

Northern Constabulary and Northern Joint Police Board

Best Value Audit and Inspection



Prepared for the Accounts Commission and Scottish ministers
April 2010

The Accounts Commission

The Accounts Commission is a statutory, independent body which, through the audit process, assists local authorities in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources. The Commission has four main responsibilities:

- securing the external audit, including the audit of Best Value and Community Planning
- following up issues of concern identified through the audit, to ensure satisfactory resolutions
- carrying out national performance studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government
- issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information they are required to publish.

The Commission secures the audit of 32 councils and 44 joint boards and committees (including police and fire and rescue services).

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland

HMICS operates independently of police forces, police authorities and the Scottish Government and exists to monitor and improve the police service in Scotland. HMICS does this on behalf of the Scottish public by:

- monitoring, through self-assessment and inspection, how effectively the police service in Scotland is fulfilling its purpose and managing risk
- supporting improvement by identifying good practice, making recommendations and sharing our findings in order to achieve better outcomes for Scotland's communities
- providing advice to Scottish ministers, police authority and joint board members and police forces and services.

Even though HMICS is independent of the Scottish Government, ministers can call upon the Inspectorate to undertake particular pieces of work.

Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. Together they ensure that the Scottish Government and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of public funds.

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Commission findings

1. This is the second audit and inspection report on the performance by a police authority and force of their statutory duties on Best Value and Community Planning. It has been produced jointly by the Controller of Audit and Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland. The Accounts Commission accepts the report from the Controller of Audit on the Northern Joint Police Board ('the board'). In accordance with the Commission's statutory responsibilities, these findings relate only to the Best Value audit of the board.

2. The Commission welcomes evidence that the board demonstrates many of the elements of best value. In particular:

- it has a strong awareness of its role, and is effective in its strategic oversight and scrutiny of the performance of the force and in holding the chief constable to account
- it displays a close connection to Community Planning Partnerships and the single outcome agreement targets relevant to policing
- it has good working relationships with the chief constable and the force, and an effective partnership with them in achieving best value
- it ensures that policing priorities focus on the needs of local communities.

3. There is scope for the board to continue to develop its role. In particular:

- it should drive the sharing with other police authorities and forces of its areas of good practice

- it needs to be more proactive in ensuring that it receives performance reports which are well aligned to its strategic priorities
- its monitoring of strategic risks, and scrutiny of the response to those risks, needs to be more structured
- it should take a more active role in initiating developments in performance monitoring. For example, it should ensure that it has performance data available to it – such as information on all key areas of the Scottish police performance framework – that will allow it to make effective comparisons with other forces

- it should ensure that consideration of diversity and equality issues is more embedded in its work and the approach of all members.

4. We note that there is some evidence of inconsistencies in relationships between the board and constituent councils. It is important that the relationships between the board and councils are clear, particularly in relation to the allocation and use of resources. This should be assisted by the clarification (currently being considered by the Scottish Government, in consultation with COSLA and ACPOS) of guidance on the duties and responsibilities of all police boards and their members.

5. We look forward to receiving an improvement plan from the board which addresses the improvement agenda set out in the joint audit and inspection report.

6. The Commission gratefully acknowledges the co-operation and assistance provided to the joint audit and inspection team by the elected members of Northern Joint Police Board, the chief constable and officers of Northern Constabulary, and other officials and community planning partners.

7. The Commission welcomes the joint approach with HMICS on these police audit and inspection reports, and the significant contribution that this is having to stimulating more effective and streamlined scrutiny and to driving commitment to securing best value.

HM Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland findings

1. I am delighted to present my findings in this joint audit and inspection report. As Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland, I hold a statutory responsibility to inspect both Northern Joint Police Board and Northern Constabulary. Complementary to the findings of the Accounts Commission on the Best Value and Community Planning performance of the Northern Joint Police Board, I offer the following comments on the performance of Northern Constabulary.

2. My overall assessment of Northern Constabulary is that it is performing well and that the force demonstrates many of the elements of best value. Northern Constabulary has good working relationships with Northern Joint Police Board and they work in tandem on community planning and leading improvement. The force executive play a key role in challenging performance, and the force are able to report low crime and high detection rates in comparison to the Scottish average. A recent force review has led to a significant restructuring of the force with a shift in resources towards front-line policing delivery.

3. There is scope for the force to improve in certain areas. In particular:

- the force should integrate the various elements of their strategic planning to strengthen their direction and the clear communication of their priorities
- the force should improve its monitoring of performance and clearly communicate this information both internally and externally
- the force should concentrate improvement efforts towards meeting national targets for call handling and submission of reports to the Procurator Fiscal and Children's Reporter.
- the force should maximise the use of its staffing resources, while developing a greater understanding of the financial costs of policing activities.

4. I look forward to receiving an improvement plan from Northern Constabulary which addresses the improvement agenda set out in this joint audit and inspection report.

5. I also wish to acknowledge my gratitude for the co-operation and assistance provided to the joint audit and inspection team by the elected members of Northern Joint Police Board, the chief constable and officers of Northern Constabulary, and other officials and community planning partners.

6. I welcome the joint audit and inspection approach adopted in the preparation of this report, and feel that it has already been proven to have contributed towards a more effective scrutiny regime that demonstrates our commitment to achieving best value.

Introduction



This joint report is made by the Controller of Audit to the Accounts Commission under section 102(1) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, and by Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) under section 33 of the Police (Scotland) Act 1967.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced new statutory duties relating to Best Value and Community Planning. Its provisions apply to local authorities, including police authorities, and require specifically that:

- councils and police authorities secure best value (defined as achieving continuous improvement in the performance of functions)
- police authorities and chief constables participate in the community planning process.

The Act also amended the audit arrangements set out in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to cover Best Value and gave powers to the Accounts Commission to examine Best Value in police authorities. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) has a statutory duty under section 33 of the Police (Scotland) Act 1967 to inspect police forces and common police services, and to report to ministers on their state and efficiency. The 2003 Act extends this to include provision for HMICS to inquire into and report to Scottish ministers on whether a local authority is carrying out its functions both as a police authority and in relation to a number of matters including Best Value.

The 2003 Act is supported by more detailed statutory guidance on Best Value and Community Planning, and a series of advisory notes on specific topics such as elected member leadership. This guidance is designed to be descriptive rather than prescriptive, defining the goals that organisations should aim for

but allowing them local discretion on the methods and routes they use. The Scottish Government has issued further guidance for police authorities and forces. This guidance includes *Justice Department Circular 11/2003 Best Value Guidance* and the *Guidance for Members of Police Authorities and Joint Boards*, June 2007.

The scope of Best Value and Community Planning is broad and the guidance and statute indicate that a successful police authority will:

- work in tandem with the chief constable to develop a clear set of priorities that respond to the needs of the community in both the short and longer term
- be organised to support the delivery of these priorities
- meet, and clearly demonstrate that it is meeting, the community's needs
- operate in a way that drives continuous improvement in all its activities.

Similarly, a successful police force will:

- work with its partners and the police authority/police authorities to develop a clear set of priorities that respond to the needs of the community in both the short and longer term
- be organised to deliver these priorities
- meet, and clearly demonstrate that it is meeting, the community's needs
- operate in a way that drives continuous improvement in all its activities.

The key objectives of this joint audit and inspection were to:

- assess the extent to which the Northern Joint Police Board and Northern Constabulary are meeting their duties under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 and complying with Scottish Government guidance
- agree planned improvements with the local authorities, force and the board, to be reviewed by external auditors and HMICS on an ongoing basis.

As Best Value and Community Planning encompass a wide variety of activities, it is not realistic to audit or inspect everything in depth. For this reason we plan our detailed work in two ways:

- Where possible we draw on the findings of other scrutiny processes, such as the work carried out by other inspectorates.
- We select certain aspects of the force and board's performance for detailed investigation. We use a wide range of sources, including the force and board's own assessment of their performance, reports issued following external audit and inspections and the Scottish Policing Performance Framework (SPPF) to assess risks and scope our work to inform this selection.

Our joint report reflects this proportionate approach, with detailed commentary in some areas and limited coverage in others. It also presents the picture we found at the time our main audit and inspection work was conducted, in October 2009. The report includes a corporate assessment of the joint board and the force, while the performance assessment covers only the force.

We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided to the team by Councillor Norman M Macleod, Convenor of Northern Joint Police Board; Chief Constable Ian Latimer, Northern Constabulary; Northern Constabulary Executive Advisory Group; Chief Inspector Ian Bryce, Head of Policy and Coordination Unit, Northern Constabulary; Michelle Morris, Clerk to the Board; and all other elected members and staff involved. We are also grateful to the representatives of the four councils and the force's community partners who agreed to participate in the audit and inspection process.

The tripartite arrangements and police authorities' leadership role

The force is governed through a tripartite arrangement between the chief constable, the joint police board ('the board') and Scottish ministers. As the force covers more than one local authority area, a joint police board comprising members from the four constituent authorities has been formed as the police authority. Scottish ministers retain overall responsibility for policing policy at national level. Northern Joint Police Board is responsible for setting the police budget, ensuring that best value is attained and holding the chief constable to account. The chief constable is responsible for the operational aspects of policing within the force area.

