

Continuous improvement arrangements in policing

Performance Summary 2023-24
Annual Performance Plan 2024-25

**Report by the Comptroller
and Auditor General**

Published
13 May 2025

**For further information about the
Northern Ireland Audit Office:**

Northern Ireland Audit Office
106 University Street
Belfast, BT7 1EU

028 9025 1000
info@niauditoffice.gov.uk
www.niauditoffice.gov.uk

© Northern Ireland
Audit Office 2025

This report has been prepared under Section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

The Comptroller and Auditor General is the head of the Northern Ireland Audit Office. She and the Northern Ireland Audit Office are totally independent of Government.

She certifies the accounts of all Government Departments and a wide range of other public sector bodies; and she has statutory authority to report to the Northern Ireland Assembly on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and other bodies have used their resources.

Dorinnia Carville *Northern Ireland Audit Office*
Comptroller and Auditor General *13 May 2025*

Contents

Executive Summary		5
Part One:	Background	10
Part Two:	Performance Summary 2023-24 and the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25	13
Part Three:	Operation of the Continuous Improvement Programme	20
Appendices:		24
	Appendix 1	
	The Comptroller and Auditor General's Review of the Board's Assessment of Performance Measures	25
	Appendix 2	
	The Comptroller and Auditor General's certificate and opinion to the Assembly on the Northern Ireland Policing Board's Performance Summary and Performance Plan	28
	Appendix 3	
	Progress on recommendations in the Comptroller and Auditor General's report	30

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Background

1. The Northern Ireland Policing Board (“the Board”) was established on 4 November 2001 by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 (“the Act”).
2. Section 28 of the Act requires the 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 Board is required to prepare and publish an Annual Performance Plan for each financial year, as well as an assessment of performance (“Performance Summary”) in respect of the previous year.

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

3. As the Comptroller and Auditor General (“C&AG”) for Northern Ireland, I am required under section 29 of the Act to audit the Performance Summary and Annual Performance Plan, and to send a report to the Board, the Chief Constable, and the Department of Justice (“the Department”).

The C&AG’s certificate and audit opinion to the Assembly on the Northern Ireland Policing Board’s Performance Summary and Performance Plan

4. In accordance with Section 29 of the Act as amended, I certify that I have audited the Board’s:
 - Performance Summary for the year ended 31 March 2024; and
 - Annual Performance Plan for the year ended 31 March 2025.

Basis of my opinion

5. I planned and performed my work to obtain all the information and explanations that I considered necessary in order to provide opinions on whether the Board has prepared and published:
 - i. A **Performance Summary** of the Board’s assessment of its and the Chief Constable’s performance in 2023-24; and
 - ii. An **Annual Performance Plan** for 2024-25 which contains details of how arrangements in place to secure continuous improvement for its functions and those of the Chief Executive are to be implemented.
6. My work included examination, on a test basis, of the evidence supporting performance actions, indicators and measures set out in the above documents. Refer to **Part Two** of this report for further detail

Main findings of my review

7. I have given an unqualified audit opinion on the Performance Summary for the year ended 31 March 2024 and the Annual Performance Plan for the year ended 31 March 2025 (Appendix 2). I have raised three recommendations for the attention of the Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland ("PSNI"), details of which are outlined in the following paragraphs.

On Performance Summary 2023-24

8. Performance actions, indicators and measures are published for both the Board and the PSNI in the Board's Business Plan and the Annual Performance Plan respectively.
9. The Board has the same three overarching outcomes aligning both their Corporate Plan 2023-2025 - Business Plan 2023-2024 ("Business Plan 2023-24") and their Policing Plan 2020-2025 and Annual Performance Plan 2023/24 ("Annual Performance Plan 2023-24"). These are:
- i. We have a safe community;
 - ii. We have confidence in policing; and
 - iii. We have engaged and supportive communities.
10. The Business Plan 2023-24 included 14 performance actions underpinning four corporate objectives.
11. The Annual Performance Plan 2023-24 for the PSNI sets out nine indicators with 16 performance measures.
12. The Board has reported its own performance summary in its Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 ("the Board's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24"), noting that of the 14 actions outlined in the Business Plan 2023-24 all were 'achieved' apart from action D1 'Scope and procure a third-party supplier to assist with the development of bespoke revised guidance to Selected Medical Practitioners and Independent Medical Referee', which was assessed as 'partially achieved' and will require additional resources and time to be achieved.
13. The Board's Policing Plan 2020-2025 Annual Performance Assessment 2023-2024 ("Annual Assessment 2023-24") provides the Board's assessment of the PSNI's performance and delivery of the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24, and concludes on the status of each measure at year-end as having been achieved or otherwise.
14. For each measure within the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24, the Annual Assessment 2023-24 includes an impacts update, initiatives to improve performance, detailed information, and an assessment of 'RAG' status as being 'achieved', 'partially achieved', or 'not achieved'. At 31 March 2024 the Board has reported that, in its opinion, of the total 16 measures: one measure (6%) was 'achieved', 11 measures (69%) were 'partially achieved', and four measures (25%) were 'not achieved'.

