



**NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD**  
**Best Value Performance Plan**  
**for 2004-05**

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**Best Value Performance Plan**  
**for 2004-05**

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**John Bourn**  
**Comptroller and Auditor General**  
**National Audit Office**

**15 December 2004**

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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 Wales<sup>1</sup>, to provide an opportunity for the Board and Police Service to demonstrate that they have operated in the most efficient, effective and economical way.

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

**3** 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.

**4** 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.

**5** This year for the first time I have also reviewed the performance against the previous year's targets as set out in their plans<sup>2</sup> and in the Annual Report of the Northern Ireland Policing Board<sup>3</sup>.

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

- Part 1: Background;
- Part 2: The Best Value Performance Plan and performance in 2003-04;
- Part 3: The operation of arrangements for securing Continuous Improvement.

## Main findings of my review

**7** 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 except for making arrangements to assess the way in which the Board's own functions are exercised. My audit opinion is given at Annex A.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> The Northern Ireland Policing Board and Police Service of Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2004-07.

<sup>3</sup> Northern Ireland Policing Board Annual Report 2003-04 published 21 September 2004. Their website is at: [www.nipolicingboard.org.uk](http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk)

8 The Policing Board and the Police Service face a number of challenges in relation to implementing Continuous Improvement:

- **Best Value has been made a statutory requirement for the PSNI and Board to leverage better value for money and for this to be demonstrated.** PSNI have focussed their attention on implementing their key change initiatives rather than reviewing whether they have been achieving Best Value - the challenge for the Board, PSNI and their sponsor, the NIO, is to work together to assist each other to meet their objectives and statutory obligations;
- **Oversight of the PSNI and Board is performed by a large number of different bodies.** In addition to the NAO and HMIC other bodies include the Office of the Oversight Commissioner, the Human Rights Commission, the Police Ombudsman and now the Criminal Justice Inspectorate. A challenge for these bodies is not only directed to improving effectiveness but to ensuring that their work is taken seriously and assisting the Board and PSNI to meet all the demands on their time;

- **Best value remains in an embryonic stage within both the PSNI and Board.** In some ways this mirrors early experience of Best Value in England and Wales. Both have now recognised that more needs to be done to ensure Best Value is effectively embedded within both organisations. The setting up of a strategic working group by the new Chief Executive is a step in the right direction. External members include the NIO and the Association of Police Authorities (APA) as well as HMIC and NAO;
- **Following the Patten Report<sup>4</sup> PSNI has been undergoing significant development.** Key strategic change projects include a step-change in the provision of IT systems, staff reductions and civilianisation. These projects commenced before Best Value became a statutory requirement and have been excluded from Best Value during 2003-04. Partly as a result Best Value has been directed to minor areas and has been viewed by senior management as low priority with only two pilot reviews being completed.

4 A new Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland (The Patten Report).



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9** In relation to the Performance Plan and performance against the previous year's plan:
- The Best Value plan needs to be developed at a strategic level and supported by additional information to inform stakeholders as to the operation of the Best Value framework in Northern Ireland (paragraphs 2.6);
  - The Performance Plan should cover both the Board and the Police Service, as the Continuous Improvement initiative develops (paragraph 2.6);
  - The Board and Service should ensure they gain early sight of planned Home Office indicators, which, although not statutory in Northern Ireland, should provide PSNI and the Policing Board with alternative ways of enhancing its monitoring (paragraph 2.15);
  - Current performance standards (targets) should be reviewed to ensure that they are explicit and take account of prior year performance in setting challenging targets (paragraph 2.16).
- 10** On the working of the arrangements to secure continuous improvement (paragraph 3.11):
- The Policing Board working with the PSNI, supported as necessary by the Northern Ireland Office, need to become fully engaged and "own" Best Value in order that they can discharge their statutory responsibilities effectively;
  - The Policing Board's Audit and Best Value Committee should ensure that it receives sufficient information on a timely basis to enable it to monitor the Best Value process and outcomes and exercise its challenge function better. Protocols for PSNI and Policing Board staff need to be communicated to all to ensure everyone is aware of their responsibilities;
  - The Policing Board should be explicit about the coverage of Continuous Improvement in meeting its statutory responsibilities and ensure that the programme of work set out in the Best Value Performance Plan is completed in future years. To achieve this staffing levels need to be at an appropriate level of quality and quantity;
  - The methodology used by PSNI should be reviewed to ensure that it draws upon best practice developed for example in England and Wales;
  - The Policing Board and the PSNI should develop a communication strategy to ensure that all staff are aware of the Best Value methodology.
- 11** The Board and Police Service have accepted all my recommendations and I understand they have a range of initiatives in hand including:
- The development of a new Best Value methodology for use from April 2005;
  - Development of a communication strategy so that all staff have an awareness of Continuous Improvement objectives and initiatives;
  - Reviewing their choice and focus of Best Value reviews to cover significant functions and processes that deliver step changes in improving performance, service delivery and achieving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 12** These are positive signs that both the Board and Police Service are aware of the challenges they face and that they have taken them up. I look forward to reporting positive progress on the working of Continuous Improvement next year and in future years.

