

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary



Performance Management Police Service of Northern Ireland

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PSNI – Performance Management

Introduction

This inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) focused on performance management which is viewed as being critical for the effective delivery of a range of services. It was part of a new risk based approach to inspections focusing on key areas instead of a broad approach looking at all areas of delivery. The other inspection activity that will be covered by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) in future years will include the suite of protective services, neighbourhood policing and leadership.

Wherever possible, HMIC undertake to carry out joint inspections with the Criminal Justice Inspectorate for Northern Ireland (CJINI), thereby minimising, as much as possible, the disruption to the operational running of the service. This inspection was an exception; undertaken as part of an overall thematic inspection looking at performance management across the United Kingdom.

Following work undertaken by the police crime standards directorate (PCSD) in 2006, PSNI can now be compared with a most similar force (MSF) group which will enable direct comparison across a broad range of indicators. The only caveat is that some of the data, utilised in England and Wales to make comparisons, is not collected in Northern Ireland or is collected in a different format and there are legislative differences around hate crime, fixed penalty notices and crime and disorder reduction which must be borne in mind when making direct comparisons.

The MSF group for PSNI consists of the following forces:

- Nottinghamshire
- Greater Manchester
- West Yorkshire
- Northumbria
- West Midlands

Whilst HMIC acknowledges the unique nature of policing in Northern Ireland, the service has accepted that in performance terms, comparison against the MSF and most similar basic command unit group (MSBCU) is appropriate albeit until PSNI subscribes to iQuanta any comparison will be problematic. The gradings used for forces in Great Britain are not utilised when assessing the PSNI.

The fieldwork phase of this assessment was undertaken in December 2007 by HMIC staff on behalf of Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI), Mr Ken Williams, CVO, CBE, QPM, BA, and involved reviewing a wide range of documentary evidence, conducting a series of both structured interviews and focus groups at headquarters and in district command units and interviewing or obtaining written feedback from a wide range of partner agencies and other stakeholders.

HMI wishes to thank the members of the Service and the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) for their assistance in supplying information, conducting self-assessment and setting aside time to speak to HMIC staff. The assessment would not have been possible without their assistance and contribution.

National Contextual Factors

There is no single accepted model for performance management across the police service nationally, but any such model or framework adopted by an individual police organisation must be fit for purpose. Ideally, all police organisations should be able to demonstrate that individuals at every level understand their contribution to converting resources into agreed delivery and understand how they are held to account for their contribution towards delivering the organisation's objectives. On a daily basis, first-line supervisors should monitor, support and quality assure the performance of their teams. At the other end of the spectrum, chief officer led performance meetings should hold senior managers to account and confirm that performance improvement is being delivered. Robust leadership, a commitment to improvement and reliable information systems are all critical factors in effective performance management.

Contextual factors

The basis of the accountability mechanisms against which the PSNI operates, flow from Chapter 6 of the report of the Independent Commission on Policing For Northern Ireland entitled *A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland* and more commonly known as the Patten Report.

This report resulted in the formulation of the NIPB (Paragraph 6.2) requiring it, amongst a raft of wider requirements, to 'hold the Chief Constable to account for any issue pertaining to the performance of his function or that of the police service' (paragraph 6.22). In addition, the Patten Report also introduced to Northern Ireland, the 'formal' concept of closer working with the community via district policing partnerships (DPPs). At Paragraph 6.30 a requirement was introduced for regular meetings between the DPP and the district police commander, at which the police should present reports and answer questions and the board should reflect community concerns and priorities to the police'.

When the PSNI was inaugurated in 2001, the Service was organised around the 26 local council structures that existed in Northern Ireland at the time. There were 29 DCUs in total, with four being within the city of Belfast. The sheer number of DCUs made effective accountability difficult due to the number of meetings necessary to fulfil Patten requirements. A government instigated review of public administration since 2001 has recommended that the council structure across Northern Ireland should be rationalised and at the time of the inspection one option under active consideration was for 11 councils. In April 2007, the Police Service rationalised its operational structure to eight larger districts each under the command of a chief superintendent. These officers are held to account by two regional assistant chief constables (ACCs). It should be noted that whilst the PSNI has rationalised its front line operational delivery mechanisms, local government within Northern Ireland continues to be delivered against the 26 district council structure. The 'new' district commanders and 'their' command teams remain legally bound to 'service' this local authority structure and the associated DPPs. This continues to include the requirement to produce 29 local policing plans annually.

