



Northern Ireland
Audit Office

PSNI Fleet Management

**Report by the Comptroller
and Auditor General**

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She certifies the accounts of all Government Departments and a wide range of other public sector bodies; and she has statutory authority to report to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and other bodies have used their resources.

Dorinnia Carville

Comptroller and Auditor General

Northern Ireland Audit Office

8 April 2025

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List of Abbreviations

CCS	Crown Commercial Services
EV	Electric Vehicle
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
HGV	Heavy Goods Vehicle
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
ULEV	Ultra Low Emissions Vehicle

Key Facts

2,700

operational PSNI
vehicles



**£26
million**

spent on fleet additions
since 2021-22

**9
months**

average time to
commission a PSNI
vehicle



**14
months**

average time to
commission an electric
vehicle

25%

PSNI vehicles more
than 10 years old



350

vehicles off the road
each day in 2024

690

electric vehicles to be
introduced by 2026



180

electric vehicles
purchased by October
2024

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Background

1. PSNI has a commissioned fleet of almost 2,700 vehicles, which cover around 27 million miles a year. The fleet includes armoured, non-armoured (soft-skin) and commercial vehicles, as well as a number of aircraft, boats and motorcycles. PSNI operates in a unique environment compared to other UK forces, and so its fleet mix and numbers reflect the distinct nature of the challenges it faces.
2. In 2021, PSNI launched a Fleet Strategy ('the Strategy'), setting out plans for modernisation, improving technology and moving to a more environmentally sustainable fleet. The Strategy's high-level aims were to increase the number of marked vehicles and to reduce costs through increased standardisation and improved maintenance. A key objective of the Strategy was the introduction of around 700 electric vehicles (EVs) to the fleet.
3. Although progress has been made towards delivering the objectives of the Strategy, including an increase in liveried vehicles, a reduction in vehicle variants and the rollout of electric vehicles, we found that much more is yet to be achieved.

Key findings

PSNI's Fleet Strategy is not supported by detailed annual purchasing plans and refresh rates are unlikely to be achieved

4. PSNI does not prepare detailed annual purchasing plans for fleet additions. Instead, there are individual business cases for armoured and soft-skin vehicle replenishment which cover a period of six years. PSNI then submits annual bids for funding to the Department of Justice. PSNI told us that it identifies vehicles for replacement based on their condition and costs to repair, but that the absence of multi-year funding cycles has an impact on its ability to complete more detailed purchasing plans.
5. In the absence of multi-year budgets and detailed purchasing plans, fleet replenishment rates are not keeping pace with the plans outlined in the Strategy and subsequent businesses cases. Since 2021-22, PSNI has spent almost £26 million on fleet additions, less than a third of the approved capital spend in the two business cases for fleet replenishment. Achieving the full fleet replenishment rates by the end of the six-year cycle will be challenging and is subject to adequate funding being available. The extent to which replenishment rates are not achieved will have an impact on the age and condition of PSNI's operational fleet.
6. Whilst PSNI's ambition is that the average age of its fleet should be five years, this has not been achievable to date. We analysed data on operational fleet vehicles in October 2024 and found most vehicles exceeded this target, with the average age of armoured vehicles around eight years, and soft-skin vehicles just over six years. Almost a quarter of the fleet was more than ten years old.

Managing an ageing fleet is costly, with ongoing operational impacts

7. PSNI vehicles often operate under extreme conditions, with additional wear and tear leading to increasing maintenance needs and costs as vehicles age. Data provided by PSNI shows that between 2021-22 and 2023-24, the costs of repairs and maintenance completed at its inhouse workshops was almost £11 million. PSNI told us that its workshop capacity decreased over this time, due to capacity and resourcing issues, meaning it has increasingly relied on contracts with external suppliers.
8. In 2023-24, PSNI spent over £840,000 on external repair contracts, an increase of around 40 per cent from the prior year. Contracting out repair and maintenance work is not as cost effective as completing this work inhouse, however it is currently necessary to ensure that sufficient vehicles are available for deployment.
9. An ageing fleet also has operational impacts for PSNI, particularly an increasing number of vehicles off the road for repairs and maintenance. We found that the proportion of the fleet in workshops on any given day increased from an average of 6 per cent in 2021 to 16 per cent in 2023. At its most extreme, almost 500 vehicles, or a fifth of the fleet, was off the road. PSNI told us that it is experiencing significant pressures in providing vehicles for frontline services and also recognises the potential safety risks associated with an older fleet.

There have been delays in commissioning new vehicles

10. We analysed data on commissioning times for all operational vehicles in the PSNI fleet. This showed that the average time between vehicle delivery and commissioning was around nine months, however many individual vehicles took much longer, with around a quarter of vehicles taking over a year to commission.
11. PSNI outlined a range of factors which have contributed to commissioning delays, including significant recruitment and retention issues within its workshops, capacity constraints with external contractors, shortages in specific vehicle components and preparation for events such as the 12th July demonstrations. It also highlighted the impact of single year budgets on both its ability to commission within standard timeframes and to plan purchases in the longer term.

The introduction of electric vehicles has been slower than expected

12. The Strategy outlined ambitious plans to increase the number of electric vehicles within PSNI's fleet, however this has been slower than expected. As of October 2024, PSNI had purchased 179 Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles (ULEVs) at a cost of £4.6 million. The introduction of a further 500 ULEVs by 2026 is likely to be challenging, given the pace of acquisition to date.
13. The addition of a significant number of EVs has added even more pressure on an already over-capacity commissioning model. Commissioning times for ULEVs have been longer than for traditional petrol and diesel vehicles. We found that the average commissioning time for ULEVs was over a year and that a small number of ULEVs purchased more than two years earlier had not been commissioned by October 2024.
14. Electric vehicles are unsuitable for many roles within PSNI's fleet, due to the restrictions on speed and mileage, uncertainties about battery life and inability to carry the weight of armouring. PSNI told us that these issues have led to it taking a more considered approach to the introduction of EVs.

There was insufficient planning and assessment of the charging infrastructure required for electric vehicles

15. PSNI's plans to introduce electric vehicles included an assumption that charging infrastructure would be implemented in tandem with fleet replenishment. We found that consideration of charging infrastructure was initially limited, with insufficient assessment of the challenges, timescales and investment required. To date, 58 charging points have been fully installed, with plans for a further 188 by June 2025. The total number of charging points planned is substantially higher than that outlined in the business cases and will require a significant increase in the pace of installation.
16. Slower than anticipated installation of charging points, along with issues in power supply and capacity have contributed to the delays in commissioning ULEVs. In our view, the root cause of many of these issues is the lack of joined up approach between Transport and Estates Services. A robust assessment of charging capacity and installation should have been a fundamental consideration when PSNI committed to purchasing these vehicles.

PSNI does not currently collect detailed data on CO2 emissions and fuels savings

17. PSNI estimated that moving to a more sustainable fleet could achieve fuel savings of £5 million over five years. It also anticipated reductions in CO2 emissions as a result of this project. However, it was not able to provide detailed data on fuel savings and CO2 emissions as a result of the introduction of ULEVs, telling us that these have not been prioritised due charging infrastructure delays and a lack of suitable vehicles for police use, despite this being a key target of the Strategy. The delays in commissioning ULEVs, coupled with the lack of detailed data on emissions and fuel savings means PSNI is unable to demonstrate the impact and value for money provided by the move to electric vehicles at this stage.