The effect of these arrangements is that the board and the chief constable, although they have different roles, must work in tandem to achieve best value. In this report, we only make judgements on the board and force, but all parties to the arrangement, including the Scottish ministers, have responsibility for the overall performance of the police service.

Constituent authorities are responsible for appointing the members of a joint board and for allocating funding. The board is a separate legal entity and, although councils have no separate residual responsibilities (beyond appointing members and funding), the effectiveness of the board is supported in practice by the constituent councils through the provision of clerking services and training and support for members.

The existing guidance for policing (*Circular 11/2003 and Guidance to Members*, June 2007), sets out expectations of the board. These can be found at [Appendix 1](#) of this report.

Summary



Summary

Northern Constabulary and the Northern Joint Police Board ('the board') have established many of the key elements of best value. There are sound working relationships between senior police officers, council managers and board members. Board members help to ensure that policing priorities meet the needs of their communities. Over many years, the force has delivered an effective policing service, with low levels of crime and high detection rates.

There are some areas in need of further development and members and officers have shown a drive to achieve continuous improvement. Following a recent self-assessment, the board has taken several initiatives designed to help strengthen its role, although the impact of these has not yet been demonstrated. Northern Constabulary has carried out a major force review, which has led to a restructuring of services, with significant savings in support costs and an increase in front-line policing resources.

Northern Joint Police Board

Board members provide effective oversight of Northern Constabulary, helping to set its strategic priorities, and being closely involved in the Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) which interact with the force. Board members are not proactive in determining what monitoring information they require, but they demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of scrutinising police performance. The board is aware of the main areas in which it needs to develop and has already initiated some changes, including the introduction of job descriptions for members and the web-casting of board meetings.

1. Board members are involved in setting the strategic priorities of the force. The chief constable and his staff carry out the detailed development of Northern Constabulary's strategic planning, reflecting their understanding of local and national policing priorities. However, board members also have a role in this process which goes beyond the formal approval of these plans. Through the annual strategic seminar and attending regular meetings of various working groups, elected members influence the force's strategic plans.

2. There are good links between the board and its community planning partners. There are some inconsistencies in how the work of the board is reported back to each of the four constituent councils. However, each of the councils takes a proactive interest in the police budget and in the effectiveness of local police services. Board members participate in each of the four community safety partnerships and they are provided with regular reports on the establishment of the Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) and, since November 2009, the progress made by the force towards achieving the various targets that are relevant to policing.

3. Members show a good understanding of scrutiny. There is a good working relationship between the board and the force and members provide independent challenge. Board members are not proactive in determining what monitoring information they require from officers. In particular, the scope of performance reports provided to the board does not allow it to fully assess the force's progress in meeting its strategic objectives. However, there are important elements of scrutiny already in place. Progress made by the force in addressing the recommendations of external audit and inspection is monitored by members, and each board meeting

is provided with budget reports and a range of performance monitoring reports.

4. The board has demonstrated a good level of self-awareness and an interest in developing its overall approach. During 2009, it carried out an EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) self-assessment, identifying a range of areas in need of improvement. Many of these are being addressed with, for example, job descriptions for members, web-casting of board meetings, and proposals for temporary administrative support for the board to help develop its capacity to provide independent challenge and scrutiny.

Northern Constabulary

Northern Constabulary has good working relationships with Northern Joint Police Board, which works in tandem with the chief constable on community planning and leading improvement. The force is performing well and continues to report low crime and high detection rates throughout its geographical area. The Force Executive plays a key role in challenging performance and driving improvement. The force could do more to assist the board in its performance scrutiny responsibilities by improving the quality of performance data supplied. The Force Policing Plan drives policing activity but its lack of integration with a key operational strategy results in activity prioritised by the force not being systematically monitored or reported. The force has a well defined corporate structure, which generally works well, but in some of the geographically remote areas of the force partnership relationships are weakened by an informality of approach. The recent force review has led to a significant restructuring of the force with a shift in resources towards front-line policing delivery.

5. Northern Constabulary has a clear strategic direction informed by an understanding of the needs of local communities. It has a comprehensive and structured approach to community consultation which informs the development of force and departmental plans. The force's planning processes suffer from a lack of integration between the policing plan priorities and the force control strategy. This lack of integration makes it challenging to identify a clear linked set of priorities or to monitor and review divisional or force activities and their impact.

6. The force has restructured into three divisions, containing a total of eight area commands, which are principally coterminous with the Highland and Island Council management areas. There is a positive level of empowerment to the divisions and area commands that allows each to reflect and focus on local need in their area. The force executive team provides strong visible leadership and there is a corporate approach to force-wide issues with a good overview and challenge of policing activity. At present the force reports to the board on progress against external scrutiny body recommendations. Historically, the board has not been fully sighted on all external scrutiny body recommendations, which has resulted in the board being unable to fully scrutinise the force's decisions on implementation or prioritisation of these recommendations. Northern Constabulary has recently developed a revised risk management strategy which is a more comprehensive approach to organisational risk, setting out prioritised risks and the action being taken to mitigate these risks.

7. The force works well with its partners, displaying a strong commitment to community planning and delivering local outcomes. There is good engagement between board members, area commanders and

divisional commanders. Community engagement and consultation takes place in a structured manner and is used to help shape force priorities. Despite the force providing clear guidance on roles and responsibilities when entering into partnerships with different agencies, some relationships with partners beyond Divisional headquarters were found to suffer from a lack of clarity about the role of partners.

8. Northern Constabulary has demonstrated commitment to improving services and is undertaking a great deal of improvement activity across the force. This activity is consolidated, prioritised and managed within an overarching corporate improvement plan. Performance management is not currently focused on a range of performance information linked to key force priorities and activity, and performance reports to the public and board lack detail.

9. As a result of the strategic planning process, Northern Constabulary carried out a review of its organisational structures and key processes to ensure its ability to meet future demands. This Force Review resulted in 20 strategic recommendations which, starting in April 2007, has led to a restructuring of the force and a significant shift in resources from support staff to front-line police officers. Northern Constabulary is currently reviewing the implementation of the force review to establish if all the predicted business benefits have been realised and to identify further business benefits and efficiency savings that can be achieved.

10. The force's financial control is sound and it has a good record of achieving efficiency savings targets. While it does not have a formal financial strategy, it does take a long-term view of its financial sustainability. A major force review has restructured

the delivery of police services and generated significant efficiency savings. The force has a sound approach to strategically managing its staff resources yet operationally there was little evidence of the divisional tasking process being used to routinely move resources across council boundaries to meet local policing challenges.

11. The consideration of equalities issues is reasonably well integrated within mainland areas of Northern Constabulary and less well developed in the island authority areas.

12. The force is developing a more comprehensive approach to sustainability. It has consulted on the effect of proposed changes to police staff posts in remote communities. Although some work has begun, the force does not have an approach that covers all aspects of sustainability.

13. The force's policing plan is outcome focused and acknowledges the importance of national imperatives as well as community policing throughout the Highlands and Islands. The plan provides a degree of continuity in the organisational priorities identified, with the same key issues remaining constant over a number of years. The force has not supplied data to the SPPF on the key areas of public satisfaction and emergency response times, making comparison with other Scottish police forces more difficult. The force has had some success in reducing recorded crime and detection rates remain good.

14. Northern Constabulary has a low crime rate and a high detection rate compared with other Scottish police forces. While the force benefits from its rural geography, where detection rates are traditionally higher than more urban locations, this also poses a number of policing challenges which the force is well positioned to address.

Part 1. Corporate assessment



Vision and strategic direction

Northern Joint Police Board

Board members are actively involved in developing the vision and strategic priorities for local police services.

15. The chief constable and his staff carry out the detailed development of the force's strategic planning, reflecting their understanding of local and national policing priorities. Board members also have a role in this process which goes beyond the formal approval of these plans. Through the annual strategy seminar and attending the regular meetings of the Policy and Finance Working Group, elected members bring their understanding of local community needs and help ensure that this is reflected in the force's strategic plans. Their vision of community policing and the importance of the service in remote rural locations is reflected in the force's strategic plans.

Northern Constabulary

Northern Constabulary has a clear strategic direction informed by an understanding of the needs of local communities. It has a comprehensive and structured approach to community consultation which informs the development of force and departmental plans. The force's planning processes suffer from a lack of integration between the policing plan priorities and the force control strategy. This lack of integration makes it challenging to identify a clear linked set of priorities or to monitor and review divisional or force activities and their impact.

16. The force consults widely and provides Northern Joint Police Board opportunity to participate in setting the force strategic direction. The Force Strategic Plan sets out the operational priorities for the force for a rolling five-year period with operational priorities being cascaded through the Force

Policing Plan for implementation. The strategic plan is developed from local planning days with wide representation from partner agencies, local communities and police board members. Information gathered feeds into the force planning day attended by divisional commanders and headquarters service unit managers. Outcomes from the force planning day are taken forward to the strategy seminar attended by internal and external stakeholders.