Specialist headquarters departments, such as human resources, finance and support services, criminal justice, crime operations and operational support are overseen by officers at assistant chief constable or police staff chief officer equivalent level. There is also one ACC with responsibility for all historic inquiries.

Part 1 of the Policing Plan for Northern Ireland (2007-10) Paragraph 1.9 states:

'The policing board holds the Chief Constable to account for the policing objectives, performance indicators and targets contained in the plan. The Chief Constable and deputy chief constable in turn hold the assistant chief constables and chief officers to account ensuring that they are achieving the targets set out in the plan and their respective business plans. The ACCs and chief officers, in addition, hold their branch heads to account for the delivery of their business plans. Similarly the two regional ACCs review the performance of the DCUs and DCU commanders to make sure the targets in the plan and their respective local policing plans are being addressed. Finally, each of the local DPPs will monitor each DCU's performance through DPP meetings in public.'

Policing Board

At the highest level the NIPB holds the Chief Constable directly to account for all policing issues at regular meetings throughout the year (minimum 8 per annum). He is supported by his chief officer team who are also often asked to report on specific issues appertaining to their particular portfolio. In addition to reporting to the full board, the NIPB committee structure also receives reports from the Service and can hold any member of the chief officer team accountable for specific issues.

Chief Constable's Forum (CCF)

This four weekly meeting, chaired by the Chief Constable, is the forum at which the ACCs and their police staff chief officer colleagues, are held to account for performance delivery. The forum also discusses corporate tasking and co-ordinating issues and other issues of concern.

Since the introduction of the new district structure, the accountability mechanism for the districts has been revised and is focused around a three-tier approach as follows:

Recommendation 78 (Patten) formal accountability meetings

These are held at six monthly intervals, in May and November, where the regional ACCs hold the district commanders and his/her senior managers to account for issues pertaining to the district including crime related policing plan targets, resource usage, corporate risk and self-assessment. Currently, the performance information used to support this process is standardised in line with that used by the commander to service existing DPP commitments. The commanders have the discretion to invite 'outside' guests to these meetings including NIPB members and DPP representatives.

Regional Management meetings

Regional management meetings take place on a bimonthly basis commencing in February each year and running through to December. These meetings, between the regional ACCs and the district commanders, address performance trends and include regional support to the operational districts. They also involve the Chief Constable and/or the deputy chief constable together with representatives from the crime operations department to discuss strategic matters driven by service-wide tactical assessments.

Volume Crime Performance Conference

Four such conferences take place annually, commencing in January each year, and then in March, July and September. The focus is on service performance and future trend analysis. The primary contributors to these fora are the Analysis Centre, the central statistics unit and scientific support services. They are attended by the regional ACCs, district command personnel and the Chief Constable/deputy chief constable. Crime operations department together with representatives from the two operational command units (OCUs) rural and urban also attend where appropriate.

