

## ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

### IPSOS-MORI SCOTLAND: RESEARCH REPORT ON BEST VALUE IN THE POLICE JOINT PILOT AUDIT AND INSPECTIONS WITH HMICS

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#### Background

1. In March 2009, the Accounts Commission and Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) issued a joint consultation paper on the proposed approach to Best Value (BV) audit and inspection of police forces and authorities.
2. The consultation response was generally positive and in order to trial the new joint approach to audit and inspection in the police, the Accounts Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) implemented audit and inspections in two areas: Northern and Tayside. Tayside was audited during May 2009 and Northern during September 2009. The two reports, with Commission (and in Northern's case HMICS) findings, were published in December 2009 and April 2010 respectively.
3. Ipsos-MORI Scotland were commissioned to research the effectiveness of the joint audit and inspection approach adopted to help inform the Accounts Commission's and HMICS's considerations of how the Best Value audit and inspection framework for police might be refined.
4. The report sets out the findings from this work, which draws primarily on interviews with chief constables, senior police officers and elected members in the related police forces and boards, as well as key national stakeholders.
5. The report is structured around the sequential processes involved in the audit and inspection (set-up and overview, the on-site audit and inspection, feedback and reporting, etc), together with three sections covering cross-cutting themes (attitudes towards the joint audit and inspection, the audit and inspection team, and supporting improvement). It also contains a set of recommendations for refining and improving the police BV audit and inspection process.

#### Accounts Commission consideration of the Ipsos-MORI report

6. The Accounts Commission considered the Ipsos-MORI report at its meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> July 2010.
7. The report has also been considered by HMIC, Bill Skelly. The findings outlined below reflect his thoughts and he is pleased that both Audit Scotland and HMICS have been able to quickly incorporate the changes recommended into their approach to this work.
8. Mark Diffley, (Research Director, Ipsos-MORI Scotland) and his colleague Dr Sara Davidson (Associate Director) attended the Commission meeting to present their findings and answer questions from Commission members on their findings and recommendations.

9. Liz McAinsh, Principal Inspection Manager (HMICS) and Antony Clark, Assistant Director, Best Value and Scrutiny Improvement (Audit Scotland) also attended the meeting to answer questions from Commission members on the management of the police BV audit and inspection process and on the Ipsos-MORI report and recommendations.
10. Commission members welcomed the largely positive findings in the Ipsos-MORI report which indicated strong support for the joint approach to audit and inspection of police forces and boards adopted by HMICS and Audit Scotland and the perceptions of a 'joined-up' approach amongst those being audited. The feedback on areas where improvements in the audit and inspection process could be made was seen as useful, and generally in line with what would be expected from a pilot project. Commission members were pleased to hear that HMICS and Audit Scotland are committed to refining the audit and inspection process in response to the issues raised in the research report.

### **What next?**

11. The Commission has asked Audit Scotland to work with HMICS to take forward the actions that are necessary to address the eight recommendations contained within the Ipsos-MORI report.
12. The key changes that Audit Scotland and HMICS have made, or are in the process of making, to the process in response to the feedback are:
  - Updated the Best Value guidance material for forces and authorities to more clearly explain expectations around those aspects of the audit and inspection process (e.g. presentations, self evaluation, risk assessment) about which there was uncertainty in the Police BV pilots.
  - Developed Characteristics of a BV Police Force and BV Police Authority which will be incorporated within the Police BV guidance material for Forces and Boards.
  - Introducing written feedback to Forces and Boards following the risk assessment and scoping stage of the audit and inspection, to provide greater clarity and transparency regarding the areas to be covered in the audit and inspection.
  - Reviewing the structure of the audit report to address concerns about repetition.
13. Audit Scotland and HMICS will also be writing to all Chief Constables and Convenors of Joint Police Boards/Authorities to advise them that the research report is now available on Audit Scotland and HMICS' websites.