

Best Value in the Police

Research report for Audit Scotland and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of
Constabulary for Scotland

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Executive Summary

Ipsos MORI was commissioned by Audit Scotland (on behalf of the Accounts Commission for Scotland) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland, to conduct an independent review of the pilot Best Value Audit and Inspections of Police.

The review was conducted through in depth interviews with chief constables, senior police officers and elected members in pilot police forces and authorities, as well as with national stakeholders. Additionally, a workshop was held with members of the audit and inspection teams. All fieldwork was carried out between February and April 2010.

Key findings

Attitudes towards joint audit and inspection

Participants were unanimously in favour of the joint approach to audit and inspection. There was also widespread support for the simultaneous audit and inspection of police forces and boards, but a few force members were unsure of the underlying rationale for the new approach.

Most participants felt that the new approach presented some important practical challenges – in particular, the fact that boards have never before been scrutinised in this way and so have little awareness of what to expect from the process. There was also some concern that a negative assessment of a board may adversely affect public confidence in the force, even if the force itself receives a positive assessment.

Set up and overview

The presentations delivered by the audit and inspection teams at the outset of the pilots was felt to be informative in terms of setting out the context for Best Value in Police and outlining key features of the process.

Views on the optional presentations by forces and boards were more mixed. Force members welcomed the opportunity to put forward their “side of the story”. However, whereas some of them felt the presentation was fairly straightforward, others would have appreciated more guidance on content.

Board members also saw the value of the optional presentations, although one pilot site was concerned about its capacity to prepare and deliver the presentation.

The on-site audit and inspection process

Participants generally felt that the pilot audit and inspections were well organised. There was particular praise for the way the teams communicated timelines and kept the boards and forces informed throughout the process.

While participants welcomed the principle of a risk-based audit and inspection, most were unsure as to whether such an approach had been pursued in practice. In both of the pilot sites, force and board members commented that it was never made clear to them on which areas of their work the audit and inspection was focusing.

There was a divergence of opinion over whether an appropriate balance of focus between forces and boards has been achieved in the reports. Some people commented that greater attention was focussed on the force and that this was entirely appropriate. Others felt there was too much emphasis on boards' role in performance management.

The audit and inspection teams

Participants spoke in mainly favourable terms about the audit and inspection teams, praising their skills, level of professionalism and general attitude. They were also very positive about the way the Audit Scotland and HMICS teams worked together; joint interviewing was seen as being a particularly effective tool in this regard.

Only a small number of participants made any direct criticisms of the audit and inspection teams. Most criticism centred on a view that the teams had unrealistically high expectations of boards and did not appear to fully appreciate the limited resources available to them

The audit and inspection reports

Perceptions of the audit and inspection reports were on the whole fairly negative. A common complaint was that the tone of the report was "disproportionately" negative. Related to this, there was repeated suggestion that the reports' authors had placed too much emphasis on areas of weakness and not given credit where this was due.

It was also widely felt that the narrative of the reports was repetitive in places. In discussing this point, several people commented that there were too many summaries

in the documents and that this made the content as a whole seem more negative than was actually the case.

Participants in one of the pilot sites felt that the recommendations section of their report was quite weak. They would have welcomed greater clarity and detail to inform their action planning.

Recommendations

The findings of this review point towards the following recommendations for consideration of the Accounts Commission and HMICS:

- be clearer about the objectives of introducing Best Value in the Police and communicate these to forces and boards
- after the risk assessment, provide feedback to forces and boards regarding the areas to be covered in the audit and inspection
- reinforce the message that boards and forces do not need to do any special preparation for the audit and inspection as they should be able to use their existing self-evaluation evidence
- make it clearer to boards and forces exactly what the purpose of the optional presentations is so that they can make an informed decision as to whether or not to give one
- establish at an early stage in the process how the force and board wish to communicate with the team throughout the audit and inspection
- ensure that when auditors and inspectors are selected for a particular force/board, best fit is achieved in terms of their expertise and experience
- consider which members of the audit and inspection team should be present at the feedback meeting with the force and board following the report factual accuracy check, so that the force and board derive maximum benefit from the discussion.
- consider altering the format of reports to address concerns about unnecessary repetition. A starting point might be reducing the number of summaries that appear throughout the reports.
- consider whether there are any higher priority recommendations that should be highlighted in the report

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of the independent review of the pilot Best Value Audit and Inspections of Police. The review was undertaken by Ipsos MORI. The findings from this research will help to inform the Accounts Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland's (HMICS) considerations around how the Best Value audit and inspection framework for the police might be refined before being implemented more widely.

This opening chapter provides some background information about the development of Best Value in the Police, and the pilot audit and inspections, before setting out the aims of the review and the methodological approach adopted.

1.1 The development of Best Value in Police

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced Best Value and Community Planning as statutory duties for councils, and police and fire and rescue authorities. The Act gives powers to Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) and the Accounts Commission to examine Best Value in police authorities.

Audit Scotland, on behalf of the Accounts Commission undertook pilot best value audit work of a joint police board in 2006. This pointed towards the Commission focusing on the role of boards in relation to leadership and governance functions, recognising that the responsibility for external assessment of professional practice and performance within police forces lies within the remit of HMICS.

Given their overlapping responsibilities in relation to police authorities, the Commission and HMICS agreed to adopt a joint approach to police Best Value audit and inspection activity.

The joint audit and inspection approach is designed to make the most efficient use of available resources. The scope of Best Value in Police effectively covers the full range of the authority's and force's activities. It was therefore decided that the audit and inspection will use a joint risk assessment to help focus on *selected* areas tailored to fit the context and identified strengths and weaknesses of each authority and force. It will also draw on existing scrutiny processes (such as national thematic reporting, local audit or inspection reports and annual self-assessments), with a view to reducing the demands on authorities and forces, and producing a more rounded picture of performance.