Conclusion and recommendations

18. Effective fleet management is key to PSNI's operational effectiveness and relies on balancing the need for regular maintenance cycles for reliable fleet availability, along with ensuring officer and public safety, in a challenging financial environment. PSNI faces a number of challenges in successfully implementing its Fleet Strategy and sustainability objectives:
 - The availability of adequate funding, and the absence of multi-year funding cycles which are aligned with annual purchasing plans to achieve ambitious fleet replenishment rates.
 - The need to increase its capacity for both vehicle maintenance and commissioning, in a competitive motor industry labour market, in order to achieve savings and rationalisation plans and to safeguard its ability to respond to major public order incidents.
 - The emergent nature of introducing EVs, which will require the development of a robust strategy outlining plans for both increased EV infrastructure and future use and maintenance of these vehicles.

Without these core elements in place, PSNI is unlikely to be able to fully deliver its ambitions for a modern, sustainable fleet.



Recommendation 1

PSNI should develop more detailed annual vehicle purchasing plans, considering allocated budgets, and an updated analysis of its fleet requirements. Annual purchasing plans should be linked to approved business cases to ensure that all purchases are subject to appropriate governance procedures.



Recommendation 2

Annual purchasing plans should include a realistic assessment of PSNI's capacity to commission new vehicles in order to reduce the time between purchase and commission where possible. PSNI should ensure that resourcing levels are sufficient to commission vehicles in a timely matter either through internal staffing or external support.



Recommendation 3

PSNI should set specific commissioning time targets for different types of vehicle, aligned to its strategic aims to reduce average vehicle age and ultimately reduce the overall fleet numbers in the longer term, and monitor its performance against these targets.



Recommendation 4

PSNI should review how it maintains and commissions its vehicles to identify ways to increase capacity, either internally or externally, and ensure it is achieving value for money in all commissioning and repair work.



Recommendation 5

PSNI should review and update its Fleet Strategy and supporting business cases, in particular its plans to expand the EV fleet, taking into account the issues it has encountered in introducing EVs to date. Updated plans should be realistic, timebound and costed.



Recommendation 6

PSNI should ensure that business cases for significant capital investment identify the infrastructure and support necessary for successful delivery and obtain detailed input from relevant business areas where required.



Recommendation 7

PSNI should put structures in place to ensure a more joined up approach between Transport and Estates is adopted for completion of the EV purchases and infrastructure installation projects. As part of this, PSNI should ensure that the purchasing plan for EVs and the installation plan for charging points are properly aligned.



Recommendation 8

PSNI should establish an overarching Energy Strategy to reflect the needs of business areas undertaking projects requiring significant power supply, including Estates, Information and Communication Services and Transport.



Recommendation 9

PSNI should develop and implement an Electric Vehicle Strategy, reflecting the issues encountered with both charging infrastructure and suitability of ULEVs for policing roles. The strategy should set achievable targets for introducing more ULEVs, alongside clearly defined timeframes and costs. It should also include plans for managing ULEVs, including guidance for charging, downtime and collation of performance data.



Recommendation 10

PSNI should collect detailed data on fuel savings and CO2 emissions resulting from the introduction of ULEVs to provide an evidence base for their cost effectiveness and environmental impact, aligned with its strategic objectives and to inform future decision-making on further ULEV purchases.

Part One:

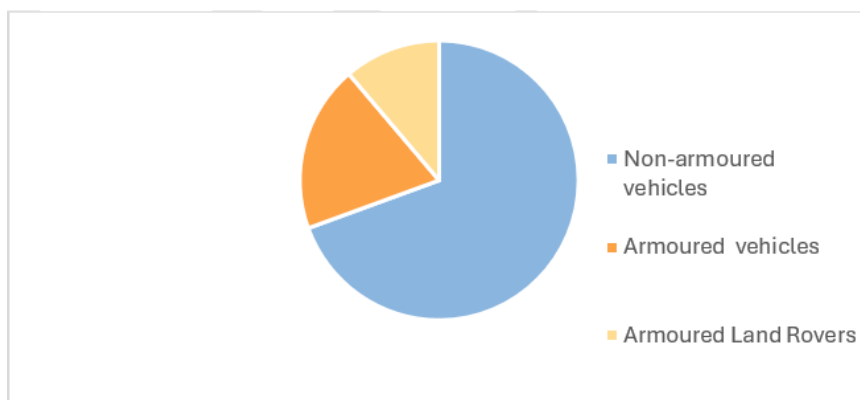
Introduction and background

Part One: Introduction and background

The PSNI has a commissioned fleet of around 2,700 vehicles

- 1.1** PSNI's fleet is essential to delivering its purpose of keeping people safe by delivering a service that is victim, community and workforce focused. PSNI's fleet includes armoured cars, armoured public order vehicles, soft-skin cars, and commercial vehicles, as well as a number of aircraft, boats and motorcycles. Each year, the fleet covers around 27 million miles across 5,400 square miles of land, including over 15,000 miles of public road and 300 miles of international land border.
- 1.2** PSNI fleet size is driven by operational requirements and a need to maintain vehicles for certain functions. PSNI operates in a unique environment and so faces challenges that are not encountered by other UK forces. The full road fleet is split between three main vehicle categories: non-armoured or "soft-skin" vehicles; armoured vehicles; and armoured Land Rovers. Within the three categories, vehicles perform specific roles with different performance and fitout requirements. These are:
- Response
 - Local policing
 - Roads policing
 - Investigations
 - Armed response
 - Public Order
 - Specialist vehicles
 - General purpose

Figure 1: Police vehicles are divided into three main categories



Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data, extracted in October 2024

- 1.3** Over half of vehicles are used as response or patrol vehicles and around a third of the fleet is armoured. The acquisition and maintenance of these vehicles fall under Transport Services Branch. Of PSNI's £64 million capital budget in 2023-24, £24 million was assigned to the purchase of vehicles.
- 1.4** Proper fleet management is key to PSNI's operational success and can be complex and resource intensive. Good fleet management relies on balancing consistent maintenance schedules with predictable and reliable vehicle availability, as well as managing officer and staff safety and working within a challenging budget environment.

Fleet replacement targets are based on a combination of mileage and age

- 1.5** PSNI has set criteria for fleet replacement, based on mileage and age. For soft-skin (non-armoured) vehicles, the current ambition is to replace these at five years old or 100,000 miles. All vehicles over four years undergo a detailed condition report to determine if it is safe and economical for them to remain in service.

Figure 2: Police vehicles are divided into three main categories

Category	Replacement mileage	Replacement age* (extended age)
Medium cars	100,000	5 years (6 years)
Large cars	120,000	5 years (6 years)
Small cars/vans	100,000	4 years (5 years)
Transit/LDV vans/minibuses	120,000	6 years**
4x4s	120,000	6 years**
Motorcycles	70,000	6 years**
Specialist/LGVs		8/9 years

* Vehicle replacement can be extended by one year depending on condition and mileage.

** These vehicles may run on in years depending on use.

Source: PSNI Outline Business Case for Soft-Skin Vehicles, February 2022

- 1.6** Armoured cars are also replaced based on mileage and age, supplemented by expert opinion as to the impact of additional wear and tear on the vehicle. The current ambition is to replace armoured vehicles at eight years or 100,000 miles. All vehicles over five years undergo a detailed condition report to determine if it is safe and economical for them to remain in service. The majority of UK police forces report replacement schedules on a similar basis, however some do replace vehicles at four years old.

