



National Audit Office

NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD

Continuous improvement arrangements

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SUMMARY

Background

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

2 Section 28 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 requires the Policing 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. The Policing Board shall

prepare and publish a performance plan for each financial year detailing how the continuous improvement arrangements are to be implemented. It shall also prepare and publish a performance summary.

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

3 The Comptroller and Auditor General is required to audit the performance plan and performance summary under Section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 and 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.

4 I have also reviewed the arrangements in place to secure continuous improvement under Section 30 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

5 This is my sixth report. The findings from my work are set out in detail in the following parts of my report:

- Part 1: The performance plan for 2008-09 and the performance summary for 2007-08; and
- Part 2: Continuous improvement arrangements.

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

Main findings of my review

6 On the performance plan 2008-09 and the performance summary for 2007-08:

- The Policing Board have prepared and published a performance plan and a performance summary in accordance with the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. My audit opinion is given at Annex B.
- The 30 performance targets for 2008-09 outlined in the performance plan are reasonable and have clear deadlines for achievement. However, 16 of the targets do not set a clear volume or percentage for improvement.
- Four performance targets have been dropped compared with the 2007-08 performance plan, but no information is provided as to the reasons why. A narrative explanation in the plan would be useful to readers, so they can follow from one year to the next why targets are changed.
- The Policing Board's assessment of its own and the Chief Constable's performance in 2007-08 is reasonable and includes clear detail on the outturn against each target. However, 11 targets are reported as not achieved, with no narrative to explain the reasons why.

7 On the continuous improvement arrangements:

- The Policing Board and the PSNI have decided not to continue with the Best Value methodology in support of their continuous improvement arrangements. Whilst the Policing Board and the PSNI have committed to explore potential tools and approaches used by other Police Services and to develop their own approach, there is no timeline in the 2008-09 performance plan as to when the new approach will be in place. In my view the new approach should be in place for 2009-10.

- The two Best Value reviews scheduled for 2007-08 were completed as planned, and have delivered recommendations for improvement.
- The Policing Board completed Post Implementation Reviews on three of the four individual Best Value reviews from 2005-06 and 2006-07. This exercise has highlighted that whilst implemented recommendations have delivered improvements there were 94 (48 per cent) of the 194 Best Value recommendations not implemented as at March 2008.
- The PSNI have developed a database which is intended to help track the progress towards the implementation of recommendations for improvement from external oversight bodies, including the Best Value recommendations.

Recommendations

- The Policing Board could further improve the information provided with the performance indicators and targets.
- The Policing Board and PSNI should ensure that where new systems are introduced the availability of timely and complete data for monitoring progress against targets in the performance plan is assured.
- The Policing Board should provide an explanation in their Annual Report, for each target not achieved, as to why it has not been achieved.
- The working group which advises on continuous improvement should meet at least three times a year.
- Lessons drawn from the Best Value post implementation reviews should be fed into the new methodology adopted for continuous improvement.
- The Policing Board needs to adopt a new approach to continuous improvement for PSNI for 2009-10, including reviews of the way in which functions are exercised, as required by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act.
- The Policing Board needs to formally adopt a methodology to secure continuous improvement in its own functions as required by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act.
- To support continuous improvement, the overview database will need to demonstrate satisfactory and timely clearance of recommendations, and to evidence reductions in the numbers of uncleared recommendations.