

Draft BCC Response to Department Of Justice (DOJ) **Consultation on the implementation of** **Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs)**

Background

The Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) are new statutory bodies established under the Justice Act (NI) 2011 (to be fully operational by April 2012) designed to combine the work of the current District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in a single unified partnership. The DOJ is consulting on how these new partnerships will operate and wish to examine critically what has gone previously and ensure the new partnerships are able to respond effectively.

There are three strands to the consultation:

1. The practical operation of PCSPs, including the Policing Committee;
2. The issue of designation (whereby bodies which have a contribution to the work of PCSPs are granted membership);
3. Draft code of practice for the appointment of independent members to PCSPs

Useful documents can be downloaded as follows

Consultation Document

<http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/public-consultations/current-consultations.htm> (this includes draft code of practice for appointment of members)

Justice Act (Northern Ireland 2011)

www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/24/contents

Belfast City Council's response below takes the form of general comments, followed by answers to the list of questions posed by DOJ.

Section One: Operation of PSCPS and DPCSPS

1) **General Comments on the practical operation of PCSPs (p 7-11 consultation document)**

Belfast City Council (BCC) would firstly like to highlight a number of key comments, principles and themes running through our response to the consultations for the DOJ / PBNI to take into consideration regarding the practical operation of the Policing Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) and relevant code of practice as follows;

- I. **Administrative procedures** - BCC strongly recommend a significant shift from the mandatory / formal requirements of the existing Code Of Practice (COP) (currently applicable to the DPP) so that the new partnerships can operate with less of an administrative burden being placed on members and officers, thus enabling them to focus on tackling ASB and improving community safety at a regional and local level. The new code should, in the Council's view, be considered as a framework only, outlining the roles and responsibilities of the new partnerships, suggesting good practice and detailing only minimal requirements in respect of reporting, etc. The code or framework should allow as much operational flexibility as possible, with the specifics of how the partnerships should operate being largely determined locally.

It is important to note that in recommending this approach, the Council does not consider that the need to consult with the community at various levels would be reduced, but rather that this function should be strengthened by considering what works locally. Each DPCSP should be able to consult / engage, plan and monitor as they decide is best for local people as opposed to having to follow rigid requirements which are often not seen as relevant.

To reduce the burden on members in terms of formal meetings, there should be sufficient scope to ensure that the Policing Committees do not need to meet separately from the PCSP by for example creating a clear decision making protocol for restricted functions.

- II. **Belfast Code of Practice** - As Belfast will retain a unique but significantly changed structure with the formation of one PCSP and four District Policing Community Safety Partnerships (DPCSPs) **we strongly recommend that Belfast will require its own separate code of practice / framework.** BCC would be happy to work with the DoJ/NIPB to develop this;
- III. **Allowances** – It is clear that the change to the legislation to allow Members (both elected and Independent) to receive expenses only is a significant issue for a number of the political parties, although not all.

Concerns raised include:

- The potential to reduce the number of people applying to become independent members is likely to lead to a reduction in the range and quality of the pool of candidates and could ultimately affect ongoing participation. There will still be a significant burden on members in the new structures considering the time that required to make the new partnerships successful.
- The potential to reduce the level of participation in the new structures could possibly undermine the principle that membership should be reflective of the community and representative of the local political parties.
- The issue of security was highlighted by some as another reason why allowances should be paid as in the past threats were made to DPP members and in some instances attacks on property and vehicles were carried out as a result of their involvement.
- That the withdrawal of allowances is not equitable as members of the Policing Board will continue to receive allowances.
- That the Council should not have to meet the costs for Members using ratepayers' money.
- Money saved from not paying allowances would not be passed back to the PCSP for investing in programmes.

There was an opinion from some parties that the Chairs and possibly vice chairs of the partnerships should at least be paid as they may well take on a much more strategic role, attend more meetings and have more delegated powers which will require a considerable amount of time. However there was little support for this cost being met by the ratepayer.

Even though all parties in Belfast City Council were not in agreement on the allowances issue, the fact that it was raised by four out of six of the party groups means that it is an issue that the DOJ and NIPB will need to consider in moving forward.

In conclusion on this point, it is imperative that the DOJ and NIPB think through the implications of not paying allowances, clarify what will be paid under expenses and appropriately market the recruitment of independent members along with district councils.

