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CONFIDENTIAL

7th March, 1978.

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N.I.O.
BELFAST
DATE: 8/3/78

Dear Billy,

Thank you for your letter of 7th March about the worries of the Senior Medical Officer at Armagh and of the Police Surgeons' Association. Your letter goes somewhat beyond what you told me on the telephone this morning but I think I must say that my reaction is still the same. I think it is wrong that Doctors Alexander, Elliott and Irwin should be taking their complaints direct to the Police Authority. I am charged with the statutory responsibility for the investigation of complaints against the police and, as I see it, the statute does not provide for the involvement of the Police Authority in the investigative process. Indeed, Home Office guidance is to the contrary.

Although in the ordinary way the Chief Constable is supposed to be shielded from the details of complaints until he is required to adjudicate, I am, in this case, prepared to see the doctors to ascertain what is worrying them. If they are making allegations I will have these taken down in writing by a superintendent from Complaints and Discipline Branch and investigated at once in the quickest possible time.

I am surprised that the doctors should have found it necessary to adopt this course of action. As you know, I set up a Special Committee under the chairmanship of the Deputy Chief Constable to overhaul procedures and get them in line with the doctors' viewpoint. They have been given clearly to understand that they may have immediate access to myself, the Senior Deputy Chief Constable or the Deputy Chief Constable. Only two weeks ago they met in Committee with the Deputy Chief Constable and made no mention of any concern such as that suggested in your letter.

There has never been any reluctance on my part to have a thorough investigation of complaints against the police and I am as concerned as the Police Authority that the behaviour of the Force should be beyond reproach. On the other hand, I can see no necessity for the statutory procedure to be bypassed in this way. I am quite prepared that the Police Complaints Committee should be given full information about the outcome of any enquiries that may ensue but as the law stands at present, the Police Authority will be going outside its function by becoming involved in the investigatory process.

Yours sincerely,

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