Press release

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1PM, 13 OCTOBER 2026

The Independent Report on Paramilitary Group Transition to Disbandment has been published today and finds there is sufficient merit in and support for a formal process of paramilitary group transition, provided certain conditions are met.

The report was written by Fleur Ravensbergen, following a year-long scoping and engagement exercise. Ravensbergen has concluded that there is sufficient merit in and support for a formal process of paramilitary group transition, provided certain conditions are met. Her principal recommendation is the establishment of an independent, time-bound transition mechanism without delay.

She also recommends strengthening neighbourhood policing, so that officers can maintain a sustained focus on their core role within the communities they serve, and targeted and sustained initiatives aimed at benefitting young people in communities affected by paramilitary harm.

Summarising the findings of her report, Ravensbergen said,

“I owe a debt of gratitude to all those who gave their time and shared their views throughout the course of this exercise.

“Stakeholders expressed a range of views on the prospect of a formal process of group transition, from strongly opposed to fully supportive. Many stakeholders acknowledged that although good work has been done and progress made, something more is needed to advance progress towards ending paramilitarism.

“On the whole, I found that the majority were willing for the governments to explore something new, including direct engagement with paramilitary groups via a formal process, provided certain conditions were met. These were:

- Credible monitoring and verification of progress,
- A robust law enforcement and criminal justice response, and,
- No financial rewards for paramilitary groups.

“I have concluded that there is sufficient merit in and support for a formal process of paramilitary group transition. I found moderate but sufficient support for a formal process among stakeholders, significant willingness to engage among loyalist and republican paramilitary groups, and broad agreement across stakeholders regarding the outcomes that a transition process should seek to achieve.

“In my engagements with paramilitary groups, there was limited support for the term “disbandment” as the endpoint of a transition process. However, objections to disbandment

appeared to be less about what transition should achieve and more about the wording. In my view, agreeing the transition process, milestones and end-state of group transition is more important than terminology.

“I believe that the risks of the persistence of paramilitary structures, continued drift and unmanaged fragmentation outweigh the risks associated with attempting a structured and time-bound transition process. Inaction is not a neutral option. My consultations suggest that a window of opportunity exists to pursue further progress, but that this may weaken over time.

“For these reasons, **I recommend the establishment of an independent, time-bound transition mechanism without delay. The UK government and the government of Ireland should work together to develop this mechanism.**

“Its purpose would be to provide a structured and accountable framework through which progress towards paramilitary group transition can be facilitated, monitored and verified. The mechanism would have three core functions: an authorised point of contact, developing a common transition framework, and monitoring, verifying and reporting. My report identifies eleven milestones that together provide a framework for a transition process. These milestones establish a shared understanding of the outcomes being sought and provide a basis through which progress can be monitored, assessed and verified.

“This recommendation is not about replacing existing efforts with a formal group transition process: it is about building on these efforts and strengthening them in an evidence-led way, whilst introducing a pathway for paramilitary group transition as a complement to existing efforts.

“Throughout my consultations, it was consistently emphasised that effective policing, robust criminal justice responses and strong and resilient communities are not only crucial goals in themselves, but also enabling conditions for a formal transition process.

“Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of ensuring that the Police Service of Northern Ireland commands community confidence and is able to police with communities. Neighbourhood policing is particularly important in this respect. **I recommend strengthening neighbourhood policing so that officers can maintain a sustained focus on their core role within the communities they serve.**

“Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of strengthening those communities most affected by paramilitary harm, without reinforcing gatekeeping, dependency or coercive control.

“Amongst other community strengthening initiatives, **I recommend targeted and sustained initiatives aimed at benefitting young people**. This is particularly important for looking ahead and furthering a sense of optimism in communities affected by paramilitary harm.”

Ends

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Notes for Editors

The Report is available from 1pm 13 October 2026 at
https://www.ircommission.org/publications

1. Background to the appointment

In their 5th Report (December 2022) the Independent Reporting Commission recommended the appointment of an Independent Person to assess whether there would be merit in, and support for, a formal process that ensures the transition to disbandment of paramilitary groups.

Building on that recommendation, and the recommendations of others, including in evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, on how further progress could be made towards ending paramilitarism, the UK Government and Government of Ireland jointly appointed Fleur Ravensbergen on 22 September 2025 as the Independent Expert to carry out a scoping and engagement exercise to assess whether there was merit in and support for a formal process of engagement to bring about paramilitary group transition to disbandment.

2. Independent Expert recommendations in full

Principal recommendation
Based on my engagements, **I recommend the establishment of an independent, time-bound transition mechanism without delay. The UK government and the government of Ireland should work together to develop this mechanism.**

Its purpose would be to provide a structured and accountable framework through which progress towards paramilitary group transition can be facilitated, monitored and verified. The mechanism would have three core functions:

1. Authorised contact point

The mechanism should provide an authorised point of contact through which issues relating to transition can be raised, clarified, and advanced.

2. A common transition framework

The mechanism should oversee the development of structured transition arrangements with paramilitary groups who engage in the transition process. This should be based on agreed commitments, indicators of progress, timelines, reporting, monitoring, and defined end-states.

3. Monitoring, verifying and reporting

The mechanism should provide independent monitoring and verification of progress, including modest periodic public reporting. This would improve transparency, strengthen accountability and help build public confidence in the process.

Considerations for implementation and further recommendations

A formal process of paramilitary group transition would not operate in isolation. Throughout my consultations, it was consistently emphasised that effective policing, robust criminal justice responses and strong and resilient communities are not only a crucial goal in themselves but also enabling conditions for a formal transition process.

Stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of ensuring that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) commands community confidence and is able to police with communities in ways that communities experience first-hand.

Neighbourhood policing is particularly important in this respect. **I recommend strengthening neighbourhood policing so that officers can maintain a sustained focus on their core role within the communities they serve.**

Another policing issue which came up frequently in my engagements was the importance of a police service that reflects the communities it serves. I encourage the PSNI to continue to improve recruitment and retention of officers from communities which are currently under-represented within the service, including people from Catholic, ethnic minority and working-class backgrounds.

Stop and search was another important issue, particularly for CNR communities, and I encourage the PSNI to give further consideration to how it can build public trust that stop and search powers are used fairly and proportionately.

Throughout my consultations, stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of strengthening those communities most affected by paramilitary harm, without reinforcing gatekeeping, dependency or coercive control. Amongst other community strengthening initiatives**, I recommend targeted and sustained initiatives aimed at benefitting young people.** This is particularly important for looking ahead and furthering a sense of optimism in communities affected by paramilitary harm. This should include initiatives that:

- Empower young people in the communities most affected by
- paramilitarism;
- Support future community leadership;
- Strengthen pathways into education and good jobs;
- Encourage participation in civic and democratic life; and,
- Reduce vulnerability to criminal recruitment and exploitation.

3. Independent Expert: Terms of reference

Purpose and objectives

The objective of the Independent Expert is, through independent scoping and engagement, to assess whether there is merit in and support for a formal process that ensures the transition to disbandment of paramilitary groups and to produce a report by mid-August 2026.

The Independent Expert will carry out their work in line with the overarching objectives of the IRC which are:

- promoting progress towards ending paramilitary activity; and
- supporting long term peace and stability in society and stable and inclusive devolved Government in Northern Ireland

In carrying out their functions, the Independent Expert will be mindful throughout of the overarching vision of the Fresh Start Agreement for the "continued transformation of our society," and the goal of "the primacy of the democratic political process in Northern Ireland and the ending of paramilitarism" as well as the recommitment to tackling paramilitarism made by the parties in the New Decade, New Approach Agreement in 2020.

Functions

To achieve their objective, the Independent Expert will carry out a programme of exploratory engagement with inter alia:

- representatives of communities affected by paramilitarism, including victims of paramilitary activity;
- representatives of wider society in Northern Ireland;
- representatives of the statutory agencies likely to have a role in aspects of implementation of a formal process of engagement with paramilitary groups aimed at facilitating their disbandment;
- representatives of paramilitary groups who have an interest in ending the violence and wider harms caused by paramilitary groups.

To achieve their objective the Independent Expert will consider through this programme of engagement, inter alia, the following:

- issues that are currently perceived or presented as a barrier and issues that could enable paramilitary group transition to disbandment;
- the advantages and disadvantages of a formal process of engagement with paramilitary groups aimed at facilitating their transition to disbandment;
- the feasibility and advisability of such a formal process;
- levels of willingness to engage in a formal process ;
- expectations of what would be achieved through participation in such a process;
- the issues likely to arise over the course of a formal process of engagement; and
- the extent to which such a process would substantially contribute to furthering the commitments of the Fresh Start Agreement to work collectively to achieve a society free of paramilitarism.

The Independent Expert will produce a **report** by mid-August 2026 setting out what could be in scope of a formal process that ensures the transition to disbandment of paramilitary groups and the levels of public support for such a process. This should include recommendations on whether there would be merit in establishing a formal process of engagement with paramilitary groups aimed at facilitating their transition towards disbandment, and if so, how such a formal process could be established to have the highest chance of success including in terms of structure, milestones, timeframe and reporting/verification arrangements.

The Independent Expert should reflect in their report, based on what they have heard through their engagement, on alternative or additional approaches which could help promote progress towards ending paramilitary harm and activity and support long term peace and stability in NI and may merit further consideration.

Approach and delivery

In carrying out the functions described above, the Independent Expert will engage the UK Government, the Government of Ireland and respective law enforcement agencies, the NI Executive and other statutory agencies, local councils, political parties, communities, and civic society organisations in order to understand their perspectives on the issue.

The Independent Expert will have a strong focus in their work on recommendations aimed at promoting and supporting practical, comprehensive and effective trauma-informed measures and initiatives that aim to bring about the continued transformation of society envisioned in the Fresh Start Agreement.

Throughout their scoping and engagement, the Independent Expert should actively encourage the ending of all paramilitary and criminal activity. They should make clear that PSNI and their partners will continue to work to bring those involved in paramilitary criminality to justice and that group behaviours will be taken as an indication of levels of commitment to transition to disbandment, in particular, supporting the police and criminal justice system in tackling criminality, including drug dealing, extortion, and child criminal and sexual exploitation. The Independent Expert should remind their interlocutors that the IRC and others have been clear about the behaviours that would demonstrate a commitment to moving from violence and harm and these include:

- ending recruitment to paramilitary groups;
- giving up paramilitary structures and activity;
- ceasing mobilisation of members;
- ceasing to exercise coercive power and control in communities;
- ending of all paramilitary style attacks and all other forms of violence, threat of violence or intimidation;
- disposal of any remaining weaponry and material;
- allowing people to exit from paramilitarism without cost or consequence;
- publicly supporting the PSNI and criminal justice system in tackling criminality and committing to democracy and the rule of law; and

- engaging with legacy bodies