- IV. **Relationship with Local communities** - BCC believes that it is imperative that the practical operation of PCSPs / DPCSPs should ultimately lead to improved community safety and policing across the city. It is therefore essential that the Belfast Model enables the establishment of structures that support responsive and effective service delivery at a local level. We recommend that arrangements for local engagement, allocation of funds, management of meetings etc is left to the discretion of councils and again flexibility is at the core of the new partnerships. It has also been recommended that there are structures already in place throughout Belfast which are tackling ASB and community safety issues and there should be more formalised links between local fora and the new DCSPs. There is no

wish to create more community structures or duplicate those which already exist. There may also be some opportunity for rationalisation at a local level to reduce duplication of effort e.g. Police and other partners being called to numerous meetings in an area to discuss the same issues which can reduce the effectiveness of inputs.

- V. **Financing & Resourcing** – BCC would seek assurances that there is no real cut in financial and resourcing terms to the cost of administering and setting up of the new partnerships e.g. the recruitment of independent members. As previously pointed out, any savings from bringing the two partnerships together (including any savings from allowances) should be redirected towards service delivery;
- VI. **Staffing** – BCC will be carrying out a review of its staffing arrangements in light of the new partnerships and would wish to make DOJ and NIPB aware of this. Currently, the DPP and CSP staff are under significant pressure to carry out their core duties. An example of this is the increase in membership of DPP from 19 to 55 after the St Andrew's agreement. Despite this increase staffing levels supporting the DPP have remained the same which has caused an adverse impact on the level of service given to the running of the DPP. BCC is of the opinion that there is likely to be a need to increase staffing levels if required in the new structure and Council does not feel it should be responsible for bearing the cost of this.
- VII. **Governance** – BCC would like clarification on the governance arrangements of the new partnerships and in particular the relationship and accountability mechanisms between local Councils (taking into consideration that the Chief Executive is the accounting officer) and the Joint Committee (DOJ / PBNI)
- VIII. **Accountability** – BCC wishes to see the reporting lines for the new partnerships being streamlined. The draft new model suggests there are two lines of accountability, one from the Policing committees (five in Belfast) to Policing Board and another from the PCSPs to Joint Committee. BCC has concerns that the accountability to both the Joint Committee and Policing Board will result in an increase in bureaucracy and reduce the amount of resources, both financial and staffing, that can be used to deliver local solutions in local communities. It is fundamental to the success of the new partnerships that the new partnerships should either report directly to the Joint Committee or that reports expected are streamlined considerably so there is no duplication.
- IX. **Relationship between PCSP and DPCSP** – Further clarification is sought on this as members who currently sit on the Principal DPP have indicated that they are not clear about its current role and the relationship between the Principal DPP and four sub groups in Belfast. Further discussions need to take place regarding this (particularly the role of the citywide Policing Committee) and included in a Belfast Code of Practice. This is imperative for success and in obtaining nominations from members. There is a view that perhaps the citywide policing committee would not formally

perform a role in practice but that the members would focus on the PSCP roles in terms of co-ordination, citywide planning and programmes etc.

There is a view that dual membership, as far as is practical, of both the PSCP and the DPCSPs would help with continuity and the functioning of the PCSP itself. However, there is also an understanding that this would represent a considerable time commitment from elected and independent members.

- X. **Review of partnerships** - In order to ensure there is effective local service delivery for communities we would ask that there is flexibility in relation to the operational and administration of partnerships and that there is scope for a review of regional and local codes of practice / frameworks to allow for improvements / changes to be made after the partnerships are in operation. Such a review should be carried out after 18 months;
- XI. **User friendly** – BCC would ask that any documentation regarding the new partnership arrangements e.g. code of practice/framework should be written from a user’s perspective using the principles of Plain English to ensure that there is a clear understanding by a wider audience of how the different functions build into a cohesive and comprehensive approach.
- XII. **Monitoring of PSNI against Policing Plan / Meetings in Public**
Whilst it is recognised that there needs to be a mechanism to enable the public to question the district commander and to be assured that the PSNI are being monitored against the targets in the Policing Plan, the Council is of the opinion that the current arrangements are not effective. Again we would call for a less prescriptive approach to how these functions are carried out at a local level.

2. Answers to question posed in the consultation document

A1 How prescriptive should the code of practice on the exercise of functions be?

BCC strongly recommends that the code should not be prescriptive at all unless there are essential mandatory functions / responsibilities that need to be delivered in a certain way and these should only be included if absolutely necessary. BCC requests that the code should take the form of a framework only, with an outline of roles and responsibilities, suggest good practice and detail only minimal requirements in respect of reporting, etc. This would enable local partnerships to have the level of flexibility required to assign the majority resources towards tackling ASB, crime and local community safety issues.

