



National Audit Office

NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD

Best Value Performance Plan for 2006-07

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Best Value Performance Plan for 2006-07

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John Bourn
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

20 March 2007

This report can be found on the National Audit Office web site at www.nao.org.uk

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SUMMARY

Background

1 The Northern Ireland Policing Board (the Board) was set up on 4 November 2001 by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 – legislation designed to put the recommendations of the Patten Report on policing into practice. At the same time the Police Service of Northern Ireland came into being, replacing the RUC.

2 Section 28 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 requires 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.

3 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.

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.

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 for Northern Ireland on the Performance Plan and reported performance under Section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

5 This is my fourth report, the purpose of which 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 Report of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.²

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

- Part 1: The Best Value Performance Plan 2006-07 and performance against the previous year's plan; and
- Part 2: Operation of arrangements to secure Continuous Improvement.

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

Main findings and recommendations of my review

8 On the Best Value Performance Plan 2006-07 and performance reported for 2005-06:

- The Policing Board have prepared and published their Best Value Performance Plan in all 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 significant progress in implementing the recommendations of past inspections by the National Audit Office and Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC). The Best Value Reviews being selected are now more outward facing in nature.

- The proposed performance indicators and standards for 2006-07 outlined in the Best Value Performance Plan are reasonable but can be improved further. For example, setting clear target dates for achieving standards should be considered. For those standards where a target is set all but one have a target set of 2006-07 or subsequent financial years, but with no reference to an actual date.
- A number of performance indicators and standards have been dropped since the previous Best Value Performance Plan. Although there may be valid operational reasons for why this has occurred, some narrative explanation in the plan would be useful to readers and add transparency.
- Several new standards are included that reflect the priorities of external stakeholders. For example, standards now refer to children within the road safety and violent crime areas following representations from organisations concerned with child welfare.
- The Policing Board continues to monitor the PSNI's performance data against the agreed standards, and the systems in place to produce the data appear to be appropriate. The Board's assessment of its own and the Chief Constable's performance in 2005-06 is reasonable but improvements can be made still in the reporting of this. In order to enhance the forward looking nature of the Performance Plan, information on why standards have not been achieved should also be included in the Annual Report together with an indication of the actions taken or planned to ensure that the target is achieved in the future.

9 On the Operation of arrangements to secure Continuous Improvement

- The methodology used to select the Best Value Reviews is thorough, yet it doesn't afford the outside observer the opportunity to follow the decisions taken to arrive at the final choice of reviews. More information could be provided on the process to select the chosen reviews and which other options were considered.
- In respect of the Best Value Reviews undertaken during 2005-06, I found that the Police Service and Policing Board worked together more closely than in previous reviews and that the reviews themselves were delivered to time and were of good quality. The Continuous Improvement Strategic Working Group facilitates this by providing a forum to discuss progress and emerging recommendations.

² *Northern Ireland Policing Board Annual Report 2005-06, published July 2006.*

- My recommendations arising from the Best Value reviews of 2005-06 include:
 - Looking for a greater involvement, during the reviews, of key decision makers from support areas such as Finance and Human Resources.
 - Fully costing the reviews' recommendations during the implementation process to better identify any resulting efficiency savings.
 - In the PSNI review of patrolling; 140 recommendations were made some of which are heavily dependent on major external influences or events such as the Review of Public Administration. The PSNI should clarify how such recommendations can be implemented to achieve best value.
- At the time of my inspection, no post implementation reviews have been completed since the commencement of the Best Value programme. Such reviews are an integral part of best value process and help ensure the expected actions and impacts are being enjoyed from all the Best Value Reviews.
- Whilst continuous improvement arrangements in Northern Ireland are not directly affected by the current Police Bill passing through Parliament, I recommend the Board, PSNI and the sponsor branch of the parent department monitor the progress of the Bill to ensure their own arrangements can continue to benefit from emerging best practice as far as they consider appropriate.

PART ONE

The 2006-07 Best Value Performance Plan and performance against the previous year's plan

Introduction

1.1 In this part I report whether:

- the content and supporting documentation for the Best Value Performance Plan published in the Policing Plan for 2006-09 meets the Board's statutory obligations (paragraphs 1.2 to 1.7);
- proposed performance indicators and standards are reasonable (paragraphs 1.8 to 1.17);
- the systems in place to produce performance information in support of the Best Value indicators and standards, are appropriate (paragraphs 1.18 to 1.20); and
- the Board's assessment of its own and the Chief Constable's performance in 2005-06 by reference to performance indicators is reasonable (paragraphs 1.21 to 1.25).

The content and supporting documentation for the Best Value Performance Plan meets the Board's statutory obligations

1.2 The Northern Ireland Policing Board have prepared and published their Best Value Performance Plan for 2006-07 as part five of the 2006-09 Policing Plan. It has therefore been prepared and published in all respects in accordance with the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 (further details are provided at Annex A). My audit opinion is given at Annex B.

