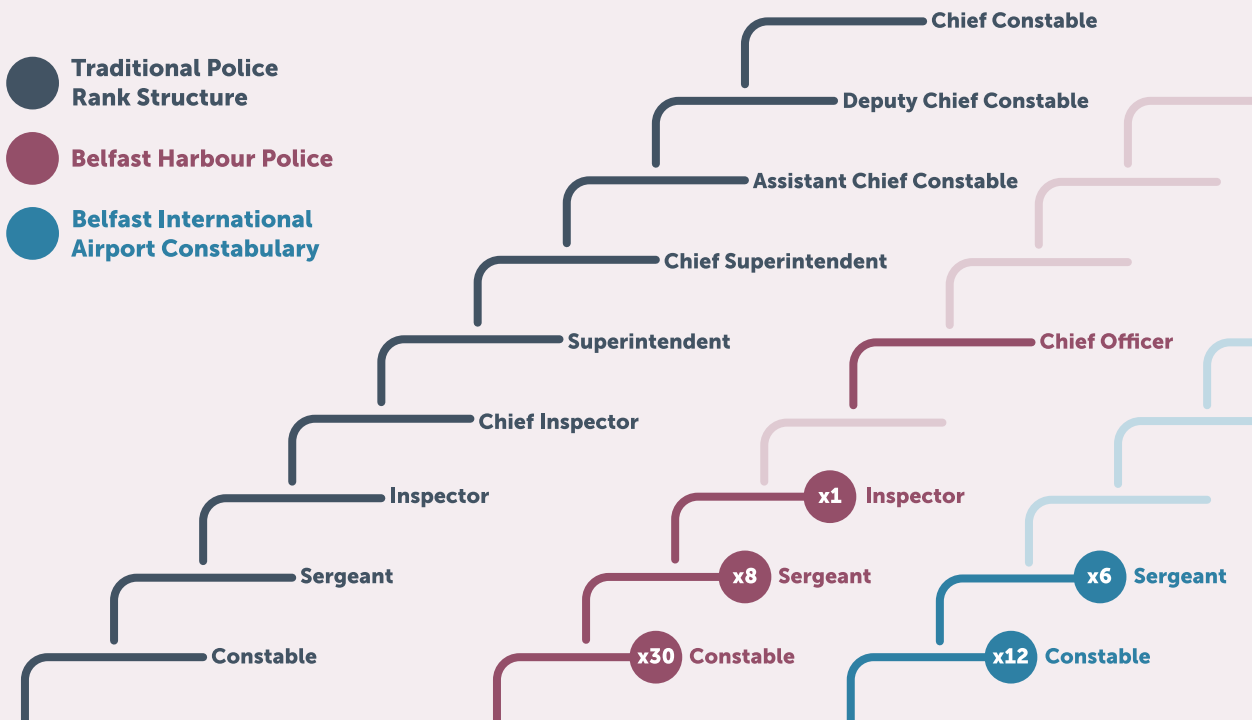
60 CJI, *An Inspection of offence investigation and criminal case processing by Northern Ireland Departments and Organisations*, June 2025, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/inspections-and-prosecutions-by-departments-and-other-bodies/>.

CHAPTER 3: DELIVERY

STAFFING

3.1 Due to the relative size of the Airport Police and the Harbour Police, both Police Services had implemented a truncated version of the traditional UK police rank structure, as shown in Figure 2. The hierarchical UK police rank structure enabled the establishment of a chain of command, ensuring clear lines of authority and accountability, and assisting in decision-making and operational efficiency. The Harbour Police rank structure, although much reduced, retained this hierarchical structure with the Chief Officer acting as a single point of leadership, authority and accountability. The Harbour Police was a Service of 40 Police Officers, supported by a control room and administrative function of approximately 10 staff members.

Figure 2: Traditional UK police rank structure, Airport Police and Harbour Police rank structure.⁶¹



61 Airport Police and Harbour Police rank structure correct at the time of inspection fieldwork.

3.2 In contrast, the Airport Police operated a much-reduced rank structure of 12 Constables and six Sergeants. No single police accountability post had been established, with oversight provided by the Belfast International Airport Chief Operating Officer. There was no control room or administrative function. Although a bigger airport, the rank structure in place at Dublin Airport by the Airport Police Service, was similar to the Harbour Police with one Chief Officer, three Inspectors, 13 Sergeants and approximately 88 Constables. The Airport Police's rank structure had resulted in a lack of leadership and accountability within the Airport Police, and this had significant implications for decision-making, consistency in operational delivery and outcomes, performance management and disciplinary processes.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within six months of report publication, Belfast International Airport Constabulary should review the effectiveness of their rank structure and put in place measures to ensure effective leadership and accountability.

3.3 New recruits to both Police Services with no prior police experience underwent six months police foundation training in the PSNI Police College followed by a two-year probation, however both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police had recently recruited Police Officers directly from the PSNI. This was a positive move that quickened the recruitment process and provided direct policing experience into both Services.

3.4 Resource levels in the Airport Police and the Harbour Police had improved since the COVID-19 pandemic and at the time of Inspection fieldwork, both had returned to their headline establishment figures. Despite this, Airport Police Officers reported feeling understaffed, and while the Harbour Police was generally well resourced during the day, resourcing at night was frequently cited as an area of concern. Harbour Police Officers reported that the reduced potential for visibility at night was the main reason for the reduced resourcing, with backup from the PSNI available if needed. In 2020 the Harbour Police conducted a demand analysis that resulted in the appointment of one Sergeant and two Constables; this was followed by a 2023 review that resulted in the removal of the Maritime Policing Team and released one Sergeant and four Constables to support the formation of a five Sector neighbourhood policing model. Resource planning was discussed at weekly internal meetings with the Port Director and bi-annually at the Police Advisory Committee. However, as both Police Services faced growing and changing environments that were likely to impact on policing requirements in both jurisdictions, Inspectors believed that more analysis of demand was needed to futureproof both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police staff resources.

POLICING MODEL

- 3.5 In 2008, CJI recommended that the 'BHP [Belfast Harbour Police] continues to work closely with its partners to enable it to move to a community policing model of delivery.'⁶² In 2018-19 the Harbour Police re-designed their delivery model away from response policing⁶³ to a neighbourhood policing⁶⁴ model that put 'the community at the forefront of our activity, enabling residents, businesses and visitors to communicate directly with officers responsible for their area.'⁶⁵ This was reflected in the strategic direction set by the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and in the Harbour Police Policing Strategy. The focus on neighbourhood policing was reflective of a Police Service defined by a low level of reactive policing demand, a restricted geographical sphere and a strategic requirement for high levels of visibility. Neighbourhood Officers continued to respond to incidents and calls for assistance, however a shift pattern that directed greater resource towards the day shift cemented the neighbourhood function and placed focus on visibility at key times, as detailed in a Patrol Strategy. This Patrol Strategy was prescriptive in its direction and closely monitored in terms of visibility. Belfast Harbour was divided into a five Sector model, and this enabled an increased focus on engagement, deterrence and crime prevention within each.
- 3.6 In 2024 CJI published 'An Inspection of Community Safety and Local Policing Arrangements in Northern Ireland'⁶⁶ assessing the performance of the PSNI's neighbourhood policing function against the 2022 'Hallmarks of Neighbourhood Policing'⁶⁷ (the Hallmarks). As part of the Hallmarks the PSNI established a Neighbourhood Training Faculty to provide the first ever PSNI dedicated neighbourhood training courses (Hallmark 7: Developing Officers and Staff). All the Harbour Police Neighbourhood Officers had been enrolled on this course. This was a positive step that would further professionalise the role within the Harbour Police.

62 CJI, 2008, *Belfast Harbour Police, An Inspection of the Belfast Harbour Police*, May 2008, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/an-inspection-of-the-belfast-harbour-police/>.

63 Response policing is the term used to describe the teams of Police Officers that respond to emergency and non-emergency calls for assistance from members of the public.

64 Neighbourhood policing is a community focussed approach to policing where Police Officers work closely with local residents, businesses and other agencies to prevent crime and fear of crime and improve public safety.

65 *Belfast Harbour, Belfast Harbour Police, Our Policing Approach*, available at <https://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/belfast-harbour-police/our-approach/>.

66 CJI, *An Inspection of Community Safety and Local Policing Arrangements in Northern Ireland, including a Follow-Up Review of 'Working Together for Safer Communities – A Review of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships in Northern Ireland'*, March 2024, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/community-safety-and-local-policing-arrangements-in-northern-ireland/>.

67 PSNI, *The Hallmarks of Neighbourhood Policing, 2022*, available at <https://www.psnipolice.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/npt-hallmarks-spreads.pdf>. The eight hallmarks were: Hallmark 1: Embedding the right culture; Hallmark 2: Engaging Neighbourhoods; Hallmark 3: Building analytical capability; Hallmark 4: Solving problems; Hallmark 5: Targeting activity; Hallmark 6: Accountability; Hallmark 7: Developing Officers and staff; and Hallmark 8: Developing and sharing learning.

- 3.7 Hallmark 2: 'Engaging Neighbourhoods' provided a focus on the need for effective community engagement in building and maintaining public trust and confidence. All the Harbour Police Officers Inspectors met with were aware of the primacy of neighbourhood policing within the Harbour Police and the role of engagement, and most Officers understood its benefit. Stakeholders reflected positively on engagement with Harbour Police Officers and were appreciative of their efforts to provide neighbourhood policing that aligned with local need. Some Officers expressed frustration at the five Sector model noting that neighbourhood policing duties were better suited to the more residential/commercial sectors. The growth of Belfast Harbour and the likely change in population dynamics with a growing and increasingly diverse residential population may provide an opportunity to re-imagine the model to more accurately align neighbourhood policing duties across the Sector Teams.
- 3.8 Harbour Police Officers were accessible in a variety of ways with residents and businesses able to make direct contact through the Harbour Police control room number, or through the PSNI 999 or 101 system who would then contact the Harbour Police control room. Several direct line emergency call points in the harbour had also been installed. All Harbour Police Officers had been issued with mobile telephones and were able to share this number with members of the public, providing direct access to Officers if needed. The Harbour Police station was located at Milewater Basin which was inaccessible to most residents, visitors and businesses. As a Service that prioritised visibility, this was unhelpful and plans were underway for a new, more accessible police station; this was positive.
- 3.9 Harbour Police Officers were actively using problem-solving techniques, including problem-solving folders based on the SARA⁶⁸ problem-solving model (Hallmark 4: Solving Problems). Harbour Police Officers were confident in the process for opening a problem-solving folder, however the Harbour Police senior management accepted that problem-solving folders needed to be managed better. Inspectors saw evidence of the use of folders for issues that did not require one, issues that were inappropriately categorised or that were confused with daily operational matters such as the opening of a Harbour Police satellite station in Titanic Quarter that was the solution identified in response to drink and drug related issues associated with the nighttime economy, a folder based on patrol of general ferry parking and interaction with Heavy Goods Vehicle drivers and requests from statutory partners to attend forum meetings. Some Officers were unsure of the necessity of the problem-solving process and Inspectors saw evidence of folders remaining open for a significant period of time. There was also some concern about the continued displacement of anti-social behaviour to other parts of the harbour following problem-solving activities. **As an Area for Improvement, Belfast Harbour Police should ensure more effective use of problem-solving folders in appropriate circumstances and provide additional training, guidance and oversight of problem-solving folders and assessment of their outcomes.**

