

NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD
Best Value Performance Plan for 2005-06

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Background

1 Section 28 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 requires the Northern Ireland Policing Board (the Board) to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions and those of the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) are exercised, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

2 This obligation replicates similar requirements (referred to as Best Value) contained in the Local Government Act 1999, for Police Authorities in England and Wales¹, to provide an opportunity for the Board and Police Service to demonstrate that they have operated in the most efficient, effective and economical way.

3 This is my third annual report on these arrangements.

Basis and scope of the audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General

4 The Comptroller and Auditor General is required to send a report to the Northern Ireland Policing Board, the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State on the Performance Plan and reported performance under Section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

5 The purpose of my annual report is to inform Parliament, Members of the Policing Board and the Chief Constable of the key issues arising from my audit of the Best Value Performance Plan, my recommendations and any actions that are now required.

6 I have also reviewed the performance against the previous year's targets as set out in the Annual Review of the Northern Ireland Policing Board² and on the Policing Board's web-site.³

7 The Policing Board have highlighted in their 2005-06 Plan that in addition to explicit 'Best value reviews', the Police Service have had in place a series of strategic initiatives which are also designed to deliver effectiveness, efficiency and economy within the organisation. Given this emphasis, I have reviewed one of these strategic initiatives (Information Systems) and included my findings on it in this report.

8 The findings from my work are set out in detail in the following parts of my report:

- Part 1: The Best Value Performance Plan and performance in 2004-05;
- Part 2: The operation of arrangements for securing Continuous Improvement; and
- Part 3: Information and Computer Services Strategy implementation.

Annex A gives details of the basis and scope of my report.

Main findings of my review

9 On Best Value:

- The Policing Board have prepared and published their Best Value Performance Plan in all significant respects in accordance with the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. My audit opinion is given at Annex B.
- Both the Policing Board and PSNI have made real efforts to implement the recommendations of past reviews by the National Audit Office and Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary. While not every recommendation has been implemented, these do not pose a major threat to further progress in measuring and achieving Continuous Improvement.
- The data systems to generate performance information and the performance monitoring activities are generally strong and both bodies are always looking to make further improvements where they can (paragraph 1.15).
- Both organisations can improve how they present to the public what they do and achieve particularly in their published summary of performance against the Best Value Performance Plan. This could be enhanced to better inform readers much more about how they have improved the quality of policing (paragraph 1.6).
- The Board and PSNI have significantly improved the quality of their performance indicators and standards for 2005-06 from 2004-05, although improvements can still be made for example with some non-specific targets covering, for example, the total number of crimes (see Figure 2 on pages 6 and 7).

¹ Best Value is described as securing continuous improvement in the exercise of all functions undertaken by the authority, whether statutory or not, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Notes to the Local Government Act 1999). Best Value and Continuous Improvement are used by practitioners interchangeably and therefore for the purposes of my report the terms Best Value and Continuous Improvement are synonymous.

² Northern Ireland Policing Board Annual Review 2004-05 published June 2005.

³ This information is published on the Policing Board's web-site at http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/word_docs/publicationschemedocs/Achieve_0405.DOC.

- Both the Board and the PSNI recognise that more needs to be done to ensure Best Value is fully embedded within their organisations. The Policing Board have recognised they can continue to improve the way they challenge the Police Service. They appear to get more information than they can readily absorb so it is important to identify the key issues on which to challenge effectively. Responsibility for monitoring progress against the Best Value Review Programme is to pass from the Board's Audit and Best Value Committee to the Finance and General Purposes Committee in 2005-06. The latter Committee meets more frequently and this should help facilitate the Board's oversight (paragraph 2.5).
- The plan for 2005-06 is ambitious and reflects a real determination to make Best Value work and we applaud this. The Policing Board are monitoring progress carefully (paragraph 2.6).
- In performing their internal reviews the PSNI seem to be weakest on the "Competition" criteria (one of the four key criteria against which functions and services should be examined). The quality of the PSNI's own reviews are improving although one of the three we looked at was poorly resourced and the quality of the review suffered. External service provision is generally dismissed fairly peremptorily at a very early stage of the review (paragraphs 2.8 to 2.9).
- Internal Review Teams can do more to engage all the interested parties in consultation. We consider that the Review Teams are still too isolated from the rest of the police force (paragraph 2.9).

10 On the implementation of their Information Systems (IS) strategy:

- the successful implementation of their IS strategy should assist PSNI in achieving their effectiveness, efficiency and economy objectives (paragraph 3.19);
- there is a strong senior management support, sponsorship and commitment to the team implementing the IS strategy and to the strategy itself (paragraph 3.6);

- the implementation timescale of the strategy, covering 2004-08 is extremely challenging and together with the complexity of the overall Programme, there is still an inherent risk that projects may not to be delivered on time and to an adequate standard for the ultimate users. I note that some parts of the project (covering mobile systems) are not due for implementation until 2009; and
- PSNI have not invited the Office for Government Commerce to perform formal "Gateway" reviews yet and funding for the implementation of the strategy from the Northern Ireland Office of a total of some £65 million has been made dependent on the PSNI undertaking these. PSNI are clarifying whether the OGC process should relate to the overall programme or individual projects (paragraph 3.11).

11 In implementing their IS Strategy, the PSNI should:

- ensure that business process analysis follows a more consistent methodology;
- update programme plans more frequently to properly reflect progress;
- address business changes more explicitly through business process analysis;
- identify business benefits that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-limited and against which progress can be monitored after projects have gone live;
- clarify how and when OGC should be involved;
- clarify the extent of approval for funding already provided and whether further approval is required for both the envelope of projects and individual elements of the strategy; and
- define, implement and monitor an Information Management training strategy together with a training needs analysis.

12 The Policing Board and Police Service have plans in progress to implement the above recommendations and I look forward to the application of Continuous Improvement to the strategically important area of patrolling in 2005-06.