1.3 Part five of the Policing Plan contains an explanation of how continuous improvement arrangements for 2006-07 are being implemented. Information contained within part five on how particular best value review subjects are selected is however limited. The Northern Ireland Policing Board members, senior Policing Board officials, and senior staff from the PSNI jointly considered a range of potential areas for review. The consultation process

was supported by informal views from key stakeholder groups. Potential areas for review were scored against a matrix which covered impact on: the service and business objectives of the PSNI and Policing Board, results, customers and stakeholders, expenditure, staffing implications, and improvement activity both planned and current. Following this evaluation, the highest ranked subject was selected as the area for review. Part five only makes reference to the matrix scoring exercise.

1.4 Since 2004-05, the PSNI have undertaken seven best value reviews and the Policing Board two.

PSNI	Clearance Rates comparison
	Enquiry Offices
	Transport
	Road Policing and the National Intelligence Model
	Fixed Penalty Processing
	Occupational Health and Welfare
	Patrolling
Policing Board	Police Administration Branch
	External Communication & Public Consultation

1.5 The results of these reviews have been published, and website references for the Patrolling and External Communication and Public Consultation Reviews are included in the Policing Board annual report for 2005-06. The references relate only to home pages and not to the actual reports themselves. In order to access the reports, further searching is required. Neither the policing plan, nor the Board's annual report contains a basic summary of the findings of previous best value reviews, and Post Implementation Reviews are still to be undertaken. Consultants to undertake the Post Implementation Reviews of Policing Board and PSNI reviews undertaken to date, were appointed in July 2006.

Recommendations

1.6 The performance plan should contain a summary of best value reviews undertaken in the previous year. When the results of post implementation reviews are completed, these should also be published in the Policing Plan. Any web links that are included in the Policing Plan should be to the actual document, rather than the home page of the organisation.

1.7 Further detail on how reviews are selected, and information on how reviews were considered would add transparency to the process. The fact that the process considers the views of interest groups is an important point which could be highlighted in the performance plan.

The proposed performance indicators and standards outlined in the Best Value Performance Plan are reasonable but can be improved

1.8 The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 requires that the Policing Board identify performance indicators and standards in its Plan to measure the performance of existing functions of the Policing Board and the PSNI. Part two of the three year Policing Plan for 2006-09 includes a number of performance indicators and standards which have been determined by the Policing Board following consultation with the Chief Constable, District Policing Partnerships and the public.

1.9 The Northern Ireland Policing Board is not subject to the statutory best value indicators determined annually³ by the Home Office for forces in England and Wales. The Northern Ireland Policing Board does however aim to use indicators broadly similar to those used in England and Wales.

1.10 The Home Office requires forces to set standards⁴ for the proportion of police recruits from minority ethnic groups compared to the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the economically active population, and for female officer representation. In Northern Ireland, recommendation 121 of the Report of the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland (The Patten Report), requires an equal number of Protestants and Catholics to be drawn from the pool of qualified candidates for recruitment. The Patten

recommendation is addressed separately through the quarterly reports of the Office of the Oversight Commissioner; however there are no indicators which extend beyond this to specifically cover minority ethnic groups and female officer representation in line with the Home Office standards.

1.11 The Board has introduced an indicator on the number of persons charged with terrorist offences (Indicator 2.2). There are no associated targets. The Board inform me that they intend to set a target for this indicator during the following year, as they secure benchmark data.

1.12 In January 2006, the Criminal Justice Inspector for Northern Ireland produced a report on Target Setting and Performance Management in the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland.⁵ One of the findings of this report was that there was scope for some agencies to identify a smaller number of key targets.

1.13 The 2005-06 performance plan noted 38 different targets (see the table at 1.22 for results). By the 2006-07 performance plan this had dropped to 23. Whilst an overall reduction in targets follows recommendations from the Criminal Justice Inspectorate report and my previous Report, no explanation was provided in the plan as to why those particular targets had been chosen to be dropped. It would be helpful if the reasons for the discarding of performance targets are documented.

1.14 The Board has made a number of improvements from the performance indicators and standards set in previous years. We have assessed whether each performance indicator is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound. (Detailed findings from our review of individual standards and indicators are set out at Annex C). Key improvements made for 2006-07 include:

- fewer standards that merely require the number of incidents to be monitored, since baselines for these standards have now been established;
- new standards have been introduced such as standard 6.1.1 'To reduce the number of children killed or seriously injured on the road' following representations from stakeholder groups; and
- more standards contain a specified level of target increase or decrease.

³ The Statutory Instrument covering the period from 1 April 2006 is *The Police Authorities (Best Value) Performance Indicators Order 2006* which slightly amends the 2005 Order.