68 SARA was a model of problem-solving with four stages: Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment.

- 3.10 The Hallmarks also had a focus on the use of data and analytics (Hallmark 3: Building Analytical Capability) to assist with problem-solving and to target proactive policing activities (Hallmark 5: Targeting Activity). The Harbour Police had one administrative staff member who provided data analytics to the Chief Officer, including crime trends for the Belfast Harbour Board and Police Advisory Committee reports; this was a useful resource that assisted with planning and oversight. Ensuring the analytical capabilities of the administrative staff member were utilised during the analysis and assessment stages of a problem-solving folder was also important.
- 3.11 As noted in Chapter 2, the lack of strategic planning regarding the policing requirements of Belfast International Airport had resulted in a lack of clarity about the core policing function of the Airport Police. Despite the low level of reactive policing demand, Inspectors were told that the policing model was based on a response policing function, with some neighbourhood duties. A neighbourhood function had not been established; no training had been provided and Officers had reservations about the potential impact it could have in the airport environment. However, the principles of neighbourhood policing, including the role of visibility, accessibility, responsiveness and effective community engagement in the establishment and maintenance of trust and confidence, were equally important at Belfast International Airport and Inspectors believed had the potential to add value to the work of the Airport Police.
- 3.12 The six Airport Police Sergeants and 12 Constables operated across four Sections, working a 12-hour shift pattern and providing 24-hour policing cover. Team briefings were not a routine element of daily planning and so tasking was limited and often based on incidents arising. The daily patrol, as detailed in the Patrol Duties Service Procedure,⁶⁹ was the primary duty and although not an explicit strategic direction, visibility of Airport Police Officers was important at Belfast International Airport and Officers understood the importance of being visible in key areas at key times. Stakeholders were positive about the visibility of Airport Police Officers noting this had improved as Officer numbers increased. Inspectors were told that Airport Police Officers were friendly, approachable and helpful and when their assistance was sought, usually by ringing the Belfast International Airport switchboard, and that they were responsive.
- 3.13 The newly created Airport Police Patrol Strategy⁷⁰ referenced a vision to ‘*Police the airport in co-operation with the community and with the aim of securing their support,*’ however, as previously noted, details of the Strategy were not well known, and it appeared to have had little operational impact. Although Officers were expected to, and did, engage with the public, staff and stakeholders, this was informal and unstructured. No formal engagement fora existed, and engagement activities undertaken during patrol were at the discretion of the Officer.

69 Airport Police, *BIAC Patrol Duties Service Procedure*, 1 January 2025, unpublished.

70 Airport Police, *Belfast International Airport Patrol Strategy 2024 / 2025*, 19 November 2024, unpublished.

No dedicated neighbourhood training had been provided and Officers were generally unsure of the purpose and benefits of engagement. Stakeholders were keen for more engagement with Officers, including opportunities to feedback on how the Airport Police could meet the needs of their business and customers, but also to understand more about policing at Belfast International Airport and to be kept up-to-date on relevant issues.

- 3.14 Inspectors were told that Officers did undertake some problem-solving activities, however problem-solving folders were not a prominent feature. The use of data and analytics was minimal, with no administrative support available.

INVESTIGATION, SUPERVISION AND CRIMINAL CASE PROCESSING

- 3.15 Inspectors spoke to Airport Police and Harbour Police Officers about the types of criminal incidents they dealt with, the procedures for investigating cases, supervision of case work as well as the standards applied when processing a criminal case file. Inspectors also reviewed 10 Airport Police case files processed within the previous 12 months, and seven Harbour Police files, and the findings were used to supplement the evidence previously collated.

- 3.16 Airport Police and Harbour Police Officers were dealing with relatively low numbers of low-level crime types including theft, making off without payment and criminal damage (see Chapter 4). Although a growing issue, more serious offences such as rape or serious sexual assault accounted for a small proportion of offences. The Officers Inspectors met with were mindful of Northern Ireland's changing crime profile including the growth of violence against the person and sexual offences⁷¹ and the impact this could have on criminal incidents within their jurisdictions. However, despite the impact of these changes, and the impact of national policing priorities such as ending violence against women and girls and human trafficking, there was less strategic management given to the impact of this on policing at Belfast International Airport and Belfast Harbour Estate. As previously noted, there was a need for much greater clarity in understanding roles and responsibilities when responding to, and for investigating, crimes such as these (Strategic Recommendation 5). As emergency responders, both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police would continue to respond to incidents of this nature; it was therefore vital that Officers were fully aware of, and trained in, dealing with them appropriately. Acknowledging the positive steps taken, including the participation of the Harbour Police in the joint agency Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Working Group, action taken in pursuit of the achievement of Strategic Recommendation 2 and 3 would ensure that such core Northern Ireland policing priorities were also at the centre of policing at Belfast International Airport and Belfast Harbour Estate.

⁷¹ PSNI, *Trends in Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland 1998/99 to 2023/24*, 29 November 2024, available at <https://www.psni.police.uk/system/files/2025-01/371647988/Police%20Recorded%20Crime%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%201998-99%20to%202023-24%20revised.pdf>.

3.17 The Harbour Police had a Criminal Justice Unit that was 'responsible for the management of all crime incidents, follow up investigations and intelligence development within Belfast Harbour Estate.'⁷² Based on the PSNI's Case Progression Team⁷³ within Belfast City District, the Criminal Justice Unit consisted of a Detective Sergeant and two Constables who were undergoing detective training. A three-month Criminal Justice Unit secondment had been developed to provide experience in file preparation and Court processes. However, Inspectors were told that applications for this role had been falling as the specialised skills and workload within the Criminal Justice Unit increased. At the time of the inspection fieldwork, the Criminal Justice Unit had a workload of approximately 45 live case files. Its main duties included:

- the investigation of serious incidents (including major property theft, burglary, fraud, serious assaults and drug investigations);
- crime scene management;
- enquiries outside of the Harbour Police jurisdiction;
- completion of case papers for the PPS; and
- giving support to the neighbourhood Sector Teams.

3.18 Harbour Police Neighbourhood Officers maintained responsibility for responding to calls for assistance, securing crime scenes and undertaking initial investigative actions. Each case (except for road traffic offences that remained with the Sector Teams and any case undertaken by a Probationary Officer) was then submitted to the Criminal Justice Unit for completion, including follow-up actions and case building. These cases were to be reviewed by the Criminal Justice Unit Sergeant and should have been returned to the Sector Teams if they did not meet a specified standard. Inspectors were told that this did not always happen and that a belief had developed among Officers that the Criminal Justice Unit would step in to address any short comings in investigations. Inspectors were therefore concerned that the Criminal Justice Unit model, in its current form, was driving a culture that discouraged Officers from developing and maintaining an investigative mindset and that this had resulted in a loss of skills across the Service.

3.19 The Harbour Police senior management team were aware of this and explained, at draft Report stage, that responsibility for initial investigative actions remained with Neighbourhood Officers and that this, together with a 'surge' model that ensured all live cases were reviewed daily by the Inspector, sought to maintain this investigative mindset. Inspectors heard mixed reviews about the 'surge' process; while it ensured that initial investigative actions were processed in a timely manner and were subject to continuous review, Inspectors were told, at draft Report stage, that the relevant Service Instruction⁷⁴ that detailed responsibility for the role of sole Investigative Officer was not always followed as intended.

72 Belfast Harbour, *Criminal Justice Unit*, available at <https://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/belfast-harbour-police/criminal-justice-unit/>.

73 The PSNI's Case Progression Team were responsible for reviewing and progressing the investigation of criminal cases within the Belfast City district, ensuring all necessary investigative actions had been taken and processing the associated criminal case file.

74 *Criminal Justice Unit Reporting Process Service Instruction, S105/21, paragraph 6*, unpublished.

This meant that there was not always an identified sole Investigative Officer throughout the lifecycle of a case, resulting in no single point of responsibility for a case until the Criminal Justice Unit took over. Officers raised concerns with Inspectors that this had implications for time spent at Court by Officers, despite the Service Instruction detailing that the *'removal of uniformed Officers from the Harbour Estate must be avoided'* and that when practicable *'Officers from the CJU [Criminal Justice Unit] will connect all charges and attend all bail applications, court hearings etc.'*

- 3.20 Inspectors were told that the strategic requirement for high levels of visibility was a primary driver for the Criminal Justice Unit model in its current form, reducing the investigative and administrative burden on Sector Teams and freeing them up to proactively patrol the Harbour Estate. **As an Area for Improvement Belfast Harbour Police should assess the effectiveness of the current Criminal Justice Unit model and consider the balance between Sector Team visibility and the necessary criminal justice response to criminal incidents.**
- 3.21 The Airport Police did not have an equivalent Criminal Justice Unit department, meaning that the responding Officer retained responsibility for the investigation and case processing of each incident they responded to. Officers were aware of their own case load (that was often very low at one or two cases per Officer at any one time) and the investigative actions that were required. Case file preparation time was provided to Officers when needed, however the four-on four-off shift pattern did have implications for timeliness with investigative actions often waiting for Officers to return to be followed-up. Supervision of case progression was problematic at the Airport Police, with frustrations aired about a significant lack of consistency in practice and standards. The Section Sergeant provided oversight of each case within their Section, however the quality of this differed across Sections and, with no dedicated team or written and agreed case preparation standards, Officers noted significant differences. This was also evident to Inspectors within the file review and of particular concern was inconsistency in outcomes assigned for similar case types. For example, Inspectors reviewed cases with similar offences and similar offending histories where different outcomes were assigned, including an adult caution in one case and a recommendation for prosecution in another. The designation of a single point of leadership and authority as part of an improved rank structure (Operational Recommendation 1) must rectify this issue by providing agreed standards for case file preparation and ensuring consistency in supervision.
- 3.22 The information management systems used by the Airport Police and the Harbour Police were ineffective as case preparation systems. Neither system enabled effective recording of rationale and reasoning for actions taken and decisions made, detailed case planning or easy access to key information for monitoring and reporting purposes. The Harbour Police were in the process of replacing 'Perspective'⁷⁵ with a new 'Core' system, and it was anticipated that this would improve some of these issues. Both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police

75 'Perspective' was the Harbour Police digital information system.

continued to produce paper-based criminal case files that were printed (often in multiples) and taken in person to the relevant PPS office. This was an inefficient, resource intensive process and not in keeping with the *'Digital Justice Strategy 2020-2025'*.⁷⁶ The PSNI had moved to a digital system enabling case preparation on the Niche™ Records Management System and submission to the PPS through the Causeway⁷⁷ data sharing mechanism. Neither the Airport Police or the Harbour Police were part of Causeway, however work undertaken by the PSNI and the Harbour Police with regards to access to the PSNI's Niche™ Records Management System was evidence of progress that can be made through collaboration. The Harbour Police had been proactive in seeking to address this issue and had held discussions with a Presiding District Judge (Magistrates' Court) to seek advice and support. CJI's 2025 *'Inspection of offence investigation and criminal case processing by Northern Ireland Departments and Organisations'*⁷⁸ recommended that six of Northern Ireland's Departments and Agencies with statutory powers to investigate and prosecute criminal offences, should seek to digitise their case planning and submission processes. That recommendation is repeated here for both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police, in conjunction with the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, should explore and implement the digitisation and transfer of criminal case files. Technology should also ensure the recording of key decision-making processes and rationale, provide live updates of case status and track issues that arise during a case.

