



Northern Ireland Audit Office

MEDIA RELEASE

Continuous improvement arrangements in policing

Mr Kieran Donnelly, the Comptroller and Auditor General, today issued his report to the Assembly on continuous improvement arrangements in policing. The report examines the performance summary of the Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in 2016-17 and the Policing Plan for 2017-18.

Mr Donnelly said “The Board and PSNI need to continue to develop appropriate outcome-based indicators. In implementing its continuous improvement projects, the PSNI must ensure that timescales set for the full completion and implementation of projects are realistic, and that sufficient resources are available to complete projects as planned. This is particularly relevant in the current environment of austerity, where the PSNI faces significant resourcing challenges.”

Background

As the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) for Northern Ireland, he is required under section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 to audit the Policing Plan and performance summary and to send a report to the Policing Board, the Chief Constable and the Department of Justice for Northern Ireland (the Department). This report from the C&AG reviews the systems underpinning the plan and performance summary. It is not an audit of PSNI's performance.

Main Findings

The C&AG has given an unqualified audit opinion on the Policing Plan for 2017-18 and the performance summary for 2016-17.

- In the absence of an NI Executive, no new political members were appointed and the Board has not been legally constituted. The 2017-18 Policing Plan was agreed by the full Board before the last election and the PSNI has been reporting performance against measures in the plan since April 2017.
- The Board's Business Plan for 2016-17 included 47 targets, spread across four main objectives. All of the targets contained in the 2016-17 Plan were reported as either fully or partially achieved. Of the 47 targets, 38 are reported as fully achieved (81 per cent) and nine were reported as partially achieved (19 per cent).
- The PSNI's annual report for 2016-17 sets out its performance against the Policing Plan. The report adequately reflects the objectives, measures and outcomes included in the Policing Plan. This year's report shows an improvement in presentation, more clearly linking objectives, measures and outcomes to those included in the Policing Plan.

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- The progress on reducing the numbers of indicators and measures and moving to an outcomes based approach is a welcome development and aligns with the new government-wide approach set out in the Executive's draft Programme for Government (PfG). The Board and the PSNI, through engagement and partnership with other stakeholders, need to continue to identify appropriate outcomes, indicators and baselines that clearly demonstrate progress against Strategic Outcomes.
- In his 2017 report, the C&AG raised concerns over the delivery of key projects that underpin the '*ServiceFirst*' programme. The delivery of the objectives and completion of the original *ServiceFirst* projects is not clear and the consistent subsuming of projects into new or other projects, which are also branded as *ServiceFirst* projects, makes an assessment of the delivery of objectives difficult.

Notes for Editors

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is Head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Audit Office). He and the NIAO are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of Government Departments and a range of other public sector bodies. He has statutory authority to report to the Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and public bodies use their resources. His reports are published as Assembly papers.
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 its functions, and those of the Chief Constable, are exercised, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The Policing Board is required to prepare and publish a performance plan for each financial year, detailing how continuous improvement arrangements are to be implemented. Under the Act, the Board must also prepare and publish a performance summary.
3. The Board's responsibilities for progressing the development, consultation and publication of a Policing Plan and Performance Plan are core functions of a properly constituted Policing Board. As a pragmatic solution the Department has recommended that the 2017-18 Policing Plan (which was agreed by the full Board before the last election) should be rolled forward to 2018-19. The 2018-19 year falls within the span of the Board's Strategic Outcomes for Policing 2016-2020, therefore the approved strategic context is already in place.
4. The Policing Plan 2017-18 sets out the second year of the 2016-20 four year strategy and has been refreshed, resulting in the Board reducing the number of its Strategic Outcomes from 12 to nine, merging three of the outcomes included in the Strategic Outcomes document. These nine Strategic Outcomes are supported by 25 measures (reduced from 26 in 2016-17).
5. *ServiceFirst* is a large organisational change programme set up in October 2013 and designed to make PSNI more efficient in its management of risks. It encompasses a range of projects covering every major business area including Review of Public Administration and Restructuring; Public Protection Units; Operational Support Department; and Intelligence Branch.
6. The report is available on the Audit Office website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk. The report is embargoed until 00.01 hrs on 27 February 2018.
7. Background briefing can be obtained from the Audit Office by contacting Neil Gray (028 9025 4345) or Sean Beattie (028 9025 1091).