⁴ Statutory Performance Indicators 3e and 3g relate to the representation of minority groups and female officers.

⁵ Published on 25 January 2006, <http://www.cjini.org/Publications/documents/targetsreport.pdf>

1.15 The wording of some standards could be clarified. Two examples are:

- Standards 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 require the reduction in the number of people and children respectively killed or injured in road traffic accidents. The level of expected reduction has not been set. A reduction by just one casualty would ensure that the standard has been achieved.
- Standard 4.1.2 requires the number of problem solving folders used for Anti Social Behaviour to be monitored. There is no indication given to the lay reader of what a problem solving folder is, what will be the impact of measuring the monitoring of these, and how anti-social behaviour may be reduced by monitoring them.

1.16 The lack of a deadline for when targets are to be achieved is a continuing problem for several indicators. It is not clear whether a target date of 31 March 2007 can be assumed in those cases where the target is 2006-07 and a specific date is not mentioned. Of the standards in the 2006-09 Policing Plan, only one has a specific target date (Standard 6.1.1 – To reduce the amount of overtime worked by 20 per cent by 31 March 2007).

Recommendations

1.17 The Board could improve the indicators and standards used for future years as follows:

- By considering targets for:
 - the level of recruits from minority ethnic groups compared to the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the economically active population; and
 - the overall percentage of female officers;
- Where a performance indicator from the previous year is not repeated in the current performance plan, the reason for its removal and an indication of the result should it not have been removed should be noted.
- All standards should have a specific target to be achieved and a clear deadline. This target may be either absolute or relative.

- In the case of standards which require a function to be monitored, we recommend the standards are strengthened to ensure that effectiveness can be measured. An example is standard 4.1.2 which could include an explanation of both, the meaning of, and how monitoring “problem solving folders” will contribute towards achieving the planned objective of dealing with anti-social behaviour.

The systems in place to produce performance information in support of their Best Value indicators and standards are appropriate

1.18 Performance information comes from the PSNI data systems, and the results of the Northern Ireland Omnibus survey. Data collection at the PSNI relies on a system of validation checks both at a District Command Unit level, and within the Central Statistical Unit. I have reviewed the system of validation checks (which includes all the new indicators for 2006-07) and consider them to be appropriate.

1.19 The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is undertaken by NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency), who are independent of the Policing Board and PSNI. NISRA follows the National Statistics Code of Practice. The survey is conducted twice a year in April and October. The Policing Board’s use of statistics provided by the Omnibus Survey is appropriate.

1.20 In my previous report I recommended that the Board consider using a continuous survey which could, for example, be used to measure public confidence levels in policing over the whole year. The Board have informed me that they have considered using the Northern Ireland Crime Survey,⁶ but as yet have not taken this option forward due to risks of the annual data not being ready in time for the publication of the Annual Report each July. Therefore, the indicators relating to public satisfaction levels continue to be drawn from a ‘snapshot’ survey with inherent risks of distortion due to one-off events.

⁶ The Northern Ireland Crime Survey is conducted by NISRA for the Northern Ireland Office.

The Board's assessment of its own and the Chief Constable's performance in 2005-06 by reference to performance indicators is reasonable but improvements can be made

1.21 The Board's assessment of their own and the Chief Constable's performance against the Best Value performance indicators during the year 2005-06 has been published in their 2005-06 annual report.⁷

1.22 The Policing Board have included performance information against all standards set in the 2005-08 policing plan. The results for the 38 performance indicators are summarised in the following table:

Achieved	On target	Partially achieved	Not achieved	Total
28	2	3	5	38

1.23 In 2005-06, the PSNI has continued to report its performance against the quantifiable performance standards quarterly to the public session of the Policing Board. At the Board meetings, a written paper is submitted by the PSNI setting out its current performance against the performance standards in the Performance Plan. This is supported by a presentation by the Chief Constable, who also answers questions raised on the performance information by the Board members. The Board consider this reporting procedure, together with the trend to hold meetings in different parts of Northern Ireland, to be a valuable and integral part of the accountability process.

1.24 The picture presented by reported performance could be enhanced, for example:

- Six of the standards are to establish a baseline, for example target 5.1.2 which is "To establish a baseline for the percentage of people who know how to contact the officer in charge of local policing". It is unclear sometimes as to what the baseline is that has been established. For the above target, the performance comes from the Omnibus survey and is 99% in April 2005, and 89% in September 2005. The annual report does not state which figure will be the baseline, or if indeed the baseline will be an average of the two.

- In the case of target 3.2.1 (to increase the percentage of people who are satisfied with police patrolling in their local area by four percentage points), the baseline is the October 2004 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey (36 per cent). However, the performance for 2005-06 is taken as the average of the April 2005 (42 per cent) and September 2005 (38 per cent) Omnibus Surveys figures. If the September 2005 figures were used, rather than the average, the target would not have been achieved.
- Where standards have not been achieved, there are no explanations of the reasons for failure or information on how the PSNI proposes to ensure that the standard is achieved in future years.