Domestic abuse

3.23 The approach to domestic abuse, which was an area of focus for CJI as the independent reviewer for Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (the 2021 Act), was included throughout the inspection fieldwork. Neither the Airport Police or the Harbour Police included domestic abuse as a policing priority, despite its prevalence in the community and importance across Northern Ireland's criminal justice system. Although most cases dealt with by the Airport Police and the Harbour Police were low-level crimes, there was an awareness that issues like domestic abuse were a growing concern for policing, however some Officers expressed concern that such issues could be missed due to a lack of prioritisation and dedicated training.

76 DoJ, *Digital Justice Strategy 2020-2025*, 6 July 2020, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/digital-justice-strategy-2020-2025.PDF>.

77 Causeway was a joint information technology data sharing initiative led by the Northern Ireland Office and involving most of Northern Ireland's core criminal justice agencies.

78 CJI, *An Inspection of offence investigation and criminal case processing by Northern Ireland Departments and Organisations*, June 2025, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/inspections-and-prosecutions-by-departments-and-other-bodies/>.

- 3.24 Harbour Police Officers had received some training on domestic abuse and further training was planned for 2025. Airport Police Officers had received domestic abuse training and awareness from Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland (Women’s Aid) in May and June 2023, however, knowledge of the 2021 Act and the powers it conferred on Police Officers to deal with domestic abuse was inadequate. This was particularly evident when considering the complexity of the issue, the range of ways that domestic abuse can manifest, including coercive and controlling behaviour, and the mindset change required to investigate a course of behaviour, rather than a standalone offence as provided for in 2021 Act. Inspectors also had concerns about the safeguarding practices put in place to safeguard domestic abuse victims, with one particularly concerning case raised at Belfast International Airport and additional safeguarding assurances requested by Inspectors.
- 3.25 Inspectors were told that when Airport Police and Harbour Police Officers responded to an incident that was domestically motivated they completed a Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Abuse risk assessment and that if a case was determined as high-risk this was passed to the PSNI Public Protection Branch for investigation. This was positive, however there was no clear agreement with the PSNI on the approach to dealing with domestic abuse cases. This was particularly problematic for Airport Police Officers who had no access to the PSNI’s Niche™ Records Management System, further complicating an investigation of a course of behaviour. It was therefore vital that, as part of the implementation of Strategic Recommendation 5, that agreement was reached with the PSNI about the approach to dealing with domestic abuse cases, and where cases remained with the Airport Police or the Harbour Police that effective supervisory review processes were in place. This also required dedicated training on the 2021 Act.

VICTIM AND WITNESS CARE

- 3.26 The rights, entitlements and services that victims of crime in Northern Ireland could expect to receive were outlined in the Victim Charter⁷⁹ (the Charter). These entitlements included access to information, support services, the right to be heard and measures to protect victims from harm or intimidation. The Witness Charter⁸⁰ set out the services that witnesses of crime were entitled to receive related to information, support and protection. In 2020, CJI published an inspection of ‘*The care and treatment of victims and witnesses by the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland*’⁸¹ identifying the steps required by criminal justice agencies to

79 DoJ, *Victim Charter, A Charter for victims of crime*, January 2019, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Victim%20Charter.pdf>

80 DoJ, *Witness Charter, A Charter for Witnesses of Crime*, January 2017, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/witness-charter.PDF>

81 CJI, *Victims and Witnesses, The care and treatment of victims and witnesses by the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland*, July 2020, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/the-care-and-treatment-of-victims-and-witnesses-by-the-criminal-justice-system-in-n-i/>.

fully realise the potential benefits of the Charter. Both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police were named as statutory bodies under the Charters meaning they had a statutory duty to adhere the relevant provisions and to provide the services contained within.

- 3.27 Knowledge of the Victim Charter was low within both Police Services and no specific training had been delivered. Inspectors heard from Officers about the importance of responding to incidents with empathy and being courteous, dignified and respectful. As both Services were policing areas that traditionally had a large number of foreign tourists and travellers, both were aware of the need to provide access to translation or interpretation. A referral to Victim Support Northern Ireland was offered to every victim and an accompanying leaflet provided. Although an uncommon circumstance, referrals to Women’s Aid were also made when a need was identified.
- 3.28 Neither Police Service routinely conducted a victim needs assessment, meaning there was no consideration of how to assist a victim to give their best evidence at Court. Child victims and the use of Achieving Best Evidence interviews were the exception to this; these were conducted by the PSNI on behalf of the Harbour Police. The Harbour Police had a dedicated Victim Support Officer, however knowledge of the role and what it involved was minimal. There was a culture within the Harbour Police that believed victim care was the responsibility of the Criminal Justice Unit. This was disappointing.
- 3.29 The information collated by both Police Services about victims was poor. Both information management systems included space for inputting data about the provision of a Victim Support Northern Ireland leaflet/referral, however Inspectors discovered that this field was often blank. Action was needed to raise awareness of the Charter and its entitlements within both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police, as well as action to monitor compliance.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 3

Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police should ensure that training on the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 and the Victim and Witness Charters is provided annually to all Officers and staff.

TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- 3.30 Prior to the recruitment of serving or retired PSNI Officers, newly recruited Airport Police and Harbour Police Officers completed the six-month police foundation training at the PSNI training college followed by a two-year probation within their respective Police Services. Both Services also completed mandatory firearms and Personal Safety Programme training with the PSNI. The Airport Police and the Harbour Police ensured that Officers were trained in their respective regulatory roles including International Ship and Port Security training and Civil Aviation Authority requirements such as Airspace Management training and Ground Security Operative training.
- 3.31 The Harbour Police had a training department led by a Sergeant with two Constables who operated on a six-month rotational basis. Inspectors were told that this system worked well and provided the training Constables with regular operational deployment to test training provision and identify training gaps. Training was a clear area of focus for the Harbour Police with a wide range of continuous training provided across a range of bodies including training delivered internally by the Harbour Police, access to online training resources, external training on issues such as coaching and mentoring, as well as College of Police training courses and access to several PSNI courses. The Harbour Police were also actively pursuing additional PSNI training in areas such as police driving courses, motorcycle courses and training on modern slavery and human trafficking. A full programme of planned training was in place for the year ahead and there was support from the Belfast Harbour Commissioners for the cost of providing necessary ongoing training.
- 3.32 Responsibility for training at the Airport Police rested with the training Sergeant. Inspectors were told that Officers felt that their training provision was sufficient, however there appeared to be a focus on Belfast International Airport training including health and safety, airport cyber security and Belfast International Airport management training, with less routine training on police specific issues. A link with the local PSNI district training had been in place, however the Belfast International Airport management team noted that training records revealed that the Airport Police had rarely received district training. Inspectors were told that communication with the PSNI District Trainer had been improving.
- 3.33 Inspectors heard concerning reports that, on occasion, requests for training by Airport Police Officers were not accepted, with cost to Belfast International Airport featuring as a barrier. The Belfast International Airport management team disputed this, and at draft Report stage, told Inspectors they were not aware of any instances when training had been refused on funding grounds. A full training needs assessment had not been undertaken at the Airport Police and Inspectors assessed that this had caused problems in making a business case for necessary training.

In fulfilling a policing function that was undertaken at every other UK airport by the local police force, it was of vital importance that the Airport Police and Belfast International Airport were fully assured that Officers were trained to national standards particularly in areas where the Airport Police was the lead, or joint lead, within the Airport Security Plan. This training needs assessment should form the basis of an agreed training schedule for the year ahead; this would provide certainty for all and ensure key training requirements were met.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 4

Within six months of report publication, Belfast International Airport Constabulary should complete a training needs analysis of its workforce and establish an annual training schedule and action implementation. This should be developed in collaboration with the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

- 3.34 A new Harbour Police performance management framework was developed in 2023, based on the wider Belfast Harbour Commissioners process and incorporating 'Realising my full potential' documents for Harbour Police Officers.⁸² The objectives set were based on the objectives within the Harbour Police Policing Plan focusing on professional service delivery and community engagement. Assessment of this was based on quarterly performance reviews with the Sector Sergeant. The Harbour Police acknowledged that the new performance management framework was still bedding in, and issues remained, particularly in dealing with poor performance.
- 3.35 The Harbour Police performance framework involved a significant quantitative assessment of activities undertaken by Neighbourhood Officers, including time on the ground; foot patrols; bicycle patrols; speed checks; and intelligence 'Form As' submitted. There was little scope for consideration of quality. As part of CJI's 2024 'Inspection of Community Safety and Local Policing Arrangements in Northern Ireland'⁸³ CJI identified the challenge of adequately assessing the performance of Neighbourhood Officers. Noting that the PSNI had not yet worked out what 'success' looked like in terms of 'good' neighbourhood policing, CJI recommended that the PSNI 'develop and implement a dedicated performance framework for neighbourhood policing, based on bespoke performance data with a focus on quality of activity and outcomes.' Despite a relatively new performance framework, the Harbour Police were experiencing similar issues and Inspectors assessed that a fresh approach was needed. **As an Area for Improvement, Belfast Harbour Police should review their performance management framework, with a view to incorporating an assessment of the quality of work undertaken by Neighbourhood Officers.**

82 Harbour Police, BHP Performance Management Plan Process including Disciplinary Process, 8 February 2023, unpublished.

83 CJI, An Inspection of Community Safety and Local Policing Arrangements in Northern Ireland, including a Follow-Up Review of 'Working Together for Safer Communities – A Review of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships in Northern Ireland', March 2024, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/community-safety-and-local-policing-arrangements-in-northern-ireland/>

3.36 There was no dedicated performance management process in place at the Airport Police. The performance of individual Officers and Sections was not assessed, and no key metrics were measured outside of the two-year probationary process. While overall responsibility for performance management rested with the Chief Operating Officer, Section Sergeants did not complete any routine assessment. Inspectors heard concerns about the lack of management of poor performance and disciplinary processes that utilised Belfast International Airport Human Resources procedures but that were ineffective in a police setting. Immediate action was required to ensure that all Airport Police Officers were performing effectively, and where poor performance was evident, that actions were taken to address it. This should be a primary function of a newly established leadership position within the Airport Police, as suggested by Operational Recommendation 1.

