



National Audit Office

NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD

Best Value Performance Plan for 2006-07

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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.