Recommendations

1.25 The Policing Board and Police Service should:

- clarify in the Policing Plan what the baseline figure is that performance will be assessed against in the next year;
- consistently measure performance, that is by comparing a period or point in time with the same period or point in time in the previous year; and
- provide better information on why a particular standard has not been achieved, and give an overview of the actions taken or planned to prevent a recurrence in the next year.

⁷ Northern Ireland Policing Board Annual Report and Accounts (published July 2006), pages 39 to 43.

PART TWO

Operation of the arrangements to secure Continuous Improvement

2.1 In this part of my report I have reviewed:

- The Role of the Policing Board and working with the Police Service (paragraphs 2.2 to 2.6);
- The selection of the Best Value Review programme for 2006-07 (paragraphs 2.7 to 2.12);
- Progress against the 2005-06 Best Value Performance Plan (paragraphs 2.13 to 2.18); and
- Developments in Best Value in England and Wales (paragraphs 2.19 to 2.23).

The role of the Policing Board and working with the Police Service

2.2 The Policing Board works in partnership with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to achieve their shared objectives for economic, efficient and effective policing.

2.3 A Continuous Improvement Strategic Working Group (CISWG), chaired by the Board, has met throughout the year to advise both the Board and the PSNI in developing and implementing a continuous improvement environment within their respective organisations. Members of the group include officials representing the Board, the PSNI, HMIC, the NAO, the NIO, the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland and the Association of Police Authorities.

2.4 Individual Project Boards are set up to manage each Best Value review. Neither the CISWG nor the Project Boards presently include any of the Board members of the Policing Board. There is therefore a delay in any input or challenge which Board Members can make. It would help secure improvements to the review process in real time if Board Members participate in these groups, as they do in England and Wales.

2.5 The Continuous Improvement Strategic Working Group has, in my view, worked well during the year in enabling stakeholders to be informed on the progress of each of the reviews and to provide input as issues emerge and to give advice to strengthen the process.

2.6 In turn, Policing Board and PSNI officials report to the Audit and Best Value Committee⁸ of the Board on the Best Value work. The Committee is constituted of Policing Board Members. The progress of the reviews underway and the emerging findings and impacts are therefore subject to challenge by the Board.

The selection of the Best Value review programme

2.7 I noted in my third report that the Best Value Review programme chosen for 2005-06 was more strategic and outward looking than the previous best value reviews. This reflected the desire of Police Service and the Policing Board to challenge more fundamental functions, and recognising best value as a tool to do so.

2.8 The selection process begins with potential review areas being assessed against nine criteria, similar to those used by the police services in England and Wales, to identify the most significant policing functions which might be subject to best value review. The Police Service then adopts a shortlist of the highest priority functions which are then taken forward for further consideration at a strategy day with the Board. A similar process but on a smaller scale is used by officials of the Policing Board to identify the shortlist of functions to consider for the Board's best value review.

⁸ From 1 April 2006 the responsibility to oversee Best Value falls to the Resources and Improvement Committee.

2.9 A formal strategy day attended by Board members, the Police Service top team and their officials consider the merits of those functions short-listed and make their recommendations as to which best value reviews the Police Service and the Policing Board will respectively undertake in the following financial year. The Policing Board consider the recommendations from the strategy day and formally approve⁹ the forward Best Value Review programme which, in turn, is published in the Policing Plan.

2.10 The Best Value Review programme for 2006-07 features two reviews, one each for the Police Service and the Policing Board. The Police Service will undertake a review of “partnerships”. The review will focus specifically on improving the highest impact outward facing partnerships drawn from the five¹⁰ policing domains of Citizen Focus, Reducing Crime, Investigating Crime, Promoting Public Safety and Resource Usage. The Policing Board have selected a best value review on “Holding the Chief Constable to Account”. This review will consider how efficient and effective the current processes are, bearing in mind the governing statutes under which Policing in Northern Ireland operates.

2.11 I believe that the two best value reviews selected for 2006-07 are addressing suitable areas to cover in pursuing continuous improvement.

2.12 The CISWG and the Audit and Best Value Committee do not receive full feedback on the strategy day, either by way of written report or a presentation. There is therefore a gap in these groups’ knowledge over how the recommended reviews were selected. I recommend that the Board and the Police Service consider ways to make the final selection process more transparent so as to assure the Board and the public that the best possible review topic, at the time, is chosen.

Progress against the 2005-06 Best Value Performance Plan

2.13 In 2005-06, the Police Service completed the Patrolling review as set out in its Best Value Performance Plan for that year. The Policing Board completed their External Communications Review which was also referred to in the same performance plan. In conjunction with Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary, I have carried out a detailed review of the Police Service’s Patrolling Review. I have also reviewed the Policing Board’s own Best Value Review.