PSNI's 2021 Fleet Strategy set out the case for refreshing the fleet and moving towards more electric vehicles

- 1.7 The PSNI's "Fleet Strategy 2021 and beyond" ('the Strategy') states that "building and maintaining an effective fleet is an integral part of our ambition to be more visible, accessible and responsive to the public." The Strategy presents the case for change both internally and externally, across three key areas; modernisation; technology; and sustainability. Its aims are to increase the number of marked high visibility vehicles and to reduce costs by more standardisation and better maintenance.
- 1.8 The Strategy, published in 2022, set out the position of PSNI's fleet and its ambitions for the subsequent five-year period. At the time the Strategy was published, there were around 2,700 vehicles in the fleet, with an average age of six and a half years.

We identified issues with fleet management during our 2022-23 and 2023-24 audits of PSNI's financial statements

- 1.9 During our 2022-23 audit of PSNI's financial statements, we found that 100 electric vehicles (EVs) had been purchased but not commissioned for use as PSNI waited on business case approval for the associated procurement and installation of electric charging points for them. At the time of the audit these cars, which had a capital value of £2.4 million, had been stored at PSNI's Seapark facility for around 12 months. We also found a significant number of non-electric vehicles recorded on the 'assets under construction' register at 31 March 2023. More than 180 of these had been on the register for a year or more without being brought into use, with a value of approximately £13 million. Upon completion of the financial audit, we indicated our intention to explore these issues in more detail in a future value for money report.

Scope and structure

- 1.10 This review focuses on two of the key pillars of the 2021 Fleet Strategy:
- **Modernisation** – how PSNI has managed purchasing and maintenance of its fleet along with disposing of older vehicles, and whether this provides value for money. We consider the financial and operational impacts of managing an ageing fleet and delays in commissioning new fleet.
 - **Sustainability** – the extent to which PSNI has progressed towards its sustainability targets for the fleet. This section explores findings from financial audit in more detail, in particular the significant number of electric vehicles purchased but not operational and the reasons for this.

Specialised assets such as aircraft and boats are not within the scope of this review.

Our methodology included analysis of financial and other information provided by PSNI and all figures relating to the PSNI fleet are accurate as of October 2024.

Part Two:

Modernising the PSNI fleet

Part Two: Modernising the PSNI fleet

The Fleet Strategy sets out fleet replacement and modernisation plans over a five-year period from 2021

2.1 PSNI's Fleet Strategy sets out its plans for modernisation, increased sustainability and creating a more flexible fleet, covering the period 2021 to 2026. Over the course of the Strategy, PSNI aims to increase the number of marked high visibility vehicles, reduce costs by having fewer vehicle variants and better maintenance, and to provide officers with a safe mobile working environment suitable to meet future demands on policing. The Strategy is aligned with PSNI's modernisation plan "Horizon 2025", which sets out how it will deliver a modern, fit for purpose police service.

2.2 The Strategy is driven by three key areas: modernisation, technology and sustainability. There are a number of high-level commitments within each of these areas:

Fleet Modernisation

- Increase liveried (marked) response fleet from 55 to 80 per cent.
- Further rationalise manufacturers and vehicle model variations to minimise costs and contribute to a 15 per cent reduction in current fleet numbers.
- Assess future armoured vehicle requirements.
- Reduce grey fleet (use of personal vehicles for business purposes) costs through improvements in fleet utilisation and accessibility.

Fleet Technology

- Equip 80 per cent of liveried fleet with Automatic Number Plate Recognition and vehicle mounted video recording.
- Introduce enhanced vehicle workstations.
- Source and introduce a new telematics system.

Fleet Sustainability

- Develop an approach to replacing Internal Combustion Engine vehicles with Ultra Low Emissions vehicles.
- Introduce 689 electric vehicles over five years – 39 per cent of soft-skin fleet.
- Encourage staff to adopt a more sustainable approach to vehicle use, both inside and outside of work.
- Reduce CO2 emissions by 18 per cent annually.

There are separate six-year plans for replacing armoured and non-armoured cars

- 2.3** Plans to update and replenish PSNI's fleet are contained in two separate business cases, one for armoured vehicles and one for soft-skin, non-armoured vehicles. PSNI considers that an armoured fleet is essential both to protect its officers and staff and to deliver community policing effectively. The business case for replenishment of armoured vehicles identified an ongoing operational need for around 530 armoured cars, of which 278 needed to be replaced by 2027. It also set out plans to move towards SUV-type vehicles, reflecting changes to the market as manufacturers move away from saloon cars, as well as providing a more ergonomic work environment for officers. Electric vehicles are not included in these plans as challenges around the weight of armouring and their range mean they are not currently viable.
- 2.4** Should these replenishment rates not be achieved, PSNI estimates the average age of armoured cars will increase to almost nine years, which it considers to be unacceptable for any emergency service vehicle. Successful fleet replenishment will result in an average vehicle age of just under three years. Armoured cars are subject to lengthy testing and independent certification procedures and so it can take 18 to 24 months to produce a fully accredited armoured car. The business case approved full project costs of £83.5 million over five years to deliver the vehicles required.
- 2.5** The majority of PSNI's fleet is soft-skin, or non-armoured vehicles. The business case for soft-skin vehicles outlines an operational need for almost 1,800 soft-skin vehicles in total with almost 1,200 new vehicles required by January 2029. PSNI describes these replacement rates as "modest", allowing it to maintain an average age of five years, compared to more than eleven years should no replenishment take place. The business case stipulates that around 60 per cent of new soft-skin vehicles should be either full or hybrid electric cars in order to meet government and PSNI net zero objectives. For these vehicles, the business case approved full project costs of over £64 million over six years were approved.

Figure 3: Costs of almost £150 million over six years have been approved to refresh PSNI's fleet

Category	Capital (£m)	Revenue (£m)	Total (£m)
Soft-skin (non-armoured)	40.5	23.7	64.2
Armoured	51.9	31.6	83.5
	92.4	55.3	147.7

Source: PSNI Outline Business Cases for soft-skin and armoured fleet

Business cases for fleet replenishment are not supported by detailed annual purchasing plans

- 2.6** Whilst PSNI has these two overarching long-term business cases for fleet replenishment, it does not prepare detailed annual fleet purchasing plans. Instead, the approved business cases provide the basis of purchases over a six-year period and PSNI submits annual bids for funding to the Department of Justice. For both armoured and soft-skin cars, purchases are made using the existing approved Crown Commercial Services (CCS) Framework for the purchase and fit-out to full specification of vehicles. The CCS Framework establishes costs for petrol, diesel, and more recently electric, hybrid and hydrogen vehicles. We note that the CCS Framework did not include prices for electric vehicles at the time the soft-skin business case was prepared.
- 2.7** In the absence of detailed annual purchasing plans, PSNI told us that vehicles are identified for replacement based on their condition and an analysis of the costs to repair where they have been damaged. PSNI also told us on some occasions additional purchases are made that are supported by further business cases, and that this element of flexibility is necessary to translate the Strategy into actionable procurement, especially given the requirement to match available funding with available vehicles. PSNI told us that in April 2024 there were 479 non-armoured vehicles due to be considered for replacement due to their age and mileage score, however replacement rates are slower than anticipated due to resourcing issues.
- 2.8** Without more detailed annual purchasing plans, there is the potential that fleet replenishment is driven by business cases which are out of date, with a lack of flexibility and scope to amend six-year plans. It is also likely that the costs and assumptions have changed over time and that business cases have not been amended in line with these changes. Further, there is misalignment between the six-year business cases and annual budget cycles and funding to date has not kept up with the amounts outlined in the business cases. Figure 5 shows that almost £26 million has been spent on fleet additions since 2021-22, less than a third of the approved capital spend in the two business cases.