In March 2009, the Commission and HMIC issued a joint consultation paper on the proposed approach to audit and inspection. The responses to the consultation were generally positive but some concerns were raised about:

- The effect of the overall scrutiny burden
- the implications for police forces in unitary authority areas (Fife and Dumfries & Galloway) – particularly the potential for duplication of work
- the support resources available to police authorities as well as their capacity to service the requirements of audit and inspection
- the likely effectiveness of joint working between the Commission and HMICS – particularly in terms of consistency of approach and possible duplication of functions

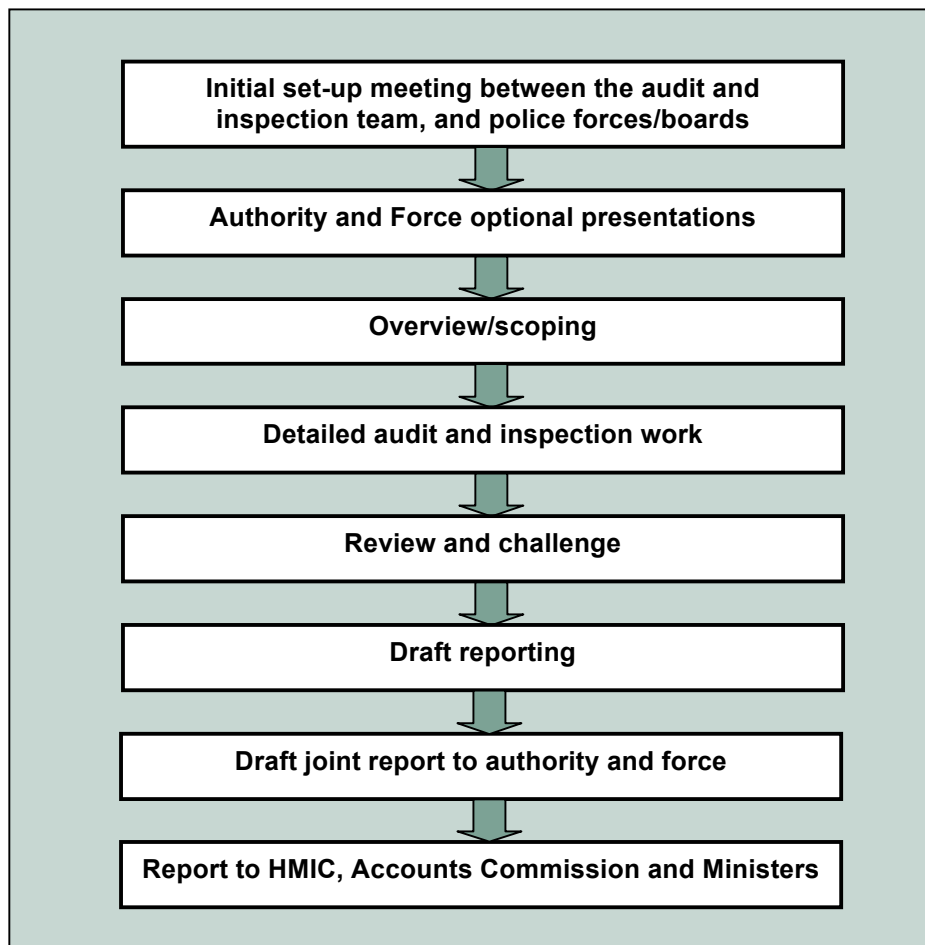
1.2 The pilot joint audit and inspections

In order to trial the new joint approach to audit and inspection in the police, the Accounts Commission and HMICS implemented audit and inspections in two pilot areas: Tayside and Northern. Tayside was audited and inspected during May 2009 and Northern during September 2009. In both areas, the process comprised a corporate assessment of the police authority and police force and a performance assessment of the police force. The key elements of the pilot audit and inspection process are set out in figure 1.1 on page 3.

The work resulted in a single joint audit and inspection report for each area by the Controller of Audit and HMICS.

Figure 1.1 below sets out the main stages of the pilot audit and inspection process.

Figure 1.1: key elements of the pilot Best Value Audit and Inspection of Police



1.3 The review

In 2009, the Accounts Commission began a review of Pathfinder Best Value 2 (BV2) audits, the Shared Risk Assessment (SRA) framework and Police Best Value pilots. As part of this review, Audit Scotland appointed Ipsos MORI to evaluate the effectiveness of the police BV pilots. The review focused on the views of the pilot police forces and authorities, as well as key national stakeholders and the pilot audit and inspection teams.

The overall objective of the review was to assess the effectiveness of the joint audit and inspection approach adopted in the two pilots against a set of specified objectives; and make recommendations for improvement or further development.

1.3.1 Methodology

The review was conducted primarily through in depth interviews with chief constables, senior police officers and elected members in the pilot police forces and authorities, as

well as with key national stakeholders. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the remainder undertaken by telephone. All fieldwork was carried out between February and April 2010.

In addition to the interviews, a workshop was held with members of the Best Value in Police pilot audit and inspection teams, comprising staff from Audit Scotland and HMICS.

1.3.2 Topic guides

The interviews and workshop were structured around topic guides designed by Ipsos MORI in consultation with Audit Scotland and HMICS. The content of the guides varied slightly depending on the role of participants in the audit and inspection process. However, all versions addressed a common set of themes. These included:

- overall perceptions of the pilot audit and inspection process
- views of the set up process, including the overview/scoping stage and the optional presentations
- the extent to which the pilot was well organised
- the extent to which the pilot was transparent
- views of the audit and inspection teams, including the effectiveness of joint working between AS and HMICS
- views of the feedback and reporting processes

Copies of all versions of the topic guides used during the course of the review are provided in appendix A.

1.3.3 Structure of the report

The following chapter sets out the main findings from the review, focusing on key stages of the process. It then draws on these findings to outline some key recommendations for enhancing the approach that the Accounts Commission and HMICS adopt to auditing and inspecting Best Value in the Police.