2.14 The Best Value methodology is based around the “Four Cs” of challenge, consult, compare and compete. My review focused on how well these criteria had been followed, as well as how the reviews had been resourced and reported on.

2.15 I found that the Board and the Police Service have delivered good quality reviews which, if recommendations are implemented successfully, will help deliver continuous improvement. I noted progress over earlier years in the way the reviews were resourced, the challenge of the review teams through the period both by their management and the Board, an improved project management allowing for feedback before reporting.

2.16 At the time of my inspection, no post implementation reviews (PIRs) had been completed since the commencement of the Best Value programme. This is an important element of the Best Value methodology, the purpose of which is to help determine the progress and impact of recommendations from specific Best Value Reviews. Evaluation should include review of performance improvement set against the Best Value Review’s aims and objectives and measured against any locally agreed performance indicators. I recommend that the Policing Board and the Police Service undertake post implementation reviews on older reviews where practicable as well as for this year’s reviews when considered appropriate.

2.17 Although the Policing Plan contains performance indicators and standards for the Police Service as a whole, there is no indication of any indicators or standards that were specifically attached to the best value reviews completed. The absence of such information means that the amount of improvement that the implementation of a review creates, cannot be measured. Information on future best value reviews should also contain details of those indicators and standards by which success of the review in securing continuous improvement will be measured. The establishment of indicators and standards relevant to each best value review will enable both the Policing Board and the Police Service to demonstrate that continuous improvement is being achieved.

⁹ For future programmes the Board has delegated authority to the Audit and Best Value committee to approve the recommended reviews.

¹⁰ The five domains are standard throughout England & Wales within the Policing Performance Assessment Framework developed by the Home Office and HMIC. The PSNI has also adopted these domains together with a sixth domain, Organisational Development.

2.18 I have the following specific observations and recommendations arising from the two reviews.

PSNI Review of Patrolling

- The recommendations that form the basis of the improvement plan reflect the findings of the Best Value Review and I am satisfied that the Policing Board is acting to improve the areas of activity highlighted within the review in conjunction with the police force.
- Many of the recommendations coming out of the Best Value Review would result in fundamental changes within the police service in Northern Ireland. At the time of the completion of the review, these were only initial recommendations which require further work to assess their feasibility. The Policing Board with the Police Service should ensure that in respect of the key or contentious recommendations that require additional research and development, consultation with relevant parties has been sufficient and appropriate.
- The Best Value Review on patrolling produced over 140 recommendations for improvement. There was however very little information on the costs of implementing these recommendations or the potential savings that could be achieved. The Board and the Service should ensure that recommendations resulting from best value reviews are costed and that any potential efficiency savings are identified and captured. The Review of Public Administration will affect the validity of some of the recommendations coming out of the Patrolling review. Future Best Value Reviews should consider the wider environment, and its influences on recommendations considered.
- The membership of the Best Value project board did not include key members of staff from support services such as finance and human resources whose input would have been useful when the reasonableness of recommendations being made was considered. I recommend that the Northern Ireland Policing Board and Police Service review membership of future project boards and consider broadening representation to include key managers from support business areas, where appropriate.
- The membership of the Best Value project board did not include a Policing Board member whose presence would have added the challenge from a

more external stakeholder, and facilitated greater input from the Board. It would also help maintain a high profile for the best value process. The Board and the Service should review current arrangements to ensure there is meaningful engagement of Policing Board members in the Best Value process initially through project boards.

- There is a misunderstanding over the frequently used term 'endorsed' and whether its use means a recommendation is simply acknowledged, or whether it is agreed to be implemented. Clarification is urgently needed as to the status of the recommendations and the terms mentioned before managers and front line staff can have confidence in the process. I recommend that the Board and the Service should agree the status of the recommendations for the patrol function review and produce a clear statement of intent for the organisation. Implementation managers should be given clear direction as to what is expected of them.

Northern Ireland Policing Board Review of External Communications

- No comparison of external communications was undertaken with other forces. This is a fundamental part of the Best Value methodology and should be done if possible to provide the benefit of good practice in use by others.
- The external communications Best Value Review specifically attempted to consult those hard to reach groups, such as travellers. In order to maximise the number of responses received, questionnaires were anonymous. However, this meant that responses could not be analysed by customer type. Customers have differing requirements in what they expect from the Policing Board in terms of external communications. A questionnaire tailored to different customer types would have provided more useful feedback and I recommend this be considered for future surveys of this kind.
- One of the main customers of the Policing Board is the General Public. There was no consultation with any members of the public as part of the Best Value Review. For future best value reviews, the Policing Board should consider consulting a sample of all of its stakeholders that are affected by the service under review.