Recommendation 1

PSNI should develop more detailed annual vehicle purchasing plans, considering allocated budgets, and an updated analysis of its fleet requirements. Annual purchasing plans should be linked to approved business cases to ensure that all purchases are subject to appropriate governance procedures.

The majority of PSNI's fleet is more than five years old

2.9 In its Fleet Strategy, PSNI states an ambition for the average age of the fleet to be five years, especially for frontline response and patrol vehicles. This would require annual refresh rates of around 10 per cent. However, our analysis of data held by PSNI shows that most operational vehicles are more than five years old and that refresh rates have varied considerably over the last few years.

Figure 4: The majority of operational fleet is more than five years old

Age	Number	Proportion
0 - 5 years	1,027	38%
5 - 10 years	1,076	39%
10 - 15 years	576	21%
15 - 20 years	26	1%
20 - 25 years	18	1%
25 - 30 years	2	0%
30 years +	1	0%

Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data (extracted October 2024)

Figure 5: Annual fleet replacement rates have varied considerably

	Number	Proportion of fleet	Cost
2021-22	171	6%	£4.9m
2022-23	403	15%	£13.8m
2023-24	199	7%	£7.0m

Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data

2.10 The Fleet Strategy recognises that PSNI's ability to meet the five-year or ten per cent refresh target has been limited by funding constraints. As a result, the average age of operational fleet vehicles is 6.7 years, with armoured vehicles averaging 7.9 years and non-armoured vehicles averaging 6.2 years. Almost a quarter of the fleet is more than 10 years old. There is significant variation in age depending on the type of vehicle. For example, our analysis of PSNI data showed that armoured Land Rovers, heavy good vehicles (HGVs), vans and certain personnel carriers tend to be much older than average. We noted:

- An armoured Land Rover that is almost 40 years old.
- Five HGVs that are over 20 years old.
- A 20-year-old motorcycle.
- 20 vans that are over 15 years old.

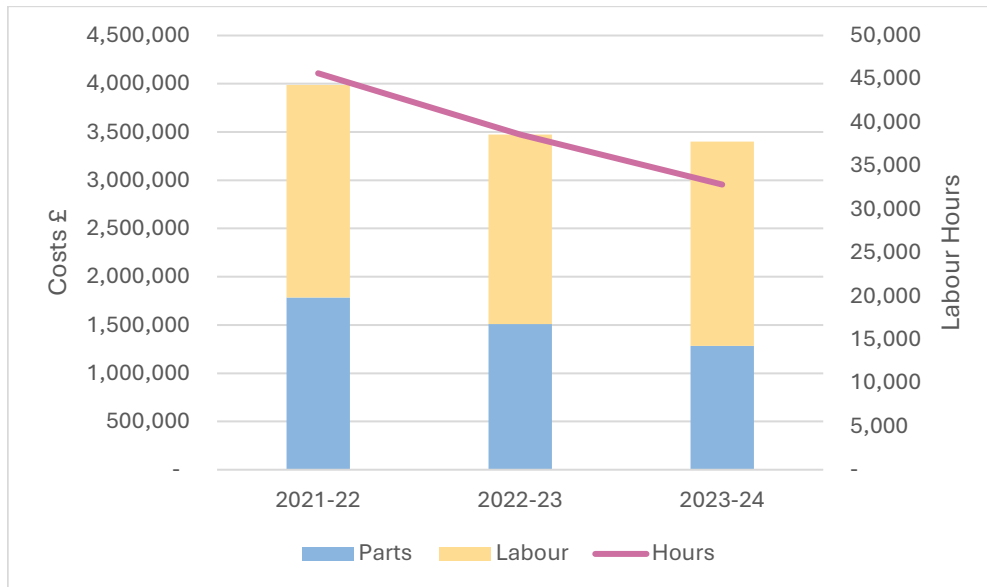
Managing and maintaining an older fleet is costly

2.11 Whilst there is insufficient capital funding available to refresh the fleet at the ideal rate, PSNI incurs significant revenue costs in maintaining an older fleet. Due to the nature of the work undertaken by the PSNI, its vehicles operate under extreme conditions, which increases the wear and tear on all the vehicle components resulting in increased maintenance and associated costs as the vehicles age. PSNI estimates that new soft-skin vehicles incur running costs of £0.01 per mile, compared to £0.13 per mile for a vehicle which is more than seven years old. For a vehicle averaging 20,000 miles per year, this equates to additional running costs of £2,400 per year. Our analysis of PSNI operational fleet numbers shows that around a third of soft-skin vehicles are over seven years old. On this basis, these vehicles could incur additional running costs of over £1.5 million per year compared to if those vehicles had been replaced.

2.12 In relation to armoured cars, the weight of the armouring causes increased wear and tear, and major components are more expensive to replace. PSNI estimates that an eight-year-old armoured car is four times more expensive to run and maintain than a three-year-old equivalent. Analysis provided by PSNI shows that around 40 of its 520 armoured vehicles are over eight years old. Unlike soft-skin fleet, where there is potential to re-assess vehicle condition at four years and redeploy cars away from critical front line policing functions, armoured vehicles generally cannot be redeployed due to the need to protect critical PSNI functions.

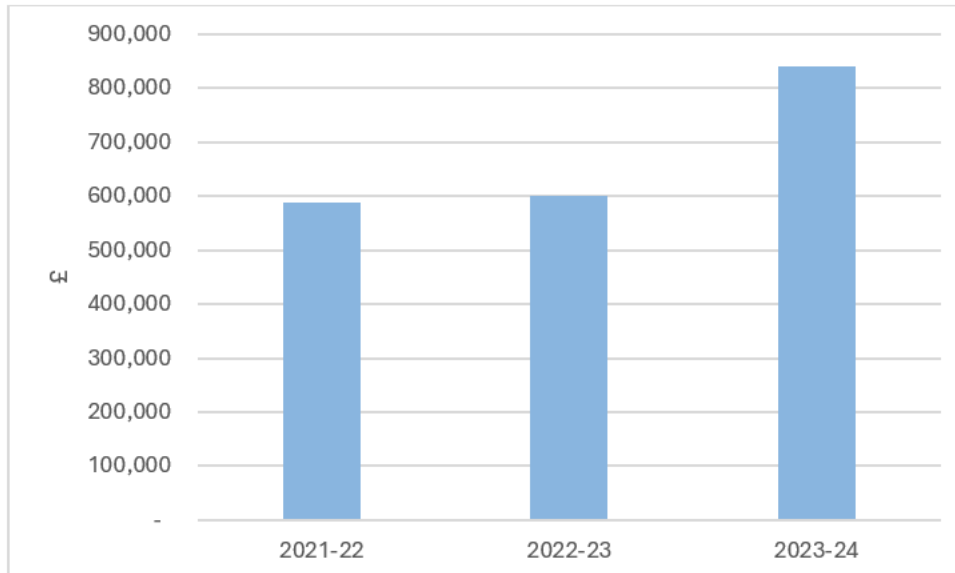
2.13 PSNI provided data on the costs of fleet repairs and maintenance work completed at both its internal workshops and by external contractors since 2021. Between 2021-22 and 2023-24, PSNI spent almost £11 million on repairs and maintenance completed internally at its own workshops. The data shows that in this period, annual PSNI labour hours reduced by around 30 per cent and costs decreased by 15 per cent. PSNI told us that this was mainly due to reduced capacity in the workshops which has led to an increasing reliance on external contracts for this work. Meanwhile, the cost of work completed by external contractors increased by around 40 per cent in 2023-24. Contracting out repair work is not as cost effective as completing the work in house, however it is currently necessary to ensure that sufficient vehicles are available for deployment. PSNI told us that external contractors are now also approaching operational capacity with little scope for taking on additional work.