We would stress the need to try and use the opportunity of the development of the new Partnership arrangements to reduce the bureaucratic burden on members and officers as much as possible and only to seek reports where they serve a useful purpose. A good example is the current attendance policy and performance appraisal of members which is a cumbersome process that requires a significant amount of work from both members and officers to implement. However, there is a strong opinion among current members that this information (and other information) gathered is not used nor is the process useful.

The Belfast PCSP code of practice needs to provide a **framework** on the distinct mandatory functions of the PCSP and the DPCSPs (and the respective Policing Committees), as well as giving guidance on the reporting structure / lines and relationship that will exist between the PCSP, DPCSPs, Policing Committees and Designated Organisations. This framework should be for guidance only and should allow local partnerships to have the flexibility to ensure that service delivery in local communities is the priority of the new partnerships. This code of practice /framework should make it clear what is required by the PCSP / DPCSP to meet legislative requirements and what is considered good practice. It must also allow flexibility and a pragmatic approach to ensure that bureaucracy and administrative burdens are kept to a minimum.

The member's handbook that was developed historically for DPP members was thought to be very helpful. We would recommend that a handbook is developed for the new Model and forms the basis for the induction and training of members of the PCSPs. Further, it is suggested that the handbook and the training which is developed is piloted with practitioners to ensure that it meets the needs of the end users and can be updated / reviewed as appropriate if required.

It is appreciated that there is a need to ensure some consistency of approach across NI, particularly to allow all partner organisations to plan their involvement to properly participate in the PCSP at an appropriately senior level, but this needs to be balanced in Belfast with the right level of flexibility to allow the PCSP and DCSPs to tailor delivery and develop local plans with (and for) local communities.

The framework / code should include the following key themes but the details of how to deliver on them should left to the local partnerships to determine:

- **Local delivery**

The focus on delivering an improvement in policing and community safety to make the district one which is safe to live and work in must be central to the work of the whole PCSP.

For Belfast, the code / framework also needs to clarify the role of the PCSP in relation to that of DPCSPs. The processes to develop action plans should be determined locally.

There needs to be further clarity and direction about the governance arrangements and how the policing committee relates to the whole PCSP, and vice versa, to ensure that the arrangements achieve a joined up approach to policing and community safety within the district.

The code / framework should refer to the allocation of resources for delivery. However it is our view that the PCSP / DPCSP should decide on how the local process should work.

- **Consult and Engage**

We should ensure that the full PCSP undertakes consultation and engagement on a number of levels to allow the full Partnership to identify the policing and community safety needs of the area.

It is recommended that the Joint Committee supports regular consultation and analysis of data from residents; there needs to be a long term commitment to this process so that we are able to prove the effectiveness of the partnership in the delivery of the local policing and community safety plan. This means that the same core questions should be asked each time the residents' consultation is undertaken so that the results are directly comparable.

In Belfast, each PCSP / DPCSP should be allowed to determine its own process of local consultation with community structures, hard to reach groups and minority groups to gain the necessary degree of understanding of the local policing and community safety issues and to utilise all the possible mechanisms to do this via its consultation structures within BCC and those used by other partner organisations. This consultation and engagement process should be developed for the life of the PCSP / DPCSP and cover the Section 75 Equality requirements on the Partnership. The code of practice / framework should require that the consultation and engagement plan is developed and regularly reviewed by the PCSP.

The timing of the consultations undertaken by PCSPs to determine local policing and community safety needs should fit with the funding cycles

from central government and the business planning processes that the Joint Committee and the other members of the PCSP are subject to. It is recommended timelines for the consultations and engagement plan should follow the lifecycle of local government elections, relate to the April to March business cycle that is utilised across government and allow the PCSP/DPCSP to inform the development of the annual plans of partners.

How each PCSP / DPCSP engages with the community should be an ongoing interactive process that includes all different types of public meetings, discussion forums, information sessions, work shops and focus groups, regular forum meetings. These should be determined as necessary at a local level to ensure that they are meaningful and bought into by the community. The primary function of such engagement should be to build community confidence that government has joined up how it makes the district one which is, and is perceived to be, safer to live and work in. BCC also recommends that there is flexibility in how we consult and engage and current administration burdens such as the notice for meetings, notice of receiving reports etc is not included in how we do this.

- **Identify** (Prepare Policing and Community Safety Plans)

The information from the consultation and engagement processes detailed above should allow each PCSP / DPCSP to identify the particular issues which are relevant to their district and to develop plans for how those issues can be tackled.

For Belfast it is anticipated that there will be four local plans and an overarching citywide plan, and that resources will be allocated for delivery in a way determined by the PCSP.

Local DPCSPs need to be given flexibility to ensure that there are local solutions for local problems as each area of the city will have differing priorities. Local community networks need to ensure that they reflect the views of the local community highlighting that they have robust community consultation in place as well as effective communication plans to ensure that communities are kept up to date with the work of the DPCSP.