CHAPTER 4: OUTCOMES

- 4.1 This Chapter provided an opportunity to explore and analyse how the Airport Police and the Harbour Police were measuring and demonstrating achievement against their strategic goals and the contribution they made to improved public safety and increased public confidence in policing in Northern Ireland. Data and information that was available from the Airport Police and the Harbour Police is presented, as well as information specifically requested by Inspectors. Where possible, this was used to provide an assessment of outcomes associated with the first two strategic themes from the Harbour Police Policing Strategy 2019-2022;⁸⁴ *'Stakeholder and public confidence'* and *'Compliance'* (see Appendix 4). The remaining two themes *'Organisational development and effectiveness'* and *'Supporting the business'* have not been included as their associated goals were largely business related. Due to the lack of any Airport Police specific strategic goals, outcomes attributable to the Airport Police have also been included under these strategic themes. This allowed for a more consistent and structured evaluation of performance, within a relevant policing context.
- 4.2 Despite the collation of some relevant data and the establishment of strategic goals, the Harbour Police did not routinely measure their performance against these goals. Data collection by the Airport Police was minimal and reporting or demonstrating performance was lacking. This prevented an assessment of how activities and resources aligned with organisational goals, where such goals existed, and reduced the opportunity to consider successes and areas for improvement in performance and outcomes. This is an area where both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police could improve.

STRATEGIC THEME ONE: STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

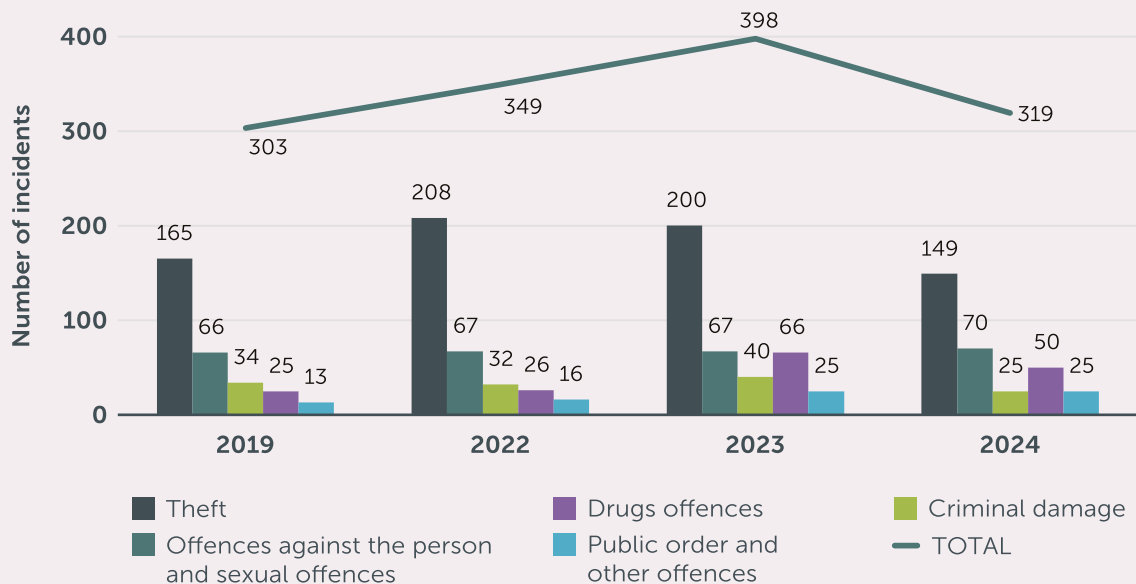
- 4.3 Within this strategic theme the Harbour Police incorporated goals on a reduction in the risk and fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, visibility, the provision of a safe environment for businesses and the public and the maintenance of effective community relationships. The Harbour Police routinely collated a significant amount of information on activities undertaken and incidents dealt with by Harbour Police Officers, including the number of hours attributable to each activity. This was positive and provided an insight into the priority areas of delivery and was used as part of internal reporting to the Board and the Police Advisory Committee. However, there was little evidence of the utilisation of this data to inform their policing strategy or understand outcomes and performance against their strategic themes and goals.

84 *Belfast Harbour, Policing Strategy 2019 – 2022, May 2019, unpublished.*

Crime and criminal incidents

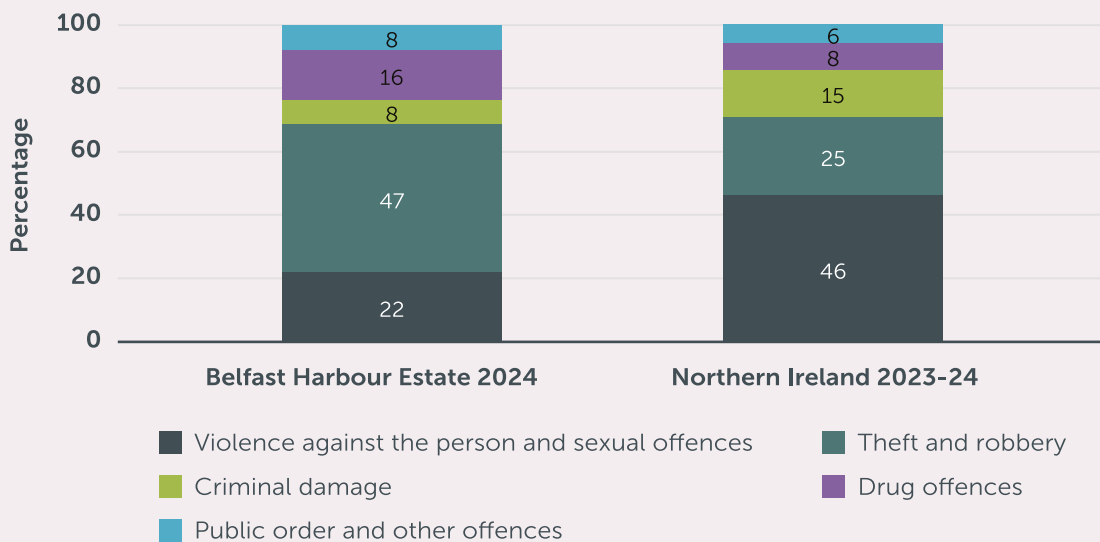
- 4.4 Neither the Airport Police nor the Harbour Police published data on the number or type of criminal incidents they dealt with within their respective jurisdictions. All criminal incidents dealt with by the Airport Police and the Harbour Police were reported to the PSNI and were included within the PSNI's police recorded crime statistics. This ensured a single overview of all crime recorded in Northern Ireland. This data was not disaggregated by Police Service and so all crime clearances and outcomes published were solely attributed to the PSNI.
- 4.5 Data provided to Inspectors for the purpose of this Inspection showed that the Harbour Police dealt with an average of 2,600 incidents each year between 2022 and 2024. The majority of these were non-criminal incidents and included occurrences such as concerns for safety, responding to alarm activations, road safety issues and animal welfare. The Harbour Police therefore provided an important additional police resource across the Belfast Harbour Estate, with the PSNI unlikely to be in the position to respond to each of these incidents.
- 4.6 Figure 3 provides an overview of the criminal incidents recorded by the Harbour Police in 2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024. Data for 2020 and 2021 has been excluded due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of criminal incidents dealt with by the Harbour Police had been increasing, rising by 31% from 303 incidents in 2019 to 398 in 2023. However, this was followed by a 20% reduction in 2024. The relatively low number of criminal incidents dealt with annually by the Harbour Police reflected the low level of reactive crime demand on the Service. This supported the decision to move from a police response function to a neighbourhood function.

Figure 3: Number of criminal incidents dealt with by the Harbour Police by crime type, 2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024



4.7 Theft accounted for over 50% of all criminal incidents dealt with by the Harbour Police in 2019, 2022 and 2023, reducing to 47% of incidents in 2024. Offences against the person, that incorporated sexual offences due to the presence of small and potential disclosive numbers, accounted for approximately one fifth of all crime in Belfast Harbour Estate each year, while criminal damage accounted for 10%. There had been a general increase in the number of drug offences dealt with by the Harbour Police, increasing from 8% of crimes in 2019 and 7% in 2022 to 16% in 2024; the Harbour Police explained that this was as a result of proactive stop and search activities. Mindful of the defined geographic boundary and differing policing arrangements in place at Belfast Harbour Estate, Figure 4 provides a contextual overview of the crime profile of Belfast Harbour Estate alongside Northern Ireland’s 2023-2024 crime profile.⁸⁵ As previously noted, the incidents dealt with by the Harbour Police at Belfast Harbour Estate were included within the PSNI’s recorded crime statistics, however these accounted for just 0.3% of Northern Ireland’s total crime.