Figure 6: Internal labour hours and costs have decreased since 2021-22



Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data

Figure 7: Reliance and expenditure on external contracts for repairs has increased



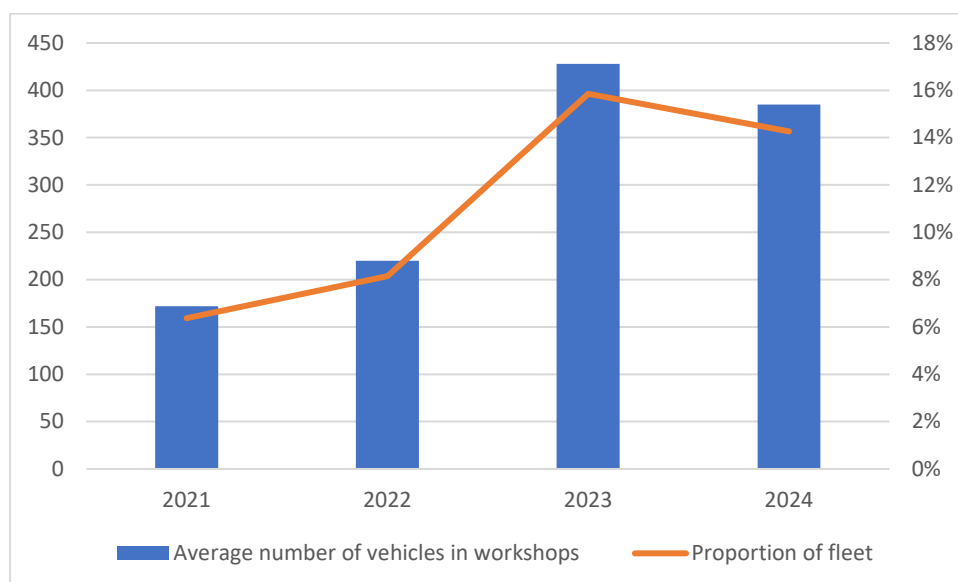
Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data (excluding costs of commissioning new vehicles)

There are operational impacts associated with managing an ageing fleet

2.14 In addition to the significant financial costs of maintaining an older fleet, there are operational impacts including an increasing number of vehicles which are not available for deployment due to the need for repairs and maintenance.

2.15 PSNI provided us with a list of vehicle jobs in the workshops on various days throughout 2021 to 2024. This showed that the number of vehicles in the workshops and therefore not available for deployment increased significantly between 2021 and 2023. At its most extreme, in September 2023, there were almost 500 vehicles in the workshops, around a fifth of the fleet. Whilst the numbers reduced slightly in 2024, there were still more than twice the number of vehicles off the road compared to 2021.

Figure 8: The average number of vehicles not available for deployment has increased significantly



Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data

2.16 PSNI told us that within the current fleet availability, there are significant pressures on providing vehicles for front line services due to a lack of inhouse mechanics and capacity issues with external contractors. This is being managed by maintaining the fleet at higher numbers than anticipated. PSNI estimates that optimal fleet numbers could result in a 15 per cent reduction in the current 2,700 vehicles, and that the running costs of retaining additional fleet are in the region of £500,000 per annum. If fleet numbers could be reduced as set out above, PSNI estimate a reduction in long-term capital commitments of around £10 million. PSNI also outlined some potential operational impacts of suboptimal fleet availability including that there could be issues in the event of prolonged period of public disorder. Similarly, there could be pressure to support a significant operational deployment similar to the Presidential Visit or G8 summit. Conversely, if there was an increase in officer numbers, there may not be sufficient vehicles to allow for deployment of these officers.

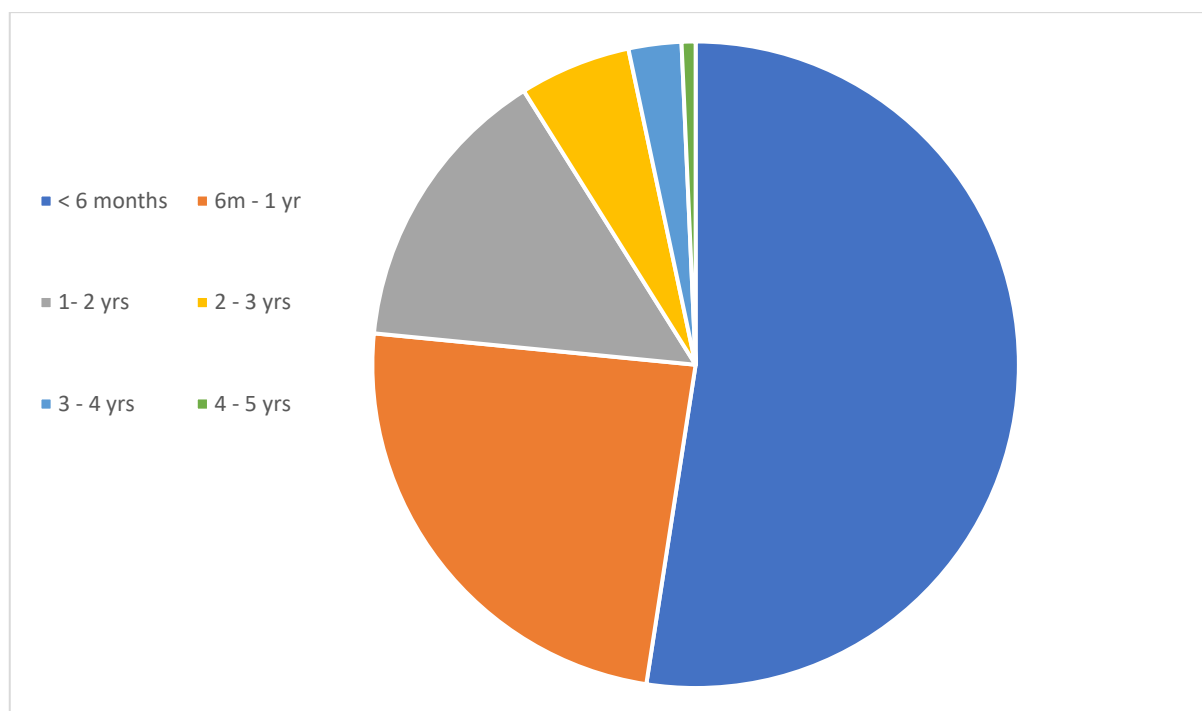
2.17 There is also a risk that officers and the public will lose confidence in an ageing fleet, particularly the armoured fleet which provides a vital role in officer safety. PSNI's own business case recognises the potential safety risks associated with older armoured vehicles

in particular, highlighting the potential for cracks in the body work due to the stress of armouring and the deterioration of ballistic glass over time. PSNI also considers that “an ageing armoured fleet puts pressure on its ability to respond in a timely manner to operational requests...The ability to keep people safe, respond to calls, tackle crime and other policing requirements are therefore unlikely to be met within the same timeframe as currently provided.”