# PART ONE

## Background



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

**1.1** 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.

**1.2** The Performance Plan prepared under section 28 for the financial year beginning 1 April 2004 should:

- Detail how the Policing Board have made arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its 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.

**1.3** The Board's summary Best Value Performance Plan was published as part of their three year Policing Plan for 2004-07 on 8 March 2004. The Board's assessment of their own and the Chief Constable's performance in 2003-04 by reference to performance indicators was included in the Board's Annual Report for 2003-04<sup>5</sup>.

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

**1.4** 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 PSNI as part of their continuous improvement framework to enable the Police Service to identify action and review all aspects of their service.

5 Northern Ireland Policing Board Annual Report 2003-04 published 21 September 2004.

**1.5** As Comptroller and Auditor General my 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 improvement;
- 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

**1.6** The Comptroller and Auditor General is required to issue an annual report to the Policing Board, the Chief Constable of the PSNI and the Secretary of State on the 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.

**1.7** 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 PSNI their plans for 2004-05;
- 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)

**1.8** 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.

**1.9** 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 March 2004. I have worked closely with HMIC both during the inspection visit and throughout the audit of the Best Value Performance Plan. HMIC have reported their findings to the Board and the PSNI in March 2004. 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](http://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, but nevertheless 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 has from its work in England and Wales and from its force inspections of the PSNI;
- Reviews benefit from the operational experience of HMIC;
- HMIC can assist with my assessment of the reasonableness of the performance indicators and standards adopted by the Policing Board.

## PART TWO

### The Best Value Performance Plan and performance against the previous year's plan



## Introduction

**2.1** In Part Two I report whether

- The content and supporting documentation for the 2004-05 Summary Best Value Performance Plan published in the Policing Plan for 2004-07 meet their statutory obligations (paragraphs 2.2 to 2.6);
- Proposed performance indicators and standards are reasonable (paragraphs 2.7 to 2.15);
- The systems in place to produce performance information in support of their Best Value indicators and standards, are appropriate (paragraphs 2.16 to 2.19);
- The Board's assessment of its own and the Chief Constable's performance in 2003-04 by reference to performance indicators is reasonable (paragraphs 2.21 to 2.26).

The content and supporting documentation for the 2004-05 Summary Best Value Performance Plan meet the Board's statutory obligations except for making arrangements to assess the way in which its own functions are exercised

**2.2** 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 except for making arrangements to assess the way in which their own functions are exercised. My audit opinion is given at Annex A.

**2.3** A summary of the 2004-05 Best Value Performance Plan was contained within the three year Policing Plan. This document was distributed widely for example to Members of the Assembly, local councillors, libraries and the media as well as on the website of the Policing Board. The publication of a summary of the Best Value Plan is in accordance with the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 (Policing Plan) Regulations 2002. However a full Best Value Performance Plan has not been produced. For example, the summary of progress against the 2003-04 Best Value Review programme was not supported by a more detailed analysis that would have allowed the Policing Board's Audit and Best Value Committee to assess progress better.

**2.4** The legislation requires the Policing Board's Plan to include details of the arrangements made to secure continuous improvement. The summary contains basic information only and the public's understanding of the Performance Plan would be enhanced by the inclusion of additional information on the following matters:

- How reviews will be carried out and how the conclusions of completed reviews will be challenged;
- How the choice of reviews and the conclusions from the reviews are going to be challenged by the Policing Board;
- The audit arrangements for the Plan;
- How the PSNI and Policing Board will consult with the public.

**2.5** The 2004-05 Best Value Performance Plan includes a summary of progress against the previous year's Plan. The aim of this is to give the public an understanding of how the Best Value Review process has enhanced the efficiency, economy and effectiveness of the PSNI. However only narrative descriptions are given of how services have been improved rather than details of any efficiency savings.