1.4 Acknowledgements

Ipsos MORI would like to thank all of the police officers, council staff, national stakeholders and members of the Audit Scotland and HMICS teams who gave up their time to take part in the review.

2 Key Findings

2.1 Introduction

In this section we set out the key findings from the review. We have included verbatim comments from the interviews to help illustrate and highlight key points that were made by participants. The section is structured around the following themes:

- attitudes towards the joint audit and inspection
- the set up and overview process
- the on-site audit and inspection process, including the organisation and the scope of the work
- the audit and inspection team
- feedback and reporting
- supporting improvement and sharing best practice

2.2 Attitudes towards the joint audit and inspection

Participants were unanimously in favour of the joint approach to audit and inspection. National stakeholders commented that it not only makes sense in practical terms but is likely to result in better quality, more comprehensive assessments of the Police, with HMICS and Audit Scotland bringing “complementary knowledge and complementary skills” to the process. A few stakeholders also felt that the joint approach would provide important subsidiary benefits; in particular, opportunities for the scrutiny partners to learn from each other and refine and improve their methods accordingly.

This is a Best Value audit, we’ve got an audit organisation and an inspection scrutiny organisation working together; they bring different competencies, skills, expertise to the task of audit.

National stakeholder

In addition to supporting the principle of joint working between HMICS and Audit Scotland, participants were generally in favour of police forces and boards being audited and inspected simultaneously. They repeatedly pointed out that the work of a force and board are inextricably linked; therefore, to audit and inspect one body and not the other would be to obtain a partial picture of performance.

There is a relationship between the Force and the Authority, you would in a sense be only talking to one half of that relationship if you didn't focus on both, [...] so I think that seems very sensible.

National stakeholder

We very much welcomed a joint approach of the force and the Board, because at the end of the day, the two of them are interconnected; I mean anything we do is overseen by the Police Board and, therefore, it makes sense to have this Best Value tied in.

Force member

At the same time, however, a few force members were unsure of the underlying rationale for the new approach. Specifically, one person was unclear as to what the desired long term “outcome” was from Audit Scotland’s and HMICS’s point of view. Another was concerned that, ultimately, the process may be a “back door” attempt to redefine the roles of boards *vis a vis* forces and, in particular, to increase boards’ powers to hold forces to account.

Beyond these comments, most participants felt that the new approach presented some important practical challenges. In particular, they emphasised that, although police forces are used to being audited and inspected, boards have never before been scrutinised in the same way and so have little awareness of what to expect from the audit and inspection. One pilot site sought to address this challenge during their pilot by seconding a senior figure from the force to the board; a move which they felt proved to be invaluable.

I suppose the challenge to us [was], firstly, it had never happened before so the Board had no experience of having an inspection of this kind. [We were] very used to the force being inspected and then responding, the Board, seeing the results of that, but not the Board actually being under the spotlight. So I think the challenge was making sure members of the Board fully understood the implications of that, understood their role in that and how they needed to participate and to make sure we have a good approach towards the preparation for the inspection.

Board member

Another stakeholder was concerned that a negative assessment of a board may have an adverse affect on public confidence in the associated force - even if the force itself has received a positive assessment. In essence, this person thought it unlikely that the

public distinguishes between boards and forces, and that this will be reflected in its interpretation of audit and inspection findings.

2.3 Set-up and overview

2.3.1 The presentation by the audit and inspection team

Prior to the start of the Best Value process, the audit and inspection teams organised set-up meetings with the authorities and forces in order to deliver a presentation outlining the purpose of the audit and inspection and how it would be carried out. This also provided elected members and officers with an opportunity to seek clarification about any aspect of the audit and inspection process.

The presentation was favourably viewed by participants. It was felt to be informative in terms of setting out the context for Best Value in Police and outlining key features of the process, including the timescales to which the audit and inspection team would be working. One participant commented that the presentation was particularly important for boards in view of the fact they had never before been subject to audit and inspection. Several participants described how pleased they were to have the opportunity to ask questions of the audit and inspection team before the start of the on-site work as this further enhanced their understanding of the process.

We had a good meeting here. It allowed all the people on both sides to meet, to understand how the process would be undertaken and the timetable which both stuck to. So, the set up meeting was very helpful.

Force Member

2.3.2 Presentations

The board and the force from each pilot area were given the option to deliver a presentation to the team before the detailed on-site audit and inspection commenced. In one site the force opted to provide a presentation while the board did not. In the other, both the board and the force delivered a presentation as well as providing supporting performance evidence.

The forces

With regard to the force presentations, participants felt glad to have the opportunity to put forward their “side of the story”, in the sense of demonstrating their awareness of

the areas in which their performance was weaker and outlining the steps they were taking to remedy this.

Some force participants felt that the presentation was fairly straightforward, particularly as they were able to draw on existing internal self-assessment evidence. Others said that they would have appreciated more guidance on what should have been covered and, in particular, more detail around the specific areas the teams would be focusing on in assessing the force.

I think, with hindsight, I would most definitely approach it much differently. I think they didn't provide, really, any guidance about what they're looking for. I think an important guide for me would be to maybe look at the BV characteristics and maybe structure the presentation, because at that point we were [...] not really sure what this was going to look like.

Force Member

Some participants said that they would have preferred the audit and inspection team to have invited them to structure their presentation around a pre-defined question set, as this would have given them a better understanding of the team's expectations and also of how best to prepare.

The board

In the site where the board opted to deliver a presentation, one participant commented that they felt this helped to increase the board's involvement and buy-in to the audit and inspection process. However, this person also pointed out that without the secondment of a force member to the board, it would not have been feasible for the board to put together and deliver the presentation with the limited resources that they had available.

I think it was helpful, I think it helped put things into context and I think it gave the Board and particularly the Board and the convener a real sense of ownership and engagement, I think that was a good process.

Force member

In the other pilot site, where the board opted *not* to give a presentation, participants recognised in hindsight that the exercise would have been beneficial in providing the

board with an opportunity to demonstrate its perspective to the audit and inspection team.