On the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25

15. The Board's Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2020-2025 & Annual Performance Plan 2024/25 ("Annual Performance Plan 2024-25") supports the final year of the *Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2020-2025* ("the Policing Plan 2020-2025") and comprises nine indicators and 16 measures (2023-24: nine indicators and 16 measures) across the same three overarching outcomes within the Business Plan 2023-24, referred to in paragraph 9 above. These are unchanged from the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24.
16. A Policing Plan Review Working Group ("PPRWG"), comprising Board members and PSNI representatives, was constituted on an annual basis by the Board to take forward the statutory requirement to review the Annual Assessment and propose any changes to the subsequent Annual Performance Plan. The Board replaced the PPRWG with the Policing Plan Development Group ("PPDG") in August 2024. The PPDG met in September 2024, with a focus on the development of the *Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2025-2030* ("the Policing Plan 2025-2030").
17. The Policing Plan 2025-2030 will apply from April 2025 through March 2030. For this reason, observations and recommendations within this report shall apply to the Policing Plan 2025-2030, as it is not deemed appropriate to make changes in the final year of the Policing Plan 2020-2025 in the interests of consistency and comparability.

On the continuous improvement arrangements

18. To satisfy the requirements of Section 28 (Part V) of the Act, the Board has stated that both the Policing Plan and the subsequent Annual Performance Plans have been developed using the Outcomes Based Accountability ("OBA") framework.
19. The key feature of an OBA approach is working in reverse from a set of desired outcomes and asking – 'How much did we do?', 'How well did we do it?' and 'Is anyone better off?'. The validity of the approach requires good quality and relevant datasets and baseline information.
20. My assessment of continuous improvement arrangements is set out in Part Three and Appendix 1 of this report.
21. As noted in Appendix 3, I had raised a recommendation in the prior year on the continued development of baselines for each identified measure. With improvements already made arising from our recommendation in 2022-23 and 2023-24, and with consideration that the Policing Plan 2020-2025 came to an end on 31 March 2025, I consider this recommendation to be closed.
22. I have made a number of further recommendations in Parts Two and Three of this report, summaries of which are included below:



Recommendation 1

The Board's assessment of the RAG status of measures in the Policing Plan 2025-30 be based, where possible, on the extent to which a particular measure has met pre-determined, incremental movements against the baseline.



Recommendation 2

The Board should consider the implementation of a four-tier RAG status of 'Not Achieved', 'Off Track', 'On Track' and 'Achieved'.



Recommendation 3

The Board should ensure the annual assessment is based on data to 31 March of the assessment year where possible, and at a minimum should be based on official crime statistics to ensure that the assessment is robust and stands to scrutiny.

23. In the course of my review, I identified a number of clerical errors in the reports, in particular:
- i. In the Board's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, action C4 '*Deliver a funding programme to support and increase community engagement with policing*', was not reported on in error. Based on the Board's quarterly reporting, this action would have been reported as achieved in the Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24.
 - ii. Also within the Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, action D1 '*Scope and procure a third-party supplier to assist with the development of bespoke revised guidance to Selected Medical Practitioners and Independent Medical Referee*' is marked as achieved in error on page 31.
 - iii. The header on each page of the Annual Assessment 2023-24 says "Policing Plan 2020-2025 & Annual Performance Plan 2022-23", which was the title of the previous year's annual assessment.
 - iv. Within the PSNI Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, indicator 1.4 has not been included within the Summary of Progress table on pages 13 and 14 in error.
24. I advise the Board to ensure rigorous review is performed to minimise confusion arising from inconsistencies and inaccuracies which undermine the quality and reliability of reporting.

Update on the legislation underpinning continuous improvement arrangements

25. In September 2024 an Executive Justice Bill ("the Bill") was brought forward to the Assembly by the Justice Minister. Section 23 of the Bill pertains to the removal of section 29 of the Act, which covers the requirement of the C&AG to audit performance plans. I welcome this development, which is consistent with the role of C&AGs across the other public audit organisations in the United Kingdom.
26. At the time of reporting in April 2025 the Bill has progressed to the Committee Stage. It is currently expected that the Bill may attain Royal Assent post-Summer 2026, although this is subject to a number of factors.

Part One:

Background

Background

Responsibilities of the Northern Ireland Policing Board

- 1.1** Under section 28 of the Act, the Board is required to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions, and those of the Chief Constable of the PSNI, are exercised, with regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.2** The Board must prepare and publish an annual performance plan for each financial year, containing details of how the continuous improvement arrangements are to be implemented. In particular, the annual performance plan must:
- identify performance indicators by reference to which performance in exercising functions can be measured; and
 - set performance standards (measures) to be met in the exercise of particular functions in relation to performance indicators.
- 1.3** The Board must also prepare and publish a performance summary for each financial year of the Board's assessment of:
- its, and the Chief Constable's, performance in the year measured by reference to performance indicators; and
 - the extent to which any performance standard (measure) which applied at any time during that year was met.
- 1.4** In practice, the Board works in partnership with the PSNI to develop the Annual Performance Plan, and monitor and review progress in its implementation, within an overall context of continuous improvement.