Figure 4: Crime Profile at Belfast Harbour Estate 2024 and Northern Ireland crime profile 2023-24



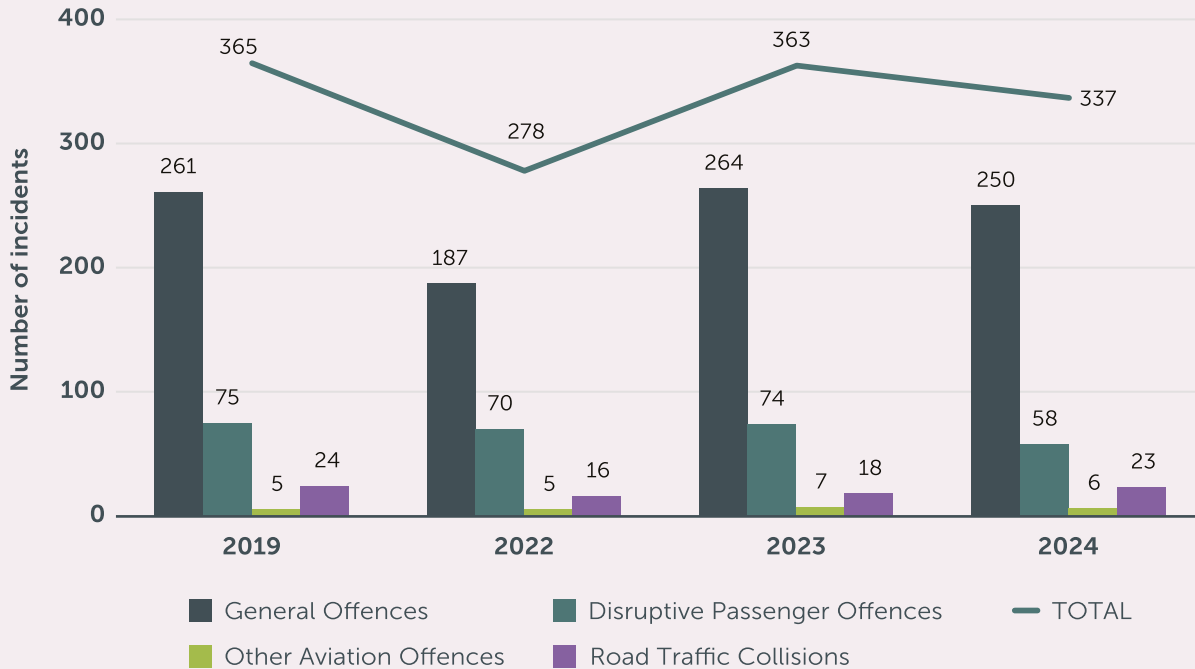
4.8 As a proportion of all crime in Northern Ireland (excluding fraud), violence against the person (including sexual offences), accounted for 46% in 2023-24, relative to 22% of crime in Belfast Harbour Estate. This was likely a reflection of the smaller residential population within Belfast Harbour, and the transient nature of those who work and socialise in the area. Conversely, theft (and robbery) accounted for 25% of all crime in Northern Ireland, compared to 47% in Belfast Harbour Estate, a reflection of the largely commercial environment and the concentration of theft

85 PSNI, *Police Recorded Crime Tables, Financial year update, period ending 31 March 2025, providing figures for 2024/25, 15 May 2025*, available at <https://www.psni.police.uk/about-us/our-publications-and-reports/official-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics>.

incidents from a retail unit. Criminal damage within Belfast Harbour accounted for approximately half of the proportion of criminal damage within Northern Ireland, while more than one sixth of all crime at the Harbour were drug offences, compared to just 8% in Northern Ireland.

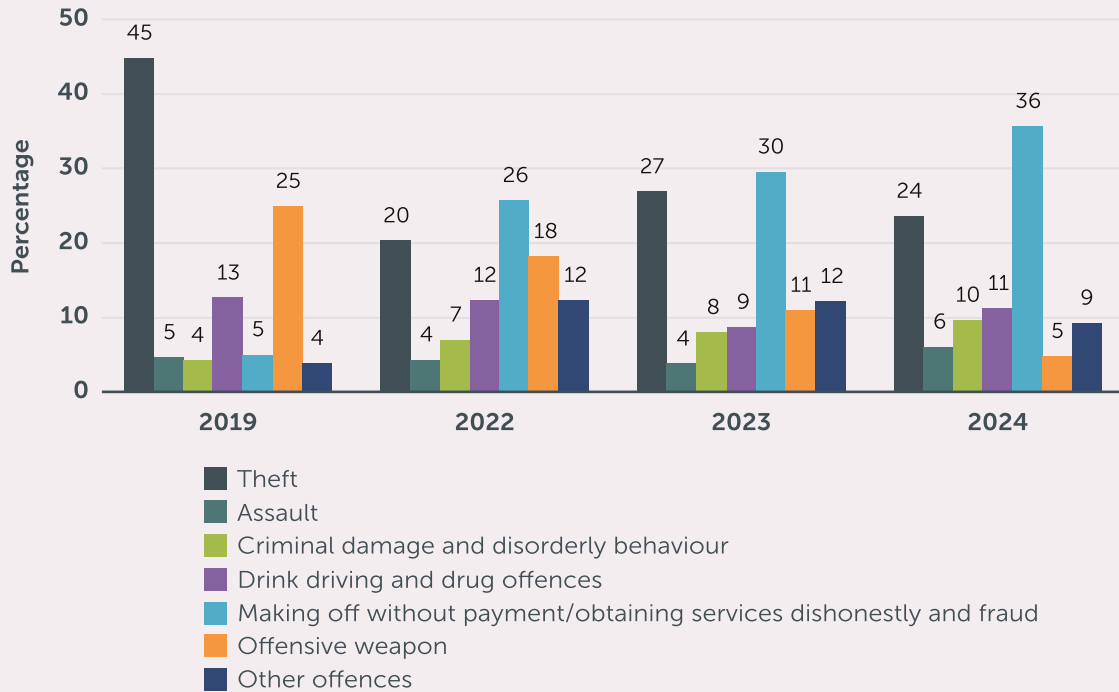
- 4.9 A direct comparison with another Port Police force was not possible due to the uniqueness of Belfast Harbour relative to other UK ports with dedicated Port Police forces. However, data provided by the Port of Dover Police identified that although the nature of the criminal incidents dealt with was vastly different relative to the Harbour Police, there was some evidence of monitoring of annual trends in key activities over time. For example, Port of Dover Police made 141 arrests in 2024, down 27% from 2023 and dealt with 21 port security regulation offences, a reduction of 42% since 2023. Internal Harbour Police reports to the Police Advisory Committee incorporated 12-month rolling crime figures by crime type and hot spot analysis that Inspectors were told was used to inform the Harbour Police Patrol Strategy.
- 4.10 The Airport Police responded to an average of 1,803 incidents each year between 2022 and 2024, with the proportion of criminal incidents declining from 21% of all incidents in 2022 to 16% in 2024. Non-criminal incidents included aircraft incidents that required a local standby or full emergency response, assistance to airport security or other enforcement agencies, responding to alarms and dealing with security breaches. As with the Harbour Police the benefit of the Airport Police as a permanent presence at Belfast International Airport was evident, providing a high level of policing response, as required by their employer, a private business, who would be unlikely to receive similar response levels from the PSNI.
- 4.11 Figure 5 provides an overview of the number of criminal incidents dealt with by the Airport Police in 2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024. Data from 2020 and 2021 has again been excluded due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of criminal incidents dealt with by the Airport Police was relatively stable, averaging 355 incidents in 2019, 2023 and 2024. This had declined to 278 in 2022 and was likely a residual impact the COVID-19 pandemic and the restriction on travel.

Figure 5: Number of criminal incidents dealt with by the Airport Police by crime type in 2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024



4.12 The type of offences outlined in Figure 5 reflect the unique policing environment at airports, with disruptive passenger offences accounting for approximately one fifth of all criminal incidents at Belfast International Airport, however this had reduced to 17% in 2024. Other aviation offences, including smoking on board an aircraft or unauthorised presence in restricted areas, accounted for 1% of incidents in 2019 and 2% between 2022 and 2024, while road traffic collisions accounted for an average of 6% of incidents. 'General offences' accounted for an average of 71% of incidents dealt with by the Airport Police each year and Figure 6 provides an overview of the offences included within this category.

Figure 6: General offences, by crime type, dealt with by the Airport Police in 2019, 2022, 2023 and 2024



4.13 Theft accounted for 45% of all 'general offences' in 2019, reducing to an average of 24% between 2022 and 2024. This aligned the prominence of theft within Belfast International Airport's crime profile to the wider Northern Ireland crime profile for 2024 as shown in Figure 4. There had been a steady increase in the proportion of crimes of making off without payment/obtaining services dishonestly and fraud, increasing from 5% of general offences in 2019 to 36% in 2024. The Airport Police should take steps to understand what was driving this increase and develop a focussed, problem-solving approach to it. Conversely, there had been a reduction in the offensive weapon offences, declining from 25% of general offences in 2019 to 5% in 2024. Violent offences, such as assault, were a less prominent feature of crime at Belfast International Airport, accounting for an average of 5% of general offences between 2022 and 2024, while criminal damage offences had increased from 4% in 2019 to 10% in 2024.

4.14 This data had been provided to Inspectors by the Airport Police and the Harbour Police, and while useful in providing evidence of activities undertaken and the nature of crime within both jurisdictions, there was no evidence that this data was being used routinely to inform policing priorities or assess performance against key strategic goals. Airport Police did not undertake detailed trend analysis.

Visibility

4.15 As previously noted, visibility was a key strategic goal for policing at Belfast Harbour, as evidenced in the Harbour Police Policing Plan. Data collated by the Harbour Police identified that in 2024, the Harbour Police provided over 2,640 hours of activities dedicated to visible community policing; this equated to approximately seven hours of visibility per day. Levels of visibility had increased steadily from 886 hours in 2019, coinciding with the realignment of the Service to neighbourhood policing and an increase in Officer numbers. These activities included beat patrols, mobile patrols, cycle patrols, and community engagement such as visits to business premises. This was a measure of success for the Harbour Police, with data available to demonstrate achievement against a key strategic goal. However, the impact of this on the provision of good policing and on confidence in policing was less well evidenced.

4.16 Although not a specific strategic aim, visibility was also important at Belfast International Airport and Airport Police Officers were aware of the need for, and benefit of, visibility across the airport. However, no data was available to understand the level of Officer visibility, although feedback from stakeholders did indicate that as Officer numbers had recovered, visibility had improved.

Community feedback and complaints

4.17 User feedback was not routinely collated by either the Airport Police or the Harbour Police and this created difficulties in measuring and understanding their effectiveness. The Harbour Police had distributed a stakeholder survey in 2020, with 139 responses provided: a 32% response rate. Analysis of the survey indicated 79% of responses were positive about the work of the Harbour Police. An engagement rating was calculated for each of the five policing Sectors, with responses ranging from 81% for the Titanic Sector to 100% for the Maritime Sector. Similarly, a service rating of 75% was received for the Titanic Sector, increasing to 100% for the Maritime Sector. While positive, the recommendations made from this survey were largely administrative with the aim of improving survey reach and ease of access to contacts. Feedback relating to reports of criminal activities or incidents and the response provided was minimal. Both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police should consider improving their community feedback mechanisms including the use of victim satisfaction surveys.

4.18 As previously noted, both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police were subject to investigation by the OPONI and the number of complaints received was generally low, including one for the Airport Police and two for the Harbour Police during 2023–24.⁸⁶ Inspectors were told by the Harbour Police that none of the complaints made to the OPONI about Harbour Police Officers had been substantiated, while the majority of those at the Airport Police had been unsubstantiated or resolved informally.