Developments in Continuous Improvement in England and Wales

2.19 The Local Government Act 1999, for Police Authorities in England and Wales, lays down that Police Authorities in England and Wales must make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way their functions are exercised. Within this framework, they must produce annual Best Value performance plans and undertake reviews (Best Value Reviews) to demonstrate that they have operated in the most efficient, effective and economical way.

2.20 Additionally, the Local Government Act amended the Police Act 1996 to confer a right of inspection for HMIC on a Police Authority's compliance with their Best Value obligations.

2.21 More recently, the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 laid down that the Policing Board shall make continuous improvement arrangements. The Act included several similar features to the Local Government Act.

2.22 Under plans set out by the Government in the Queen's speech, Parliament is expecting to consider a Bill on Policing within the coming year. This Bill may change the way police authorities in England and Wales seek continuous improvement, reflecting the success of the Best Value initiative introduced in the 1999 Act. As Best Value disciplines and processes are now recognised as an integral part of a police force's business, the new Bill may look to remove the compulsions to provide Best Value plans and undertake reviews on an annualised basis. In turn, this could lead to a different framework under which HMIC (and the Audit Commission as Police Authorities' external auditor) review and report on continuous improvement.

2.23 Whilst continuous improvement arrangements in Northern Ireland are not directly affected by the current Police Bill I recommend that the Board, the Police Service and the sponsor branch of the parent department monitor its progress to ensure their own arrangements can continue to benefit from emerging best practice as far as they consider appropriate.

ANNEX A

The statutory requirement for Continuous Improvement (Best Value) Performance Plans

1 Under the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 section 28 the Northern Ireland Policing Board (Policing Board) is required 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 The Performance Plan prepared under section 28 for the year ended 31 March 2007 should:

- detail how the Policing Board have made arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions, and those of the Chief Constable, are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness;
- identify factors (performance indicators) by reference to which performance in exercising functions can be measured;
- set standards (performance targets) to be met in the exercise of particular functions in relation to performance indicators;
- contain the Board's assessment of their own and the Chief Constable's performance in the year by reference to performance indicators; and
- contain explanations of the extent that any performance standard that applied at any time during the year was not met.

3 The Board's Best Value Performance Plan was published as part of their three year Policing Plan for 2006-09. The Board's assessment of their own and the Chief Constable's performance in 2005-06 by reference to performance indicators was included in the Board's Annual Review.

Respective responsibilities of the Policing Board and the Comptroller and Auditor General

4 The Policing Board is responsible for preparing their Performance Plan and Annual Report, for the information and the assessments that are set out within them and the assumptions and estimates on which they are based. It is also responsible for ensuring that the PSNI have in place appropriate performance management and internal control systems, from which the information and assessments in the Best Value Performance Plan are derived. In practice the Policing Board works in partnership with the Police Service as part of their continuous improvement framework to enable the Police Service to identify actions and review all aspects of their service.

5 The Comptroller and Auditor General's responsibilities are to:

- certify and report on whether the Policing Board has complied with statutory requirements in respect of the preparation and publication of its Performance Plan. In particular whether the Plan states how continuous improvement is going to be achieved, whether it contains performance indicators and standards and whether there is a summary of the Policing Board's assessment of their performance and that of the Chief Constable for the previous year;
- state whether the performance indicators and performance standards are reasonable, and, if appropriate, recommend changes to them;
- review and report on the working of the arrangements to secure continuous improvements; and
- to recommend to the Secretary of State whether to give a direction under Section 31 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 requiring the Policing Board to take corrective action to ensure compliance with the Act.

Basis and scope of the Comptroller and Auditor General's audit

6 The Comptroller and Auditor General is required to issue a report to the Policing Board, the Chief Constable of the PSNI and the Secretary of State on the annual Performance Plan under Section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. The purpose of this report is to inform Parliament, Members of the Policing Board and the Chief Constable of the key issues arising from the audit of the Best Value Performance Plan and related performance information in the Annual Report, and to make recommendations as required.

7 To fulfil my statutory responsibilities outlined above I have:

- reviewed the Best Value Performance Plan to confirm compliance with legislative and statutory guidance;
- assessed whether the stated performance indicators and standards are reasonable;
- discussed with senior management of both the Policing Board and the Police Service their plans for 2006-07;
- liaised with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary; and
- reviewed the systems in place to produce the required performance information.

Consultation with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)

8 In England and Wales the role of HMIC in inspecting police forces and reporting on the achievement of Best Value is laid down in statute and the responsibility for reviewing and auditing Best Value is shared with the Audit Commission. Under section 25 of the Local Government Act 1999, there is a statutory requirement for auditors to have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State for the purposes of securing the coordination of different kinds of inspection, inquiry and investigation. Inspectorate reports are public documents and in every case a copy will be forwarded to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Police Authority and the Chief Constable or Commissioner of the Force concerned.