There are often long periods between delivery and commissioning of new vehicles

2.18 PSNI provided details on the time taken from delivery of vehicles to their commissioning, when they become operational. The average time between delivery and commissioning was around nine months, however many individual vehicles took longer than this. We found that around a quarter of vehicles were commissioned more than a year after their delivery, 240 vehicles took over two years and around 20 took over four years to come into use. PSNI told us that while optimum commissioning would vary depending on the complexity of build and availability of parts, ideally vehicles should be commissioned within 12 months.

Figure 9: Around half of vehicles took more than six months to commission



Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data (extracted in October 2024)

2.19 We asked PSNI for explanations for the long periods between delivery and commissioning of vehicles. It outlined a number of operational factors and issues which had contributed to delays:

- Significant recruitment and retention issues in workshops, leading to reduced in-house capacity (explored further in paragraphs 2.24 to 2.27).
- External contractors being at capacity and unable to take on more commissioning work.

- Anticipated gaps in supply, and manufacturers ceasing production on certain models, leading to vehicles being purchased in advance to secure their supply.
- The impact of strike action on workshop capacity.
- Scarcity of “turnkey” models, meaning more work must be done to convert vehicles purchased.
- Lack of appetite for specialist work in the external market. For example, PSNI went out to tender for conversion work on 20 transporter vans three times but received no bids.
- Global shortages in specific electrical components, with the Russian-Ukraine conflict having a particular impact.
- The annual requirement to prepare Land Rovers for the July 12th demonstrations also impacts the workshops and takes around two months of preparation and therefore has knock on impacts on commissioning new vehicles.

2.20 PSNI also told us that single year budgets, coupled with funding being allocated late in the financial year via monitoring rounds, have an impact on both its purchasing plans and ability to commission vehicles within standard or predictable timetables. The lack of long-term certainty over budget availability has necessitated that vehicles have been purchased from available stock, often in batches that can be delivered quickly at year end to ensure budgets are utilised, with little consideration of PSNI’s capacity to then prepare and commission these vehicles for use.



Recommendation 2

Annual purchasing plans should include a realistic assessment of PSNI’s capacity to commission new vehicles in order to reduce the time between purchase and commission where possible. PSNI should ensure that resourcing levels are sufficient to commission vehicles in a timely matter either through internal conversion or external support.

Increasing standardisation and a reduction in fleet numbers has not been possible

- 2.21** The Strategy states that standardisation of the fleet will increase opportunities for cross-deployment of vehicles and contribute to a 15 per cent reduction in fleet numbers and cost savings of £1 million over five years. This would represent an overall reduction of around 400 vehicles in the fleet. Whilst there has been rationalisation of makes and models in recent years, with 90 per cent the fleet now provided by five core manufacturers, overall fleet numbers are largely unchanged since 2021, remaining at around 2,700.
- 2.22** PSNI told us that it has not been possible to reduce fleet numbers due to the number of vehicles off the road at any given time. It said that fleet availability has been as low as 80 per cent at times, and any reduction in overall fleet numbers would create a significant risk to operational capacity, particularly for specific operations and public order incidents.



Recommendation 3

PSNI should set specific commissioning time targets for different types of vehicle, aligned to its strategic aims to reduce average vehicle age overall fleet numbers in the longer term, and monitor its performance against these targets.

There is a significant number of non-operational vehicles

2.23 In addition to the 2,700 operational fleet, at October 2024 there were a further 350 vehicles which have been commissioned but are not yet operational. PSNI provided us with explanations for why these were not in use. These included:

- Vehicles held in reserve for surge deployment.
- Armoured vehicles awaiting certification.
- End of model vehicles, which were purchased when models were about to go out of production in order to secure the supply of standard liveried vehicles.
- Vehicles which are held off site having additional work done.
- Vehicles delayed due to supply issues with specific parts.

The time take to develop and certify armoured vehicles is particularly lengthy, taking 18 to 24 months. This certification, which is completed by independent contractors, lasts for the entire life of the vehicle and armoured cars cannot become operational without it.

Resourcing issues are a key cause of the delays in both commissioning and maintenance

2.24 A significant proportion of fleet commissioning and maintenance is carried out in-house at one of three PSNI workshops. There are currently 71.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in the workshops, compared to an operational requirement of 88 FTEs. PSNI Transport Branch has highlighted resourcing issues, including attrition and an inability to recruit, as a key constraint with potential risks to operational delivery due to staffing levels.

2.25 PSNI estimates that it needs 67,000 total labour hours per year to support the delivery of frontline policing. At current staffing levels there are 39,000 hours available, resulting in shortfall of over 40 per cent. Additional labour time, estimated to be around 20,000 hours, is currently being delivered by external contractors whose hourly rates are considerably more expensive than internal labour, at around £70 to £150 per hour, compared to internal labour costs of around £40 per hour. PSNI estimates that the annual cost to cover the shortfall in staff using external trades would be between £1.4 and £2.4 million. This level of funding is not available and means there are currently insufficient hours to support front line policing. PSNI also told us that its external contracts are reaching capacity, and contractors have experienced similar recruitment and retention issues compounding the delays in commissioning and repairs.

2.26 As a result of these issues, lead times for internal repairs have increased from an average of 39 hours to 115 hours, or around five working days. PSNI told us that external contractors have performance targets which are regularly reviewed. However, in practice it does not currently enforce penalties as the volume of external work required is far in excess of what was anticipated, and contractors are operating at capacity and facing similar resourcing issues. PSNI plans to review this approach but told us that this would be challenging and that contractors may opt to focus on delivering more profitable private sector work.

- 2.27** PSNI Transport Branch has carried out work to review and benchmark vehicle technician salaries and workloads against other UK forces and similar public sector roles in Northern Ireland. PSNI requires its mechanics to be multi-skilled and qualified across more than one area. External recruitment exercises have highlighted the scarcity of such skills in the market and comparison with other UK forces, who are experiencing similar recruitment and retention issues, shows that PSNI has amongst the lowest salaries and has the current highest ratio of vehicles to technician.



Recommendation 4

PSNI should review how it maintains and commissions its vehicles to identify opportunities to increase capacity, either internally or externally, and ensure it is achieving value for money in all commissioning and repair work.

Part Three:

Introducing a more sustainable PSNI fleet

Part Three: Introducing a more sustainable PSNI fleet

PSNI has committed to introducing almost 700 Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles (ULEVs) to its fleet over five years

- 3.1** One of the key principles of PSNI's service modernisation plan "Horizon 2025" ('the Plan') is to consider its environmental impact and sustainability. Development and delivery of a fleet strategy, followed by fleet modernisation is highlighted as a corporate priority throughout the Plan.
- 3.2** The overall business case for soft-skin fleet included plans for moving towards a more sustainable, electrified fleet. Specifically, its aim was to support national and local sustainability objectives by replacing older, less efficient vehicles with reduced or zero emission vehicles. As a result, it was planned that over half of soft-skin vehicles to be replaced between 2021 and 2026 would be either hybrid or fully electric, resulting in around 40 per cent of the overall soft-skin fleet being electric.
- 3.3** PSNI's plans to increase electric fleet numbers appear ambitious in comparison to some other police forces. By example An Garda Síochána's Climate Action Roadmap aims for around nine per cent of its fleet to be electric by the end of 2024, whereas PSNI's initial plan was for 25 per cent to be electric by 2026. However, longer term Garda plans are to purchase only zero-emissions vehicles where available and operationally feasible. Police Scotland has committed to fully electrifying its fleet by 2030, with a specific goal of transitioning all unmarked vehicles by 2024-25. It also aims for half of its fleet to be ULEVs by this stage, however latest figures show that it is falling short of this target, with 1,000 ULEVs in full service, compared to a target of 1,400.
- 3.4** The unique nature of policing in Northern Ireland has an impact on the extent to which PSNI can move to an electric fleet. For example, ongoing operational needs mean that around a third of PSNI's fleet is armoured, however EVs are not suitable for use due to limitations in their range and the weight of armouring which impacts the vehicles' performance. These limitations should be considered when making comparisons with other forces and are outlined in the Fleet Strategy and subsequent business cases.