Beyond these site-specific reflections, one board member was critical of the optional nature of the presentation, commenting that this simply creates uncertainty and insecurity around what the “right” thing is to do in the eyes of the audit and inspection team. They felt that making the exercises compulsory would avoid this type of rumination and create more of a “level playing field” for boards in this initial stage of the process.

Some of it was a bit flexible, so we were told at the beginning, you can do a self-assessment if you want, but you don't have to, it's not a requirement and you can do a presentation if you want but you don't have to, it's not a requirement. Well in that case what do you do?

Board member

2.4 The on-site audit and inspection process

2.4.1 Organisation

Participants generally felt that the pilot audit and inspections were well organised. There was particular praise for the way the teams communicated timelines to the boards and forces, and kept them informed throughout the process. In one of the pilot sites, participants felt that effective communication was facilitated by having a single point of contact in both the police and audit/inspection team.

I thought the relationship we had with HMICS and Audit Scotland was particularly good. I thought there was excellent dialogue [...] I had a single point of contact in HMICS and that was excellent. There was good contact maintained throughout that time, before they even came to do the visits, and during the visits they were always touching base to reflect on some of the things they found. So I really did think they were probably the two biggest plus points.

Force member

A few participants commented that their audit and inspection was undertaken relatively quickly and attributed this, in part, to the efficient scheduling of meetings and visits. Participants in one site were particularly pleased that efforts had been made to avoid any unnecessary duplication between their audit/inspection and the Pathfinder BV2 work undertaken in one of their constituent councils. They took this as a signal that

Audit Scotland were “thinking about these things” and had the council’s interests in mind.

All in all, there was a perception that the pilots were not overly burdensome, particularly when compared with former HMCIS primary inspection, although, as noted in the previous section, the boards did face some resourcing issues in preparing.

Participants spoke in positive terms about the way Audit Scotland and HMICS had worked together during the on-site phase of the audits and inspections. In one pilot site, the two organisations jointly interviewed force members, leaving the impression of being a single team. The alternative approach adopted in the other area, whereby Audit Scotland focused primarily on the Board and HMCIS on the force, was equally well received. Perceptions of the audit and inspection teams are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The sole negative comment made about the organisation of the pilots came from a participant who was unhappy that the audit and inspection took place in parallel with a separate inspection of high priorities in the area. This is discussed more fully in the next section.

2.4.2 The scope of the audit and inspection

The risk-based approach

One of the defining features of the Best Value audit and inspection of police is that it is risk-based, with the scrutiny partners undertaking joint risk assessment of selected areas, “tailored to fit the context and identified strengths and weaknesses of each authority and force.”¹

Participants welcomed the principle of a risk-based audit and inspection. One stakeholder commented that this approach was preferable to an overarching audit and inspection as it would allow auditors and inspectors to obtain an accurate, in depth view of boards’ and forces’ performance in particular areas - as opposed to simply “scraping the surface” of several different areas.

¹ Audit Scotland & HMICS (2009). Best Value Audit and Inspection of Police: A guide for forces and authorities.

However, most participants were unsure as to whether a risk-based approach had been pursued in practice. In both of the pilot sites, force and board members commented that it was never made clear to them on which areas the audit and inspection was focusing, or on what basis those areas had been selected. Some board members compared the process unfavourably with the BV2 Pathfinder audits in this respect. They had anticipated that after the joint risk assessment a document outlining the risk areas would be produced by Audit Scotland and HMICS, similar to the Initial Risk Assessment documents produced following the Pathfinder Shared Risk Assessments. That this did not happen led them to feel that the process lacked transparency.

While a risk assessment was done, that was very much used for the inspection teams purposes and wasn't something that was shared with the Board. That would have been helpful, because if they were focusing on particular areas, because they thought those were risk areas or weak areas for the Board, it would have been, also in terms of transparency, [...] good for us to know that as well. [...] So I think at that stage it would have been helpful to have more dialogue about what the risk assessment was.

Board Member

Participants in both areas commented that, even when the on-site audit and inspection work was well underway, there was still some ambiguity around the focus of the scrutiny activity. One participant mentioned that the subject areas presented as those they would be asked about in their interview were so general that they could have applied to any number of different topics and did not clarify what the risk areas were. Others commented that the breadth of the audit and inspection was quite extensive and not as proportionate as they had hoped. One person went as far as to suggest that the scope of the audit and inspection felt no different to that which they had experienced during former HMICS primary inspections.

Links to existing scrutiny processes

Participants viewed the proposal to link the audit and inspection into existing scrutiny processes positively, commenting that it would help to minimise the scrutiny burden.

It means that you don't necessarily have to dig into areas [...] if you can put up all these other scrutiny reports, etc, and thematic things like that, that would probably assist greatly, I would imagine and make it less burdensome for those being inspected.

National stakeholder

There were differing views on the extent to which the audit and inspection had linked into existing scrutiny processes in practice, however. On the positive side, some participants mentioned that there was very little overlap with recent thematic inspections, while another praised efforts on the part of auditors and inspectors to avoid any duplication with the BV2 Pathfinder work, as discussed in section 2.4.1. Furthermore, there were comments that the audit and inspection was congruent with the increased focus among forces on becoming more effective at self-assessment.

However, one force was unhappy that the Best Value audit and inspection was conducted at the same time as another, separate review. Members of this force felt that, from the outset, HMICS had not made it clear which interviews and information requests related to which scrutiny element and this in turn resulted in confusion among those who were being audited and inspected.

They weren't as upfront in saying "these are the areas." Whether they thought that we would be able to, as if by magic, sort it out in the gap between them coming, I don't know.

Force member

On a separate point, participants in the same site felt that the audit and inspection should have taken place after the annual self-evaluation exercise that forces are required to undertake for HMICS. They felt this would have been a more logical ordering in the sense that they could have drawn on their self-evaluation in preparing their presentation.