86 OPONI, *Annual Statistical Bulletin and accompanying spreadsheet 2023/24*, 6 June 2024, available at <https://www.policeombudsman.org/publications/annual-statistical-bulletin-2023-24>.

STRATEGIC THEME TWO: COMPLIANCE

4.19 Alongside compliance with their regulatory requirements, the Harbour Police included goals relating to the delivery of high standards in criminal justice processing and in road safety within the Belfast Harbour Estate within their second strategic theme. As with the first theme, data was not routinely collated or measured by either organisation to understand outcomes against this theme, however data requested by Inspectors provided some insight into the two key areas.

Criminal justice processing

4.20 Data on the submission of criminal case files to the PPS for decision on prosecution was recorded by both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police, however this was not routinely monitored. Data provided by the Harbour Police showed that between 2022 and 2024, 192 criminal case files were submitted to the PPS for a decision on prosecution; this included 71 files in 2022, 89 in 2023 and 32 in 2024. Approximately one fifth of the files submitted each year were in relation to road traffic offences. Information on outcomes was not available for every case file due to the time taken for the PPS to decide on prosecution, however where data was available it indicated that the PPS had decided to proceed with prosecution in 40% of cases, recommended a caution in 10% of cases and recommended no prosecution in 24% of cases. Out of Court resolutions had been utilised in 7% of cases and a conviction secured in 18% of cases.

4.21 The Airport Police submitted 153 files to the PPS for decision on prosecution between 2022 and 2024; this included 53 in 2022, 58 in 2023 and 42 in 2024. Reflecting the nature of the criminal incidents dealt with by the Airport Police, most of the criminal case files submitted to the PPS were for theft (21%), making off without payment (20%), disorderly behaviour (15%), assault (12%) and drug offences (11%). Outcome data was not available for every file submitted, however of the 74 files that did have an outcome, 7% had a no prosecution recommendation from the PPS, 9% received an Out of Court disposal or were prosecuted and 84% received an adult caution.

4.22 Data on timeliness of case file preparation and submission was not readily available at either the Airport Police or the Harbour Police, however Inspectors were able to ascertain details of timeliness for both based on the date of the offence and the date the file was submitted to the PPS. Figure 7 provides an overview of the median number of days taken to submit a case file to the PPS for both Police Services.

Figure 7: Median number of days from date of offence to date of case file submission to the PPS by the Airport Police and the Harbour Police, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 3-year 2022-24 average

	2022	2023	2024	2022-2024
Airport Police	58	45	17	43
Harbour Police	56	53	51	53

- 4.23 Between 2022 and 2024 the median number of days from the date of an offence to a case file being submitted to the PPS for a decision on prosecution by the Harbour Police was 53. This had declined from 56 days in 2022 to 51 days in 2024. The minimum number of days taken for submission was zero days with a case file being submitted the same day as the offence, however the maximum number of days across the three-year period for a single case file was 661 days. This was for a large-scale fraud case. A second case took 635 days to submit to the PPS; this was for an offence against the person case.
- 4.24 The median number of days to submission of criminal case files by Airport Police Officers was 43 days between 2022 and 2024. Similarly to the Harbour Police this had been reducing over time, from 58 days in 2022 to 17 days in 2024. As at Harbour Police the minimum number of days was zero and the maximum was 722, which related to a sexual assault case. This included a 481 day period from when the initial report was made to the PSNI and then escalated to the Airport Police.⁸⁷ This was the only Airport Police case that took longer than 500 days to process.
- 4.25 Data provided to CJI about case processing time across Northern Ireland’s criminal justice system⁸⁸ indicated that in the adult Magistrates’ Court in 2024, across all cases, the median number of days between an offence being reported and submission of a case file to the PPS was 29. This varied from 15 days for charge cases and 39 days for summons cases.⁸⁹ The longer time taken to process and submit case files to the PPS by both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police, relative to the median for all Northern Ireland Magistrates’ Court cases, was concerning and at odds with the Northern Ireland Executive’s Programme for Government and wider criminal justice systems’ priority to speed up justice and reduce avoidable delay across the system. Neither the Airport Police nor the Harbour Police were aware of the scale of the delay due to the lack of any monitoring of case progression timeliness. However, the Harbour Police explained that some of the delay was attributable to arrest and search operations that were tied to availability of PSNI resources and a reliance on voluntary interviews of

87 Data provided by Belfast International Airport at factual accuracy stage.

88 DoJ, Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency, *Case Processing Time, 2024*, calculations completed on 7 August 2025, unpublished.

89 The figures relate to non-validated information from management information systems and should not be considered official statistics. Figures relate to all cases brought on behalf of the PSNI, Airport Police and Harbour Police that resulted in a Court disposal. Appeals are not included.

suspects and non-attendance, as well delays in receiving forensic reports and access to typists for transcripts of interviews and reports. The continued reliance on paper case files was also noted as a contributing factor.

- 4.26 CJI have previously reported on the issue of avoidable delay within Northern Ireland's criminal justice system and the need for the PSNI to improve their timeliness in the submission of case files to the PPS.⁹⁰ CJI's 2025 *'Inspection of offence investigation and criminal case processing by Northern Ireland Departments and Organisations'*⁹¹ also assessed timeliness across a range of Northern Ireland's Departments and Agencies with statutory powers to investigate and prosecute criminal offences, recommending the need for timeliness targets for case processing, and appropriate monitoring of timeliness data. This also applied to the Airport Police and the Harbour Police where timeliness was not routinely monitored or reported on.

Road safety

- 4.27 Road safety was a priority area of focus for the Harbour Police and there was evidence of delivery against this strategic goal. In 2024 Harbour Police Officers spent almost 1,200 hours in total directing traffic, conducting vehicle check points, speed checks and traffic monitoring. In line with the data on visibility, this had increased since 2019 when just 424 hours were attributed to road safety, partly due to increased Officer numbers, but also as an extension of the requirement for visibility that delivery against this goal also contributed to.

LOOKING FORWARD

- 4.28 Although not public authorities with statutory duties to publish data in the same way as the PSNI, both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police operated with significant powers, including of arrest, detention and stop and search. Transparency about their activities was therefore vital to public trust and confidence in policing. This extended not just to confidence in their own activities, but also by association to the PSNI, and therefore to confidence in policing in Northern Ireland more generally.

90 CJI, *Avoidable delay*, A thematic inspection of delay in the processing of criminal cases in Northern Ireland, May 2006, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/avoidable-delay/>.
CJI, *Avoidable Delay*, June 2010, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/a-thematic-inspection-of-avoidable-delay-in-the-processing-of-criminal-cases-in-northern-ireland/>.
CJI, *Avoidable Delay – A progress Report*, January 2012, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/avoidable-delay-a-progress-report/>.
CJI, *An inspection of the quality and timeliness of police files (incorporating disclosure) submitted to the PPS*, November 2015, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/an-inspection-of-the-quality-and-timeliness-of-police-files-incorporating-disclosure-submitted-to-the-pps/>.
CJI, *File Quality, Disclosure and Case Progression and trial recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic*, June 2023, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/file-quality-disclosure-and-case-progression-and-trial-recovery-from-the-covid-19-pandemic/>.

91 CJI, *An Inspection of offence investigation and criminal case processing by Northern Ireland Departments and Organisations*, June 2025, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/inspections-and-prosecutions-by-departments-and-other-bodies/>.

4.29 In 2008, CJI recommended that 'to improve openness BHP [Belfast Harbour Police] should report its activities in an annual report that should be published on the BHC [Belfast Harbour Commissioners] website and distributed to all of its key stakeholders.'⁹² Since 2008 the Harbour Police had undertaken some sporadic reporting, including an annual report in 2009, however this had been discontinued and at the time of Inspection fieldwork, no annual reports were available on the Belfast Harbour Commissioners website. Similarly, there had been no reporting of policing activities undertaken by the Airport Police or the use of police powers. There was also a lack of any equality monitoring data by both Police Services. Inspectors therefore believed that there was a need for much greater transparency and openness at both the Airport Police and the Harbour Police that could be addressed through the annual publication of data, covering the issues raised throughout this chapter including performance reporting and clear links to strategic goals and outcomes.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 5

Belfast International Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police should collate and publish data annually on their policing activities. This should include monitoring and reporting of timeliness targets from the report of a criminal incident to file submission to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and decisions on prosecution.

⁹² CJI, 2008, *Belfast Harbour Police, An Inspection of the Belfast Harbour Police, May 2008*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/4120bf5d-c04d-4b5a-81ba-c0d3bd433073/Belfast-Harbour-Police-May-2008.aspx>.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