Responsibilities of the Comptroller and Auditor General

- 1.5** Under section 29 of the Act, I must issue a report (Appendix 2):
- certifying that I have audited the Performance Summary and the Annual Performance Plan;
 - stating whether I believe the Performance Summary and the Annual Performance Plan were prepared and published in accordance with the requirements of section 28 of the Act;
 - stating whether I believe the performance indicators and standards (i.e. measures) in the Annual Performance Plan are reasonable and, if appropriate, recommending changes to them;
 - if appropriate, recommending how the Performance Summary and Annual Performance Plan should be amended so as to accord with the requirements of section 28 of the Act; and
 - recommending whether the Department should give a direction to the Board, under section 31 (2) of the Act. Such a direction would require the Board to take appropriate corrective action to ensure compliance with the Act.

- 1.6** In July 2024 I published my report summarising my audit of the Performance Summary 2022-23 and the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24. My report at that time contained a recommendation which is presented at Appendix 3, along with an update from the Board on progress. With improvements already made arising from our recommendation in 2022-23 and 2023-24, and with consideration that the Policing Plan 2020-2025 is coming to an end, I consider this recommendation to be closed. Having had sight of the draft Policing Plan 2025-2030, I can see that baselines – quantitative and qualitative – are at the forefront of the Board’s Annual Performance Plan 2025-26, which provides me with assurance that the Board has addressed the recommendation.

Scope of the review

- 1.7** During the course of the review, my staff liaised closely with the Board and the PSNI. My findings are set out as follows:
- **Part Two: Performance Summary 2023-24 and the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25**
Assessing whether the:
 - performance summaries in the Board’s Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 and the Board’s Policing Plan and Performance Plan Annual Assessment 2023-24 meet the Board’s statutory obligations; and
 - the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 is reasonable.
 - **Part Three: Continuous Improvement**
Reviewing the arrangements made by the Board to secure continuous improvement, and examining how such arrangements are being implemented.

Part Two:

Performance Summary

2023-24 and

the Annual

Performance Plan

2024-25

Performance Summary 2023-24 and the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25

Overview

- 2.1** In this part of the report, I assess whether the Board has met its statutory obligations under section 28 of the Act with regards to the Performance Summary and the Annual Performance Plan, and assess whether I believe the performance indicators and standards (measures) in the Annual Performance Plan are reasonable.
- 2.2** The Board was required to prepare and publish:
- A performance summary of the Board's assessment of: its and the Chief Constable's performance in 2023-24 measured by reference to performance indicators; and the extent to which performance standards (measures) applied during 2023-24 were met; and
 - A performance plan for 2024-25 which details how continuous improvement arrangements are to be implemented, identifies performance indicators by reference to which performance in exercising functions can be measured, and sets performance standards (measures) to be met in the exercise of particular functions in relation to performance indicators.

Board's assessment of Board and PSNI performance in 2023-24

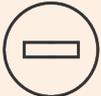
- 2.3** The Board's Business Plan 2023-24 sets out the Board's Purpose, Vision and Values and outlines the key challenges envisaged during the period. The Board has set four key objectives based on the three overarching outcomes in line with the outcomes in the Northern Ireland Policing Plan 2020-2025 ("Policing Plan").
- 2.4** For each of the four objectives, a number of associated actions have been identified (14 in total) which will be used by the Board to gauge its progress in achieving the overall objective.
- 2.5** The Board's performance is summarised in its Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24. *Section 2. Performance Analysis* within the Board's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 presents an analysis of the Board's performance against the key objectives and associated actions as set out in the Business Plan 2023-24.
- 2.6** All 14 actions are reported as fully achieved, however *Objective D, Action 1 – Scope and procure a third-party supplier to assist with the development of bespoke revised guidance to Select Medical Practitioners and Independent Medical Referees* is noted as requiring additional resource or time in order to be achieved and will be progressed through 2024-25. I confirmed with the Board that this action is marked as 'Achieved' in error on page 31 of the Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, and should have been marked as 'partially achieved'. A third-party supplier has been identified, however there are ongoing discussions on affordability and pending regulatory changes that need to be completed prior to a medical review taking place. The Board confirmed this action will remain 'partially achieved' in 2024-25.

- 2.7** In the course of my review, I noted that action C4 'Deliver a funding programme to support and increase community engagement with policing', was not reported on in error within the Board's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24. Based on the Board's quarterly reporting, this action would have been reported as achieved in the Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24.
- 2.8** The performance information in the Board's Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 reproduces the detailed information from the Business Plan and is consistent with it, supporting the higher-level Corporate Plan outcomes.