## Recommendations

**2.6** The Board and Service should consider:

- Producing a full Performance Plan supporting the published summary plan for future years which will allow the Policing Board to give their stakeholders a more detailed view of how the Best Value Framework will operate in practice;
- The Performance Plan should cover both the Board and the Police Service, as the Continuous Improvement initiative develops;
- Developing their Best Value Performance Summary Plan for 2005-06. This will enable the public to have a clearer understanding of the Best Value regime, the methodologies involved, how they can expect to be consulted and how the accountability framework will operate;
- In future years, the usefulness of the Performance Plan could be enhanced by ensuring that the outcomes of Best Value Reviews have been quantified and reported.

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

**2.7** The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 requires that the Policing Board identifies performance indicators and performance standards in its Plan to measure performance of existing functions of the Policing Board and the PSNI. Section Two of the three year Policing Plan for 2004-07 includes a number of performance indicators and standards which have been determined by the Policing Board. Police service performance is also measured by a number of indicators showing their progress in implementing the recommendations of the Patten Report. These are contained in quarterly reports of the Office of the Oversight Commissioner (OOC), whose mandate is due to end in May 2005.

**2.8** Unlike in England and Wales, the Policing Board is not subject to the statutory best value indicators determined annually by the Home Office. Nevertheless the Policing Board use indicators broadly similar to those used in England and Wales and in some cases more detailed ones, for example there is a specific indicator relating to the level of homophobic crime. Some Home Office indicators are not used for example on sickness absence<sup>6</sup>, the levels of satisfaction with the police service of the victims of different types of crime, or the number of road traffic collisions resulting in death or serious injury. In some areas such as domestic burglary and vehicle crime, the Home Office indicators measure crime rates per household or head of population while the Board's indicators measure the number of types of crime in absolute terms. This can make it difficult for the public to benchmark the PSNI's performance with that of other police forces.

**2.9** Standards (targets) are set for each performance indicator. Some of these standards are deliverable over several years, but from the Plan it is not clear whether the intention is that performance will be gradually improved or achieved as a result of a single set of initiatives. Many police authorities utilise milestones to monitor the progress towards the achievement of standards. This enables earlier corrective action if necessary and the milestone methodology has been used extensively in police authorities in England and Wales.

**2.10** A number of the Best Value standards are not specific about what the PSNI should achieve. For example:

- Some standards focus on the requirements for the PSNI to report to the Policing Board on various strategies rather than achieving the planned outcomes from those strategies;
- Other standards require the PSNI to monitor the number of certain types of incident, but do not set a standard to reduce the number of incidents or improve the detection rate; and
- Other standards do relate to an increase in the number of detections for a type of offence, but do not state what level of increase is to be achieved.

**2.11** There are a number of reasons why the Policing Board has selected the non-specific standards. For example:

- Standards requiring the PSNI to report to the Policing Board on a particular strategy are often supported by a large number of unpublished standards, performance against which is included in internal reports to the Policing Board.
- For some types of incidents, such as incidents of a racist or homophobic nature, the Board believe it is more appropriate initially to have standards to monitor the number of incidents, as there may be problems of under-reporting that need to be addressed before standards to reduce the number of incidents are useful.

**2.12** However, the reasons why standards are not specific are not set out in the Policing Plan and readers will therefore not understand how achieving the standards will result in improvements to the service.

**2.13** A number of factors are taken into account when setting standards for future years. These include current performance against the indicator. Comparing the performance standards for 2004-05 to performance against the equivalent indicators in 2003-04 reveals that two of the standards on public satisfaction are actually lower than current performance. In both cases, the Policing Board did take current performance into account when considering what the standards for 2004-05 should be. Other factors resulted in the standards being set below current performance. Again, it is not obvious from comparing the standards published in the Policing Plan. There is a risk that stakeholders might think that the standards set were insufficiently challenging.

**2.14** The present indicators are not currently within the Best Value part of the Policing Plan. The Policing Board believe the Best Value programme is only one aspect of the change programme occurring in the police service at present and thus the indicators are wider-reaching than simply to reflect the impact of the Best Value program.

<sup>6</sup> Further information on the implications of high levels of sickness absence for an organisation can be found in my report *"The Management of Sickness Absence in the Prison Service"* (May 2004). As part of the Police Service's Human Resources Strategy data on levels of sick absence is already collected and the OOC publishes information on sickness absence in its reports. Information on sick absence is also published in the Policing Board's Annual Report.