The balance of focus between force and board

There was a divergence of opinion over whether an appropriate balance of focus between forces and boards had been achieved in the audits and inspections. Some people commented that greater attention was focussed on the force but that this was entirely appropriate because, although the board must work closely with and challenge the force, it is the force that is providing a service to the public.

However, other participants believed that the audit and inspection placed too much emphasis on the corporate management of performance - and particularly the board's role in this - rather than on assessing performance *per se*. In discussing this point,

several participants suggested that the audit and inspection team perhaps had too high expectations concerning the level of scrutiny under which boards should be placing forces, particularly where force are performing well. They were also keen to emphasise that the public's primary concern is with the standard of policing in their area; therefore, boards' main focus should be on ensuring that forces are performing satisfactorily in this regard.

You would think [that this area] was rife with crime and that we didn't do anything [...] but in actual fact when you look at statistics, the force is actually performing really well and that is what the Board are interested in [...]. I mean we do audit and scrutinize [...] the force carefully, but not in the way the auditors felt were appropriate and I just feel that their expectations were unrealistic.

Board member

What the public want is to know whether their police force are actually stopping crime and solving crime. They don't want to know whether or not some councillor is scrutinizing a report to the nth degree in a back room.

Board Member

Approaches to assessing performance

As well as commenting on the general focus of the audits and inspections, participants raised a number of issues concerning the teams' approach to assessing the performance of the boards and forces.

Some participants simply felt that they had not been given enough information on the specific criteria that would be used to judge performance.

One person also felt that some of the evidence gathering could have been more in depth, particularly when it came to examining the role of the councillors on the board. The participant felt the team should attend more meetings and be more visible. They also emphasised that the audit and inspection team should use a range of techniques to obtain the views of councillors as some councillors did not find the time to complete the questionnaire that was emailed to them.

[Councillors] were issued with a questionnaire, which actually very few of them filled, [...], which again didn't help the audit to kind of sort itself out, but yes, I think I would question whether an e-mailed questionnaire is the appropriate way to communicate with councillors who are busy. If you've got meetings happening

you've got council, you know constituents wanting to talk to you, the e-mail is the first thing that gets ignored. People tend to deal with the phone calls and meetings face to face in preference to sitting down and working through e-mails, especially if it's something like an audit to be honest.

Board member

2.5 The audit and inspection team

Both board and force members spoke in mainly favourable terms about the audit and inspection teams, praising their skills, level of professionalism and general attitude. Several people commented that the teams had kept an "open mind" throughout the process and had displayed a willingness to work constructively with them.

I think their attitude to the approach was positive [...], they came in [...] with an open mind and they said "it is [the] first [time] we are here and it's going to be a learning process" [...], and the attitude they had: "we're not in here just to rip you apart, we're here to work with you".

Force member

As noted earlier in this chapter, participants also spoke in very positive terms about the way the HMICS and Audit Scotland teams worked together during the pilots. Joint interviewing was seen to be a particularly effective tool in this regard, both because it involved a pooling of the teams' "complementary" knowledge bases, and because it signified that the two organisations were genuinely committed to working together to deliver high quality audit and inspection. Significantly, these views were shared by both police representatives, and by the audit and inspection teams themselves.

Well I thought it worked very well to be honest; I think they paired up well and they obviously knew their own strengths [...] I think to see that synergy between the two of them worked well, because obviously they were coming from different angles.

Force member

The majority of interviews should be pretty high level interviews with the strategic people [...] For those high level interviews I think it's important that both parties are at the table because I think there is an issue of visually communicating that this is joint work; this isn't the force being looked at by HMICS and then the board being looked at by Audit Scotland and they will come

together and you will see the join. I think that kind of credibility issue is important.

Audit and inspection team member

However, some force members referred to “cultural” differences between the HMICS and Audit Scotland teams. Most notably, one participant commented that the Audit Scotland approach was quite distinct from that traditionally used by HMICS, with the former organisation placing much more emphasis on seeing written records of decisions and processes. While the participant concerned characterised Audit Scotland’s approach as a little “inflexible” in this regard, they recognised the importance of having an “audit trail” and felt that, in light of the pilot experience, their force would be much better prepared for audit and inspection in the future.

The thing for us is obviously their methodology is different, [it’s] more intense and more rigorous than the HMIC [...]. So for us it was all a bit, “wow”, because the HMIC was a bit softer, so it just felt different. [...] You only get a tick in the box if there is a real evidence base for it [...] So it’s no good you saying to them: “no we do that, but we don’t record [it]”.

Force member

Only a small number of participants made any direct criticisms of the audit and inspection teams. Most criticisms centred around a view that the teams had unrealistically high expectations of police boards and did not appear to fully appreciate the limited resources available to boards nor the limited statutory powers they have to hold forces to account. A couple of participants also expressed a view that there needs to be a greater understanding of the complexities involved in scrutinising police forces and the challenges individual councillors — who may be newly elected or may not necessarily have a background in this or similar type of work — face in performing this role effectively.

Policing in some ways is slightly more complex, because it’s not your normal [...] council service committee. They have to have understanding of finance, they have got to understand the performance, they’ve got to understand their policy, whereas sometimes the other service committees, [for example] social work, will have elements of that, but there will be a separate finance committee. So within policing you’ve got to be a master of all in some ways.

National stakeholder

In addition to these issues, a couple of participants had concerns about the extent to which the expertise of the teams “fitted” with the nature of the work they were undertaking. For example, in one of the pilot sites, there was a perception that the HMICS team had limited experience of policing in areas similar to that site, and that this compromised the effectiveness of the exercise.

2.6 Feedback and reporting

When the audit and inspection teams had completed fieldwork in the two pilot sites, they provided the boards and forces with some initial verbal feedback on what they had found. Participants in one of the sites felt this feedback was quite useful, particularly in terms of highlighting the force’s main strengths and weaknesses. In the other site, views of the feedback were much less positive, with one person describing it as “limited and superficial.”