- **Monitor** (Delivery of the Partnership and Local Policing Plans)

It is recommended that the various structures of the PCSP, the policing committees and DPCSPs have monitoring as an agenda item at regular meetings (to be determined locally) to ensure that they are responding to appropriate issues through the delivery of their work to stay relevant and responsive to the needs of the local communities.

It appears that there are two lines of accountability in the new structure. BCC has concerns that the accountability to both the Joint Committee and policing board will result in an increase in bureaucracy and reduce the amount of resources both financial and staffing that can be used to deliver local solutions in local communities. It is fundamental to the success of

the new partnerships that the new partnerships should report directly to the one body only i.e. the joint committee or that reports expected are streamlined considerably so there is no duplication.

- **PCSPs and DPCSPs**

Statistics from all relevant partner agencies along with monitoring reports from projects/interventions and the information gleaned during the ongoing engagement process will allow PCSPs to monitor the delivery of plans. **All** partners should be required to show how their activity contributes to making safer areas so that the Partnerships are able to evidence change and improve / develop interventions to increase community safety and reduce ASB.

- **Policing Committees**

Policing Committees will monitor the performance of the Police in line with the district policing plan, it is recommended that routine aspects of this monitoring function are carried out in private meetings and not in public as currently happens. We agree that Police and other partners need to be held to account but we recommend that this can be done in a less prescriptive manner in public e.g. the local DPCSPs can give an update on their plans at a meeting in public (attended regularly by the district commander) but this should also serve the purpose of illustrating how the overall partnership is making a positive impact on reducing crime and ASB and allow for improvements to be made locally if necessary.

The code / framework should outline the role of the PCSP in preparing an annual report; and that each Council is responsible for publishing it in a way it feels is appropriate. In specifying how often monitoring returns are made to the Joint Committee, it is important that these monitoring requirements are not bureaucratic but are focused on PCSPs delivering a good service for local people. Therefore, flexibility needs to be built into any monitoring framework to allow changes to be made to local plans. Reports should only be sought where they are useful to the receiver and have a purpose.

A2 Which of the issues listed on pages 8-10 definitely needs to be included within the code?

To provide clarity it is recommended that the code / framework should be written from a user's perspective using the principles of Plain English, to ensure that there is a clear understanding of how the different functions build into a cohesive and comprehensive approach. Also taking the opportunity to make the code adaptive and flexible to local circumstances rather than being too prescriptive.

Therefore BCC recommends that the framework covers the following procedures in outline only giving sufficient discretion in respect of the detail to local PCSPs / DPCSPs especially in relation to the running of meetings.

- **Arrangements for the submission by or to a PCSP or policing committee of reports and other documentation**

It is recommended that the code / framework provides guidance on arrangements for sending in reports, but reports should only be required for functions that are essential such as monitoring / financial returns. The exact timescales of reports or any other essential documentation should be agreed with the PCSP to fit in with systems already in place e.g. deadlines for financial returns should be agreed by local Councils and fit in with their systems.

- **Arrangements for the monitoring of the performance of the PCSP / DPCSP in carrying out appropriate plans**

Plans should reflect local policing and community safety priorities, and as such, the code / framework should recommend that local impact targets should be developed with the support of a crime analyst, which could then be reported quarterly on a City wide and local basis.

- **The arrangements for dealings with the joint committee**

Specific arrangements around dealings will need further consideration. It is important to understand how this will best operate to ensure effective communications and the ability to have open, useful and ongoing dialogue as the process of the new PCSPs takes shape. BCC recommends that, as far as possible, the committee should be flexible and work with PCSPs / DPCSPs to agree the easiest and most effective way of doing this.

A3 Which elements of the code of practice previously available for DPPs could be omitted?

It is recommended that the code of practice / framework omits as much of the previous prescriptive requirements as possible and makes a clear distinction between meeting the legislative requirements and good practice. BCC recommends that flexibility should be given in the code /framework on the following for both PCSP and local DPCSPs, who should be able to decide locally how they carry out the necessary functions required.

- **Meetings in public** (As a tool to monitor the performance of the police).

It is widely recognised that public attendance is low and there are often frustrations about the reporting format and responses to the supplementary questions which are posed.

A locally determined engagement process which would enable a more meaningful, flexible and targeted approach is recommended.

- **Holding of public meetings**

As public meetings will take many forms and be reactive to local concerns, it is recommended that how public meetings are held is determined locally, depending on the function of the meeting and that the code/framework

provides guidance only. We recommend that arrangements for local engagement, allocation of funds, management of meetings etc is left to the discretion of councils and partnerships.