17. Northern Constabulary effectively communicate the force's strategic direction and community focus through the force and divisional policing plans. Staff were found to have a good awareness of, and were working towards, policing plan objectives. Local policing plans and strategic objectives are posted on the force website, which is accessible to the public and easy to navigate.

18. Northern Constabulary has a strong community policing focus, helping it to understand the needs of its communities. It maintains officers and stations in very remote locations. All officers are required to relocate during their service to these very remote communities or islands where they are visible as police officers both on and off duty. This transfer policy results in officers and their families moving into and participating in the life of the communities they police.

19. The force, in partnership with the board, has identified five strategic priorities and supporting objectives for the period 2009–12 ([Exhibit 1, overleaf](#)). These priorities were identified in accordance with the four SOAs. These policing plan priorities are not fully integrated with the force operational control strategy and although there are some elements of overlap, there is no direct link to the control strategy priorities. It is the policing plan that is the main driver for business and this lack of integration makes it challenging to identify a clear linked set of priorities and to monitor and review divisional or force activity and impact.

Governance and accountability

Northern Joint Police Board

Board members have a good understanding of their role, with training provided to new members and, more recently, the introduction of a formal job description for board members. There are some inconsistencies in how the work of the board is reported back to each of the four constituent councils. The board does not yet have a structured approach to monitoring risks and the action being taken to mitigate them. Independent custody visits are carried out for the main facilities within Northern Constabulary and the results reported to the board. However, these independent visits do not cover all of the custody facilities, particularly those in Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland.

20. The board has 24 members, made up of 16 councillors from Highland Council, four from Western Isles Council, two from Orkney Council and two from Shetland Islands Council. It meets four times per year, usually in Inverness but meetings are also regularly scheduled to be held in one of the island authorities. The board convenor is a councillor from the Western Isles. The board is supported by seven subcommittees. The audit and complaints subcommittees meet four times per year; the others meet when requested by the board.

21. The board is supported by the treasurer, the clerk and the assistant clerk to the board, all provided by Highland Council. Their roles are incorporated within the work of Legal Services at the council. Approximately five per cent of the clerk's time, and 50 per cent of the assistant clerk's, is devoted to supporting the police board. The board has recently approved proposals to establish a dedicated support post, in order to help strengthen its independent scrutiny role.

Exhibit 1

Strategic priorities and objectives

Promoting safer roads	By being proactive in our efforts to ensure that everyone feels safe and secure. We will proactively work to make our roads safer, reducing road accidents and casualties, while working productively with key partners to improve road safety and public education.
Reducing crime	By working with our strategic partners, including our communities, to prevent crime by addressing the causes of crime as well as actual incidents of crime.
Tackling serious crime	By investigating all aspects of a crime, including drug-related crime, to address the needs of victims, witnesses and offenders. We will work efficiently and effectively to increase the level of crime detection and the number of serious offenders brought to justice.
Developing safer and stronger communities	By responding to all relevant incidents, regardless of whether the incident is a major road accident or related to anti-social behaviour. Criminal disruption of business and quality of life within local communities will not be considered acceptable. We will work to protect and preserve individual safety, as well as reducing fear, prejudice and injustice.
Maintaining public order	By managing organisational and operational risks, implementing best practice in terms of business continuity and operating as a Best Value public service in a policing context that increasingly sees international issues resonating regionally and locally.

Source: *Strategic Plan 2009–12*, Northern Constabulary

22. There is some inconsistency in the governance arrangements between the board and the four constituent councils with, for example, one receiving board minutes at full council meetings, one placing board minutes in the members' lounge and another receiving briefings from board members only on an exceptions basis. However, there is a sound underlying level of engagement between the board and the four councils with, for example, the four council convenors meeting to discuss policing budgets. Generally, the councils view the board as effective but are clear that they have a limited role once the board is constituted. The board's status as a 'separate legal entity' leads to some ambiguity in how constituent councils engage with the board.

23. New board members receive training on policing issues from Northern Constabulary. Job descriptions have also recently been introduced for board members. These provide useful guidance on the role of board members in areas such as partnership working and scrutiny.

We found little evidence of ongoing training provided to board members by the force. However, a training needs analysis was carried out during 2009 with the aim of developing a programming of training for members.

24. The board's decision-making is open and transparent. Board meetings are held in public, and agendas, reports and minutes are easily accessible on the website. Around a third of board reports are for decision-making and two-thirds for noting. Members do not limit their questions to local concerns and generally focus on strategic concerns. The board has also recently piloted the web-casting of its meetings, in an effort to make them more open and accessible to the public.

25. The board has not had a structured approach to risk management. A corporate risk register has been established for several years and board members have recently approved a revised risk management strategy. However, there is no evidence that board members have regularly considered

high-level risks and the proposed action to mitigate these risks. Specific risks, such as financial sustainability, are discussed by the board, but there is no structured consideration, carried out throughout the year, of the corporate risk register and the action being taken to mitigate risks.

26. Northern Joint Police Board undertakes its duty of scrutiny of police custody through its Independent Custody Visiting Scheme (ICVS). Since 2000, Northern Joint Police Board has operated an ICVS with independent members of the community making unannounced visits to police stations and checking on the conditions and welfare of those held in police custody. The findings of these visits are reported to the board and incorporated into the Scottish Annual Report on the operation of Independent Custody Visiting in Scotland.

27. While the board is fulfilling its scrutiny responsibilities within mainland custody facilities, the Northern Joint Police Board ICVS does not presently visit police cells

on the island authorities. Following the introduction of custody visiting in 2000 at Inverness, the scheme was extended by 2002 to cover the stations at Dingwall, Alness, Aviemore and Nairn. This left a number of custody facilities outwith the scope of the ICVS, with around 400 custodies processed each quarter in the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland. There are practical difficulties for the board in undertaking truly independent custody visits to prisoners from within small population groups, and a number of local authority members currently inspect these facilities as legalised cells. While the use of local authority members to perform this role is a pragmatic solution to the problem, until such time as these persons become fully trained and accredited members of the ICVS, the board remains vulnerable to risk in this area. The board is required to ensure that the Northern Joint Police Board ICVS covers all the custody facilities within the force area and there is opportunity to learn from good practice in this area.

28. Northern Joint Police Board does not currently ensure that its custody visitors are adequately briefed on recommendations on police custody from external scrutiny bodies. HMICS has completed three custody-related thematic reports in the two years prior to this report. The recommendations from these inspections have not been passed to the custody visitors by the board. This inhibits the custody visitors from exploring these areas and reporting their subsequent findings to the board.

Northern Constabulary

The force has restructured into three divisions, containing a total of eight area commands, which are principally coterminous with the Highland and Island Council management areas. There is a positive level of empowerment to the divisions and area commands that allows each to reflect and focus on local need in their area. The force executive team provide strong visible leadership and there

is a corporate approach to force-wide issues, with a good overview and challenge of policing activity. At present the force reports to the board on progress against external scrutiny body recommendations. There is insufficient information in these reports to allow the board to effectively scrutinise the force's decisions on implementation or prioritisation of these recommendations. Northern Constabulary has recently developed a revised risk management strategy which is a more comprehensive approach to organisational risk, setting out prioritised risks and the action being taken to mitigate these risks.

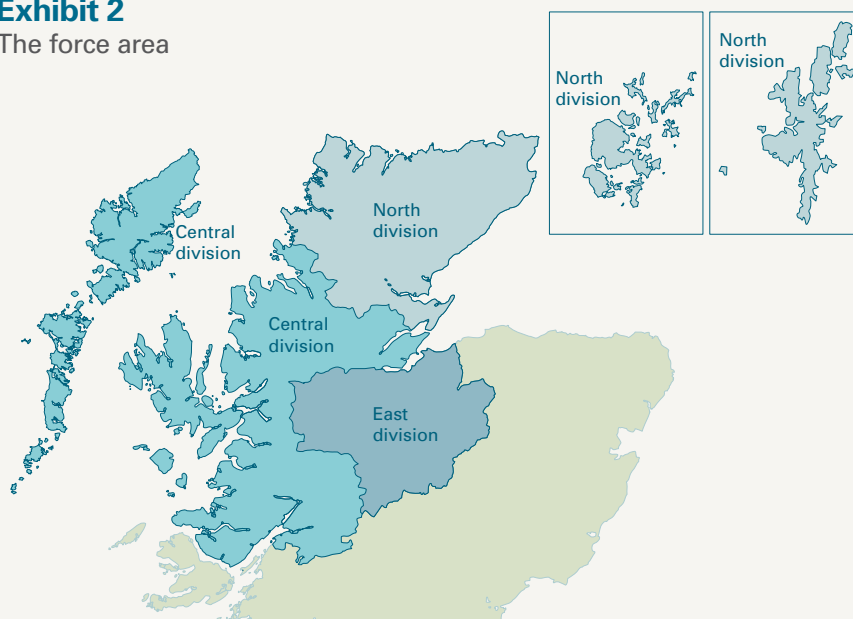
29. At a strategic level, the force is led by the Force Executive, which meets on a weekly basis to manage operational activities. The executive is made up of the chief constable, deputy chief constable, and two chief superintendents, plus the director of Human Resources and the director of Finance and Asset Management. All members of this group also sit on the Executive Advisory Group, which oversees broader strategic issues.