With regard to the audit and inspection reports, perceptions of these were, on the whole, fairly negative. A common complaint was that the tone of the documents was “disproportionately” negative compared to the nature of the findings and recommendations presented. Related to this, there was repeated suggestion that the authors of the reports had placed too much emphasis on areas of weakness and failed to give credit where this was due – indeed, one person expressed bemusement that positive comments made by an auditor/inspector during the verbal feedback session did not appear in the report at all. Among a few participants there was concern about the impact negative reporting might have on public confidence in the police.

Some force members clearly felt that the style of the reports was very different to – and, indeed, compared unfavourably with – that which HMICS has hitherto adopted in its inspection reports. For their part, members of the audit and inspection teams who took part in the review anticipated this reaction, commenting that the reports were very much produced in the Audit Scotland mould and “felt like” Audit Scotland publications.

[The report] was a lot edgier; the use of bold language, like “poor” [...] HMICS reports tend to be woollier and you can work it out; I mean it’s still saying the same thing, but it’s not giving people as easy that headline or that negative sound bite [...] So the language was a lot more stark and unforgiving.

Force member

While at the same time the auditors were accepting that we had good practice in place, before the end of the sentence or the paragraph, whatever benefit they were giving you was being swept away.

Board member

Well throughout the report when you read it you just think: “oh crikey, this is doom and gloom all the way through”. When you actually get to the improvement agenda there doesn’t seem to be that much meat to it.

Board member

The audit and inspection teams had some concerns about the report being seen as Audit Scotland led, rather than the product of joint endeavour by Audit Scotland and HMICS. They felt this was particularly an issue in respect of the Tayside report which is prefaced with Accounts Commission findings only and no equivalent commentary from HMICS. In producing the Northern report, the team sought to introduce greater “balance” by presenting HMICS’ findings alongside those of the Commission.

I think the balance we brought to the Northern one by adding HMICS [findings] will hopefully assist us and make it more equitable. Tayside, because they have the front page on the Accounts Commission, was all Accounts Commission reporting.

Audit and inspection team member

In addition to issues of style, another common complaint force and board members had about the reports was that the narrative was repetitive in places. Two separate issues were raised in this regard. Firstly, it was felt that there were too many summaries in the reports, relative to the overall length of the documents, with the effect that the content as a whole seemed more negative than was actually the case. Secondly, participants in both sites were unhappy that a particular piece of performance data had been used to evidence a range of different failings. This, it was felt, gave disproportionate prominence to that data and further contributed to the negative slant of the report.

I kind of felt, how many times do they need to tell us we’re rubbish at something. There is so much repetition [...] It wasn’t a big report; I felt they did not need so many summaries and then they picked out the little boxes to tell you again how poor you were. I felt: enough, we get it. When you read the report it sounded worse than we actually are because you’re being told it time and time again.

Force member

We feel it is quite repetitive in terms of picking up on quite limited negative information that's then reflected to sustain a number of points of evidence in different places throughout the report.

Force member

Participants in one of the pilot sites felt that their initial draft report contained factual inaccuracies and “misunderstandings of process”. While they welcomed the fact that they were able to submit evidence to address these inaccuracies and misunderstandings, there was a sense in which they felt this should not have been necessary and that the first drafts of the reports should have been of better quality.

A few participants suggested that some of the problems with the initial draft reports could have been avoided if boards and forces had been given more opportunities to comment on the audit and inspections team’s findings at key stages of the process. For example, one person commented that, although the team did provide a ‘hot’ debrief at the conclusion of the on site work, he would have preferred more *ongoing* feedback during the course of the visit so that he could comment on and, where appropriate, challenge findings as these emerged. In a similar vein, another participant expressed a view that the draft report should not have been sent to the Moderation Panel without first being reviewed for factual accuracy by the board and force because, in effect, the panel had made important decisions and judgements without having the most relevant – or, indeed, the most accurate – information to hand.

Notwithstanding these comments, board and force members welcomed the opportunities they had been given to discuss their draft reports with the teams and were pleased that at least some of their comments had been taken on board. In one of the sites, however, there was disappointment that HM Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland and a key member of the team, the report’s co-author², were not able to attend the discussions.

² The co-author could not attend the meeting as he had left HMICS.

2.7 Supporting Improvement

Most participants felt that the joint audit and inspection had provided them with a good opportunity to develop a greater awareness of which areas of their work they could improve upon. That said, participants in one of the pilot sites felt that the improvement recommendations section of their report was quite “weak” particularly when compared to the “punchy” tone adopted in the remainder of the report. These participants would have appreciated more clarity and detail on each recommendation to help them compile their action plans. One participant also felt that there should have been some *prioritisation* of the recommendations in the report so that it was more apparent which issues should be addressed first.

I'm not sure I was completely impressed with the improvement agenda they set [...] I kind of felt that the improvement agenda was fairly weak given the tone of the report which was very punchy [...] and they needed to be a bit more specific.

Force member

Another participant felt that there was a lack of clarity around Audit Scotland's and HMICS' plans for monitoring and reviewing progress on the recommendations, and that this too was an impediment to effective forward planning.

I still feel there are a lot of things particularly around how it's going to be reviewed and monitored are fairly unclear for the Police [...] I have asked a couple of times what it is going to look like moving forward, because without planning, it seriously impacts on my ability to plan the work of my area.

Force member

3 Recommendations

In respect of the future development of the Best Value audit and inspection framework for the police, the findings of this review point towards a number of recommendations for consideration by Audit Scotland, the Accounts Commission and HMICS.