The Board's assessment of the PSNI's performance against the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24

- 2.9** The Policing Plan sets out three overarching outcomes that the Board have set for policing to deliver over the five-year period. The Annual Performance Plan 2023-24 includes nine indicators and 16 measures which are used to assess progress in the delivery of the fourth year of the Policing Plan. The Board's Annual Assessment 2023-24 outlines their assessment of PSNI's performance against each of the 16 measures, which is available for reference in Figure 1.
- 2.10** The Performance Summary section of the PSNI Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24 includes PSNI's reporting on their performance against the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24. The Board's assessment of performance should be read in conjunction with that of the PSNI's assessment for a full understanding.
- 2.11** In the course of my review, I identified some reporting differences between the Board and PSNI. The Board had assessed two indicators as 'partially achieved' which the PSNI had assessed as 'achieved', and for one indicator the Board had assessed it as 'not achieved' whereas the PSNI assessment was 'partially achieved'. Such disparities may arise due to timing differences in reporting timeframes and the underlying data used by the Board and PSNI, as well as variances in the interpretation of the data by the two organisations. Recommendation 3, outlined in Part Three of this report, addresses the use of consistent data for reporting and would go some way towards balancing the assessments made. Further, I noted within the PSNI Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24, indicator 1.4 has not been included within the Summary of Progress table on pages 13 and 14 in error.
- 2.12** The Board published its assessment of the PSNI's performance against the Performance Plan 2023-24 in its Annual Assessment 2023-24. The narrative summarises how the PSNI reported how it met each performance measure through its OBA report cards presented to either the Board's Performance, Partnership or Resources Committees. Additionally, for each performance measure, the Annual Assessment includes:
- an impacts update, including initiatives to continuously improve performance;
 - the Board's assessment; and
 - an assessment of 'RAG' status as being achieved, partially achieved or not achieved, identifying the position in respect of data development, baselines and surveys.
- 2.13** At 31 March 2024 the Board has reported in the Annual Assessment 2023-24 that of the total 16 measures, in its opinion, one measure (6%) was achieved, 11 measures (69%) were partially achieved and 4 measures were not achieved (25%).

Figure 1: RAG status summary table

PERFORMANCE PLAN MEASURE		RAG STATUS		
KEY:		2022-23	2023-24	Change
No movement		Deteriorated		
Improved		Not applicable		
Outcome 1: We have a safe community				
1.1.1	Repeat victimisation rate and report on initiatives to support repeat victims with a focus on victims of (i) Domestic Abuse, (ii) Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (CSAE) and (iii) Hate Crime in 2023/24.	Partially Achieved	Partially Achieved	
1.2.1	Repeat offending rate and report on initiatives to reduce repeat offenders with a focus on Domestic Abuse.	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	
1.2.2	Through activity which has a minor, moderate or major impact, reduce the capacity and capability of Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) or paramilitary organisations to engage in criminal activity.	Partially Achieved	Partially Achieved	
1.3.1	Number of people in Northern Ireland who feel safe in their local area, local high street or town centre and own home, including in the online space	Achieved	Partially Achieved	
1.3.2	Rate of places repeatedly victimised.	Achieved	Partially Achieved	
1.4.1	Benchmark PSNI crime rates against previous rates and other similar police services.	Partially Achieved	Achieved	
1.4.2	Demonstrate progress against the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy and Action Plan.	NA	Partially Achieved	
Outcome 2: We have confidence in policing				
2.1.1	Number of people in Northern Ireland who are confident that PSNI is accessible, visible, responsive and victim focused.	Achieved	Not Achieved	
2.1.2	Report on the levels (numbers and outcomes) of conduct cases within the police service.	NA	Partially Achieved	
2.1.3	Report on the levels of 999 (emergency) and 101 (priority) call response.	NA	Partially Achieved	
2.2.1	Number of victims and service users who are satisfied with the service they have received	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	

PERFORMANCE PLAN MEASURE		RAG STATUS		
		2022-23	2023-24	Change
2.3.1	Improve representativeness of the service across ranks, grades and departments by gender, community background, ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation and in respect of recruitment, socio-economic background.	Not Achieved	Partially Achieved	
2.4.1	Levels of crime outcomes, with a particular focus on Domestic Abuse, to identify areas of concern.	Partially Achieved	Partially Achieved	
Outcome 3: We have engaged and supportive communities				
3.1.1	Demonstrate progress against the "Here for You" Public Engagement Strategy and the associated Hallmarks of Neighbourhood Policing.	Achieved	NA	
3.1.1	In collaboration with the community deliver the commitments outlined in the Local Policing Review.	NA	Partially Achieved	
3.1.2	Identify and report on the Neighbourhood Policing Team initiatives to address local problems and tackle local issues, including co-designed solutions, in line with Neighbourhood Policing Guidelines.	Partially Achieved	Partially Achieved	
3.1.3	Assess and evaluate the impact of partnership working with local communities, including but not exclusively, in areas of high deprivation and areas that have been repeatedly victimised.	Partially Achieved	Partially Achieved	

Source: NIAO summary of reporting from the Board's Annual Assessment 2023-24

2.14 Of the four new measures in the year, I have selected three for testing. This involved obtaining and reviewing the Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) report cards that were developed for each measure, along with the committee meeting minutes in which the report cards were discussed during the year. Individual measures are discussed at least once, if not multiple times at committee meetings during the year so I obtained all relevant minutes and report cards for the year. A summary of testing, along with my conclusion on the reasonableness of the measures and their recorded outcomes during the year, is presented in Appendix 1.

