

BY REBECCA BLACK

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NORTHERN Ireland's most senior female police officer — once tipped as a future Chief Constable — has announced her intention to retire.

Many senior officers were reportedly shocked after being told that Deputy Chief Constable Judith Gillespie had informed the Policing Board yesterday that she planned to step down early next year.

She had been seen as a potential successor to Chief Constable Matt Baggott when he stepped down from the top post next year.

There was speculation in policing circles yesterday that she may have had another job offer, or considered it unlikely that she'd be appointed to replace Mr Baggott.

Usually a candidate for the Chief Constable post must have experience of serving in a different police force to be considered, which Ms Gillespie does not.

Just two years ago she turned down an enormous £500,000 redundancy package, then saying that policing was about "far more than the financial rewards", and that her sense of vocation was as strong as it had been when she

'She has made an enormous contribution to policing in Northern Ireland'

joined the force in 1982. A spokeswoman for the Policing Board said Ms Gillespie will not receive a large payout like she would have if she had retired two years ago, but could not confirm what sort of retirement package she will receive.

Ms Gillespie's salary is currently £145,605.

Ms Gillespie was the first female Assistant Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable, and even served as interim Chief Constable in 2009 following the departure of Hugh Orde.

Policing Board chair Anne Connolly praised Ms Gillespie for her dedication.

"Judith has made an enormous contribution to policing in Northern Ireland throughout her 31-year career," she said.

"Deputy Chief Constable Gillespie has provided strong leadership to the service in driving forward a programme of policing change and reform.

"A strong advocate for women in policing, Judith championed the introduction of the first gender action plan and diversity strat-



Shock as the woman who shattered police force's glass ceiling announces retirement

Clockwise from main picture: A smiling Judith Gillespie; with a £1 million heroin seizure in 2000; at the Belfast Mela Festival in 2009, and in her office at Antrim Road police station in 2000



Rejected by RUC twice, Judith went on to become top female officer

JUDITH Gillespie has been one of the most prominent officers in the transition from the RUC to PSNI — even reaching out to nationalists by learning Irish, achieving a silver fainne.

Most recently she led the first World Police and Fire Games to take place in Northern Ireland.

However, her rise to the top

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was not without obstacles. Ms Gillespie was turned down by the RUC twice before she was eventually accepted in 1982. Then enrolled as a student at Queen's University, she dropped out in order to take up her place.

In a rare interview earlier this

year, she told the Ulster Tatler how her experience was a lesson to never give up on what you really wanted to do. "I knew I wanted to join the police force and serve my community," she said.

The daughter of a Presbyterian minister, she grew up in sharply divided north Belfast during the Troubles, where she heard

gunshots and explosions ring out day and night.

The family later moved to Newtownards, where she attended Regent House Grammar School.

She quickly made her mark in the RUC, winning the Baton of Honour during her initial training.

She rose steadily through the ranks and gained experience

working in operational policing in Belfast and Newtownards, at Traffic Branch, as staff officer to chief officers, co-ordinator of Child Abuse and Rape Enquiry Units, and head of Drugs Squad.

In 2004 Ms Gillespie broke the glass ceiling for women in the PSNI when she was appointed the first female Assistant Chief

Constable. In 2009 she was appointed Deputy Chief Constable and received an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Ms Gillespie was acting Chief Constable following the 2009 departure of Hugh Orde until Matt Baggott was appointed.

She is married to a retired police officer and has two daughters.

on a number of matters, he wished her well in the future. "Deputy Chief Constable Judith Gillespie can look back with pride on a number of distinguished achievements throughout her years of service," he said.

"With a career both in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, DCC

Gillespie broke through the glass ceiling by becoming not only the first female DCC, but also the first female Assistant Chief Constable.

"Undoubtedly, this accomplishment still acts as an inspiration for others.

"Whilst we may have taken differing views on a range of matters at the board, I wish DCC Gillespie

every success for her future wherever that may lead."

A PSNI spokesman confirmed that Ms Gillespie intends to retire on March 31, 2014.

Ms Gillespie declined interview requests yesterday and the PSNI spokesman said the service would not be commenting on the matter of her retirement.