The introduction of ULEVs has been slower than expected

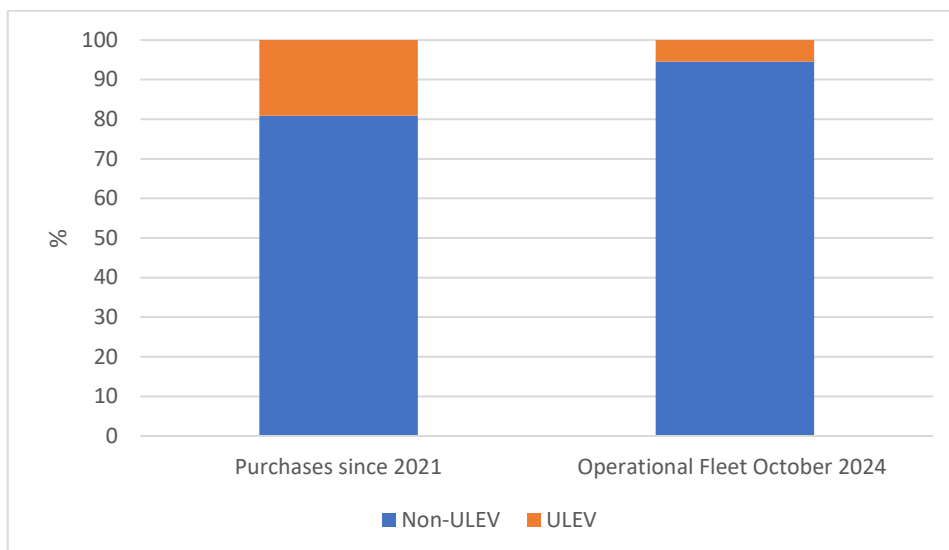
- 3.5** As of October 2024, PSNI had purchased 179 ULEVs at a cost of £4.6 million. The majority of these vehicles were purchased in 2022-23. Since 2021, purchases have been predominantly petrol and diesel vehicles, with ULEVs now making up around five per cent of the operational fleet. The target of 689 ULEV soft-skin fleet by 2026 would require the purchase of more than 500 additional ULEVs over the next two years. PSNI confirmed that the intention to source these vehicles remains, however we consider that this is likely to be challenging. The business case and Fleet Strategy should therefore be reviewed to consider whether the target and timeframe need to be adjusted.

Figure 10: Since 2021, PSNI has purchased around 180 Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles costing £4.6 million

	Number	Cost (£m)
2020-21	5	0.2
2021-22	11	0.4
2022-23	152	3.6
2023-24	11	0.5
	179	4.6

Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data (extracted October 2024)

Figure 11: A very small proportion of operational vehicles are ULEVs

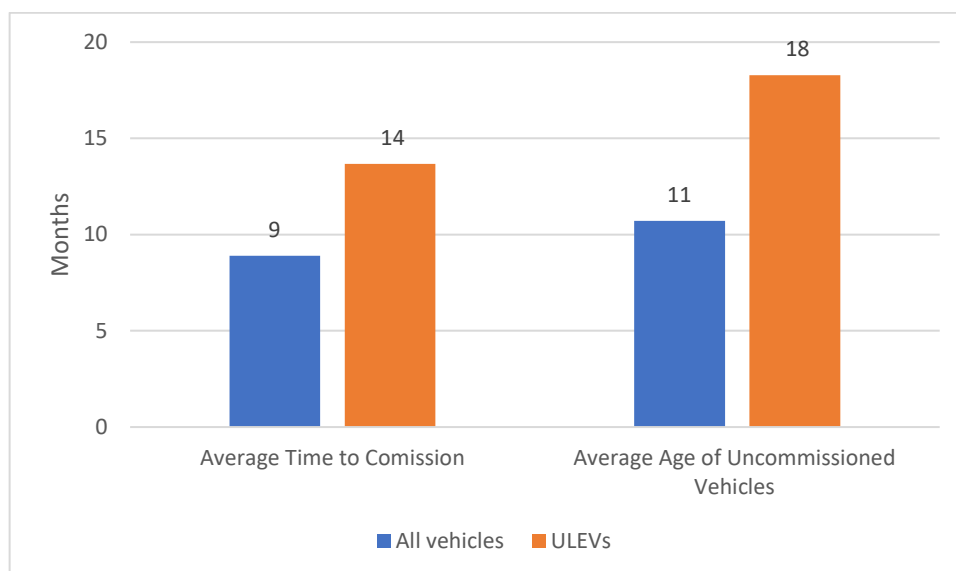


Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data (extracted October 2024)

3.6

As noted in Part Two, new vehicles are often subject to long commissioning times, partly due to resourcing issues and backlogs in workshops and with external contractors. The addition of a significant number of EVs is likely to have added even more pressure on an already over-capacity commissioning model. The average commissioning time for the ULEVs noted above has been over a year, compared to an overall fleet commissioning average of nine months. We also found that 31 vehicles purchased between April 2022 and May 2024 at a cost of £974,000 had not been commissioned by October 2024. Of these, 11 were delivered more than two years ago. PSNI told us that factors that delaying commissioning included a lack of charging infrastructure, the need for training on EVs, workshop resourcing issues and higher priority rollouts in 2023-24. Whilst some of these factors could not have been foreseen, issues around charging infrastructure do not appear to have been fully considered before purchasing EVs. These vehicles are now available as pool cars and it is expected that final commissioning will be completed by March 2025.

Figure 12: ULEVs take longer to commission than petrol and diesel vehicles



Source: NIAO analysis of PSNI data (extracted October 2024)



Recommendation 5

PSNI should review and update its Fleet Strategy and supporting business cases, in particular its plans to expand the EV fleet, taking into account the issues it has encountered in introducing EVs to date. Updated plans should be realistic, timebound and costed.

- 3.7** We reviewed the business case for soft-skin fleet replacement, which included the provision of 689 electric vehicles. It included an assumption that charging infrastructure could be implemented in tandem with fleet replenishment. This is a significant assumption to make, with little evidence of its feasibility. Consideration of the charging infrastructure required in the business case is limited, with a short section on challenges stating that “the electric vehicle charging infrastructure or indeed the supply network is not yet in place to support an EV roll-out and will require significant investment.” Those involved in preparing and approving businesses cases of this nature should ensure that these include a robust assessment of potential constraints, such as infrastructure and support requirements.



Recommendation 6

PSNI should ensure that business cases for significant capital investment identify the infrastructure and support necessary for successful delivery and obtain detailed input from relevant business areas where required.

- 3.8** The business case section on costing assumptions notes that 120 installations are required across 30 sites and that, as “introduction of ULEVS to the Police fleet is gradual, it is proposed that a series of individual charging points be installed.” It also notes that fast chargers will not be suitable initially, as they require vehicles to be in close proximity, while the 689 EVs will be spread across the PSNI Estate. PSNI told us that responsibility for planning and delivery of charging infrastructure lay with its Estates Services team, rather than with Transport Branch.