30. The force is organised into three divisions. This follows a major force review, which was started in 2006 and saw a reduction from the previous eight Area Command Units to three divisions:

- East (serving the Highland communities of Inverness, Badenoch, Strathspey and Nairn).
- Central (Ross and Cromarty, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, and the Western Isles).
- North (Caithness, Sutherland, East Ross, Orkney and Shetland).

31. The area commands have been retained within the divisional structure and each of the eight area commands is led by a chief inspector. The island authorities of Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland are coterminous with their respective area commands. These area commands are part of larger divisions which are led by a superintendent (see Exhibit 2). The divisions are principally coterminous with highland and island council management areas and provide strategic management and direction

Exhibit 2
The force area



Source: HMICS and the Scottish Government

to the area commands. This pragmatic approach results in the relevant council areas deriving the benefits of being coterminous with policing boundaries, while retaining the cost benefits of larger divisions.

32. The force retains oversight of divisional activity and has a corporate approach to force-wide issues. The three territorial police divisions and their component area commands differ widely in geographical challenge but there is clear central oversight and monitoring of activity and performance against the policing plan. Divisional performance is scrutinised and commanders held to account by the head of operations on a monthly basis.

33. Northern Constabulary has recently developed a revised risk management strategy but at the time of the inspection had not yet fully implemented it. The revised strategy is a more comprehensive approach to organisational risk. The force established a corporate risk register several years ago. There is little evidence that this was regularly updated or that mitigating actions were routinely monitored, suggesting that strategic risk management was not fully embedded within the organisation. A revised risk management strategy has recently been developed, with a timetable for establishing a revised risk register by March 2010, a broader scope to take in wider issues such as financial sustainability and reputational risks, and a methodology for risks to be regularly monitored by senior officers.

34. The force has a good overview of community planning and community engagement activity across the three divisions, with central monitoring and analysis of activity. There is coordination of approach to managing operational risk areas. The force demonstrates a balance of focus between local issues and prioritisation of national risk areas.

35. Historically, the reports which are supplied to the board by Northern Constabulary on progress made against external scrutiny body recommendations have not fully detailed all recommendations received, which has hindered the board in fully discharging its scrutiny responsibilities. Northern Constabulary reports its progress on the majority of recommendations made by HMICS and other scrutiny bodies to the police board. Overall, this provides a useful summary, allowing members to easily monitor the force's progress in implementing recommendations, but does not provide enough information to allow the board to scrutinise the force's rationale behind decisions on prioritisation or rejection of improvement recommendations. Reporting of progress against recommendations on its own is insufficient to allow the board to fully discharge its scrutiny responsibilities.

36. The force could do more to improve its public accountability by improving the performance information available to the public. The force website www.northern.police.uk is easily accessible by the public and allows access to the *Strategic and Annual Policing Performance Report* but is limited in the amount of contextual performance information. Performance information is available and easy to read and understand but does not include trend information, targets, comparisons with Scottish average figures and other forces, or explain the reasons for underperformance and how it plans to improve.

Partnership working and community engagement

Northern Joint Police Board

Board members understand the policing needs of their communities. They are also involved in community planning activities in each of the four council areas. Scrutiny of the force's community planning activities is developing. Members have monitored the introduction of SOAs and the progress being made towards the various objectives which relate to policing.

37. Board members have a good understanding about policing issues affecting their communities. They receive reports on the results of policing surveys, helping to supplement their general knowledge gained through their role as elected members.

38. There is clear evidence of effective partnership working between the board and its community planning partners. Board members are involved in each of the four community safety partnerships covered by Northern Constabulary. In recent months, the board has temporarily not been represented on the Orkney community safety partnership, but this is now being addressed.

39. Scrutiny of the force's community planning activity is developing. During 2008/09, the board was provided with regular updates on the introduction of SOAs for each of the four council areas. This was followed, in November 2009, with a consolidated SOA report, which provided members with detailed monitoring information, allowing them to assess the progress being made by the force towards achieving the various SOA objectives which relate to policing.

Northern Constabulary

The force works well with its partners, displaying a strong commitment to community planning and to delivering local outcomes. There is good engagement between board members, area commanders and divisional commanders. There is a lack of force-wide reporting of progress against SOA outcomes. Community engagement and consultation takes place in a structured manner and is used to help shape force priorities. Despite the force providing clear guidance on roles and responsibilities when entering into partnerships with different agencies, some relationships with partners beyond divisional headquarters were found to suffer from a lack of clarity of the partners' role.

40. Community engagement and consultation takes place in a structured, well-managed three-tier consultation process. All community councils and ward forums within the force area are attended by a police officer. Divisional and area commanders engage with and are accessible to key stakeholders, partners and elected members. The chief constable and force executive engage at chief officer level. This provides opportunity for community groups and elected members to raise issues of concern or interest and receive feedback. Partners and elected members interviewed reported favourably on the process. The structured consultation process provides opportunity for local to strategic issues to be raised and dealt with appropriately.

41. Northern Constabulary has engaged well with each of its four CPPs to develop SOAs. While each CPP had a sound understanding of the success or otherwise of their own individual SOA, the force failed to present the board with evidence of collective progress across all CPP areas. The chief constable signs all SOAs and the area commanders in

each island authority report back to the CPP on a quarterly basis. The force demonstrates an understanding of the role of SOAs in driving policing activity, yet monitoring and reporting on SOA outcomes is still a developing area. The force has recently introduced an overview report, summarising its progress in achieving the various targets contained within the four SOAs.

42. The force has a strong commitment to community planning. It has incorporated local community planning activity within the three divisions. Area commanders are active members of their local Community Safety Partnership. Divisional and area commanders meet informally with local board members and undertake a detailed exploration of local issues.

43. The force's community planning partners across all four partnerships are confident that Northern Constabulary is fully committed to community planning. There are strong governance and accountability links between the divisional commanders and area commanders and their local CPPs. The force maintains a corporate overview of partnership activities. Central coordination and monitoring of partnership activity is undertaken by the force and any issues or good practice identified. There is police participation throughout the community planning themed partnerships and there was evidence of well-established, mature partnership relationships.

44. Outside of the CPP structure, partnership involvement in operational business planning through police tasking and coordinating meetings is variable. In the Western Isles there is a stated intention to hold a partnership tasking and coordinating meeting every two months, though this has not materialised. Historically, in Orkney a joint tasking meeting was held which partners attended. This now no longer takes place, and a lack of communication as to why has meant that partners are unclear as to

whether it is the result of a conscious decision made by the force or if it is being held in abeyance.

45. Despite the force producing clear guidance on roles and responsibilities in partnership working, in some areas relationships with partners had become informal resulting in a lack of clarity of the partners' role. At both strategic and divisional headquarters level there was good sharing of information, engagement and effective working. At area command level this was less consistent. The partnership relationships in two of the council areas were well balanced, while the relationships found on two of the island councils were of passive partners who took what they were provided with. They were unaware of what information, data and statistics were available to them.

Performance management and improvement

Northern Joint Police Board

Board members have a good understanding of the importance of scrutinising police performance. They are provided with a wide range of information on policing activities, performance levels, and progress in implementing the recommendations of external audit and inspection. Members also participate in a series of working groups, providing independent challenge on specific areas such as equalities and the force review. However, board members do not proactively determine what monitoring information they require in order to fully assess the force's progress in meeting its strategic objectives and to meet their scrutiny responsibilities. Similarly, the board tends to rely on the force to identify areas in need of review and improvement. There is also scope for a short summary of the board's activities during the year within the annual public performance report.

46. The chief constable provides a quarterly *Crime Situation* report for each board meeting. This provides a summary of incidents and policing activity, both at force and at area command levels, and is regarded by board members as a useful report. The report is structured on the force's five strategic themes, but it does not provide a full picture of the progress being made. For example, some specific information is given on particular objectives, such as road injuries and deaths and drink driving incidents. But information relating to other objectives, such as detections for speeding, failing to wear seat belts and the use of mobile phones illegally while driving is not routinely provided.

47. Board members also receive the force's monthly performance reports. These provide much more detailed statistical information on policing activity and performance. However, these reports are not structured on the force's five strategic themes. They provide monitoring information on some, but not all, of the strategic targets, and they also report on other, non-strategic, performance issues. In addition, the detailed performance reports are tabled on the day of board meetings, giving most members little time to absorb the key issues. Members are provided with a wealth of information, but they are not able to readily monitor the force's progress towards meeting its strategic targets.

48. The board reviews Northern Constabulary's annual *Public Performance Report*. This is an accessible document and provides a wide range of information, some of which is structured on the main themes of the strategic plan. However, as with the monthly performance reports, there are gaps in the information provided. As a result, it does not provide the reader with a clear assessment of Northern Constabulary's progress in meeting each of its key objectives that are set out in its strategic plan. The report includes a short overview from the convenor, but this does not provide any summary of board activity or its impact.