These recommendations, which concern various elements of the audit and inspection process, are as follows:

- be clearer about the objectives of introducing Best Value in the Police, both to provide boards and forces with a better understanding of the respective agenda of HMICS and the Accounts Commission, and to reduce speculation around this issue
- after the risk assessment and following the scoping exercise, provide feedback to forces and boards regarding the areas to be covered in the audit and inspection
- reinforce the message that boards and forces do not need to do any special preparation for the audit and inspection as they should be able to use their existing self-evaluation evidence
- make it clearer to boards and forces exactly what the purpose of the presentations is so that they can make an informed decision as to whether or not to give one
- establish at an early stage in the process how the force and board wish to communicate with the team throughout the audit and inspection
- ensure that when auditors and inspectors are selected for a particular force/board, a best fit is achieved in terms of their expertise and experience
- consider which members of the audit and inspection team should be present at the feedback meeting with the force and board following the report factual accuracy check, so that the force and board derive maximum benefit from the discussion.
- consider altering the format of reports to address concerns about unnecessary repetition. A starting point might be reducing the number of summaries that appear throughout the reports.

- Consider whether there are any higher priority recommendations that should be highlighted in the report.

4 Appendix A

Evaluation of BV Audit and Inspections of the Police Final topic guide for police authority/force participants

Introduction

- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI and the research
- Explain the purpose of the interviews: WE HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND/HMICS TO CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH TO EVALUATE ASPECTS OF THE PILOT BV AUDIT AND INSPECTIONS OF POLICE.
- Explain the interview should last around 45 minutes
- Emphasise confidentiality, anonymity etc: BEFORE WE BEGIN, I'D LIKE TO REASSURE YOU THAT EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE AND YOU WILL NOT BE NAMED IN ANY REPORTS THAT WE PRODUCE FOR AUDIT SCOTLAND/HMICS
- Request permission to record and explain can be turned off at any point

Background

- To provide some context for your comments, I'd just like to begin by asking you about your role in the audit and inspection and the ways in which you were involved?
- In advance of the audit and inspection, how did you feel about the proposed joint approach to Best Value audit and inspection of the police? Did this seem an improvement on what had happened previously in the primary and review inspection cycle?
- Did you foresee any particular problems or challenges for [INSERT NAME OF POLICE FORCE/AUTHORITY] with the proposed approach? What were these?

Overall perceptions

- Now that you have participated in the BV audit and inspection pilot, overall, how would you rate the experience?
- Why do you say that?
- What would you say were the strengths of the approach?
- And what would you say were the main weaknesses of the approach, or areas where it could be further improved?
- And how did it compare to what happened previously in the primary and review inspection cycle? PROBE FOR BETTER/WORSE
- How effective was joint working between Audit Scotland and HMICS? PROBE FOR CONSISTENCY OF APPROACH, DUPLICATION OF WORK, WHETHER THEY WORKED WELL TOGETHER

Setup and overview processes

EXPLAIN: I'D NOW LIKE TO AND ASK YOU SOME MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER THE SETUP PROCESS OF THE AUDIT AND INSPECTION WAS WELL CO-ORDINATED

- How helpful was the initial set up meeting in explaining the process, and the purpose, of the audit and inspection?
- Police authorities and forces could deliver an optional presentation during the set up stage of the audit and inspection process. Did you opt to do this? To

what extent do you think your presentation influenced the planned scope of the audit and inspection?

- Previously during primary and review inspections, HMICS issued a comprehensive question set to which the police force then responded. In the new BV audit and inspection approach, this has been replaced by Audit Scotland and HMICS requesting the documentation that they need. What are your views on the move from responding to the question set to the document request?
- Did the audit and inspection team sufficiently link in to existing scrutiny processes and publications? What impact did this have on the scrutiny demands of the force and authority? Why would you say that?

The main audit and inspection process

- How well organised would you say the audit and inspection was? PROBE FOR: communication from the audit and inspection team, scheduling, conduct during the audit and inspection
- How much of a burden did the audit and inspection process place on you and your organisation, particularly when compared with previous arrangements? How do you feel about this?
- To what extent did you feel the audit and inspection focused on the right issues?
- To what extent do you agree that 'the process was transparent'
 - Why do you say that?
- Was their clarity around the criteria that audit and inspection teams used to judge the police force and authority? Why do you say that?
- Did you feel that the balance of focus between corporate processes/strategic role of the force's executive team and improved service outcomes was appropriate?
 - Why do you say that?

The audit and inspection teams

I'D LIKE TO MOVE ON AND ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THE AUDIT AND INSPECTION TEAM

- What were your views of the audit and inspection team?
- Why do you say this? PROBE FOR: experience, professionalism, credible
- What were the main strengths of the audit and inspection team?
- What were the main weaknesses of the audit and inspection team?

Feedback

- When the auditors and inspectors concluded their work, did they:
 - Give you any initial feedback on how it had gone?
 - Tell you what would happen next in terms of the procedures and timetable for reporting?

IF INTERVIEWEES HAVE SEEN THEIR REPORT ASK:

- What were your views on the audit and inspection report that your police force and authority received?
- Why do you say that?
- Was the balance of focus between force and authority findings appropriate?
- To what extent would you say that the report is:
 - fair and consistent
 - readable
 - covered the local context well
 - the appropriate length

- Is clear in terms of the judgements made and rationale underpinning these?
- Do you think the final audit and inspection report is accessible to the public? PROBE FOR FORMAT, LANGUAGE ETC.
- Was there sufficient opportunity to discuss the report with senior members of staff from HMICS and Audit Scotland?
- To what extent did Audit Scotland and HMICS address any concerns you had with the report?

Looking to the future

FINALLY, JUST TO SUM UP:

- Overall, have the Accounts Commission/Audit Scotland/HMICS accomplished what they set out to achieve?
- In general, were your experiences of the audit and inspection consistent with what you expected?
- What changes would you like to see to BV audit and inspection before the approach is rolled out to all police authorities?
- Do you have any other views on future developments?