2.15 Despite non-achievement of 25% of measures, I am encouraged that 75% of measures are at least partially achieved within the Annual Assessment 2023-24. However, comparing the RAG status of measures from 2022-23 to 2023-24 in Figure 1 above, ten measures (62.5%) have seen no change or a decrease in their RAG status. This highlights a need for further Board scrutiny on actions both already taken and planned for the future to ensure they see continuous improvement across all measures. Following my review and performance of testing as outlined in Appendix 1, I have the following recommendations to make to the

Board.

- 2.16** While I am happy to note improvements in the provision of baseline information, I feel it is important that this continues to be developed, with the Board's assessment of RAG status of measures based on the extent to which a particular measure has met pre-determined, incremental movements against baseline. This should allow for more consistency in the classification of RAG status both year-on-year for a particular measure, and in determining classification across different measures, while demonstrating the efforts and progress being made by the Board and PSNI towards continuous improvement. For example, it may take a number of years for measure 2.3.1, relating to the representativeness of the police service, to be deemed as 'Achieved' as this will rely upon the successful completion of multiple rounds of recruitment which is both time-dependent and challenging in the context of what is often a constrained budget. However, by demonstrating incremental progress in line with targets set against the baseline year-on-year, this measure can be shown in a positive light, heading towards achievement, rather than remaining static at 'partially achieved' in each annual assessment for a number of years to come.



Recommendation 1

The Board's assessment of the RAG status of measures in the Policing Plan 2025-30 be based, where possible, on the extent to which a particular measure has met pre-determined, incremental movements against the baseline.

- 2.17** As noted in paragraph 2.13 above, the majority of measures (69%, or 11 out of 16) are presented as 'partially achieved' in the Annual Assessment 2023-24. This is a broad category that covers measures which may be close to achievement or non-achievement with no differentiation between them. The 'partially achieved' category should be replaced with revised RAG statuses that note whether the underlying data points to the measure as either 'off track' (i.e. heading towards non-achievement, or not meeting predetermined incremental improvement targets against the baseline) or 'on track' (i.e. heading towards achievement, meeting predetermined incremental improvement targets against the baseline).



Recommendation 2

The Board should consider the implementation of a four-tier RAG status of 'Not Achieved', 'Off Track', 'On Track' and 'Achieved'.

Board's Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 and reasonableness review of measures

- 2.18** The Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 includes nine indicators and 16 measures covering the three outcomes and as such meets the Board's statutory obligations.
- 2.19** As the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 covers the final year of the Policing Plan 2020-2025, the Board has elected to maintain the same measures from the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24, to ensure consistency and comparability before the Policing Plan 2025-2030 comes into effect. I believe this is a reasonable approach to the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25, and as such have limited review to perform on the plan.
- 2.20** Last year I concluded the performance indicators and measures in the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24 were reasonable. Subsequent to this, as detailed in Appendix 1, this year I have tested and assessed as reasonable a sample of the new measures included in the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24. With all measures being maintained between years, I can therefore conclude that the measures included in the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 are reasonable.

Conclusion

- 2.21** Based on my review, I can conclude that:
- the Board has disclosed its own performance against Business Plan actions in its Annual Report and Accounts 2023-24;
 - the Board published its assessment of the PSNI's performance against the Performance Plan 2023-24 in the Annual Assessment 2023-24;
 - the performance indicators and measures in the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 are reasonable; and
 - the Annual Performance Plan 2023-24 meets the Board's statutory obligations.

Part Three:

Operation of the Continuous Improvement Programme

Operation of the Continuous Improvement Programme

Continuous improvement within the Board

- 3.1** Continuous improvement within the Board itself is addressed through the regular review of policies and procedures; standing committees, in particular the Performance Committee, Resources Committee, Partnership Committee, and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee; self-assessments completed by each committee (see next paragraph); and other reports which may be commissioned by the Board or other bodies such as the Ministry of Justice or Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland.
- 3.2** The Board publishes their report on their committees' effectiveness each year. The Committee Reports 2023-24 report has been published and provides an overview of the work completed by the committees during the year, against their agreed Terms of Reference.
- 3.3** The Board has also maintained their Investors in People accreditation through June 2025, demonstrating their commitment to continuous improvement of the workplace for their staff members.

Continuous improvement within the PSNI

- 3.4** This is the fourth year I have reported on Continuous Improvement within the PSNI under the Board's adopted OBA framework methodology.
- 3.5** The development of the Policing Plan follows the OBA framework and aims to embed continuous improvement throughout the design and monitoring of the outcomes of the Annual Performance Plans. To facilitate this, the Policing Plan Review Working Group supports the Board in its review of the PSNI's past performance and challenge to future Annual Performance Plans, ensuring the measures within remain appropriate and relevant. The monitoring of individual measures and indicators is delegated to either the Board's Performance Committee, Partnership Committee, or Resources Committee. The PSNI provide monthly information to the Board using the OBA methodology in 'report card' format, setting out the three OBA performance measures "How much did we do? How well did we do it? Is anyone better off?"
- 3.6** To obtain assurance that the Board's approach is fully compliant with Section 28 (4) of the Act and, in particular, the Board's requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement within the PSNI, I selected and tested the following three performance measures, each of which were new in 2023-24:
- i. 1.4.2 Demonstrate progress against the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy and Action Plan;
 - ii. 2.1.2 Report on the levels (numbers and outcomes) of conduct cases within the Police service; and
 - iii. 2.1.3 Report on the levels of 999 (emergency) and 101 (priority) response.
- Refer to Appendix 1 for details of testing performed.

