

PRESS RELEASE - 9 DECEMBER 2025

EIGHTH REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REPORTING COMMISSION

The Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) has today published its Eighth Report on progress towards ending paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland.

The IRC, established in 2017, stemmed from the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, which aimed to address the complexities underlying the continuation of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland, emphasising the importance of peace and political stability.

The Agreement identified a key goal: the ending of paramilitary activity 'once and for all.' Last month marked the tenth anniversary of the Fresh Start Agreement, and the Eighth Report reflects on achievements and remaining challenges in tackling paramilitarism.

Commenting on the Eighth Report and its recommendations the Commissioners' said:

"We welcome that 2024/25 marks our first reporting period in which there were no security related deaths in Northern Ireland and that violent crime linked to paramilitarism has declined. We also note that the Northern Ireland-related Terrorism Threat Level has remained at 'substantial' since March 2024. We commend the progress that has been made which reflects the combined and sustained efforts undertaken by the PSNI and criminal justice system, the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime, the voluntary sector and community groups and all those involved in combating paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland.

"However, we caution that there is no room for complacency since paramilitarism remains resilient and continues to pose a threat to individuals and communities in Northern Ireland. Intimidation, coercive control, and organised crime linked to paramilitary structures persist in our society. While paramilitarism today is different, the reality is it still exists – and is still hugely damaging as a phenomenon. Therefore, we firmly believe that a sustained and strategic focus — one that fully addresses the complexities of this issue — is essential to ending paramilitarism once and for all."

Commenting on the achievements so far, the Commissioners added:

“The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime encompasses over 100 projects to keep people safe and build safer, stronger communities across Northern Ireland. The Programme is due to come to an end in March 2027, but we are under no illusion the aim of the Fresh Start Agreement will be achieved by this date. The next few years provide a pivotal opportunity to achieve a society free of paramilitarism. The task we see ahead is to safeguard what has been achieved by the Programme and build upon the lessons learned beyond March 2027.

“We recognise that the current fiscal environment is challenging; however, strategic investment now will help avoid significantly greater costs for Northern Ireland in the future. If paramilitarism is not brought to an end, it will continue to create unmanageable strain on public finances through its direct and indirect harms. In our engagement with victims and survivors the overwhelming message has been the prevention of any future harm. It is a key reason why the work of ending paramilitarism, once and for all, remains an urgent one.

“Most worrying is the reported element of paramilitarism associated with the extremely troubling instances of racially motivated intimidation, crime, and violence, in particular the involvement of young people in violent disorder. Efforts to address this must be agile and adaptive to ensure that paramilitary structures, and their complex roles within communities, are not exploited to coordinate or facilitate racially motivated anti-social behaviour and violence.

“That is why we continue to believe that the comprehensive and innovative approach of the Fresh Start Agreement, remains the correct direction of travel. The ‘Twin Track’ approach—policing and criminal justice measures alongside targeted socio-economic interventions—remains essential, and our Report makes three recommendations to this effect. In our view sustained, strategic investment in policing and the criminal justice system is required to achieve the goal of ending paramilitarism. Additionally, we advocate that a particular focus on paramilitarism needs to be maintained after the end of the Executive Programme in March 2027. Success requires a whole-system approach. Departments and agencies which are not involved in the programme have a role to play in dealing with paramilitarism, we call for greater cross-Executive collaboration with central coordination underpinned by suitable structures, and ownership of responsibilities.

“Finally, we welcome the appointment of Fleur Ravensbergen following the acceptance of Irish and UK Governments of our Recommendation to appoint an Independent Person to undertake a scoping exercise to assess if there is merit in, and support for, a formal process of engagement to bring about paramilitary group transition to disbandment.”

Ends

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Notes for Editors:

The Report is available from 1pm Tuesday 9th December at:
<https://www.ircommission.org/publications>

- The Fresh Start Agreement was reached on 17 November 2015. It included measures aimed at ending paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland.
- The agreement led to the Northern Ireland Executive publishing the Executive Action Plan for Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime on 19 July 2016.
- The second phase of the Tackling Paramilitarism Programme (now called the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime) began in 2021 and will run until March 2027.
- The IRC was established in 2017 to monitor progress towards ending paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland, as mandated by an international treaty agreed by the UK and Irish Governments.
- The IRC has a statutory duty to report annually to both governments and the Executive; its reports provide an overview of the implementation of measures designed to address paramilitarism and connected activity in Northern Ireland and make recommendations to inform future Programme for Government priorities and commitments.
- The IRC comprises of four Commissioners who prepare their reports through wide reaching consultation with a range of individuals and organisations who have relevant expertise and experience of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland.

- The four Commissioners are: John McBurney and Monica McWilliams, nominated by the Northern Ireland Executive; Tim O'Connor, nominated by the Irish Government; and Mitchell Reiss, nominated by the UK Government.

Report Recommendations

In the Eighth Report the IRC has made three recommendations. These are:

1. Sustained, strategic investment in the criminal justice system is required.

Which would encompass:

- a) Introducing organised crime legislation.
- b) Maintaining law enforcement cooperation and focus.
- c) Increasing investment in neighbourhood policing.
- d) Expanding problem-solving justice.

2. A particular focus on paramilitarism needs to be maintained after the end of the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime in March 2027

This should include:

- a) Policy decision-making for departments and statutory bodies should include a requirement to consider the impact of their work on tackling paramilitarism.
- b) Specific consideration of tackling paramilitarism in investment and funding decisions to support community development and resilience.

3. A whole-system approach to tackling paramilitarism, with collaboration, suitable structures, and ownership of responsibilities is required.

To achieve this the Commissioners, recommend that:

Programme oversight structures must deliver a whole-system approach, with central coordination in place that brings together all relevant departments.