9 In Northern Ireland HMIC do not have a similar statutory responsibility but instead carry out an annual inspection of the Police Service for Northern Ireland by invitation. This inspection is an examination of those areas of policing organisation and practice judged to be central to the efficient and effective discharge of the policing function. The Police (Northern Ireland) Act also allows HMIC to perform reviews of Best Value projects by direction of the Secretary of State. HMIC were invited to carry out a Best Value Inspection of the PSNI in May 2006. I have worked closely with HMIC both during the inspection visit and throughout the audit of the Best Value Performance Plan. In common with practice in England and Wales, I have incorporated the findings of the inspection into my report. Their full report can be found at www.hmic.org.uk. In addition, the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 gives me the authority to perform my own reviews of Best Value projects, and I have carried out my own review of the Policing Board's Best Value Review of the Police Administration Branch. However, for the Best Value Reviews carried out by the Police Service, I have proceeded thus far on the basis of collaboration with HMIC. This has the following advantages:

- those involved in developing and promoting Best Value work can take advantage of the knowledge base that HMIC have from their work in England and Wales and from their force inspections of the PSNI;
- reviews benefit from the operational experience of HMIC; and
- HMIC can assist with my assessment of the reasonableness of the performance indicators and standards adopted by the Policing Board.

ANNEX B

Auditor's certificate and opinion to the Houses of Parliament on the Northern Ireland Policing Board Best Value Performance

As reported in the Northern Ireland Policing Board and Police Service of Northern Ireland Policing Plan for 2006-09¹¹ and relevant sections on their performance on Best Value achieved reported in their 2005-06 Annual Report and on their website.

Certificate

In accordance with Section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 as amended, I certify that I have audited:

- the Policing Board and Police Service of Northern Ireland's Best Value Performance Plan for the year ended 31 March 2007; and
- the performance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland for the year 2005-06 against the performance indicators and standards in the Best Value Performance Plan.

Basis of my opinion

Audit of the Best Value Performance Plan

I planned and performed my work so as to obtain all the information and explanations which I considered necessary in order to provide an opinion on whether:

- the plan has been prepared and published in accordance with statutory requirements;
- arrangements have been made to secure continuous improvement in the way that the Police Board's functions, and those of the Chief Constable, are exercised; and
- the performance indicators and standards are reasonable.

In giving my opinion I am not required to form a view on the achievability of the forward looking Best Value Performance Plan published by the Northern Ireland Policing Board. My work comprised a review and assessment of the plan and where appropriate, examination, on a test basis, of relevant evidence sufficient to satisfy me that arrangements to secure continuous improvements are in place, that the plan includes those matters prescribed in legislation and that the arrangements for publishing the plan complied with those requirements.

I am required, under Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 section 29, to give an opinion on whether the performance indicators and performance standards are reasonable. The Northern Ireland Policing Board and Police Service of Northern Ireland are not required to follow the statutory indicators set for Police Authorities in England and Wales on an annual basis by the Home Office. However, in arriving at my assessment I have kept the requirements placed on other police forces in mind and discussed their relevance with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary.

Where I have qualified my audit opinion on the plan I am required to recommend how the plan should be amended so as to comply in all significant respects with the legislation.

11 *The Northern Ireland Policing Board and Police Service of Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2006-09.*

Audit of the performance indicator information for the year 2005-06

I planned and performed my work so as to obtain all the information and explanations which I considered necessary in order to provide an opinion on whether the Northern Ireland Policing Board has prepared and published an assessment of their own and the Police Service's performance in the year measured by reference to performance indicators and standards.

My work comprised a review and assessment, and where appropriate, examination on a test basis of the evidence supporting performance against the indicators as prescribed in the prior year's Best Value Performance Plan. I obtained sufficient evidence to satisfy me that the plan provided includes those matters required by statute, that the performance information is accurate and the systems that generated the information are sufficiently well controlled so as to mitigate significant risks to data reliability.

Opinion

In my opinion,

- the Northern Ireland Policing Board has prepared and published its Best Value Performance Plan in all significant respects in accordance with the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.
- the performance indicators and standards included in the Best Value Performance Plan for the year ended 31 March 2007 are reasonable.
- the Northern Ireland Policing Board has prepared and published its and the PSNI's performance in year by reference to performance indicators in accordance with subsection 5A of Section 28 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. The Board publishes this information within its Annual Report.
- the performance information against performance indicators and standards, contained within the Northern Ireland Policing Board's Annual Report is an accurate assessment of the Northern Ireland Policing Board's and PSNI's performance.

Recommendations to the Secretary of State

Under section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 I am required to recommend whether the Secretary of State issue a direction under section 31.