- 3.7** My audit work focused on reviewing the underlying supporting documentation, including OBA report cards, presented to the respective committees throughout 2023-24, and the ensuing scrutiny, analysis and discussion.
- 3.8** In performing my review and testing, I identified an opportunity for improvement, where I believe there could be increased disclosure of the data being used in the RAG status assessment process. OBA report cards (and/or other relevant reporting) are presented to the Board and its committees during the assessment year using data that is up-to-date at the time of presentation. However, it is clearly noted on the report cards that this data may be provisional, not representative of official crime statistics, and subject to change. Should the Board's assessment be made on data that is incomplete, inaccurate, or inappropriate, there is a risk that an incorrect assessment will be made and reported. This may also manifest in differences of reporting between the Board and PSNI, as outlined in paragraph 2.11, above.



Recommendation 3

The Board should ensure the annual assessment is based on data to 31 March of the assessment year where possible, and at a minimum should be based on official crime statistics to ensure that the assessment is robust and stands to scrutiny.

Review of Data Breach reporting

- 3.9** In my 2022-23 report, I noted that on 8 August 2023 the names of police officers and staff in Northern Ireland, where they were based, and their job roles were published on the internet. The data was made public, in error, by the PSNI as they responded to a routine freedom of information ("Fol") request.
- 3.10** In response, the Board and Chief Constable jointly commissioned an independently led review into the circumstances surrounding the data breach incident. Board members had requested an expert panel be established, to benefit from expertise in data/information management as well as an extra layer of independence. The Independent Review Team reported its findings in a document titled 'Protecting from within' to the Chief Constable in December 2023, making 37 recommendations for the PSNI – all of which were accepted.
- 3.11** In November 2024 the PSNI reported to the Board's Resources Committee that, as at the end of October 2024, 18 of the recommendations were complete and closed, with most of the remaining 19 having some progress to report. It was noted by the PSNI that ongoing resourcing cost and capacity issues were impacting their ability to address the recommendations while also delivering business as usual activities.
- 3.12** To oversee the implementation of recommendations made by this review, the PSNI established a new Service Data Board to set the strategic direction for the management of information and data. The Service Data Board has arranged to meet six times (bi-monthly) through 2025, and updates are to be provided to the Board's Resources Committee.
- 3.13** The Information Commissioner's Office ("the ICO") also undertook an independent investigation into the data breach, the findings of which were reported to the Chief Constable on 20 May 2024, giving notice of a proposed monetary penalty and Enforcement Notice. All recommendations from the ICO investigation were implemented, resulting in the removal of the Enforcement Notice, however the ICO imposed a fine of £750,000 on the PSNI.

- 3.14** Based on the recommendations and subsequent actions taken by these reviews, which were undertaken by experts in their field, I believe that there has been a sufficient and reasonable response to the data breach and am satisfied any continuous improvement implications will be captured by existing performance indicators and measures for 2024-25, and the refreshed framework of outcomes and indicators in the Policing Plan 2025-2030.

Conclusion

- 3.15** I can conclude that, in combination with continuous improvement arrangements within the Board itself, using the OBA framework and methodology the Board has established arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which it functions, and those of the Chief Constable, are exercised.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Comptroller and Auditor General's Review of the Board's Assessment of Performance Measures

1.4.2 Demonstrate progress against the Violence against Women and Girls Strategy and Action Plan

Test Step	Findings
A Performance Plan Timetable	This measure for Violence Against Women and Girls ("VAWG") was discussed twice in 2023-24 by the Performance Committee – on 13 October 2023 and 8 February 2024. Noted that figures presented were provisional, do not represent official crime statistics, and were subject to change at the time of reporting.
B OBA Report Card produced by PSNI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OBA report card was produced by the PSNI and presented at both of the Performance Committee meetings noted in test step A, above. Rolling 365-day data was presented to 31 August 2023 and 10 January 2024 for each respective meeting, with comparatives for the preceding rolling 365-day periods. Both report cards demonstrated a reduction of VAWG offences against the prior period, 6.3% and 12% reductions respectively. However, some of the reduction has been attributed to changing counting rules. Included in the report card template is a table which demonstrates how VAWG offences compare to the same crimes for all victims, and graphs were included to show the five-year average for outcomes of VAWG offences. A breakdown of VAWG offences for each of the five previous financial years showed an increase in these offences being recorded year-on-year. Updates were provided against the VAWG Action Plan across the key themes of Building Trust and Confidence, Relentless Perpetrator Pursuit, and Safer Spaces.
C PSNI Update via presentation to the Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PSNI's Policing Performance Manager ("PPM") presented the OBA Report Cards to the Board's Performance Committee on the dates under test step A, above.
D Board Analysis of OBA Report Card	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have obtained and reviewed the minutes of the Performance Committee meetings noted under test step A, above. Minutes from both meetings demonstrate detailed discussion and consideration of the OBA report cards by the Board, with Board members questioning of the PSNI's PPM presenting the report.