- **Arrangements for giving notice of meetings**

BCC recommends that, as far as reasonably possible, meeting dates are set at the beginning of the year on an annual basis in order to carry out mandatory requirements such as monitoring progress against objectives / developing local plans etc. Further discussion needs to take place around the notification to be given for these meetings but again flexibility should be considered to ensure the administration of meetings does not reduce service delivery at a local level. BCC recommends that the code / framework does not stipulate the minimum number of meetings as was previously the case.

- **Procedures for meetings**

It is recommended that the new code is much less prescriptive in this regard.

- **Arrangements for enabling questions on the discharge of functions by PSNI to be put by members of the policing committee for answer by the relevant district commander or their nominee**

It is recommended that the code allows for flexibility on the above and the current mechanism to enable questions is not always productive and meaningful. All partners on PCSPs / DPCSPs should be meeting with local communities on a regular basis and should be reacting to questions on an ongoing basis. Current arrangements are too inflexible and do not assist the community engaging with Police as they are too formal in their approach.

- **Arrangements to be made in relation to obtaining the cooperation of the public with the police.**

The code/framework should give guidance only. It is important that this role is seen, as widely as possible, as being about building direct relationships between residents / communities and the PCSPs / DPCSPs not just Police.

Whilst this function is restricted to the policing committee, the code should give guidance about how it connects to the whole engagement process that the PCSP / DPCSP undertakes. If local people are to effectively engage and co-operate on an ongoing basis, then this must be done in a meaningful way through processes that suit local people and networks.

A4 What could be adjusted or amended? For example, concerns had been raised about the number of DPP meetings being held – what are your views on this?

The current Code of Practice for DPPs and the established practice of these partnerships in Belfast has resulted in too many meetings in public and private. For example, in 2010/2011 there were **118** meetings of the DPP / CSP with **108** of these meetings being held by DPP. The issue is not just about numbers of meetings but also purpose and outcomes. Members feel that the requirements of the Policing Board are too bureaucratic regarding administration functions and that Officers / members time could be served better engaging with the public through current structures and holding public meetings in local areas to deal with specific local issues.

Also the high level of formality applied to the minutes and papers of the current DPP should be greatly reduced. All papers, minutes and action plans of the new PCSP should be focused on action points and to the Plain English standard so they can be easily understood by all. The use of the current DPP models for the administration of meetings will result in a similar process being applied to the new Partnerships. There needs to be a balance struck between the more informal approaches for the arrangements around CSPs rather than shaping the new partnership to one side of the current arrangements.

BCC proposes that a minimum number of meetings needs to be decided locally to allow each PCSP to determine the best, most efficient and effective way to deliver a safer district. There should also be flexibility to allow PCSPs / DPCSPs to organise meetings in public as and when required in order to respond to local need but without having to carry out current formal procedures in order to do so – e.g. an issue may arise and the PCSP / DPCSP will need to organise an emergency meeting in a locality with those affected, they need to have the flexibility to be able to hold a meeting at short notice without being consigned to formal procedures around this.

A5 Which aspects should be left to the discretion of councils?

BCC would again stress the need to try and use the opportunity of the development of the new Partnership arrangements to reduce the bureaucratic burden as much as possible allowing flexibility at a local level. The Council strongly advocates a less prescriptive approach to the administrative arrangements than previously experienced by DPPs. This is to allow focus on delivery and a pragmatic involvement of all the relevant stakeholders and members.

Therefore we recommend that arrangements for local engagement, allocation of funds, management of meetings etc is left to the discretion of councils/partnerships and the code only provides a general framework for delivery of functions.

B. How can this code of practice help partnerships to focus on delivery of outcomes, whether in relation to the operation of the Policing Committee or the overall PCSP?

The focus of the new partnership has to be on the delivery of outcomes: to achieve this, the code / framework should ensure it facilitates a process where each partner organisation presents the necessary data to allow the impact of the work on local communities to be measured.

BCC recommends that a framework is developed to assist with the monitoring and evaluating of PCSPs / DPCSPs. This would allow each PCSP to report in a way where change is clearly measured and regularly compared.

PCSP Model

In the PCSP model (Annex A) in the consultation document there is a foot note at the bottom which states:

It is *anticipated* that pre-existing relevant groups / for a working on a community level will have *informal*.....

BCC recommends that the words anticipated and informal are removed and make this a statement of intent to ensure that local fora / groups can have a formal link with PCSPs through engagement activity etc. This should allow the relationship of the partnerships and the community to be determined locally.