Installation of charging infrastructure has lagged behind purchase of electric vehicles

- 3.9** PSNI is installing charging points over four phases running from October 2022 until June 2025. PSNI Estates Services provided information on progress of the project at January 2025. The first two phases of the project are complete and have resulted in the installation of 58 charging points, however a small number of these are noted as damaged or impacted by supply issues. PSNI told us that phase three is underway and will result in infrastructure for an additional 100 charging points. Phase four has not commenced but is expected to provide a further 88 charging points by June 2025, bringing the total number to 246 charging points across 32 sites. This is considerably higher than the 120 installations noted in the soft-skin fleet business case and will require a significantly faster pace of construction than has been achieved to date. Total construction costs, excluding professional fees, are expected to be £1.75 million.

Figure 13: PSNI plans to install almost 250 charging points by June 2025

Phase	Number of charging points	Completion date	Construction costs (£k)
1	12	October 2022	80
2	46	September 2023	274
3	100	April – June 2025	616
4	88	April 2025	781
	246		1,751

Source: PSNI Estates Services

3.10 The assumption that charging point installations would incur in tandem with vehicle purchasing has proved incorrect, with the majority of installations due to be completed in Spring 2025. Information provided by PSNI shows that no charging points were completed between September 2023 and March 2025. PSNI told us that there have been some issues with implementation to date, for example, the power supply and therefore charging capacity of its stations is lower than expected. As noted above, these issues, coupled with the slower than anticipated installation of charging points, have contributed to delays in commissioning ULEVs. In our view, the root cause of many of these issues is the lack of joined up approach between Transport and Estates Services.

3.11 Police forces in the UK and Ireland have encountered similar issues with charging infrastructure capacity and supply. A challenge identified in the Republic of Ireland is the reliance on slow chargers, which typically take around eight hours to fully charge a vehicle, making them unsuitable for police operations that require quick turnaround times. Police Scotland has noted issues with building new electricity substations, including leasing land and planning permissions. It should be noted that, in the absence of internal charging infrastructure, other forces can use some public charging points, an option which is not available to PSNI due to security concerns.

3.12 PSNI's ability to install infrastructure which would allow it to charge a large number of ULEVs should have been a fundamental consideration when preparing and approving the business case for purchasing these vehicles. In the absence of a robust assessment of charging capacity and implementation, PSNI has purchased a significant number of ULEVs which it has been unable to put into use in a timely manner, at a considerable cost to the public purse. In addition, issues with charging infrastructure and capacity are not limited to vehicles and restrictions to power supply are likely to impact future large scale capital projects across PSNI.



Recommendation 7

PSNI should put structures in place to ensure a more joined up approach between Transport and Estates is adopted for completion of the EV purchases and infrastructure installation projects. As part of this, PSNI should ensure that the purchasing plan for EVs and the installation plan for charging points are properly aligned.



Recommendation 8

PSNI should establish an overarching Energy Strategy to reflect the needs of business areas undertaking projects requiring significant power supply, including Estates, Information and Communication Services and Transport.

Electric vehicles are not suitable for many roles within PSNI's fleet

- 3.13** Electric vehicles work best on consistent and predictable usage cycles, when the fleet manager knows how far they will travel each shift, and when they will be parked up and recharged. The use of response vehicles is by nature unpredictable, and they need to be ready to deploy rapidly and at short notice. These vehicles are likely to cover larger distances at sustained high speeds, which renders most electric vehicles unsuitable as the battery drains quickly. Response vehicles may also need to be redeployed at pace, which means there may be insufficient time to recharge their batteries. PSNI's business case for soft-skin fleet replacement recognised these limitations and referred to the use of hybrid or electric alternatives being restricted to non-response, general purpose fleet.
- 3.14** A recent report from BlueLight Commercial, which was established by the Home Office and policing sector to work in collaboration with blue light organisations to help transform their procurement activities, highlighted issues with deploying EVs in frontline policing roles. This report found that electric vehicles were not suitable for certain roles, specifically, there are uncertainties around the deployment of battery electric options for armed response, large response and high-performance traffic vehicles. Issues were identified with real-world range and performance, the impact of rapid discharge and charge rates on battery life and the proportion of mileage that could be driven electrically. It recommended that sustainable fuels should be used for these vehicles until uncertainties can be resolved. It also recommended a program of further vehicle testing work to understand real-world performance across various vehicle categories.
- 3.15** PSNI has used this report as the basis for its draft Fleet Decarbonisation Strategy, which sets out plans for transitioning different categories of vehicles and recommends a programme of real-world testing and vehicle trials. PSNI confirmed that pure electric vehicles are currently only deployed for general use in non-response roles. A number of hybrid, mild and plug-in hybrids are used in firearms and roads policing teams. PSNI also told us that the issues with electric vehicles' charging capacity and suitability for certain roles have led to a more measured approach towards using EVs within the fleet.

3.16 Moving towards a more sustainable, electric fleet also has potentially significant implications for fleet management practices. Electric vehicle fleet management will be a step change for PSNI and will require different processes and controls. Examples of potential changes include:

- A need for consistent, planned charging schedules.
- Regular, planned downtime while vehicles are charging.
- Different storage arrangements, as cold weather can impact battery performance.
- Collection and monitoring of new data on charging and performance.
- Consideration of route suitability.
- Different replacement schedules to the existing fleet.
- Analysis of and response to potential cyber security risks.

3.17 Given the issues encountered in establishing an EV fleet to date, and the potential impacts on fleet management processes, there is a clear need for a separate, more comprehensive EV Strategy which sets out PSNI's plans for transition to and management of electric vehicles.



Recommendation 9

PSNI should develop and implement an Electric Vehicle Strategy, reflecting the issues encountered with both charging infrastructure and suitability of ULEVs for policing roles. The strategy should set achievable targets for introducing more ULEVs, alongside clearly defined timeframes and costs. It should also include plans for managing ULEVs, including guidance for charging, downtime and collation of performance data.

PSNI is not currently monitoring fuel savings and emissions targets resulting from the introduction of electric vehicles

3.18 An objective of the soft-skin fleet replenishment project was to achieve a five per cent improvement in CO2 emissions from April 2022, increasing cumulatively over the next five years, reaching 18 per cent. It also estimated fuel savings of £5 million over the next five years as a result of the move to a more sustainable fleet. PSNI's 2023-24 annual report and accounts report a two per cent reduction in carbon emissions from the prior year and notes investment in new fuel monitoring systems to allow improved fuel management and reduced emissions.

3.19 PSNI was not able to provide us with more detailed analysis of fuel savings and CO2 emissions related to the introduction of electric vehicles. It told us that monitoring and data collection on fuel savings and CO2 emissions targets have not been prioritised due to infrastructure delays for EV charging and lack of suitable vehicles for police use. Despite the fact that 179 vehicles at a cost of £4.6 million have been purchased, and that this was a key target of the Fleet Strategy, there is currently little monitoring of the environmental or financial impact of these vehicles. This lack of monitoring, coupled with the slower than anticipated introduction of ULEVs, means PSNI is currently unable to demonstrate that they provide value for money or that its sustainability objectives are being achieved.



Recommendation 10

PSNI should collect detailed data on fuel savings and CO2 emissions resulting from the introduction of ULEVs to provide an evidence base for the cost effectiveness and environmental impact of electric vehicles, aligned with its strategic objectives and to inform future decision-making on further ULEV purchases.

NIAO Reports: 2024 and 2025

NIAO Reports 2024 and 2025

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