

CULTURE, ETHOS AND SYMBOLS

- 17.1** The culture and ethos of an organization include both the way in which it sees itself and manages itself internally and the way in which it sees and interacts with its clients and others outside the organization. Culture and ethos are hard to gauge and judgments made about the culture and ethos of others are inevitably subjective. We have tried to be as comprehensive and as objective as we can in our approach to this aspect of our terms of reference. We have consulted widely within the RUC and within different communities in Northern Ireland as to how the police see themselves and how they are seen by others. We conducted a cultural audit of the entire police establishment, officers and civilians, and over 6,250 or almost 40% responded (a high response rate for exercises of this kind). We also gained valuable insights from the project (begun in 1997) which is being conducted with the police by Mediation Network.
- 17.2** Many of the findings of these researches have been mentioned in earlier chapters of this report. The police in Northern Ireland pride themselves on their professionalism and on the way they have faced up to the security challenges of the past thirty years. The security environment has pitted them against elements from both the republican and loyalist communities, and the effect of these clashes and the risk to police officers of living in or delivering normal policing services in some areas has created a gulf between the police and many neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland. The pervasive security threat against police has extended right across Northern Ireland and, to protect themselves from attack, the police have resorted to methods of policing that have separated them from the community to some extent even in areas where the local residents are not themselves hostile to the police. Partly because of all this, the RUC has remained somewhat militaristic and hierarchical compared with other police services, and has been slow to move towards the culture of customer service, public consultation and openness, problem-solving community-based policing, and devolved management that many other police services are now well into the process of developing. Like many other police services it has also done little to instil a human rights-based culture.
- 17.3** The recommendations we have made in preceding chapters should address many of these problems. We have recommended a programme to reorient policing onto a human rights-based approach. We have recommended community accountability mechanisms at local and central levels, and a policy of complete transparency about police work except when the public interest would be damaged. We have recommended, subject to the security situation, that policing in and with the community should become the main focus of police work, delivered in a more flexible and accessible manner than in the past. We have recommended a transformation of management style, civilianisation of up to 1,000 posts at all levels of the organization, and a determined effort to alter the composition of the police service so that it is more representative of the population. If implemented, these recommendations would inevitably bring about dramatic change to the culture and ethos of the police organization. As we noted in Chapter 10, our cultural audit showed that an encouragingly large proportion of police said they would welcome change.
- 17.4** Many people in Northern Ireland from the Irish nationalist and republican tradition regard the name, badge and symbols of the Royal Ulster Constabulary as associating the police with the

British constitution and state. This contributes to the perception that the police are not their police. On the other hand, many people in Northern Ireland from the unionist tradition consider it perfectly natural that a service provided and funded by the state should signal its provenance. The problem is that the name of the RUC, and to some extent the badge and the uniform too, have become politicised – one community effectively claiming ownership of the name of “our” police force, and the other community taking the position that the name is symbolic of a relationship between the police and unionism and the British state. The argument about symbols is not an argument about policing, but an argument about the constitution.

17.5 Where a police service operates in part of a country in which virtually all of the people share the same constitutional allegiance, there is no real difficulty when the police adopt a name or symbols reflecting that allegiance. But in Northern Ireland, where the constitutional aspirations of the inhabitants conflict, the use of words or symbols perceived to associate the police with one side of the constitutional argument must inevitably go some way to inhibiting the wholehearted participation in policing of those who espouse the other side of that argument.

17.6 In Chapter 1 we quoted the reference in the Agreement to “the opportunity for a new beginning to policing Northern Ireland with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole”. In our judgment that new beginning cannot be achieved unless the reality that part of the community feels unable to identify with the present name and symbols associated with the police is addressed. Like the unique constitutional arrangements, our proposals seek to achieve a situation in which people can be British, Irish or Northern Irish, as they wish, and all regard the police service as their own. *We therefore recommend:*

- *that while we have not accepted the argument that the Royal Ulster Constabulary should be disbanded, it should henceforth be named the Northern Ireland Police Service*
- *that the Northern Ireland Police Service adopt a new badge and symbols which are entirely free from any association with either the British or Irish states (we note that the Assembly was able to adopt a crest acceptable to all parties)*
- *that the Union flag should no longer be flown from police buildings*
- *that, on those occasions on which it is appropriate to fly a flag on police buildings, the flag flown should be that of the Northern Ireland Police Service and it, too, should be free from association with the British or Irish states.*

17.7 We are conscious that in some quarters in Northern Ireland our recommendations may be seen as some sort of repudiation of the sacrifice and service of thousands of RUC officers who have not only performed their duties with professionalism and fortitude but who have also faced, and on many occasions suffered, death and injury. Such a view would be profoundly mistaken. We do not recommend the disbandment of the RUC, which would in any case be impractical. Our recommendations are designed to achieve a transformation of policing in Northern Ireland to meet the requirements agreed by the parties to the Agreement and endorsed by the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum. We consider it important that the link between the RUC and the new Northern Ireland Police Service be recognized and to this end *we recommend that the colour of the current police uniform be retained*. However, we have been persuaded by the Police Federation and individual officers who commented on the present uniform that it is somewhat outdated and *we recommend that a new, more practical style of uniform be provided to police officers*.

- 17.8** Consistent with our recognition of the dedication and sacrifice of officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and of the continuity between the past and the future we emphasise that our proposed changes do not extend to existing memorials in police stations. *We recommend that such memorials should remain as they are and where they are.*
- 17.9** Employers are required under Northern Ireland's fair employment legislation to create and sustain a neutral work place. The creation of a neutral working environment, both for police officers and civilians and for members of the public and others visiting police buildings, goes much deeper than symbols. Our cultural audit showed that, although most police officers and civilians from minority groups do not feel under threat or intimidation in the workplace, more than half have experienced incidents of harassment or offensive behaviour at some time over the past five years. The statistics are not alarmingly high – it would be a rare organization where nothing of this sort occurred over a five year period. But they show that there is a problem here to be taken seriously, especially because it is our intention that the police service should become much more diverse over a short period of time. The aim must be that the police service should recruit not only more Catholics, but nationalists (of whom there are some but not many at the moment) and republicans (of whom there are almost certainly none now); and that there should be many more women, and, we hope, also more members from ethnic minorities and greater tolerance of sexual diversity. So the challenge of maintaining a neutral working environment will be more important than at present. *We recommend that the maintenance of a neutral working environment should become an assessed management responsibility at all levels of management.*