Section 2. Designated Bodies (p 12-14 consultation document)

What bodies should be compulsorily designated to all PCSPS?

In order to answer this question fully BCC recommends that guidance is given in relation to the difference between regional designation and local designation. For example the guidance would need to address:

- Will the requirements be different for organisations that are compulsorily designated?
- What if local PCSPs request an organisation to be designated and they refuse?
- How will local communities and the voluntary sector be designated on local PCSPs / DPCSPs?

Currently, through the Belfast Community Safety Partnership (BCSP), the following organisations are members. These stakeholders have made a positive contribution to the development of the BCSP since its formation and provide much needed strategic direction and resources to develop our Safer Belfast plan which allows us to have local services to assist local communities reduce ASB and tackle community safety issues.

- Belfast City Council (elected members and officers)
- Belfast Area Partnership Boards
- Belfast City Centre Management
- Belfast District Policing Partnership
- Belfast Education and Library Board
- Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
- Belfast Regeneration Office
- Engage with Age
- NIACRO (on behalf of NICVA)
- Northern Ireland Alternatives
- Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
- Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue
- NI Housing Executive
- PSNI
- Probation Board NI
- Public Health Agency
- Translink
- Victim Support
- Women's Aid
- Youth Justice Agency

As mentioned, we recommend that the above organisations are represented on PCSPs / DPCSPs in Belfast and that consideration is given to including the community and voluntary sector, whilst at the same time trying to keep numbers

manageable In terms of focus and decision making. Therefore flexibility needs to be built in to allow local Councils to choose who sits on the new structures and perhaps mechanisms be put in place to co-opt organisations onto structures as required.

As you will see from the above, we are not recommending that Council officers sit on PCSPs / DPCSPs as we are assuming that they will help to facilitate the delivery of PCSPs / DPCSPs (but have no voting rights). Elected members will represent the Council and have voting rights

From a regional perspective BCC proposes the following organisations for compulsory designation

- Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
- NI Housing Executive
- Probation Board NI
- PSNI
- Youth Justice Agency

How can designated organisations be best represented on PCSPS?

BCC recommends that organisations should appoint persons who are at an appropriate accountable level within their organisation to be able to commit resources under the auspices of reducing crime and enhancing community safety, be that in financial terms or in kind.

The PCSP will consult, engage and plan; therefore the person appointed should be of a position to influence planning on a short, medium and long term basis within their organisations and feed in the priorities of PCSPs and DPCSPs and ensure their plans, policies and activities work to reduce crime and enhance community safety.

BCC also recommends that attendance at relevant meetings should be consistent e.g. if senior staff officer in any of the organisations is designated to attend the PCSP meeting then he or she should make every reasonable effort to attend. If this is not possible an appropriate deputy should attend who can make decisions re resourcing or at least come back with a quick decision on urgent matters.

What guidance should be given on the appropriate level of representation or on the consistency of representation?

Good practice only. There also needs to be an acknowledgement that DPCSPs must be given local flexibility, linked to local knowledge, issues, concerns, ability to influence and persuade within local communities

Local DPCSPs need to be given flexibility to ensure that there are local solutions for local problems as each area of the city will have differing priorities, this will

need to be reflected in the members of the group. Local community networks need to ensure that they reflect the views of the local community highlighting that they have robust community consultation (e.g. terms of reference and governance arrangements) in place as well as effective communication plans to ensure that communities are kept up to date with the work of the DPCSP. The Department may wish to consider developing some good practice guidelines about the constitutions of groups that are desirable. Councils could work with groups to build this level of capacity.

Section 3 Draft Code of Practice for appointment of independent members (p 15-17 consultation document)

How can we encourage and ensure all Section 75 groups are engaged?

NIPB should use its existing network of contacts including its Reference Groups. NIPB should liaise with other statutory bodies such as Councils, PSNI and the NIHE to link into their networks and local structures. Furthermore, NIPB should engage with regional groups who represent various Section 75 groups throughout Northern Ireland.

How can individuals be encouraged to apply for independent membership?

NIPB should develop a recruitment process which uses multiple forms of media and social networking sites. All documentation should be in 'plain English' and available in various formats and languages. Clear descriptions of the roles and functions of the structures of the PCSP, DPCSP, and Policing Committees should be provided. Furthermore, the documentation should outline the role of Independent Members on both the Policing Committee and DPCSP/PCSP as well as an indication of the time commitment required and what expenses are recoverable.

Also organisations (e.g. community and voluntary sector) may wish to nominate representatives who act on behalf of the organisation rather than in an individual capacity so targeted recruitment utilising NICVA or other similar bodies may be appropriate.