## Recommendations

**2.15** The indicators used by the Board for future years could be improved as follows:

- Ensure that it considers the latest set of Home Office indicators when deciding on its own indicators for future years. As the Home Office indicators for 2004-05 were published after the Policing Board's own indicators, it may be useful to consult the Home Office before their indicators are published to ensure that likely changes to prior year indicators can be considered;
- Consider inclusion of other Home Office indicators, for example for the level of sickness in the police force;
- Consider developing and publishing milestones to enable progress towards achieving standards to be monitored more easily and corrective action taken if necessary;
- Where the Policing Board has chosen to set a standard that is not specific or below current levels of performance, it should consider setting out the reasons for this in the Policing Plan to demonstrate how the selected standard will result in improvements to the quality of service; and
- Specific reference to the Policing Board and PSNI performance indicators and targets should be made in the Best Value Performance Plan for 2005-06. Where appropriate, links should be made between individual Best Value Reviews (both planned and completed) noted in the Best Value Performance Plan and the indicators and standards by which they are to be measured.

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

**2.16** For a number of the performance indicators and standards, the Policing Board relies on the PSNI to collate the information that it uses to monitor performance. I have reviewed the systems that the PSNI has put in place to collect this information, and I am satisfied that those systems are appropriate.

**2.17** The Best Value performance indicators include a number of measures relating to public satisfaction with and confidence in the PSNI. Performance against the standard for public confidence levels in the equity of treatment (target 7.2.1) has previously been measured using the Community Attitudes Survey, where views are sought throughout the year. However, from April 2004 the information for this indicator will be obtained from a different source which will be the Omnibus Survey. This survey gives results from a snapshot of views and performance will be measured twice a year, with the most recent result published in the Policing Board's Annual Report. While this survey is cheaper than a continuous survey there is a risk that the results of a snapshot survey could be distorted by one-off events that have a short-term effect on public confidence.

**2.18** Altogether, performance information for three standards is taken from the Omnibus Survey. As already noted this survey is carried out twice a year. The performance information in the Annual Report has been taken from the October 2003 Omnibus Survey, although the results of the April 2004 Omnibus Survey were available before the Annual Report was prepared. The fieldwork for the April 2004 Omnibus Survey was carried out between 22 March and 23 April 2004, so it would have given information on levels of satisfaction at the end of the period reported on, rather than half-way through the year.

## Recommendations

**2.19** The Board should consider whether:

- It would be beneficial to have a continuous survey to measure public confidence levels in the equity of treatment rather than a snapshot survey which might reflect only the impact of events in the short term rather than the longer-term effectiveness of the Board and Service's actions and policies;
- If a snapshot survey is considered the best option, the most recent version should be used.

### The Board's assessment of its own and the Chief Constable's performance in 2003-04 by reference to performance indicators is reasonable

#### Inclusion of performance information in the Policing Board's Annual Report

**2.20** The Policing Board's Annual Report for 2003-04 contains the Board's assessment of its own and the Chief Constable's performance in the year 2003-04 by reference to performance indicators and an explanation of the extent that any performance standard that applied at any time during the year was not met. This information is contained in the section of the Annual Report entitled "Report on Police Performance 1 April 2003 - 31 March 2004".

**2.21** However, the Policing Board has not included performance in the year by reference to performance indicator 6.1 ("The number of officers available for duty within district command units").

**2.22** No explanations are provided for why, in some cases, actual performance has varied from the standard set. These would provide useful additional information to the public and allow the Board to highlight particularly successful initiatives where actual performance was better than the standard set. Underperformance against a standard could be put in context and details could also be given of any initiatives that have been put in place to address this.

### Performance information on standards relating to long-term strategies

**2.23** The Best Value Performance Plan for 2003-04 included a number of standards that related to the PSNI's implementation of long-term strategies, such as the Workforce Plan and the Training and Development Strategy.

**2.24** As part of their change programme, the Police Service have embarked on four major departmental reviews covering Human Resources; Training, Education and Development; Finance and Resource Management; and Information and Computer Services. The Police Service does not extend Best Value to the areas covered by these departmental reviews until after they have been completed. Instead they intend to use the Best Value review methodology to demonstrate the benefits that these departmental reviews have achieved. Information about these reviews is not currently included in the Best Value element of the three year Policing Plan. It is not, therefore, within the scope of my report to comment on the effect that they have had on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which the functions of the Chief Constable have been exercised.

**2.25** The Policing Board has included performance information for these standards, but this focuses on whether or not the PSNI has met the requirements on reporting progress to the Policing Board rather than how successfully the strategies have been, or are being, implemented.