FINDINGS

Strengths

- The NIPB holds the Chief Constable directly to account for the delivery of an effective, efficient and impartial policing service and for the delivery of the policing plan on a regular basis. The Chief Constable and other ACPO level officers are also effectively held to account on specific issues through the board's committee structure.
- Additional mechanisms which ensure the Service is held publicly accountable for its actions include that of the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (OPONI).
- The minutes and agenda of the CCF evidence the consideration of the Service's performance by the chief officer group. All key areas in the policing plan are considered and individual ACCs held to account by the Chief Constable for delivery within their specific portfolio. The function of the CCF is to also undertake the strategic tasking and coordinating meeting at which corporate priorities are determined. Short term issues of concern are also addressed.
- There is a vision and strategy for the service that is widely advertised across the organisation and which is generally understood by staff. The annual policing plan forms the basis of the Service's medium-term strategy. This is reviewed annually in partnership with NIPB, and includes consultation with the DPPs to ensure that the views of local members of the community are aired and considered in terms of the Service's priorities and objectives.
- The centrally located HQ analysis centre has staff 'embedded' within the district and OCU structure. This arrangement affords the opportunity for direct 'cross fertilisation' between HQ and the operational districts. Each district has an action strategy relating to the 'key' performance areas. Direct linkages are made between these 'key' areas of business and NIM based tasking and coordinating processes.
- The process for the development of the annual policing plan includes consultation each September with the DPPs to identify common themes that apply across Northern Ireland, as well as a range of other inputs including surveys, feedback from reference groups and the National Policing Plan. There is a planning day involving the Service and the NIPB where all the issues are discussed. This results in the development of Part 2 of the policing plan, together with the targets contained therein (also see WIP section regarding the development of three year targets).
- Considerable evidence was adduced which confirmed that a culture of improvement exists within the Service. Significant efficiency gains have been achieved in terms of staffing levels, driven by the improving political and security situations and the requirements of the Patten report for the re-structuring of the service. At the local level, staff are alert to the absolute requirement to improve levels of victim satisfaction and the recurring joint PSNI/NIPB surveys confirm the progress being made in this regard. The development of the Service's citizen focus agenda is expected to further

enhance levels of victim satisfaction.

- The formal performance accountability structure, which has recently been revised, consists of section 78 meetings, regional meetings and volume crime performance conferences. There is one or other of the meetings every month as well as informal meetings between the district commanders and the relevant regional ACCs. The overall impact is one of effective accountability of district staff by the relevant ACCs. The style of the meetings attended was relaxed and informative rather than confrontational but searching questions were in evidence. There was effective debate on corporate issues of concern such as the number of MITs and relations with the PPS.
- There was evidence of the desire to identify best practice at the regional management meeting where guest speakers from Northumbria had been invited to give a presentation on volume crime performance. There were also debates relating to alcohol fuelled violence and the high-time economy. The meetings attended and the minutes viewed provided evidence of a Service that is keen to identify best practice from both within the organisation and from external sources and where applicable these are introduced locally.
- NIPB and DPP members are invited and often attend the section 78 meetings. Performance against the corporate policing plan is the key driver for accountability, however the minutes also indicated that local issues relating to the local policing plans that are particularly relevant to the DPPs are also discussed and performance at this more local level monitored and examined.

Work in progress

- The Service uses the annual policing plan (which covers three year timeframes) and the targets contained within it, as the main driver for operational performance improvement. The Board and the Service are currently exploring the feasibility of setting three year targets within the plan, e.g. to reduce reported crime to under 100,000 occurrences by 2010/11. NIPB are keen, however to retain agreed annual milestones.
- The transition to the new district structure has highlighted a lack of corporacy in relation to how some data is collected and quality assured, eg domestic disputes, that inform broader work undertaken by the analysis centre. NIM products are now standardised as are the performance and accountability documents (PAC) but they depend on the submission of accurate data. There is some evidence to indicate differences between districts and areas regarding the means by which statistical information is captured and quality assured. The service is alert to this issue and with the introduction of the Niche IT system, has started to migrate towards a Service-wide 'corporate' approach to data capture and development.
- The corporate development department is currently establishing service-wide quality of service standards.
- The NIPB carries out public satisfaction surveys across Northern Ireland twice each year. The most recent survey, in December 2007, revealed an

improvement on the very positive survey result earlier in 2007. At present the information is collected and presented for the whole of Northern Ireland. There is a view that having satisfaction data at a more local level would support the development of neighbourhood policing. This occurs in forces in England and Wales and has been found to be beneficial. HMI would support any move in this direction.