What should the 'default' mechanism be if not enough applications are received for a PCSP (paragraph 66 in the draft code)?

Paragraph 66 states that if less than twice the number of candidates are put forward by the Council, the Policing Board, in partnership with the Council, may consider reviewing the local networks of community representatives and volunteers (such as Neighbourhood Watch Groups, CPLCs/PACTs) who may be interested in becoming involved in this area of work.

The Council feels that there is a need to maintain public confidence in the appointment process and seek assurances that this would not be considered as canvassing after the application process has been completed. To ensure the credibility of the process the Council believes that the local networks of community representatives and volunteers should be targeted during the publicity/awareness-raising stage of the process.

How could the appointment process be improved further and made more cost effective?

The Council recognises that the previous process and costs need to be rationalised. We appreciate that the NIPB is considering how this can be achieved and are identifying a number of steps in the recruitment process where savings can be made. BCC would however like to express our concern in relation to the additional burden on the Councils to administer and support the process of appointment of Independent Members - the impact on the resources needed to implement this could be significant for Councils. We would therefore seek assurances that appropriate expenses for panel members will be covered by NIPB.

We recognise this is a new process and places more onerous responsibility within the Councils remit. In order to ensure the additional processes are applied to the highest standard we are likely to require additional support from experienced Human Resources staff to support the process, possibly at worst case in the same way as the current 75:25 contribution split to ensure no detriment to Council.

The NIPB should also outline their proposals as soon as possible around the support and training that will be provided to members, and any Council staff taking part in the process and the timeframe for this.

To ensure that Independent Members have the necessary skills for full participation in PCSP/DPCSP/Policing Committees, the Board should consider whether a more competency based recruitment approach could be accommodated so that we appoint the right people with the right skills. This will help identify candidates with the necessary skills and attributes to be active participants in the Partnerships. This could include some form of measurement that will identify key competencies required by an Independent Member, for example report reading/writing, consultation/presentation skills, monitoring and evaluation, strategic planning and community engagement.

Disqualification

The Code indicates that the process of appointment has several stages. Firstly, (see Paragraph 53) the Policing Board will carry out an initial sift of applications and exclude those from candidates who clearly do not meet the published criteria.

The second stage will involve the Shortlisting/Interview Panel (the Council's nominees and an independent panel member) shortlisting the remaining candidates against predetermined essential and desirable criteria (Paragraph 57 refers). Following this the Panel will interview the shortlisted candidates and forward to the Policing Board an alphabetical list of candidates deemed to be suitable for appointment.

Only after this second stage has been completed will the Policing Board request the Chief Constable to undertake a check of persons on the list to ascertain if

they have fully and accurately stated on their application form any prior criminal convictions. The legislation makes it clear that a person will not be appointable to a PCSP/DPCSP if they have a prison record and if 5 years has not elapsed since they were released either on remission or on license.

It would seem to make more common sense for this check to be undertaken between the first and second stages of the overall process, prior to the Panel undertaking the short-listing and interviews. Otherwise, the panel may waste time and public money in considering applicants who will eventually be disqualified from appointment.

The Council would recommend that a cost benefit analysis of both options is undertaken.

Any other / general comments?

Merit Principle in the Selection of Candidates

Paragraph 62 of the Code makes reference to the requirement for the panel to appoint candidates based upon the merit principle. However, the panel is permitted only to divide candidates into two pools; one for candidates suitable for appointment and the other for those unsuitable for appointment, based on a suitability pass mark which will be determined by the Policing Board in advance. The panel is permitted to grade the appointable candidates in order of merit, however, the Council is only able to submit, in alphabetical order, a list of those candidates considered suitable for nomination to the Policing Board, individual rankings should not be provided.

It is accepted that in appointing the Independent Members, the Policing Board must ensure, so far as is practicable, that the overall membership of the PCSP, both political and independent taken together, is representative of the Council area and that membership of each DPCSP is representative of that district. It is accepted also that the selection of Independent Members will be influenced by the political breakdown of the Council's nominations.

As a suggestion a better outcome may be achieved by the panel grading those persons deemed suitable for appointment in order of merit and the Policing Board then choosing the highest ranked candidates who meet the required profiles.

If legislative or other restrictions prevent the Policing Board from using the aforementioned method of selection then the Board should consider whether the requirement for the Council to nominate twice the number of appointments required could be reduced. This will result in only the candidates with the highest merit scores being put forward for consideration by the Policing Board's final appointment panels (Paragraph 65 refers).