Evaluation of BV Audit and Inspections of the Police

Final topic guide for national stakeholders

Introduction

- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI and the research
- Explain the purpose of the interviews: WE HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND/HMICS TO CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH TO EVALUATE ASPECTS OF THE PILOT BV AUDIT AND INSPECTIONS OF POLICE.
- Explain the interview should take no more than 30 minutes
- Emphasise confidentiality, anonymity etc: BEFORE WE BEGIN, I'D LIKE TO REASSURE YOU THAT EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE AND YOU WILL NOT BE NAMED IN ANY REPORTS THAT WE PRODUCE FOR AUDIT SCOTLAND/HMICS
- Request permission to record and explain can be turned off at any point

Background

- To help contextualise your comments it would be useful if you could briefly describe the role your organisation has played in the development of BV audit and inspection of the police.
- In advance of the pilot audit and inspection in the police, what was your organisation's view of the proposed joint approach to Best Value audit and inspection of the police?
- To what extent did this seem an improvement on the primary and review inspection cycle that happened previously?
- What risks or potential difficulties, if any, did you foresee with the approach.

Overall perceptions

- Now that it has happened, what is your overall impression of how well the pilot BV audit and inspection developments have worked?
- Why do you say that?
- From what you have heard, what have been the main strengths of the new approach?
- And what do you think the main weaknesses of the approach or areas for improvement are?

The audit and inspection process

- To what extent did the audit and inspection team take into account the local context of the pilot areas?
- The audit and inspection took a risk based approach, focusing on selected areas of strength and weakness for the police force/authority. From what you know, to what extent do you feel that the audit and inspection teams focused on the right issues in each of the pilot areas?
- Did you feel that the pilot audit and inspections drew sufficiently on existing scrutiny processes (e.g. national thematic reporting and local audit and inspection reports)?
- How much of a burden did the audit and inspection process place on the police force/authority, particularly when compared with previous arrangements?
- How effective was the working relationship between Audit Scotland and HMICS? PROBE FOR CONSISTENCY OF APPROACH, DUPLICATION OF WORK, WHETHER THEY WORKED WELL TOGETHER

Looking to the future

- Overall, at this stage, have the Accounts Commission/Audit Scotland/HMICS accomplished what they set out to achieve?
- What further changes, if any, would you like to BV audit and inspection of the police before it is implemented in all councils
- Do you have any other views on future developments?

Evaluation of BV Audit and Inspections of the Police Final topic guide for Audit Scotland and HMICS Workshop

Introduction

- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI and the research
- Explain the purpose of the workshop: WE HAVE BEEN COMMISSIONED BY AUDIT SCOTLAND/HMICS TO CONDUCT THIS RESEARCH TO EVALUATE ASPECTS OF THE PILOT BV AUDIT AND INSPECTIONS OF POLICE.
- Explain the group should last around 1½ hours
- Emphasise confidentiality, anonymity etc: BEFORE WE BEGIN, I'D LIKE TO REASSURE YOU THAT EVERYTHING YOU SAY WILL BE TREATED IN CONFIDENCE AND YOU WILL NOT BE NAMED IN ANY REPORTS THAT WE PRODUCE FOR AUDIT SCOTLAND/HMICS. ASK PARTICIPANTS NOT TO TALK OUTSIDE THE GROUP ABOUT WHAT COLLEAGUES HAVE SAID
- Request permission to record and explain can be turned off at any point

Background

- I'm sure most of you know each other but for our benefit I'd appreciate it if you could go round and introduce yourselves briefly and tell us which pilot area you were involved with and what your role was within the audit and inspection team.
- In advance of the audit and inspection, how did you feel about the proposed joint approach to Best Value audit and inspection of the police?
- Did you foresee any particular problems or challenges with the proposed approach? What were these?

Overall Perceptions

- Now that you have conducted the BV audit and inspection pilot, overall, how would you rate the experience? Why do you say that?
- What would you say were the strengths of the approach?
- And what would you say were the main weaknesses of the approach, or areas where it could be further improved?
- How effective was joint working between Audit Scotland and HMICS? PROBE FOR CONSISTENCY OF APPROACH, DUPLICATION OF WORK,

Setup and overview processes

EXPLAIN: I'D NOW LIKE TO AND ASK YOU SOME MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER THE SETUP PROCESS OF THE AUDIT AND INSPECTION WAS WELL CO-ORDINATED

- How helpful was the initial set up meeting in explaining the process, and the purpose, of the audit and inspection?
- Police authorities and forces could deliver an optional presentation during the set up stage of the audit and inspection process. How useful were these presentations? Should they be mandatory?
- Previously during primary and review inspections, HMICS issued a comprehensive question set to which the police force then responded. In the new BV audit and inspection approach, this has been replaced by Audit Scotland and HMICS requesting the documentation that they need. What are

your views on the move from responding to the question set to the document request?

- To what extent did you feel that the audit and inspection focused on areas of risk?

The main audit and inspection process

- How well organised would you say the audit and inspection was? In what ways could this be improved?
- How transparent did you feel the audit process was? In your view did the force/board feel the same? In what ways, if any, could the audit process be made more transparent?
- How clear were the police force/board on the criteria you used to make judgements? In what ways, if any, could the criteria be made clearer?
- Did you feel that the balance of focus between corporate processes/strategic role of the force's executive team and improved service outcomes was appropriate?
 - Why do you say that?

Working with the police force and board

- How well did the police authority/force engage with the new BV audit and inspection approach? How cooperative were they? Why would you say that? PROBE FOR BOTH POLICE OFFICERS AND ELECTED MEMBERS.

Feedback and reporting

- When you concluded fieldwork, did you provide initial verbal feedback on how the audit had gone? Do you feel the feedback consistent with the conclusions that were included in the report?
- What are your views on the reports that were produced?
- Was the balance of focus between force and authority findings appropriate?
- Do you think the final reports are accessible to the public? PROBE FOR FORMAT, LANGUAGE ETC.
- Do you have any other comments on the report? How might reporting be approached differently in the future?

Looking to the future

FINALLY, JUST TO SUM UP:

- Overall, have the Accounts Commission/Audit Scotland/HMICS accomplished what they set out to achieve?
- In general, were your experiences of the audit and inspection consistent with what you expected?
- What changes would you like to see to BV audit and inspection before the approach is rolled out to all police authorities?
- Do you have any other views on future developments?