49. There is a good level of debate and questioning at board meetings. While most board papers are for noting, rather than presenting options for board decisions, members do question officers and, in general, focus on strategic matters, such as financial sustainability. There is also a good level of scrutiny provided by the Audit Working Group, which considers a range of audit and inspection reports and monitors the progress being made in implementing the various recommendations.

50. The board is not proactive in determining what reports it needs to allow it to fulfil its responsibilities. Members do request reports on specific issues, but have not determined the scope and structure of performance monitoring reports. Instead, police officers and managers determine the information which is routinely provided to board members. For example, the board has not been receiving information on the number of children in custody, or made aware about all recommendations from external scrutiny, including those which officers have deemed to be not relevant to their area.

51. Board members carry out some overview of the force's improvement agenda. For example, they were involved in the Force Review Working Group, providing some independent challenge to this major restructuring of Northern Constabulary. More recently, they have become involved in a review of shared services. These are worthwhile reviews, with the potential to generate significant savings, but they are largely initiated by the force, rather than flowing from the independent scrutiny of members. In order to fulfil their duty to work 'in tandem' with the chief constable to secure best value, there is scope for members to play a stronger role in identifying and prioritising activity.

Northern Constabulary

Northern Constabulary has demonstrated commitment to improving services and has undertaken a great deal of improvement activity across the force. This activity is consolidated, prioritised and managed within an overarching corporate improvement plan. Performance management is not currently focused on a range of performance information linked to key force priorities and activity and performance reports to the public and board lack detail.

52. Northern Constabulary has a clear focus on improvement. The force review has led to a major restructuring, with a streamlining of headquarters functions and a shift in resources from support staff to front-line. In addition, it has allowed the creation of Public Protection, Pro-active and National Intelligence Model (NIM) units at each divisional headquarters to support operational policing. The force has introduced a Variable Shift Agreement to concentrate policing resources at core times. The force is now reviewing the impact of this restructuring and aiming to identify any further business benefits or efficiency savings that can be achieved.

53. Northern Constabulary consolidates, prioritises and manages improvement activity within an overarching corporate improvement plan. Prioritisation and delivery of planned objectives following consultation with key stakeholders is managed through the force's annual planning and review cycle. A range of improvement recommendations, consultation activity, ongoing projects and capital works information is considered in setting the forthcoming force objectives, tasks and priorities. These are then implemented in tandem with organisational objectives approved by the force's Capital and Project Monitoring Group. The force retains oversight of progress through the Force Performance

Board, which is chaired by the deputy chief constable and scrutinises and challenges exceptionally good or poor activity.

54. While the Force Policing Plan has a number of performance objectives related to strategic priorities, the Force Strategic Plan contains slightly different performance objectives. This lack of consistency is further demonstrated by the force's own performance reporting mechanism, which details a number of performance objectives which do not mirror those contained within the policing plan. This discrepancy has the potential to cause confusion and to divert attention from key performance areas.

55. The force has a comprehensive management structure to monitor and challenge its performance and through the various chairs such meetings, though collegiate in approach, offer a high level of rigour and challenge. The force's overall approach is, however, constrained by a lack of alignment with its control strategy: the performance report that informs the monitoring process is designed around the force's policing plan but not its control strategy. While the Force Information Management Unit monitors and reports on performance against prevention, information or enforcement activity as part of the NIM process, these updates are not embedded within the force's performance monitoring process.

56. Publicly accessible performance information is not comprehensive. Information available through the force website is easy to read and understand but does not include trend information, targets, comparisons with Scottish average figures and other forces or explore the reasons for variation in force performance. While there is evidence of internal force comparison of performance within divisions and area commands, there is little evidence of the force benchmarking itself against other forces or areas.

57. Improvement activity reports to the board are not comprehensive. The force does not provide sufficient information to the board to enable it to explore fully the rationale behind decisions made in response to scrutiny body recommendations. The board receives external scrutiny reports directly but it currently remains reliant on the police to itemise and report on the recommendations. A consolidated monitoring report, pulling together all the recommendations from the various external scrutiny bodies, has recently been introduced by the force, and provided to board members. This is a welcome development but while there is sufficient information recorded to enable the board to monitor its progress against recommendations, there is insufficient information to allow it to scrutinise the rationale and decisions taken around the force responses to the recommendation.

Use of resources

Northern Joint Police Board

Board members are kept well informed of financial matters, are active in financial monitoring and, through various human resources working groups, are effective in monitoring staffing issues. They scrutinise some strategic aspects of the use of resources, but tend to rely of the force to initiate these reviews.

58. The board is actively involved in overseeing the financial management of the force. In addition to approving the overall budget, it approves all significant financial decisions, such as major contracts and the annual capital expenditure programme. It also monitors budget reports throughout the year and reviews annual savings and efficiency reports.

59. Board members also monitor the use of resources through their membership of various member-officer working groups. The Investors In People (IIP) working group, for

example, has reviewed sickness absence rates, and the results of the biannual staffing surveys. The board was also represented in the force review through the convenor and vice convenor's involvement in the Force Review Programme Board. In addition, board members attended a one-day seminar on the review. This major restructuring, which saw a significant shift in resources from support services to front-line policing, was supported by an informed and participating board.

60. The board takes a strategic interest in the force's financial position, which goes beyond simply monitoring the monthly budget reports for the current year. Following the force review, there has been an increase in front-line policing numbers and the force currently has a relatively sound financial position. Board members have shown a keen awareness of the economic climate and, in anticipation of future budgetary restrictions, have challenged officers on the sustainability of the current policing model and financial position.

61. Board members have scrutinised some strategic aspects of the force's use of resources. As mentioned earlier, they were involved in overseeing the force review, which has led to a significant restructuring of the force and a shift in resources. More recently, they have also become involved in a working group to review the potential for shared services with neighbouring authorities. However, these reviews have generally been initiated by the force, rather than arisen from the board's scrutiny of performance and assessment of areas in need of improvement. While it has considered particular projects at various times, the board has not established an overall prioritised programme of reviews, based on an assessment of performance or risk.

Northern Constabulary

The force's financial control is sound and it has a good record of achieving efficiency savings targets. While it does not have a formal financial strategy, it does take a long-term view of its financial sustainability. A major force review has restructured the delivery of police services and generated significant efficiency savings. The force has a sound approach to strategically managing its staff resources, yet operationally there was little evidence of the divisional tasking process being used to meet local policing challenges through the routine movement of resources from the mainland to island locations.

62. Northern Constabulary had a net revenue budget for 2009/10 of £59.4 million, representing a net increase of over £1 million on the previous year. However, there is evidence to show that the force's expenditure is relatively low compared with other Scottish police forces. In 2008/09, it spent £223 per capita, significantly less than the Scottish average of £258 and slightly below the force's expenditure levels in 2007/08 ([Exhibit 3](#)).

63. Northern Constabulary has strong financial control. It has in place good processes for budget setting and monitoring, and provides comprehensive reports to the board. The force also has a proven record of achieving efficiency savings. In 2008/09, £1.8 million of recurring savings were reported, together with a further £1.7 million received from the sale of police houses. A further £1.8 million of savings is planned for the current financial year. The force has been able to generate cash savings which have been reinvested in increasing the number of front-line police officers.

Exhibit 3

Gross expenditure per capita population on Scottish policing 2008/09 and 2007/08

Gross expenditure per capita population	2008/09 Annual accounts £	2007/08 £
Scotland	258	258
Tayside	241	234
Lothian and Borders	292	287
Strathclyde	265	267
Northern	223	230
Grampian	236	222
Central	221	229
Fife	235	239
Dumfries and Galloway	277	272

Note: On 1 April 2008 police ICT functions transferred to the SPSA (Scottish Police Services Authority). This will affect comparative expenditure information between 2007/08 and 2008/09.

Source: Annual accounts of police boards

64. Much of this was achieved through a review of its policing model. The force review, which started in 2007, involved a rationalisation of policing service. The chief constable and board members were clear that this would not result in any reduction of visible community policing. The force reduced the number of police support staff posts by 75 (approximately 15 per cent), reduced the number of staff in force headquarters and increased the number of police officers. The force review did not result in the closure of any police stations. Northern Constabulary retains a number of single officer stations which are geographically remote and where officers routinely work alone or supported by a special constable. The board and the chief constable maintain this is essential to provide a visible police presence to communities in very remote locations.

65. The force restructuring has enabled the creation at each divisional headquarters (Inverness, Dingwall and Wick) of a Public Protection unit, NIM unit and a Pro-active unit. This structure is more in line with that adopted by other Scottish forces and has allowed greater divisional resilience in both mainstream and specialist policing resources, as well as increasing the oversight and support to the management of child protection and public protection enquiries.

66. In common with other forces there is good awareness of the total costs of policing in relation to its divisions and functions, but it has difficulty in identifying the cost of policing activities. This means the force has little awareness and hence lacks transparency in the relationship between resources invested, performance levels and overall outcomes.

