

STATEMENT

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Statement From Governor Of The Virgin Islands Daniel Pruce On The Implementation Of The Commission Of Inquiry's Recommendations And The Security Of The Territory

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At the time of my last Quarterly Review, one week before the deadline we were working toward of May 2024, nineteen of the forty-eight recommendations remained. Significant work took place over the following months to complete the remaining recommendations. Two recommendations have been delayed due to external factors beyond our control, and that has been known for some time: new Criminal Procedure Rules have been developed under the supervision of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court as part of their regional review, and judge-only criminal trials will be part of the forthcoming negotiations on a new Constitution.

The Immigration & Passport Act required some further amendment to address issues with the legislation passed last year. I was delighted to take delivery in the last couple of days of the amendment and I have assented to it. It now needs to be brought into force. I assented to the Public Assistance (Amendment) Act 2024 last August, and that has yet to be brought into force. The Ministry advises that they are working hard on regulations to underpin the new law. So progress is underway.

I was pleased to learn that the Acting Commissioner launched vetting of the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force yesterday. Further work remains to be done before we commence vetting for Customs, Immigration and Prison Officers. Progress is underway on that. I will talk more about that shortly.

Since the COI report was published, eighteen pieces of legislation relating to the delivery of the reforms passed in the House of Assembly. Thirteen of these laws were passed between May 2024 and September 2024 so that was a particularly intensive period. Once laws are brought into force, the key priority in most areas is the development of comprehensive policies and procedures which align with the legislation. These policies must be accessible to the public and must be consistently applied. To enable that resources and training will be needed. So we are yet to fully deliver the objectives of the Commission of Inquiry reforms, which were ultimately intended to improve the lives of people living in the Virgin Islands. This is largely because the laws which establish the institutions and ways of working are in their infancy. On 9th April, Cabinet agreed a Governance Reform Implementation Action Plan which describes the steps for implementing the reforms so that they result in meaningful, practical and real-world benefits. This will need to be closely monitored and owned by the Government of the Virgin Islands.

As we've discussed previously, the decision on whether to lift the Order in Council sits with the Minister for the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty, and UK Foreign Secretary, David Lammy. It is not for me to prejudge what that decision might be. This report is my best effort to present an accurate assessment of all the work to deliver the COI recommendations. Also at this time, I do not judge that additional powers for the Governor are necessary.

Reflecting on the work I've been involved in over the last year and a half, it is evident that the closer we work together, the more we achieve. Based on my lived experience, a genuine partnership, based on trust and mutual understanding, is the most effective way of ensuring that the aspirations of the COI reforms are achieved.

In addition to my final review, findings of the public feedback exercise which ran between 12th February to 2nd March this year are also being published today.

The response to the survey was encouraging, over 600 people shared their views. The thoughtful and considered comments of those who participated represented a wide cross-section of society. I am extremely grateful to everyone who took the time and trouble to respond.

While it may be too early to draw reliable conclusions, and still more can be done to improve the experiences of residents, the findings already provide enough to give confidence that governance is moving in the right direction in several areas. The public feedback also provides evidence for the importance of moving towards more public education and a particular sustained focus on implementation.

Law Enforcement Review

Last month, Part Two of a review of law enforcement here in the Virgin Islands was published. The review was conducted by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services, this is an independent body whose role is to conduct these sorts of assessments.

There's been a lot of discussion about the findings of the Law Enforcement Review and that is understandable - it is an ambitious and far-reaching roadmap for change, to make the Territory safer over the next decade and beyond. It recommends improvements designed to optimise and support law enforcement agencies in performing their duties.

This is a thorough piece of work which deserves thorough consideration.

Collaboration is at the heart. To succeed, we must take a proactive, integrated approach to tackling crime, including organised crime and the violence that gangs proliferate. I look forward to working with the Premier, National Security Council, law enforcement agencies and partners across Government and beyond.

By improving the governance and oversight of law enforcement agencies, we will be better equipped to tackle crime, including international organised crime, better able to protect our borders, better equipped to halt the flow of illicit finance, make the criminal justice system more efficient and protect vulnerable people, while safeguarding fundamental rights and freedoms. The first duty of any government is the safety and security of its citizens.

I am grateful to the UK Government for funding the review and helping to resource

the programme which will support the implementation of the recommendations. Two experts from the UK have been recruited.

Vetting

The starting point of building effective law enforcement agencies is based on trust: trust from the public, trust across agencies, and trust between colleagues. The Commission of Inquiry itself heard that there was a “reluctance to share intelligence for fear of it being divulged”, and as a consequence the COI recommended that all officers should be subject to vetting.

As I said earlier, we have been working for some time on this, and I was pleased to hear that the Acting Commission launched vetting for members of the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force yesterday. We are continuing to work to start the process of vetting Customs, Immigration and Prison Officers.

I have worked closely with the Attorney General and her Chambers every step of the way. This work of course has been guided by a firm commitment to upholding the Constitution of the Virgin Islands and being consistent with it. It is important that those conducting the vetting are provided with the necessary information, and the form officers are required to fill out is available in the Regulations. Officers are required to disclose information about their personal circumstances. Circumstances which might place them at risk. Circumstances which could make them vulnerable or stop them from being able to do their jobs. It is also important to identify associations they may have. At no stage of the vetting process would anyone be expected to disclose PIN numbers.

I know vetting can feel intrusive, particularly when it is new. In common with my colleagues in the Diplomatic Service, I have undergone a stringent vetting process at every stage of my career. It is important that we share information to allow our employers to manage any risks and mitigate any vulnerabilities. These requirements flow from the work we do.

Security and good governance underpin prosperity, and we all want to see the Virgin Islands flourish. I look forward to continuing to work together, collaboratively, to ensure the safety and security of our community.

Additional Documents or Media

- [coi_public_feedback_report_9_may_2025.pdf](#)
- [final_review_of_coi_implementation_by_he_governor_daniel_pruce_9_may_2025.pdf](#)