## Recommendations

**2.26** The Policing Board and Service should consider:

- In order to comply with the requirements of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, whether their performance information covers all of the indicators that applied during the year.
- Including more details of how the PSNI is implementing these departmental reviews and how they will improve the quality of policing services. Such details would also allow the Policing Board to demonstrate to stakeholders how it is exercising its challenge function;
- Including explanations of why performance is above or below the standard set.

## PART THREE

### Operation of the arrangements to secure Continuous Improvement



**3.1** In this part of my report I have reviewed:

- The context within which the Board and Service have to operate the requirements for Continuous improvement (paragraphs 3.2 to 3.3);
- The Role of the Policing Board and working with the Police Service (paragraphs 3.4 to 3.5);
- The selection of the Best Value review programme (paragraphs 3.6 to 3.7);
- The Best Value Review Methodology (paragraph 3.8);
- Progress against the 2003-04 Best Value Performance Plan (paragraphs 3.9 to 3.10).

## The context within which the Board and Service have to operate the requirements for Continuous Improvement

**3.2** Best Value has been made a statutory requirement for the PSNI and NIPB to leverage better value for money and for this to be demonstrated. PSNI have focussed their attention on implementing their key change initiatives rather than reviewing whether they have been achieving Best Value - the challenge for the Board, PSNI and their sponsor, the NIO, is to work together to assist each other to meet their objectives and statutory obligations.

**3.3** Oversight of the PSNI and NIPB is performed by a large number of different bodies. The PSNI are scrutinised by a large number of different bodies. In addition to the NAO and HMIC other bodies include the Office of the Oversight Commissioner, the Human Rights Commission, the Police Ombudsman and now the Criminal Justice Inspectorate. A challenge for these bodies is to ensure their work is relevant, taken seriously and assists the Board and PSNI to meet all the demands on their time.

## The Role of the Policing Board and working with the Police Service

**3.4** Best value remains in an embryonic stage within both the PSNI and Board. In some ways this mirrors early experience of Best Value in England and Wales. However, to date the Policing Board has been insufficiently involved in Best Value at both the strategic and the working level. At the strategic level the Policing Board has not played any role yet in the selection of the Best Value review programme published in the Best Value Performance Plan, nor has the Audit and Best Value Committee received regular, formal updates from the PSNI in respect of the review programme that would have enabled it to monitor the progress of Best Value reviews and challenge their findings better. At the working level the Board and the PSNI have yet to develop mutually agreed working protocols for performing Best Value reviews. Such protocols would aid understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Policing Board and its officials.

**3.5** The NIPB and PSNI have now recognised that more needs to be done to ensure Best Value is effectively embedded within both organisations. The setting up of a strategic working group by the new Chief Executive to advise on developing an effective continuous improvement environment within their respective organisations is a step in the right direction. Representatives include the NIO and the Association of Police Authorities (APA) as well as HMIC and NAO.

## The selection of the Best Value review programme

**3.6** Following the Patten Report PSNI has been undergoing significant development. Key strategic change projects include a step-change in the provision of IT systems, staff reductions and civilianisation. These projects commenced before Best Value became a statutory requirement and have been excluded from Best Value during 2003-04. Partly as a result Best Value has been directed to minor areas and is viewed by senior management as low priority, internally facing and limited in scope. As such, they offer only very limited scope for strategic improvements in the way that the PSNI delivers its services.

**3.7** The continuous improvement is delivered through a series of Best Value reviews selected by the PSNI. A Best Value Review Programme covering 2004-05 is included in the three year Policing Plan for 2004-07. The Best Value reviews to be carried out are selected using a review priority matrix, which weights elements of service provision across five criteria. This matrix has not been updated since it was introduced two years ago although it has been used to select the Best Value review programme up to and including 2006-2007. There is a risk that areas that have become more of a high priority over the last two years will not receive adequate coverage if the current published Best Value reviews are followed.

## The Best Value Review Methodology

**3.8** The PSNI adopted its Best Value methodology in December 2001. It has not been updated since its introduction and has not taken account of good practice developed in England and Wales as set out in the Home Office Best Value and Planning Guidance 2003. It might also be difficult to apply this methodology to larger initiatives.

## Progress against the 2003-04 Best Value Performance Plan

**3.9** In 2003-04, the PSNI did not complete the programme of work set out in its Best Value Performance Plan for that year. Although two pilot reviews were carried out, neither of them fully used PSNI's Best Value methodology. No post-implementation reviews have been carried out to measure the effectiveness of the review, and there are no agreed protocols by which the Policing Board can monitor the progress of recommendations and the impact of Best Value Reviews on service delivery. The team responsible for delivering Best Value at both the Policing Board and the PSNI has been below complement and this has had a knock-on effect on carrying out the programme published in the three year Policing Plan for 2003-06.