C&AG Conclusion on Measure 1.4.2

Overall, based on what has been presented and considered by the Board's Performance Committee, I conclude there is reasonable data and baseline information for measure 1.4.2. I am content the RAG Status of 'partially achieved' for measure 1.4.2 is appropriate based on relative movement since 2022-23.

2.1.2 Report on the levels (numbers and outcomes) of conduct cases within the Police service

Test Step	Findings
A Performance Plan Timetable	<p>This measure was discussed once in 2023-24 by the Performance Committee – on 14 September 2023.</p>
B OBA Report Card produced by PSNI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noted no OBA report card is produced by the PSNI for this indicator, as the PSNI's Professional Standards Department produces an Annual Report to the Board. The August 2023 report was presented at the Performance Committee meeting noted in test step A, above. • The PSNI noted that their performance in respect of professional standards was agreed to be scrutinized under measure 2.1.2, which the Board agreed to add to the Policing Plan in March 2023. • Baselines identified include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Number of investigations; – Number of outcomes (misconduct meetings and hearings); – Number of reported breaches of the Code of Ethics; and – Number of investigations under the whistleblowing policy. • Although this is a new measure for the Policing Plan, the report is not new and includes a review of data across a number of years, allowing for meaningful review and discussion. • Key issues were discussed including the significant increase in Code of Ethics breaches from 2021/22 to 2022/23; data breaches; allegations of domestic or sexual misconduct; referrals relating to drugs; vetting; how long misconduct investigations take including where criminal proceedings are involved; notifiable memberships; the newly established PSNI Integrity Board; and additional information requested by officials including an update on recommendations contained in the Professional Standards Review of November 2022, and an update on the Code of Ethics.
C PSNI Update via presentation to the Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Board Official presented the key issues from the PSNI Professional Standards Annual Report 2022/23 to the Board's Performance Committee on the date noted in test step A, above. PSNI Professional Standards Department members provided a briefing and fielded questions from Performance Committee members.
D Board Analysis of OBA Report Card	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have obtained and reviewed the minutes of the Performance Committee meeting noted under test step A, above. • Minutes demonstrate detailed discussion and consideration of the Professional Standards Annual Report 2022/23 by the Board, with Board members questioning of the PSNI members present. • Increases are noted in Code of Ethics breaches and investigations, conduct cases, suspensions, and repositionings. However, decreases were noted in the number of outcomes for misconduct, and Anti-Corruption Unit investigations have also decreased.

C&AG Conclusion on Measure 2.1.2

Overall, based on what has been presented and considered by the Board's Performance Committee, I conclude there is reasonable data and baseline information for measure 2.1.2. I am content the RAG Status of 'partially achieved' for measure 2.1.2 is appropriate based on varying performance, with both increases and decreases reported for different baselines.

2.1.3 Report on the levels of 999 (emergency) and 101 (priority) response

Test Step	Findings
A Performance Plan Timetable	This measure was discussed by the Partnership Committee twice during 2023-24, on 19 October 2023 and 21 March 2024.
B OBA Report Card produced by PSNI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OBA report card was produced by the PSNI and presented at both of the Performance Committee meetings noted in test step A, above. There was relative consistency of data presented on both report cards, primarily relating to tables showing PSNI and National attendance times within the SLA for emergency ("EM") and priority ("PR") calls. In the February 2024 meeting, it was noted that the percentage of EM and PR calls responded to within the SLA saw no significant increase or decrease during calendar year 2023 – fluctuating up and down monthly from 80.3% and 73.3% respectively in January 2023, to slightly improved positions of 81.2% and 75.1% respectively in December 2023. Detail was provided on the PSNI's Telephone Resolution Unit, which aims to resolve calls which would previously have been attended by police via discussions which are not face-to-face, or are not required to occur immediately.
C PSNI Update via presentation to the Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The PSNI's Assistant Chief Constable ("ACC") presented the OBA Report Cards to the Board's Performance Committee on the dates under test step A, above.
D Board Analysis of OBA Report Card	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have obtained and reviewed the minutes of the Performance Committee meetings noted under test step A, above. Minutes from both meetings demonstrate detailed discussion and consideration of the OBA report cards by the Board, with Board members questioning of the PSNI's ACC presenting the report.

C&AG Conclusion on Measure 2.1.3

Overall, based on what has been presented and considered by the Board's Performance Committee, I conclude there is reasonable data and baseline information for measure 2.1.3. I am content the RAG Status of 'partially achieved' for measure 2.1.3 is appropriate based on relative movements in the year.

Appendix 2: The Comptroller and Auditor General's certificate and opinion to the Assembly on the Northern Ireland Policing Board's Performance Summary and Performance Plan

- 1 In accordance with section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 as amended, I certify that I have audited the Northern Ireland Policing Board's:
- Performance Summary for the year ended 31 March 2024; and
 - Annual Performance Plan for the year ended 31 March 2025.