67. The force does not have a long-term financial plan but does look beyond the current financial year. Current capital plans are for three years (2008/09 to 2010/11) with current revenue plans only covering a single year, 2009/10. The force has engaged with constituent authorities around the level of funding it receives and has recognised that this level may not be sustainable. It has been examining how it can generate time-releasing and cash efficiencies, modelling its budget on different levels of efficiency savings to alleviate the impact.

68. Northern Constabulary does not have an overarching asset management strategy, linked to its strategic priorities and objectives. The force has asset management plans for both its fleet and property. It has largely completed a long-term programme of upgrading or replacing its police stations and, as a result, its estate is in a good state of repair. Surprisingly, given the rurality of much of the area, there are few examples of shared accommodation with other public sector organisations, such as the fire service. We understand that Northern Constabulary has made efforts to progress this issue in recent years but has found partner organisations often unwilling to commit fully to the proposed works.

69. Despite Northern Constabulary deploying a high number of special police constables, there are restrictions on access to equipment and information which unnecessarily limits their effectiveness. The use of special constables is a pragmatic solution to policing very remote communities as they are able to provide a first response to accidents or significant incidents and communicate with the nearest full-time police officers. In less remote communities special constables are integral parts of policing teams. At single officer stations the special constable can be the main source

of corroboration or partner working with the full-time officer. When there is no full-time officer present at a police station the special constable has no access to the building, the police computer systems or self-briefing information. Additionally, the majority of special constables are not authorised to drive police vehicles within Northern Constabulary. This restriction on access to equipment, information and vehicles inhibits the deployment of a valuable policing resource.

70. Northern Constabulary has workforce planning processes in place and has linked its force training plan to its strategic priorities. Training need is assessed and prioritised on a force-wide basis to meet service demand. The force has also made savings in its training budget, with an innovative approach to the funding of officers undertaking the Diploma in Police Leadership and Management. Successful diploma students are eligible to be considered for promotion. Northern Constabulary has made changes to its diploma selection criteria, which have reduced training costs. Candidates who are selected for promotion but who do not hold the necessary qualifications are supported for the diploma course, with the guarantee of promotion on successful completion of the diploma. This has reduced the number of candidates supported for diploma studies who are not subsequently required for predicted promoted post vacancies.

71. There is also evidence of good staff morale within the force. Staff surveys, covering police officers and support staff, have been carried out every two years, though from 2009 they will be conducted annually. The most recent survey had a high response rate of over 70 per cent and does not reveal any significant concerns. Staff are particularly positive about having a clear role within the force and in having sufficient training

and support to help them carry out their work. The most significant concern expressed was about the level of consultation carried out before operational changes are made.

72. Limited evidence was found of specialist staff resources being routinely moved within divisions to address policing challenges. Since the recent force re-organisation, the capacity of divisions to deploy specialist resources based on demand has increased, yet access across all area commands was variable. Movement of officers based on identified operational need is relatively common in mainland areas yet during the inspection we found movement of officers to the island areas of the force occurred less frequently. Despite a widespread recognition that drug abuse presents a major problem in Shetland, we found no evidence of it being addressed through the division-wide tasking process, for example by deployment of the divisional proactive team to the islands.

Equalities

Northern Joint Police Board

The board receives regular progress reports on the force's statutory equality schemes, and it is represented on the force's Diversity Progress Group. However, diversity and equality issues are not fully embedded in its work.

73. The board has developed statutory equality schemes for race, gender and disability and has published annual progress reports for each of the three schemes which are supported by action plans. All of these publications are available on the board's website. The board receives updates on Northern Constabulary's equality schemes at regular intervals throughout the year, but there is no evidence to suggest that these items are routinely scrutinised by board members.

74. Three board members are represented on the force's Diversity Progress Group, including the convenor and the vice convenor. Their contribution to the group is still developing, but this does place them in a good position to strengthen the board's involvement in equalities. However, there is limited involvement of other board members in diversity and equality issues. In April 2009, Northern Constabulary and Highland Council delivered joint equalities training for the board, but only 50 per cent of members participated in this training event.

Northern Constabulary

The consideration of equalities issues is reasonably well integrated within mainland areas of Northern Constabulary but less well developed in the island authority areas.

75. Northern Constabulary has a reasonably well-developed approach to equalities at the corporate centre. It is currently writing a single equality scheme, which will consolidate the existing schemes for race, gender and disability and add additional guidance on equality issues relating to age, sexual orientation, gender identity and religion. Northern Constabulary has also worked with its partners in the Highlands to promote equality and diversity through the 'Hate Free Highlands' campaign, which includes an online reporting system. This is due to be extended to the island authorities but was not in place at the time of the inspection.

76. The chief constable chairs the Diversity and Equality business area for Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) which helps drive/support equality and diversity within force business. The force has worked to access hard to

reach groups. There is evidence of positive engagement and interaction with a wide range of diversity groups at the strategic level. This was less evident outside the Highland authority area, with little representation and engagement from representatives of minority communities within the island authorities.

77. There is clear leadership and strategic emphasis on equality and diversity but less focus on the assessment of the impact of policies and activities. Good practice is promoted by the force diversity officer among constituent councils' CPPs. The force benchmarks itself against other forces through the Stonewall workplace equality index and collects equality monitoring data across the strands of diversity. This information is monitored and reviewed through the diversity progress group. The force has been slow to progress equality impact assessments and as a result cannot be assured that staff and communities are not being adversely impacted by policies or policing activity.

78. While there is a diverse range of participants at the strategic Community Advisory Group (CAG), more needs to be done to ensure that the hard to reach communities in the island authority areas have their voices heard. In August 2008, Northern Constabulary formalised its community engagement structures with different equality groups by developing a strategic Community Advisory Group. The group has broad representation from faith, LGBT and transgender, youth, ethnicity and disabled groups. Representatives are primarily drawn from within Highland Council area and there is little representation from communities within the island authorities.

Sustainability

Northern Joint Police Board

While there is little specific consideration of environmental matters, board members do consider the wider issues relating to the sustainability of communities, particularly in rural areas.

79. There has been little discussion of environmental sustainability at board meetings, although issues relating to the wider economic and social sustainability of communities are considered by board members. A key aspect of the recent force review was a restructuring of the force, but board members helped to ensure that any drive for economies was balanced with the need to sustain policing in relatively remote rural locations.

Northern Constabulary

The force is developing a more comprehensive approach to sustainability. It has consulted on the effect of proposed changes to police staff posts in remote communities. Although some work has begun, the force does not have an approach that covers all aspects of sustainability.

80. The force has a good understanding of social and service sustainability. During the force review it consulted extensively when considering the removal of jobs from remote communities. There is a strong commitment to the maintenance of visible community policing in geographically remote areas. The force has maintained and invested in single officer stations to retain the policing infrastructure in these remote areas. In very remote areas the force recruits and retains special constables who can provide a point of contact and reassurance to their communities as well as the initial response to incidents.

81. The force has invested heavily in having an infrastructure that is modern and fit for purpose. The force property stock is predominantly new and well maintained. New build properties benefit from modern insulation and the newest have on site renewable power generation. Where possible, meetings are conducted by video conferencing rather than travelling. The force is presently running a light bulb scheme to encourage staff to identify efficiencies and this is identifying financial savings. The financial savings target is well communicated throughout the force but there were no clear energy consumption or carbon emission targets for buildings, divisions or service areas. The force has the opportunity to further develop its approach to sustainability.

Part 2. Northern Constabulary performance assessment



Delivering policing plan outcomes

The force's policing plan is outcome-focused and acknowledges the importance of national imperatives as well as community policing throughout the Islands and Highlands. The plan provides a degree of continuity in the organisational priorities identified, with the same key issues remaining constant over a number of years. The force has not supplied data to the SPPF on the key areas of public satisfaction and emergency response times, making comparison with other Scottish police forces more difficult. The force has had some success in reducing recorded crime and detection rates remain good.

82. The most fundamental measure of success for any police force is the delivery of tangible outcomes for the communities it serves. SOAs will become one of the key sources of evidence of force performance. Given that the SOAs are still at a relatively early stage of development, our ability to assess the extent to which outcomes have been achieved is limited. We have therefore considered how Northern Constabulary is making a difference by examining service performance in relation to its strategic objectives for 2008/09.

83. The force's strategic priorities are outlined in the *Annual Policing Plan* and, since the publication of the 2007/08 plan, have remained unchanged. The five strategic priorities are:

- promoting safer roads
- reducing crime
- tackling serious crime
- developing safer and stronger communities
- maintaining public order.

Since 2009/10, two further non-operational objectives have been added to the plan:

- Modernising our services.
- Developing our people and becoming an employer of choice.

84. There are some gaps in the performance monitoring information that is available. Over the past two years, Northern Constabulary has not supplied all of the information or contextual narrative required as part of the national SPPF. These omissions include key issues such as public satisfaction and emergency response times. This lack of fully reporting in all SPPF areas makes it more difficult to compare Northern Constabulary's performance with other police forces. Despite these gaps an assessment can be made of the force's progress in meeting its strategic priorities, based on annual trends in its performance.