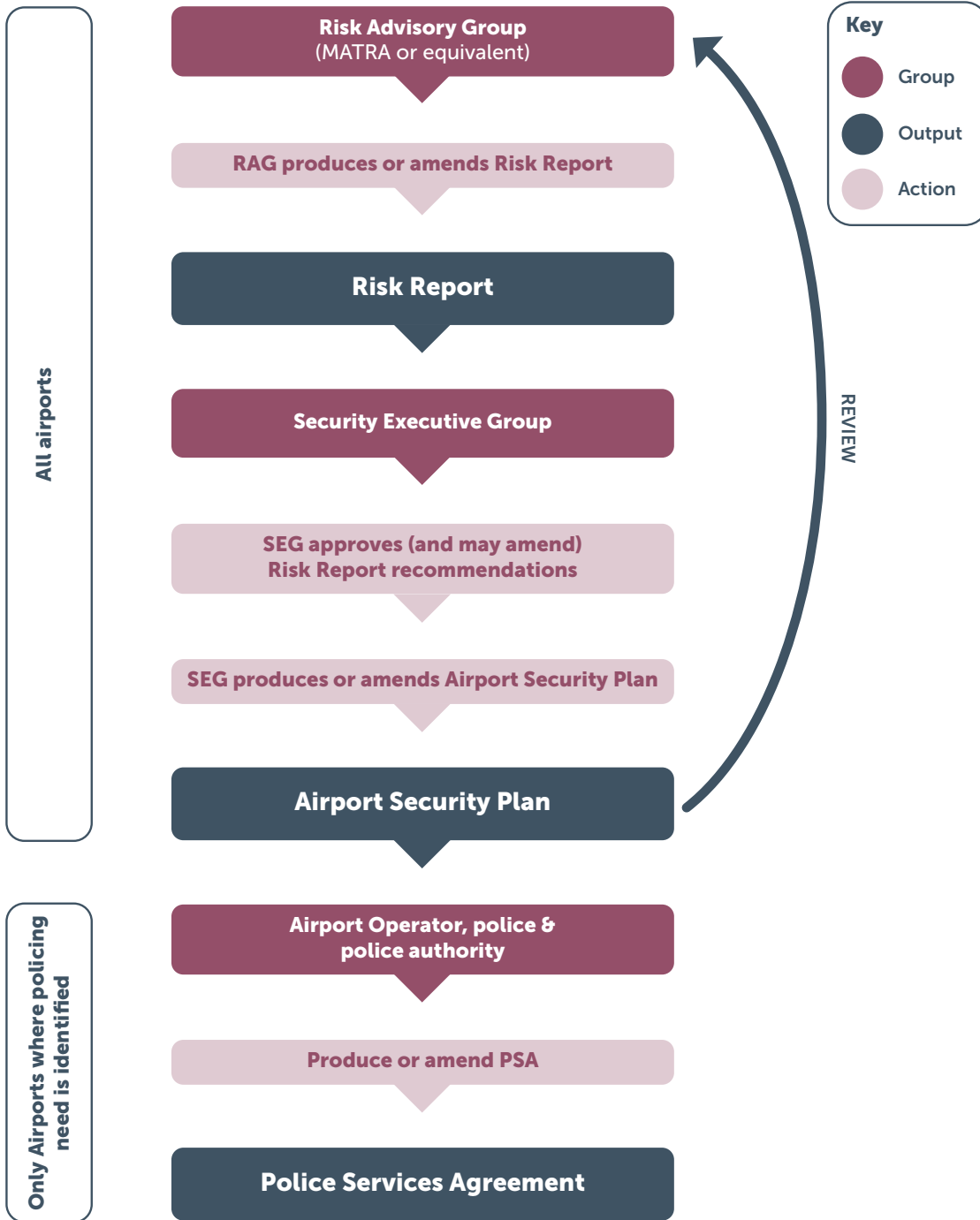
- 5.1 No matter how small the police jurisdiction and regardless of funding arrangements, policing must be able to consistently operate to expected national policing standards including the Code of Ethics, national training standards and professional standards in areas such as the use of force, conduct and decision-making. This is vital to ensure public safety, uphold the law and foster public confidence in policing.
- 5.2 Inspectors had serious concerns about the policing of Belfast International Airport by the Airport Police and urgent action was needed to address significant gaps in leadership, governance and accountability as well as consistency in operational delivery and outcomes. The Airport Police required urgent action to improve policing in the short-term and recommendations have been made to begin this process. However, longer-term discussions about the policing model at all Northern Ireland's airports are also needed. The PSNI are best placed to lead this work with Belfast Harbour Police and Airport Police as key partners, but it must also include consultation with a wide range of key Northern Ireland and UK strategic partners.
- 5.3 The Harbour Police provided an example of where a private Police Service can operate effectively and where a trusted partnership with the PSNI can develop and be maintained. This occurred over the long term and was based on leadership with significant policing experience and the ability to drive professional networks with the PSNI, appropriate accountability and robust governance processes and access to continuous police training that ensured officers had the appropriate knowledge and expertise to operate to national standards.
- 5.4 The PSNI are, and should to a greater degree be, involved in assisting both Services in achieving this aim, not only to ensure more effective policing, but also as a means of working collaboratively to secure and maintain public trust and confidence in policing all of Northern Ireland. It is in all our interests to have ports and airports with consistent quality policing where citizens and visitors are safe and feel safe in our community.

APPENDIX 1: MAP OF BELFAST HARBOUR ESTATE



APPENDIX 3: AIRPORT SECURITY PLANNING CYCLE⁹³

Airport Security Planning Cycle



93 Home Office & DfT, Airport Security Planning Guidance, January 2010, unpublished.

APPENDIX 4: **BELFAST HARBOUR POLICE POLICING PLAN 2019-2023 – STRATEGIC THEMES AND GOALS**

STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

- To provide an effective and highly visible policing service.
- To reduce the risk of crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- To ensure that Belfast Harbour is a safe environment for business and the public.
- To forge and maintain effective relationships with the community.

COMPLIANCE

- To deliver effective and compliant Port Security.
- To ensure the highest standards of road safety within Belfast Harbour.
- To ensure the highest standards of criminal justice processes and customer support.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS

- To create effective working relationships with key partners including PSNI, Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Fire & Rescue Service, Lagan Search and Rescue.
- To develop professionalism and a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.
- To leverage SMART technologies to support safety and security and traffic efficiency in Belfast Harbour.
- To match organisational structure and resource deployment with policing demands to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.
- To ensure our personnel have the knowledge and skills to meet current and future demands.

SUPPORTING THE BUSINESS

- To support the increasing number of tourists and leisure visitors and public events within Belfast Harbour.
- To support effective and safe movement of people and freight around Belfast Harbour.
- To protect our customers' high value assets.
- To continue to enhance our water safety.
- To safely coordinate, support and deliver Cruise Ship operations on a multi-agency basis, thus contributing to successful outcomes for our stakeholders.

APPENDIX 5: **METHODOLOGY**

Scoping meetings

Inspectors met with the Chief Officer and Inspector of Belfast Harbour Police and the Chief Operating Officer and a Sergeant from the Belfast International Airport Constabulary. An initial discussion was also held with the Aviation Security and Airport Policing Commander from the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Desktop research and development of Inspection Terms of Reference and question areas

Research literature, legislation and guidance documents on the statutory requirements relating to the policing of airports and harbours in the UK and Republic of Ireland were reviewed. This was used to inform the development of terms of reference for the inspection and fieldwork planning.

Self-Assessment

The Chief Operating Officer of the Belfast International Airport and the Chief Officer of the Belfast Harbour Police were invited to complete a self-assessment template against the CJI Inspection Framework areas of Strategy and Governance, Delivery and Outcomes. Each was asked, and provided, information and data to support their assessment.

Document review

A review was undertaken of all the documentation collated during and after the self-assessment process. This was used to inform interview questions used during the fieldwork and was triangulated against and assessed in light of the evidence gained through the fieldwork and the case file review.

Fieldwork

One-to-one interviews and focus groups were conducted with a range of personnel within each inspected organisation. Interviews were also conducted with stakeholders from across the two inspected sites. Representatives from the following areas were interviewed during fieldwork:

Belfast International Airport:

- Chief Operating Officer.

Belfast International Airport Constabulary:

- Constables; and
- Sergeants.

Belfast Harbour Commissioners:

- Chief Executive Officer; and
- Port Director.

Belfast Harbour Police:

- Neighbourhood Constables;
- Neighbourhood Sergeants;
- Criminal Justice Unit – Constables;
- Administrative staff;
- Control room staff;
- Inspector; and
- Chief Officer.

Department for Transport:

- Domestic Aviation Team.

Department of Justice:

- Policing Policy and Strategy Division.

Dublin Airport Police Service:

- Chief Airport Police Officer; and
- Inspector.

George Best Belfast City Airport:

- Operations Manager; and
- Head of Security.

National Police Chiefs' Council

- Aviation Security and Airport Policing Lead.

Police Service of Northern Ireland:

- Aviation Security and Airport Policing Commander;
- Emergency Planning Inspector;
- Maritime Commander and Belfast Area Commander;
- Inspector and Chair of Maritime Working Group; and
- Operational Planning Constable.

Port of Dover Police:

- Sergeant.

Stakeholder engagement took place face-to-face, virtually and, for many of the stakeholders based at Belfast International Airport, by telephone. The Belfast International Airport Constabulary inspection liaison officer was asked to inform local businesses and stakeholders that a telephone call from a CJI Inspector would be forthcoming, this avoided issues with cold calling.

Stakeholders:

- Belfast City Council;
- Boots;
- Border Force;
- Causeway Lounge;
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs;
- Drive and Vehicle Agency;
- EasyJet;
- Global Trek;
- Harbour Residents Engagement Group – Sailortown;
- Home Office Immigration Enforcement;
- JD Sports;
- Jet2;
- Mitie;
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency – Environmental Crime Unit;
- Ports Security Authority – BC Terminal, Exolum, Doyle Shipping Group and Harland & Wolff;
- Spectrum Aviation;
- SPP – food and drink;
- Titanic Quarter Traffic Forum – SSE, Titanic Quarter Ltd, Odyssey Car Park and Citi Bank;
- Belfast International Airport Tourist Information;
- WHSmith; and
- Woodgate.

An Inspector also accompanied Officers of both private Police Services on a routine patrol of their respective jurisdictions.

Case file reviews

Inspectors reviewed 10 criminal case files prepared by the Belfast International Airport Constabulary relating to a range of offences committed at the Belfast International Airport over the previous 12 months. Seven criminal case files prepared by the Belfast Harbour Police were also reviewed. These reviews were undertaken to supplement the evidence gathered as part of the inspection fieldwork.

APPENDIX 6: **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

INTRODUCTION

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) proposes to undertake an inspection of the policing of harbours and airports in Northern Ireland, specifically the policing of Belfast Harbour, George Best Belfast City Airport and Belfast International Airport.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) were responsible for policing the whole of Northern Ireland, including its harbours and airports where Local Policing Teams responded to incidents and local engagement was undertaken by Neighbourhood Policing Teams. A Small Ports Unit also monitored and managed Northern Ireland's small ports dealing with reports of unusual or suspicious activity.ⁱ However, the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and Belfast International Airport Authority also funded their own Police Services to police their respective areas. The day-to-day policing of these areas was therefore primarily undertaken by the Belfast Harbour Police (BHP) and the Belfast International Airport Police (the Airport Police). The BHP and the Airport Police were not responsible for immigration or customs,ⁱⁱ this is therefore outside the scope of this inspection however the effectiveness of key strategic relationships will be explored.

CONTEXT

Belfast Harbour and Belfast International Airport are nationally important areas which serve a range of economic and social functions. Belfast Harbour Estate is a major maritime hub, business, commercial and educational district and tourist destination. It incorporates the George Best Belfast City Airport and extends to the Holywood Exchange retail park. It also includes a growing residential population. Belfast International Airport is Northern Ireland's largest airport and is the 10th largest airport in the United Kingdom (UK), handling almost six million passengers in 2023.ⁱⁱⁱ The airport supports a variety of businesses and transport services for consumers, tourists and business travellers. Together, these areas are essential for Northern Ireland's economy, tourism and trade and international reputation as a safe place to visit.

The BHP and the Airport Police were independent Police Services with full police powers operating in and responsible for policing and law enforcement in their respective locations. Each was also responsible for enforcing byelaws^{iv,v} which regulated the use and operation of the areas and the conduct of persons within them.

Unlike publicly funded Police Services, the BHP were authorised and funded by the Belfast Harbour Commissioners, an independent, statutory corporation which oversees the operation of Belfast Harbour.^{vi} The Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847^{vii} enabled the appointment of Port Police Constables, with the BHP operational for over 160 years. The BHP consisted of one Chief Officer, one Inspector, eight Sergeants and 30 Constables.