On the basis of my work:

- I do not recommend that the Secretary of State issues a direction under section 31 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

John Bourn
12 February 2007

National Audit Office
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road
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London
SW1W 9SP

ANNEX C

Analysis of 2006-07 performance indicators and standards

See Table on Pages 20-23

2006-09 Indicator	Reasonable?	Standards
1.1 Percentage of people who are confident in the PSNI's ability to provide an ordinary, day-to-day policing service for all the people of Northern Ireland.	Yes	<p>1.1.1 To increase the percentage of people who have confidence in the PSNI's ability to provide an ordinary, day-to-day policing service for all the people of Northern Ireland by five percentage points.</p> <p>1.1.2 To increase the percentage of crime victims satisfied that they have been kept informed regarding their case by three percentage points.</p>
1.2 Response times to emergency calls.	Yes	1.2.1 To respond to 75 per cent of emergency calls within 15 minutes.
2.1 Number of recorded crimes.	Yes	<p>2.1.1 To reduce the total number of crimes by 2 per cent.</p> <p>2.1.2 To reduce the total number of domestic burglaries by 5 per cent.</p> <p>2.1.3 To reduce the total number of vehicle crimes by 5 per cent.</p> <p>2.1.4 To reduce the total number of violent crimes by 2 per cent.</p> <p>2.1.5 To reduce the total number of violent crimes against children by 2 per cent.</p>
3.1 Percentage of recorded crimes cleared.	Yes	<p>3.1.1 To achieve an overall clearance rate of at least 29 per cent.</p> <p>3.1.2 To achieve a clearance rate of at least 50 per cent for violent crimes.</p> <p>3.1.3 To increase the clearance rate for sectarian crimes by 2 percentage points.</p> <p>3.1.4 To increase the clearance rate for race crimes by 2 percentage points.</p>
3.2 Number of persons charged with terrorist offences.	This indicator is not used by the Home Office.	No standard set.
3.3 Number of persons charged or summoned for drugs supply offences.	Yes	3.3.1 To increase the number of persons charged or summoned for drugs supply offences as a proportion of those arrested for all drugs offences.
4.1 Number of partnership initiatives and problem solving folders to deal with anti-social behaviour.	Yes	<p>4.1.1 To deal with all identified anti-social behaviour by way of partnership initiatives.</p> <p>4.1.2 To monitor the number of problem solving folders used to deal with anti-social behaviour.</p>

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Timebound
Yes, a definite target reduction is given	Yes, performance against standard is measured using the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey	Yes	Yes, the standard does reflect the views of citizens.	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a definite target reduction is given	Yes, performance against standard is measured using the Victim Survey	Yes	Yes, the standard does reflect the views of citizens.	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a specific target has been set	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes, the standard does reflect the views of citizens.	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a definite target reduction is given, with a baseline of 2005-06 performance.	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a definite target reduction is given, with a baseline of 2005-06 performance.	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a definite target reduction is given, with a baseline of 2005-06 performance.	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a definite target reduction is given, with a baseline of 2005-06 performance.	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a definite target reduction is given, with a baseline of 2005-06 performance.	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a definite target reduction is given, with a baseline of 2005-06 performance.	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a definite target reduction is given, with a baseline of 2005-06 performance.	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes, a definite target reduction is given, with a baseline of 2005-06 performance.	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Yes, although no specific target is set	Yes, information is captured using the PSNI data management system	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
No, there is no target	Yes	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
No, there is no target	Yes	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.

2006-09 Indicator	Reasonable?	Standards
5.1 Number killed or seriously injured on the road.	Yes, the indicator mirrors a Home Office indicator for England and Wales forces.	5.1.1 To reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on the road. 5.1.2 To reduce the number of children killed or seriously injured on the road.
6.1 Amount of overtime worked.	Yes	6.1.1 To reduce the amount of overtime worked by 20 per cent by 31 March 2007.
6.2 The percentage of officers available for frontline duties.	Yes	6.2.1 To continue to work towards increasing the percentage of officers available for frontline duties to 72 per cent by 2007–2008.
6.3 Average working days lost through sickness for police officers and civilian staff.	Yes. The Home Office equivalent refers to hours lost, and differentiates between police officers and civilian staff.	6.3.1 To reduce average sickness levels to 12 days for police officers and civilian staff in 2006-2007.
6.4 Percentage of custody and bail cases processed within administrative time limits.	Yes	6.4.1 To process 85 per cent of custody cases within 90 days. 6.4.2 To process 85 per cent of bail cases within 110 days.
7.1 Progress against agreed changes and timetables for change.	Yes	7.1.1 To demonstrate progress towards implementing agreed changes within agreed timetables reporting to the relevant Committees of the Board as required.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Timebound
No, there is no target	Yes	Yes, although the absence of a target facilitates this.	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
No, there is no target	Yes	Yes, although the absence of a target facilitates this.	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	There is no specific deadline noted.

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