Objective 1 – promoting safer roads

Working with its partners, the force has succeeded in significantly reducing the number of individuals killed or seriously injured in road collisions, while not meeting its target to increase the numbers of drink drivers brought to justice.

85. Between 1994 and 1998, a yearly average of 412 people were killed or seriously injured within the Northern Constabulary area. By 2008/09, that figure had fallen to 179, a figure that greatly exceeds the force target of a 40 per cent reduction (see Exhibit 4, overleaf). Similarly, declines have been recorded in the numbers of children killed or seriously injured with the 1994–98 yearly average falling from 46 to just six children in 2008/09.

86. Road deaths alone have remained at a fairly consistent level over the last three years with the number of fatalities at an average level compared with those recorded by other Scottish forces.

87. The success in casualty reduction has not extended to efforts to target drink and drug drivers. Despite attempting to increase by five per cent the amount of offenders brought to justice for drink and drug driving, 2008/09 has seen an eight per cent fall in the number of offences detected on the previous year. In actual numbers this has meant a reduction in recorded offences of drink driving from 863 in 2007/08, to 796 during 2008/09.

88. Overall, in 2008/09, the number of motor vehicle offences recorded by Northern Constabulary increased by 11 per cent on the previous year. This is largely due to a marked increase in speeding offences (23 per cent) which is attributed to a new intelligence-led deployment of officers which was introduced in January 2009 with the Northern Safety Camera Partnership. This new approach uses speed survey and collision data to more effectively target vehicles driving at excess or inappropriate speed at or near areas where serious collisions have occurred.

Objective 2 – reducing crime

Over the past year, the force has not met the majority of its own yearly crime reduction targets, with an increase of 1.5 per cent in Groups 1 to 4 crimes (crimes of violence, indecency, dishonesty, fire-raising and reckless conduct). Only in Group 4 crime did the force achieve its target and record a reduction in crime.

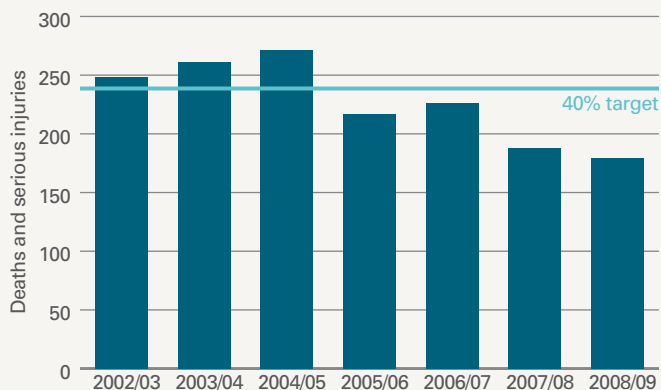
89. The force has experienced significant fluctuations in the numbers of Group 1 to 4 crimes reported over successive years. During the three-year period from 2006/07 to 2008/09 the force experienced significant rises in recorded crime followed by subsequent improvements which were not sustained in 2008/09. The absence of contextual information supplied by the force to the SPPF makes detailed interpretation of these

fluctuations difficult. While recorded crime data for 2009/10 fell outside of the scope of this inspection, it is encouraging to note that early indications are that crime is declining in all four groups

90. Group 1 crime (crimes of violence) shows an increase in reported offences in part linked to alcohol-related incidents in the night-time economy, and in part as a result of more offences against children being reported with the roll-out of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC). During 2008/09, Group 1 crimes increased by 5.8 per cent on the previous year. This included increases in serious assault, threats and extortion, cruelty and unnatural treatment of children and possession of firearms. The majority of serious assaults were linked to the night-time economy. Threats and extortion incidents tend to relate to escalating domestic and neighbourhood disputes and not to serious and organised crime. The increase in crimes against children is indicative of increased public awareness and better information sharing between partners with the roll-out of GIRFEC. The majority of firearms offences related to threatening behaviour involving imitation firearms, and no incidents resulted in the ultimate discharge of a firearm by an offender.

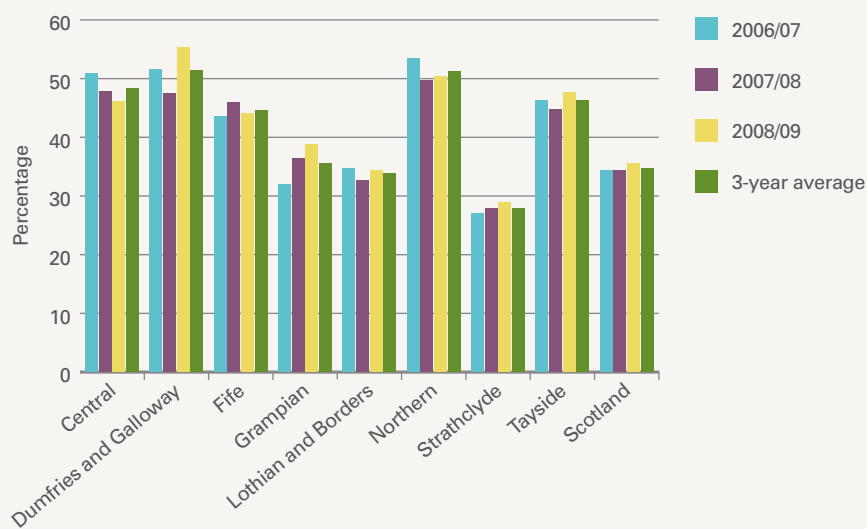
91. In common with other forces, Northern Constabulary does not currently have a recording mechanism that can differentiate between offences that are historical in nature and those that were committed within the reporting period. For example, there appears to have been a 34 per cent increase since 2007/08 in the number of lewd and libidinous offences. This is largely due to the retrospective reporting and detection of a number of historical offences, carried out in previous years. Therefore, the apparent increase in this crime type can be attributed to additional police activity in child and family protection rather than an increase in offending.

Exhibit 4
Road deaths and serious injuries



Source: HMICS and Audit Scotland

Exhibit 5
Group 1 to 4 detection rates



Source: HMICS

92. During 2008/09, the force recorded a detection rate for all crime of 63 per cent, the second highest in Scotland. This figure is higher than the average detection rates recorded by all forces in Scotland (Exhibit 5). In fact, detection rates vary widely across Scotland, influenced by various factors such as recorded crime levels, adherence to the Scottish Crime

Recording Standard, geography and demography. Northern Constabulary undoubtedly benefits from the rural nature of its geographical area, as detection rates are traditionally higher in these locations than in urban areas.

Objective 3 – tackling serious crime

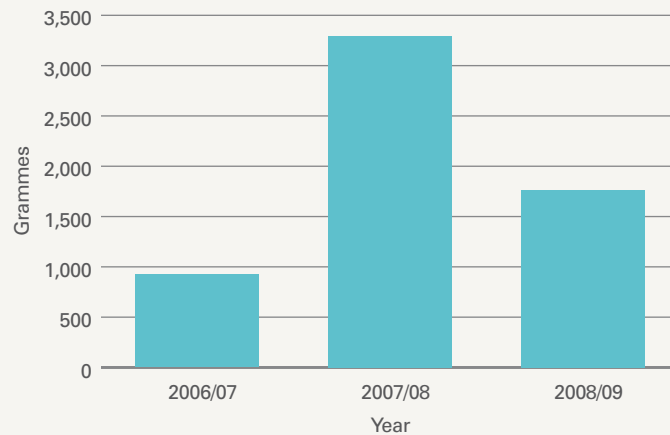
Detected drugs offences are indicative of the pro-activity of a force. Northern Constabulary has been increasing the number of recorded offences detected for class A drugs, although the volume of drugs recovered has fallen. Despite a recent increase, the longer-term trend for violent crime is falling. The narrow range of targets used by the force to measure performance in tackling serious crime makes a comprehensive assessment of performance in this area difficult.

93. The limited nature of the measures selected by Northern Constabulary makes a thorough assessment of performance in this area challenging. The force concentrates performance objectives in this category on class A drug offences and serious and violent crimes. Additional performance measures should be considered to provide a fuller picture of the outcomes of police activity in this priority area.

94. The force has been able to record an increase in class A drug offences during 2008/09, but has seen the volume of recoveries fall from the previous year (Exhibit 6). This reflects good progress with more detections for supply and possession with intent to supply of controlled drugs. And though drug recoveries have fallen, it should be noted that a particularly large amount of drugs were recovered during 2007/08 making it more difficult to sustain further increases. Tackling the supply of class A drugs is a priority throughout Scotland as it is often a sign of the presence of serious and organised crime groups. As a result of the force review and divisional re-structuring, its ability to act proactively was greatly enhanced and directed mainly towards combating the supply of controlled drugs.

