



National Audit Office

The Estate Strategy of the Police Service of Northern Ireland

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SUMMARY

This report looks at the plans of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to modernise and rationalise its estate. The plans, part of a five year estate strategy approved by the Northern Ireland Policing Board in May 2005, are being taken forward by the PSNI against a challenging background. It occupies a large estate with many old and fortified buildings, a legacy of the security situation, and as part of the security normalisation process the military is withdrawing from sites it shares with the PSNI. Against this backdrop the report looks at the PSNI's progress so far in implementing its plans and identifies ways it can develop its approach to estate management. Our methods are explained in more detail at Appendix 1.

Our main findings are as follows:

- As the PSNI recognises, the police estate in Northern Ireland is larger and more expensive to run than the estates of other police forces in the UK. The PSNI is implementing plans to build and refurbish police stations, upgrade the condition of the estate and soften the look of police stations. The PSNI is also reviewing the need for almost half of its 135 police stations. It is spending £60 million on the estate in 2006-07.

Summary text continued

- Work to modernise the estate is leading to visible improvements, although overall progress is behind where the PSNI intended at this stage. In addition to the security normalisation process, the restructuring of local government in Northern Ireland, which is leading to changes in the PSNI's district command structure, is having an impact on the PSNI's original plans. Cost increases and delays to modernisation projects are also having an effect on the programme.
- Reviewing stations for closure is sensitive and, as at November 2006, 24 have been reviewed, with 20 approved for closure by the Northern Ireland Policing Board, the owner of the police estate. Nine of the 20 stations have been sold. Receipts from the disposal of police stations are required to partly fund the modernisation of the estate.

Our overall conclusion is that while the PSNI is taking steps to strengthen its estate management, on current progress it has much to do if it is to deliver on time its five year plan to transform, and deliver better value for money from, the estate. There are interdependencies between restructuring, modernisation, rationalisation and funding to be managed so clarity about needs, priorities and timings will be essential.

Recommendations

The final section of this report (Paragraph 29 onwards) sets out a number of areas the PSNI should give particular attention to in further developing its approach to estate management. The following will be key:

In taking stock of the estate strategy the PSNI should:

- establish a clear view of future requirements under its revised command structure and convert these into a programme of timetabled and costed plans, prioritised within available funding (Paragraphs 30 and 32); and
- take forward plans to rationalise its headquarter and support sites, and prepare individual strategies for its largest sites (Paragraph 30).

In planning the rationalisation programme the PSNI should:

- prepare a clear timetable for its review of stations and referral to the Policing Board, as circumstances at individual stations permit, which shows the likely value and timing of sales, as the disposal of stations impacts on funding available for modernisation of the estate (Paragraph 31); and



- plan for managing an increase in the number of disposals. In continuing to improve conveyancing information on buildings, giving priority to those stations due to be reviewed for closure would help speed up disposals (Paragraph 46).

In developing project management, the PSNI should:

- work to minimise design changes largely driven by end users, which can impact on cost and time. Using design and build contracts will help in this respect (Paragraph 38); and
- consult all stakeholders early to prevent delays and later design changes (Paragraphs 39 to 41).

In monitoring performance the PSNI should:

- build on its external benchmarking against other police forces by internally benchmarking costs and space usage across the estate (Paragraphs 47 to 50);
- regularly seek the views of estate users, for example through periodic surveys (Paragraph 51); and
- establish a performance management framework to support day-to-day management of the estate and forward planning, and to enhance reporting of progress on the strategy to senior management and the Policing Board, as illustrated in Figure 6 (Paragraph 54).