The Aerodromes Act (Northern Ireland) 1971^{viii} enabled the appointment of dedicated Constables for policing at Belfast International Airport and this arrangement remained with the privatisation of the airport in 1994.^{ix} The Airport Police was the only independent Airport Police Service in the UK, with all other designated airports funding agreed policing provision from the local Police Force, or as was the case for George Best Belfast City Airport, from the BHP. The Airport Police consisted of six Sergeants and 11 Constables, reporting to the Chief Operating Officer of the Airport Authority.

The private funding of both the BHP and the Airport Police meant that the Police Services were accountable to commercial operators and held a role in supporting the commercial development of their respective jurisdictions. Despite this, policing in Belfast Harbour Estate and in Belfast International Airport had much in common with day-to-day policing in other environments and the same standards in crime prevention, detection and investigation applied. Both the BHP and the Airport Police worked closely with the PSNI, utilising shared training resources, undertaking joint police operations and shared police custody facilities. They also fell under the remit of the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.^x

This is the first CJI inspection of the Airport Police. CJI previously inspected the BHP in 2008^{xi} and made 13 recommendations aimed at improving internal and external communication to improve transparency and accountability; improved Police Officer learning and development opportunities; improved data recording and monitoring; and the development of more formalised agreements and structures with the PSNI to ensure the continued professionalisation of BHP. Further work was also recommended to embed a community policing model of delivery and legislative change was also recommended to ensure that the BHP operated with full constabulary powers, in certain circumstances, outside of the boundaries of the Harbour Estate.

A Follow-Up Review^{xii} was conducted in 2010 to assess progress towards recommendation implementation. Seven recommendations were assessed as achieved and six as partly achieved. Further work was required to develop and agree an overarching protocol with the PSNI to assist with information sharing and more effective engagement. Although progress was noted in areas of Officer development, more guidance for officers was needed to ensure up-to-date knowledge of legislation. The necessary legislative amendment had been drafted nationally but not passed in the Westminster Parliament, and at the time of writing these Terms of Reference this legislation had not been made and enacted.

Policing in the harbour and airport environments involved responding to reported incidents such as theft, assault or criminal damage, alongside investigation and intelligence gathering related to organised crime like drug trafficking. The level of reported crime in Belfast's Harbour Estate increased by 6% from 362 incidents in 2019 to 382 incidents in 2023.^{xiii} Since the 2008 CJI inspection policing within the Harbour Estate had transitioned towards a neighbourhood policing model based on 'visible community policing' across five policing sectors.^{xiv} This saw BHP officers work together with businesses and the local community to ensure the area was, and remained, a desirable place to live, work, study, visit and invest. There were 365 criminal incidents at Belfast International Airport in 2019 and 363 in 2023, 70% of which were offences such as theft, assault and possessing an offensive weapon while 20% related to disruptive passenger offences.^{xv}

Neither the BHP nor the Airport Police were under the remit of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services, however the BHP had previously privately commissioned PEEL inspections^{xvi} to be conducted by retired PSNI officers. The most recent assessment was completed in 2022, with a focus on 'legitimacy', where the Service was assessed as 'good' at engaging with the people it serves, preventing and deterring crime and anti-social behaviour and vulnerability, and in building and developing its workforce. An 'adequate' assessment was made of how the BHP encourages an ethical and inclusive workplace.

As two non-core criminal justice organisations, this inspection aligns with the current CJI 'Inspection of offence investigation and criminal case processing by Northern Ireland Departments and Organisations.'^{xvii} The inspection also complements CJI's 2024 inspection of Community Safety and Local Policing arrangements in Northern Ireland^{xviii} which assessed the PSNI's neighbourhood policing function against the eight Hallmarks of Neighbourhood Policing^{xix}, with a focus on engaging neighbourhoods.

Aims of the Inspection

The aims of the inspection are to:

- determine the effectiveness of the inspected organisations' policing plans and strategies in achieving their security and safety objectives, including victim care;
- examine and assess the outcomes of strategies and delivery mechanisms against targets and expectations;
- assess the effectiveness of the current operational governance structures;
- examine the knowledge, understanding and clarity of roles and responsibilities for delivery across the inspected harbour and airport sites;
- examine the policing models deployed across the harbour and airport sites and benchmark against models in other jurisdictions;
- examine the effectiveness of engagement with local residential and business groups in determining priority actions and the delivery of local policing;
- review how operational delivery and staff resource is structured to meet policing needs and the expectations of stakeholders;

- examine management information and the performance of the inspected organisations in policing Northern Ireland’s harbours and airports; and
- examine the effectiveness of partnership arrangements between the inspected organisations and other stakeholders, including other law enforcement agencies.

Any other matters of significance arising during the course of the inspection, if considered appropriate by CJI, may also be included. As the inspection progresses, Inspectors may determine it necessary to focus more on a specific aspect of the Terms of Reference while always adopting a risk-based approach.

Methodology

This inspection will be based on the CJI Inspection Framework. The three main elements of the Inspection Framework are:

- strategy and governance;
- delivery; and
- outcomes.

Constants in each of the three framework elements and throughout each inspection are equality and fairness, together with standards and best practice. The CJI inspection methodology can be found at on our website.

Design and Planning

Preliminary research

All relevant documentation including corporate strategies, policing and business plans, security plans and risk reports, external reports, minutes of meetings, performance management, financial management and monitoring information, risk registers, internal and external survey results and any other relevant internal reviews, papers and correspondence will be requested and reviewed.

Contact with agencies

A planning meeting has been held with the Chief Officer for BHP, the Port Director and Chief Executive of Belfast Harbour Commissioners and the Chief Operating Officer and Airport Police Duty Sergeant. These Terms of Reference will be shared with the BHP and the Airport Police.

Delivery

Stakeholder consultation

CJI will consult with stakeholder organisations, including:

- The PSNI;
- The Department of Justice;
- The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland;
- The Harbour Commissioners;
- Belfast International Airport Authority;

- Belfast International Airport Police Association;
- Belfast Chamber of Commerce;
- Belfast City Council;
- George Best Belfast City Airport Authority;
- The Joint Agency Group including Border Force, His Majesty's (HM) Revenue and Customs and Immigration Enforcement;
- Belfast Harbour stakeholder engagement forum;
- Belfast Harbour residents' engagement group; and
- Belfast International Airport businesses and stakeholders.

Self-assessment

A bespoke self-assessment will be requested from the inspected organisations and relevant supporting documentation supplied. Each organisation will be asked to nominate a liaison officer for the purposes of this inspection.

Inspection fieldwork

A series of one-to-one interviews will be conducted with senior leaders in each of the inspected organisations alongside focus groups with Police Officers of differing ranks. These will be used to give Inspectors an insight into the organisation, the strategic direction of policing and operational delivery structures, as well as the effectiveness of key strategic partnerships and stakeholder relationships.

Initial feedback to agency

On conclusion of the fieldwork the evidence will be collated, triangulated and analysed and emerging findings will be developed. CJI will then present the findings to each of the inspected organisations.

Drafting of report

Following completion of the fieldwork and data analysis a draft report will be shared with the inspected organisations for factual accuracy check. The Chief Inspector will invite each organisation to complete an action plan within six weeks to address the recommendations and if the plan has been agreed and is available it will be published. The Inspection Report will be shared, under embargo, in advance of the publication date with the inspected organisations.

Publication and Closure

A report will be sent to the Minister of Justice for permission to publish. When permission is received the report will be finalised for publication. A press release will be drafted and shared with the inspected organisations prior to publication and release.

Indicative Timetable

Scoping/research:	October-November 2024.
Self-assessment completed:	November 2024.
Stakeholder consultation:	December 2024-January 2025.
Fieldwork:	January-February 2025.
Draft report to agencies:	Spring 2025.
Factual accuracy feedback received:	Spring 2025.

The above timetable may be impacted by factors outside CJI's control. The inspected organisations will be kept advised of any significant changes to the indicative timetable.

ENDNOTES

- i *Police Service of Northern Ireland, Police Small Ports Unit*, available at <https://www.psnipolice.uk/police-small-ports-unit>.
- ii The UK Border Force, HM Revenue and Customs and the Home Office Immigration Enforcement were responsible for the policing of immigration and customs at Northern Ireland's borders.
- iii *Flightright, The largest airports in the UK*, 17 April 2024, available at <https://www.flightright.co.uk/blog/largest-airports-in-the-uk>.
- iv Belfast Harbour Byelaws can be viewed at the Harbour Office by arrangement.
- v *Belfast International Airport Byelaws*, available at <https://www.belfastairport.com/media/1349/byelaws.pdf>.
- vi *Belfast Harbour, Our Status, 2023*, available at <https://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/corporate/our-status/>.
- vii *Legislation.gov.uk, Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847*, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/10-11/27/contents>.
- viii *Aerodromes Act (Northern Ireland) 1971, Section 11* available at https://www.bailii.org/nie/legis/num_act/aai1971284/s11.html.
- ix *Legislation.gov.uk, The Airports (Northern Ireland) Order 1994*, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1994/426/article/19/made>.
- x In 2023/24, two complaints were received by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland regarding the Belfast Harbour Police and one relating to the Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary, available at <https://www.policeombudsman.org/statistics-and-research/complaint-statistics-in-northern-ireland>.
- xi *CJI, Belfast Harbour Police, An Inspection of the Belfast Harbour Police, May 2008*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/an-inspection-of-the-belfast-harbour-police/>.
- xii *CJI, Belfast Harbour Police, A Follow-up review of inspection recommendations, May 2010*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/a-follow-up-review-of-inspection-recommendations-3/>.
- xiii *Belfast Harbour, Police Advisory Committee Chief Officer's Report, 4 December 2023*, unpublished.
- xiv *Belfast Harbour Policing, Our Purpose*, available at <https://www.belfast-harbour.co.uk/belfast-harbour-police/>.
- xv Belfast International Airport Crime Statistics, 2019-2023, unpublished.
- xvi PEEL inspections are HMICFRS inspections of police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL), that assessed the performance of the 43 police forces in England and Wales and the PSNI.
- xvii *CJI, An Inspection of offence investigation and criminal case processing by Northern Ireland Departments and Organisations, June 2025*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/inspections-and-prosecutions-by-departments-and-other-bodies/>.
- xviii *CJI, 2024, Community Safety and Local Policing Arrangements in Northern Ireland*, available at <https://www.cjini.org/reports/community-safety-and-local-policing-arrangements-in-northern-ireland/>.
- xix *PSNI, 2022, The Hallmarks of Neighbourhood Policing*, available at <https://www.psnipolice.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/npt-hallmarks-spreads.pdf>.



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