Exhibit 6

Northern Constabulary – class A drug seizures (grams)



Source: HMICS

95. The force has seen a recent increase in recorded offences of a serious violent nature. Although, over a three-year period the trend remains downwards, with over 20 per cent fewer offences being recorded in 2008/09 than in 2006/07. Detection rates for offences of this nature have remained consistently high and in 2008/09 stood at 90.8 per cent. Thus the force has succeeded in achieving its target, despite in real terms this reflecting a fall of 2.4 percentage points on the previous year.

Objective 4 – developing safer and stronger communities

The force is not meeting its targets for the time taken to submit reports to the Children's Reporter or Procurator Fiscal and in both cases is exhibiting the second to worst performance in Scotland. Public perception surveys indicate that the fear of crime and antisocial behaviour among the residents of Northern has increased, while satisfaction with police visibility and service standards have increased slightly.

96. Over the last three years, Northern Constabulary has improved the time it takes to submit reports to the procurator fiscal, with 80 per cent now achieving the national target of being submitted within 28 days. While this improvement is acknowledged, it should be noted that nationally this figure is the second lowest reported by forces in Scotland and is well behind the highest rate of 95.8 per cent.

97. During 2008/09, the timeliness of reports submitted to the Children's Reporter fell by four per cent on the previous year and now stands at 77.5 per cent. This figure is the second lowest of all forces in Scotland and is considerably lower than the highest rate recorded of 95.9 per cent.

98. Reducing sickness absence is one of the force's targets for safer and stronger communities. In 2006/07, the force's absence rates were among the highest in Scotland yet these have steadily reduced over the past three years. With reference to recent work carried out by the CIPD, Northern Constabulary's current absence rate

for police staff is approximately as expected for a Scottish force of its size, while that for its police officers is greater than might be expected. HMICS has recently published a national inspection of attendance management which may provide the force with further guidance and help it to maintain the progress it has made.

99. The force review enabled police commanders to deploy extra police officers on high profile patrols and yet the fear of crime and antisocial behaviour within the community has not declined but has in fact risen. Notwithstanding the lack of the force's public satisfaction data in the SPPF, an examination of its public perception surveys reveals that satisfaction among Northern residents in levels of police visibility and service standards has increased. In order that the positive impact of the force review is not diluted, the force should address this perception gap.

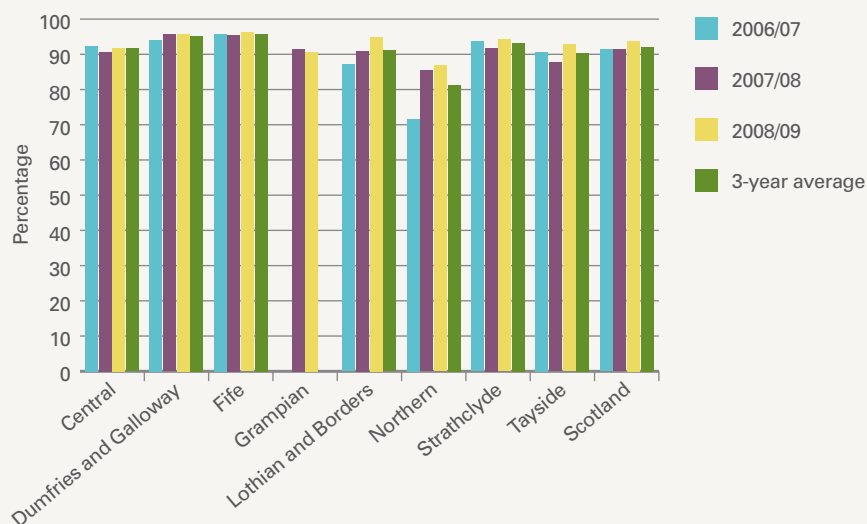
Objective 5 – maintaining public order

Northern Constabulary has the second lowest number of reported racist incidents in Scotland and the highest detection rate for racially motivated crime. It has made progress towards the national target to answer 90 per cent of 999 calls within ten seconds but is still the only force in Scotland not to achieve this.

100. During 2008/09, the force achieved an eight per cent increase in the number of racially aggravated crimes detected. While the figure achieved of 84 per cent is evidence of progress in this area, it still falls some way short of the challenging target of 90 per cent that the force set itself. Nevertheless, the force enjoys the highest detection rate in Scotland for offences of this nature.

Exhibit 7

Proportion of 999 calls answered within ten seconds



Note: No data is available for Grampian 2006/07.

Source: HMICS

101. While the force also was just unsuccessful in achieving its target of maintaining the 'number of racist incidents per 1,000 population' at 0.4 by end of 2008/09, it is possible that the figure of 0.5 per 1,000 population is evidence of greater community confidence in reporting incidents to the police.

102. Northern Constabulary is the only force in Scotland not to achieve the national target of answering 90 per cent of 999 calls within ten seconds ([Exhibit 7](#)). During 2008/09, a total of 86.8 per cent of emergency calls were answered within this time, an increase of 16.7 percentage points since 2006/07. Despite a positive upward trend over the last three years, the force continues to exhibit the poorest performance in Scotland in this area. These circumstances clearly represent an area for improvement that the force should address.

Part 3. Improvement recommendations



The improvement programme

103. Continuous improvement in public services and local governance are central to the Best Value and Community Planning policy framework. In striving to achieve the highest possible standards of service, members of the joint board must focus on key policy objectives and the needs of service users and

communities. This requires a culture where areas in need of improvement are identified and openly discussed and in which service performance is constructively challenged.

104. Northern Constabulary and the Joint Board are aware of the key areas where improvements are needed and are addressing them.

105. In order to deliver a best value police service to the communities of Highland, the Western Isles, Orkney, and Shetland, Northern Joint Police Board, Northern Constabulary and the chief constable must work together and take shared responsibility. The table below sets out the key areas where the force and the board need to improve.

Improvement agenda

Northern Joint Police Board

1. A programme of ongoing training on policing issues should be developed for board members.
2. Board members should be more proactive in determining the range and content of reports submitted by officers. In particular, they should ensure that they are provided with enough information to allow them to fully assess the force's progress in achieving its key strategic targets.
3. Board members should develop a more proactive scrutiny of the strategic use of resources by Northern Constabulary, to help them play a stronger role in leading improvements and identifying and prioritising review activity.
4. The board and chief constable should review the annual public performance report to ensure that it provides a report on the performance of the board as well as the force.
5. Board members should take a more active role in regularly monitoring strategic risks and the action being taken by officers to mitigate these risks.

Northern Constabulary

1. To strengthen corporate direction and communication of priorities the force should integrate the Force Policing Plan and the Force Control Strategy.
2. To improve its performance monitoring and reporting the force should:
 - monitor and report on the prevention, intelligence and enforcement activity driven by the Force Control Strategy
 - provide comprehensive performance reports to the joint police board
 - provide comprehensive publicly accessible performance information on the force website
 - align performance monitoring reports to strategic objectives.
3. The force should expand its report to Northern Joint Police Board on progress against recommendations made by external scrutiny bodies. It should include the rationale behind the course of action selected by the force.

4. The force should formally agree information-sharing protocols with all partners beyond the CPP structure.
5. The force should concentrate performance improvement on the following areas:
 - Focus on meeting agreed national targets for the submission of reports to the Procurator Fiscal and Children's Reporter.
 - Continue to address achieving the national call handling targets for emergency calls.

Northern Joint Police Board, police authorities (constituent councils) and Northern Constabulary

1. Work together to strengthen the capacity of the board to provide independent challenge and scrutiny.
2. Northern Joint Police Board should work with the four constituent councils to help ensure that a consistent approach is taken to reporting its activities and the performance of Northern Constabulary to elected members.

Appendix 1.

Expectations of police authorities

The Scottish government has issued two main sources of guidance on the role of elected members and police authorities:

- Circular 11/2003, *Implementing Best Value In The Scottish Police Service*, issued in December 2003.
- *Guidance to Members*, issued in June 2007.

Taken together, these two documents set out six main areas of activity for police authorities and their members:

- Police authorities need to pursue best value in tandem with chief constables who are responsible for police operations in their force. Members of the police authorities should take joint responsibility for the overarching plan to achieve best value and other duties in the force, and work with the chief constable to ensure that it is carried out effectively.
- Best value requires elected members and senior managers to develop a vision of how best value will contribute to the corporate goals of the authorities, inform the direction of services and be communicated to staff.
- Police authorities are expected to demonstrate responsiveness to the needs of the public and other stakeholders. Plans, priorities and actions should be informed by an understanding of those needs. Police authorities may make clear publicly how they engage and work with chief constables delivering and reporting on best value. They have a particular role to play in ensuring effective public consultation on aspects of policing.
- It is a matter for each authority to determine how it fulfils these roles. However, one option might be for the police authorities to contribute to and endorse the chief constable's annual plan.
- Members of the police authorities should be able to demonstrate that they are making the best use of public resources and demonstrate an approach to review that is rigorous, robust and covers all aspects of their work.
- Police authorities need to make sure that the force collects and reports good quality performance data to them. Police authorities should analyse the data and any accompanying commentary. They may then want to investigate further by asking questions of the chief constable as part of a continuous discussion and review of force performance.

Northern Constabulary and Northern Joint Police Board

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