**3.10** The level of knowledge about the Best Value programme in PSNI staff who have not been directly involved in a Best Value Review is limited. Staff members are unclear what the Best Value programme is and how it will improve service delivery. This could result in staff not being fully engaged in future reviews

## Recommendations

3.11 These include:

- **On the Role of the Policing Board and their work with the Police Service**
  - The Policing Board working with the PSNI, supported as necessary by the Northern Ireland Office, need to become fully engaged and "own" Best Value in order that they can discharge their statutory responsibilities effectively;
  - The Audit and Best Value Committee should ensure that it receives sufficient information on a timely basis to ensure that it is able to monitor the Best Value process and its outcomes, and to exercise its challenge function better. This should include input into the selection of the Best Value Review programme and regular written updates on the progress on individual reviews and their outcomes;
  - At the working level, Policing Board officials should be in regular contact with the PSNI Best Value team in order to ensure that the Policing Board has timely, meaningful involvement in all aspects of Best Value;

- The establishment of working protocols for Policing Board and PSNI staff at all levels would help to clarify the role of the Policing Board and its officials. This would assist a fuller engagement with the Best Value process and ensure that each party was aware of its responsibilities. I understand that the organisations plan to agree such protocols in the near future.
- **On the selection of the Best Value review programme, improvements could be made to the process by which the programme is selected:**
  - The priorities that are taken into account when setting the Best Value review programme should be reviewed regularly by the Policing Board to ensure that they reflect the current priorities for the PSNI;
  - The Policing Board should reconsider its Best Value Performance Plan for 2004-05 and beyond, and ensure that it includes reviews with the potential to bring about strategic improvement to policing services.
- **The Best Value Review Methodology**
  - PSNI has been reviewing its Best Value methodology and they should ensure that it draws upon best practice highlighted by Home Office guidance. Future versions of the methodology should ensure greater use of the “Five Cs” (Challenge, Consult, Compare, Compete and Collaborate) in a focused manner. In particular, an appropriate level of challenge by the Policing Board and external consultation with the public, police associations and District Policing Partnerships (DPPs), should be included.
- **Progress against the 2003-04 Best Value Performance Plan.** The Policing Board should consider changes to ensure that the programme of work set out in the Best Value Performance Plan is completed in future years, and that the review programme brings about step improvements to policing services:
  - Both the Policing Board and the PSNI have increased the staff levels within their Best Value teams during 2003-04 and are continuing to recruit additional staff. Achieving an appropriate level of resources will require increased commitment to achieving the Best Value programme from the senior management of both organisations;
  - To ensure that the potential benefits of each Best Value Review are realised, a Performance Improvement Plan for each review should be drawn up with the active involvement of the Policing Board. Each plan should include agreed and realistic timescales, milestone dates, and outcome measures. The outcome measures should link into the Best Value performance indicators and should allow the impact of Best Value Reviews on service delivery to be measured objectively;
  - The agreed standards in the Performance Improvement Plans should act as the basis on which the Policing Board monitors the implementation of the recommendations of the completed Best Value Reviews;
  - The Policing Board and the PSNI should develop a communication strategy to ensure that all staff are aware of the Best Value methodology and the improvements to service delivery resulting from the Best Value programme.

# ANNEX 1

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

(as reported in the Northern Ireland Policing Board and Police Service of Northern Ireland Policing Plan for 2004-07<sup>7</sup> and relevant sections on their performance on Best Value achieved reported in their Annual Report for 2003-04<sup>8</sup>).

### 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 31st March 2005;
- the performance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland for the year 2003-04 against the performance indicators and standards in the Best Value Performance Plan.

### Opinion

#### Basis of this 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.

<sup>7</sup> The Northern Ireland Policing Board and Police Service of Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2004-07.

<sup>8</sup> Northern Ireland Policing Board 2003-2004 Annual Report published 21 September 2004.

### Audit of the performance indicator information for the year 2003-04

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 years Best Value Performance Plan. I obtained sufficient evidence to satisfy me that the summary 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 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 except for making arrangements to assess the way in which their own functions are exercised.
- the performance indicators and standards included in the Best Value Performance Plan for the year ended March 31st 2004 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 Section 28 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 as amended by Section 9 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2003. The Northern Ireland Policing Board publish this information within their 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**  
15 December 2004

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