Areas for Improvement

- Though the Service has an annual performance review (APR) mechanism, conflicting evidence was adduced about its overall value and application to staff across the 'whole' organisation. Feedback confirmed that the APR is currently not linked to national occupational standards, some targets within the review process are not SMART and that there is little performance management of police staff. APR mechanisms are an important tool in any performance-driven organisation and HMI considers that the Service should review its APR processes to ensure that they are not only applied corporately to all staff (police officers and police staff members alike), but that best use of the system is being made to 'drive' individual performance and the achievement of corporate objectives.
- The Service's three tier performance and accountability structure, in particular the section 78 meetings, is comprehensive if judged by the areas of business reviewed, but opinion was split on whether all the meetings amount to robust performance accountability or are actually focused more towards performance monitoring. Both the bimonthly regional meeting and quarterly volume crime meeting monitor performance and enable discussion of key issues and identify best practice but do not formally hold people to account and drill down in to issues as effectively as the section 78 meetings. The frequency of the latter is every 6 months and there was evidence adduced that this may not be frequent enough. Following the decision to move to one region by April 2010 it may also be appropriate for the Service to review the frequency of all the meetings in the cycle to ensure that more regular section 78 meetings are held, even if this is at the expense of the less accountable, but still important, bimonthly regional meeting or quarterly volume crime meeting. This would ensure a formal focus on district accountability on a more regular basis.
- The three tier approach for performance management and accountability of the eight operational districts is not replicated for the Service's HQ departments. These are somewhat disparate with no single model being adopted to hold heads of departments to account for the performance of 'their' units. HMI acknowledges that there is evidence of performance management taking place within these units but as long as the model remains non-corporate he questions whether maximum benefit to the objectives of the organisation can be achieved.
- The Service now has an empirically determined MSF group against which its operational performance can be compared directly. No evidence was adduced to confirm that the Service subscribes to the iQuanta database, albeit some comparison against the MSF does take place. HMI does acknowledge that the MSF group has been used to compare performance in specific instances, eg scientific support outturn measures, sanction detection

rates. He suggests that wherever possible comparison against MSF forces should now be developed in terms of direct iQuanta linkage and used routinely to assess the performance of the PSNI against its peers.

- Whilst acknowledging that the ongoing debate in relation to the review of public administration may ultimately influence the district structure in the PSNI, HMI still contends that comparison against most similar BCUs in England and Wales could be effective in gauging operational effectiveness at a local level. The Service should seek to become a contributor to the national performance database (iQuanta) which proves 'real time' comparison of performance at both a corporate and local level.
- Responsibility for inspection, audit, business improvement is the responsibility of a number of disparate units spread across the organisational structure. The Best Value unit and Inspection and Review are currently aligned under ACC (OS) and a continuous improvement unit (CIU) reports direct to the DCC. The CORE project is to embark on phase 2 of the HQ review and the opportunity now exists to examine, as part of that review, the role, function, reporting lines and resources of these units. Best Value, as a methodology for achieving continuous improvement, is no longer undertaken within England and Wales forces and the Service may also wish to consider if these posts can be more effectively utilised within the CIU to examine those business processes that are key to an effective change programme.
- The allocation of staff is undertaken through a resource allocation model that is managed by the central human resources department. Feedback received raised questions about whether the model is understood by staff working within the districts, takes account of the risks facing the service or allocates staff in line with the business plan. As a result, challenges to resource allocation decisions are made on a case-by-case basis by district commanders to the relevant regional ACC. The Service should review the model to ensure that its current application is not actually hindering effective operational performance through inappropriate staff allocation.
- Strong messages were received that due to the lack of sophistication in the existing performance monitoring regime at a local level, instances can be highlighted where poor individual performance is not being challenged robustly. Some districts have recognised this weakness and are currently exploring the potential to develop personal performance indicators for their staff; the approach is, however, fragmented. Whilst HMI acknowledges the initiative being shown within some districts, he emphasises the need to develop a system that can be applied corporately and consistently across the whole organisation that also engages the staff affected, in the development of the process. This should take full account of national good practice relating to the monitoring of individual performance. (See HMIC thematic report on Performance Management January 2008).

APPENDIX

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

ACC	assistant chief constable
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
APR	annual performance review
BCU	basic command unit
CJINI	Criminal Justice Inspectorate for Northern Ireland
CIU	continuous improvement unit
DCC	deputy chief constable
DCU	district command unit
DPP	district policing partnership
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
iQuanta	a web-based tool for policing performance information and analysis
MSF	most similar force
NIM	national intelligence model
NIPB	Northern Ireland Policing Board
OCU	operational command unit
OPONI	Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
PCSD	Police Crime Standards Directorate
SMART	specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely