



## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

### **Substantial changes are needed to make police and prison service injury schemes sustainable**

Schemes providing payments to former police and prison officers who sustained injuries whilst on duty are not fit for purpose according to a report published today (Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March) by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Mr Kieran Donnelly CB:

*“Substantial changes are necessary if the schemes are to be affordable in the future. The current review of the Prison Service scheme should be joined by a similar, fundamental review of the PSNI scheme. Both reviews should provide clarity on the aims of the schemes and how these will be accomplished and how appropriate checks and balances can be established.*

*“The end to end process for the PSNI scheme needs to be simplified and streamlined with reconsideration given to the respective roles of the PSNI, the Policing Board and the Department of Justice. In the interim, the public bodies involved should take action to address the most urgent issues.”*

The injury on duty schemes for officers in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the Northern Ireland Prison Service are two of the largest of their type in Northern Ireland. Both schemes have seen costs soar over the last five years, with £33.9 million spent by PSNI and £2.3 million by the Northern Ireland Prison Service in 2018-19. Total liabilities are estimated at £488 million for the PSNI and £53 million for the Prison Service.

Mr Donnelly’s report highlights a number of issues.

- The scale of claims in Northern Ireland is significantly greater than in England. The Policing Board receives an average of 12 claims per week. The Metropolitan Police Service, with over 30,000 officers, receives around 20 applications each year. No police service in England has more than 650 IoD awards in payment, while there are more than 2,800 in Northern Ireland.
- The PSNI scheme is complex and challenging to administer. While the PSNI is responsible for the budget, the Northern Ireland Policing Board is responsible for the overall administration of the scheme and the Department of Justice is responsible for the legislative framework and for co-ordinating medical appeals.
- The payment of injury awards is not always equitable. Someone of pension age with an IoD award could earn more than another officer with a retirement pension.
- There are no time limits within which an application must be made. Backdated awards have a significant impact on the spend as they involve payment of arrears of

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OR BROADCAST BEFORE 00.01 hrs ON TUESDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2020**

the award from the date of the injury. One example in 2018-19 dated back 25 years and cost £429,000 in arrears alone.

Action has been taken by the PSNI and Prison Service to improve well-being and reduce the level of injuries sustained by officers. Nevertheless, changes to legislation will be necessary to ensure that the schemes are efficient, affordable and controlled properly.

ENDS

**Notes for Editors**

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
2. The report is available on the Audit Office website at [www.niauditoffice.gov.uk](http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk). The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on Tuesday 10th March 2020.
3. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Neil Gray (028 9025 4345) or Karen Beattie (028 9025 1003).
4. The main type of injury award paid by the schemes to former police and prison officers is a one-off gratuity together with a monthly award which is normally payable for life.
5. The injury award scheme for prison officers is the Northern Ireland Civil Service Injury on Duty (IoD) scheme administered by Civil Service Pensions within the Department of Finance. Employers are responsible for the costs of IoD awards paid to former employees.
6. At 31 March 2019 there were 2,881 injury awards in payments for former police officers and 181 for former Prison Officers.