Conflicts of Interest

The Council welcomes the commitment, outlined in Paragraphs 37 and 38, for candidates to be required to state clearly on their application forms either direct or indirect conflicts of interest. The appointment process should ensure that the Policing Board recommend that no appointments are made of persons who hold other positions, either in their employment or in other public appointments, which the public might reasonably perceive to have connections to or with policing and which may give rise to a potential or perceived conflict or which may restrict the candidate from carrying out the full range of the duties of the post.

The need to maintain public confidence in the membership of appointees should not be underestimated and any conflict of interest must be avoided in order to strengthen the credibility of the process.

Whilst the Council recognises that the Policing Board cannot produce an exhaustive list of conflicts of interest it believes that the Policing Board should provide further guidance in the application pack in relation to this issue.

Interview Panels for Sub-Groups

Paragraphs 57 to 63 outline the role of the Council's nominees to the Short-listing/Interview Panel. Paragraph 58 recommends that, to ensure consistency and because of the possibility of overlap in membership, the same panel should be involved in selecting Independent Members for the PCSP and all four DPCSPs. Furthermore, paragraph 61 states that the short-listing panel should aim to interview at least three times the number of candidates who will eventually be appointed. If this is applied to the forthcoming process, dependent on the Council determining the size of the PCSP, then a minimum of 81 candidates up to a maximum of 87 candidates would be required to be interviewed.

This will result in a considerable workload for those Members appointed to the panel. This time commitment will need to be borne in mind in making the Council nominations to the Panel. As stated earlier and at the beginning of BCC's response, the impact on the resources needed to implement could be significant for Councils and we would seek support that arrangements can be made to ensure claims for remuneration and expenses around the appointments process can be made from the NIPB budget for Belfast DPPs. We recognise this is a new process and places more onerous responsibility within the Councils' remit. In order to ensure the additional processes are applied to the highest standard we are likely to require additional support from experienced Human Resources staff to support the process.

BCC would argue that the burden on elected members to be involved in the appointment process without further clarity on remunerations is likely to be unsupported. However we recognise there is opportunity for the NIPB to consider this within the independent appointment process and we welcome your communication on this as urgently as possible. The Council therefore seeks urgent clarity on the new arrangements for financing this part of the process and

more clarity on the expectations of the additional roles and responsibilities envisaged by the NIPB.

Provision of Feedback to those Deemed Unsuitable for Appointment

During previous appointment processes candidates who had been deemed unsuitable at the interview stage received feedback from the consultants. However, for this recruitment process Paragraph 61 states that the Policing Board/service provider will arrange the interviews for the panel but it will be the responsibility of the Council to appoint a secretary for each panel and to provide feedback to candidates if requested.

The Policing Board has obviously decided to reduce the costs of the recruitment process which are associated with the hire of consultants by transferring this element of the process to the Council. However, any human/financial resources in relation to this element of the process will now have to be absorbed 100% by the Council.

The Council will need to consider what financial/resources implications that this change in the process will have and whether it is willing to absorb these costs. Therefore, as stated above, clarity around the current DPP budget claims in the 2011/12 year for the application of this process would be helpful. Councils are mindful that additional Human resources support is likely to be needed to support this process and therefore could form part of the claim. There is no budget provision within councils other than through DPP expenditure claims for the additional costs.

Remuneration of Panel Members

As with previous Codes, there is no indication given as to the mechanism to be used to reimburse the Members of Council appointed to the Short-listing/Interview Panel. In previous appointment processes undertaken in 2002/2003, 2005 and 2007 remuneration was provided, however, given that no provision has been made to pay allowances to PCSP/DPCSP Members, this issue would need to be clarified. It is our understanding that consideration is currently being given to this by the NIPB, therefore urgent clarity would be helpful.

Dual Membership

Paragraph 20 indicates that the Members of the DPCSPs need not be Members of the Principal Belfast PCSP, but it is felt that in principle it would be beneficial for both Political and Independent Members to sit on both to ensure continuity. Although it is beyond the scope of this Code to recommend this, careful consideration must be given to this dual membership given the time commitment that this would require. This level of commitment will not only be time consuming but may also be a financial burden given that no allowances will be payable. Therefore clarity will be needed on what 'out of pocket' expenses could be payable.

Information Packs

As previously mentioned, in the case of Belfast, it will be possible for candidates to be appointed to more than one DPCSP, or to a DPCSP and the main PCSP. Paragraph 49 of the Code makes reference to the requirement for the application form for Belfast applicants to provide an opportunity for candidates to indicate which of these they are interested in and may ask them to express a preference. If this is the case then it would be important for the information pack to clearly indicate the differing role and purpose of a PCSP Member and a DPCSP Member and also the time commitment involved.