Basis of my opinion

Audit of the Performance Summary

- 2 I planned and performed my work to obtain all the information and explanations that I considered necessary in order to provide an opinion on whether the Northern Ireland Policing Board has prepared and published a Performance Summary of the Board's assessment of:
- its and the Chief Constable's performance in 2023-24, measured by reference to performance actions and performance indicators; and
 - the extent to which performance measures in 2023-24 were met.
- 3 My work comprised a review and assessment and, where appropriate, examination on a test basis of the evidence supporting performance against the actions, indicators and measures as prescribed in the Board's Business Plan 2023-24 and Annual Performance Plan 2023-24. I obtained sufficient evidence to satisfy myself that the Performance Summary provided includes those matters prescribed in legislation, and that the arrangements for publishing the Performance Summary complied with those requirements.

Audit of the Performance Plan

- 4 I planned and performed my work to obtain all the information and explanations that I considered necessary in order to provide an opinion on whether:
- the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 has been prepared and published in accordance with statutory requirements; and
 - the performance indicators and performance measures in the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 are reasonable.
- 5 My work comprised a review and assessment of the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 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.

Opinion

6 In my opinion:

- the Northern Ireland Policing Board has prepared and published its Performance Summary for the year ended 31 March 2024 in accordance with the requirements of section 28 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000;
- the Northern Ireland Policing Board has prepared and published its Annual Performance Plan for the year ended 31 March 2025 in accordance with the requirements of section 28 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000; and
- the performance indicators and performance measures included within the Annual Performance Plan 2024-25 are reasonable.

Recommendation to the Department of Justice

- 7 Under section 29 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, I am required to make a recommendation as to whether the Department of Justice should issue a direction to the Policing Board under section 31 (2) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.
- 8 On the basis of my work, I do not recommend that the Department of Justice issues a direction under section 31 (2) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.



Dorinnia Carville
Comptroller and Auditor General
Northern Ireland Audit Office
106 University Street
Belfast
BT7 1EU

29 April 2025

Appendix 3: Progress on recommendations in the Comptroller and Auditor General's report

NIAO Recommendations	Board and PSNI Response September 2024	Progress to March 2025
<p>The Performance Plan requires the inclusion of up to date and relevant data and baseline information for all indicators and measures. Whilst baselines and measures have been set and reported on in previous years, these datasets must be continuously developed using all available information. This would include updating the indicators and measures to absorb any information gleaned from the Policing Plan Survey 2023. This is essential in order to monitor performance and for the evaluation of success against the measures, indicators, and outcomes stated in the Annual Performance Plan.</p>	<p>Accepted – During 2022/23 the Board and the PSNI again focused on providing the relevant data and baseline information for all indicators and measures. The Policing Plan Review Working Group focused their attention to this task and further updated the baselines and impacts for each Measure of the Policing Plan for PSNI to report against to enable more robust performance measurement. In addition, a second major Policing Plan survey was delivered and published in June 2023 which will enable further comparisons to be made with the previous year's survey that acted as a baseline. A final Policing Plan Survey will be carried out and reported on in 2025 to provide further information in relation to the baseline date. The Policing Plan Review Working Group has also updated the indicators and baselines to include information gleaned from the previous two surveys on a number of measures within the new 2024/25 Annual Performance Plan. This information will also be useful to inform the development of a new five-year Policing Plan during autumn 2024 and early 2025.</p> <p>Police Service of Northern Ireland Response</p> <p>The PSNI accepts this recommendation and looks forward to giving further consideration to this through the Policing Plan Development Group (PPDG), and as part of the development of a performance and monitoring framework for the new Policing Plan 2025-30. The PSNI also welcomes further opportunities to streamline the existing arrangements for performance, and looks forward to further engagements with the Board and NIAO concerning this.</p>	<p>The Policing Plan Development Group (PPDG) met from May 2024 to March 2025 with the primary aim of developing a new Policing Plan for the period 2025 to 2030. During this process the PPDG Members were aware of the recommendation from the NIAO report concerning up to date and relevant data and baseline information for all indicators and measures. The Group placed an emphasis on developing baselines, measures (both quantitative and qualitative) and impacts for each Indicator of the new Policing Plan and setting these out clearly in the Annual Performance Plan for the 25/26 year. A focus was brought to identify relevant baseline data for each of the 16 Indicators and also to identify an "anchor point" from which to track PSNI progress over the next five years. The Group also spent significant time and effort in identifying specific impacts that they wished to see the PSNI deliver in each of the 16 Indicators over the next five years. Also, the information from surveys will be an important data source for measuring a number of indicators and the Group has also identified the information from 5 surveys and how this will inform the baselines, measures and impacts for a number of Indicators. In making this easier the Group has developed a Performance Monitoring Framework document to be published on the Board's website when agreed by the Policing Board in April 2025.</p>

C&AG Conclusion

With improvements already made arising from our recommendation in 2022-23 and 2023-24, and with consideration that the Policing Plan 2020-2025 is coming to an end, I consider this recommendation to be closed. Having had sight of the draft Policing Plan 2025-2030, I can see that baselines – quantitative and qualitative – are at the forefront of the Board’s Annual Performance Plan 2025-26, which provides me with assurance that the Board has addressed the recommendation. Recommendations arising from this 2023-24 report are outlined on page 5 above.



Published and printed by CDS
CDS 335001



**Independence and excellence in
audit to improve public services**

