HMICS HM INSPECTORATE OF
CONSTABULARY FOR SCOTLAND

Thematic Inspection
Strategic priority setting in
Scottish forces:
Consulting the public

March 2009

Summary of Recommendations

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS) has examined how Scottish forces take account of the public's views when setting their priorities. This choice of topic arose initially through consultation with our stakeholders. It was subsequently further endorsed by the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee, following its inquiry report on the effective use of police resources[1].

The inspection focused on the following areas:

- forces' strategic approach to public consultation to inform priorities;
- the key processes by which this is achieved; and
- the availability of resources and skills to carry out consultation, including partnership working.

Our aim in making the following recommendations is to foster a more direct and genuinely consultative approach to harnessing public opinion. This can be done, we argue, by exploiting the ways in which the police routinely consult the public in the course of their job. We also acknowledge the increasing focus on joint working, through local community planning partnerships and, more recently, single outcome agreements (SOAs). In our opinion it is precisely at the local level that consultation should be targeted. At the time of writing, approved guidance on how consultation to inform SOAs should be conducted was still being developed by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). In the meantime we believe that a more cohesive and co-ordinated approach to consultation in forces would help to ensure that, among other things, standards, support and good practice are shared.

Recommendation 1: That all forces develop a consultation strategy or reconsider their existing one, in light of the findings of this report. In particular, strategies must be clear about the purpose and use of all consultation going on throughout forces and their divisions and, without being overly prescriptive, should identify mechanisms for support, guidance and oversight.

Recommendation 2: That, in order to make it easier to plan, co-ordinate and rationalise exercises, each force establish a central database for maintaining the details of its consultation activities. Forces should also consider to what extent this information could be made available to all staff, the police service as a whole, partner agencies and the public.

Recommendation 3: That forces evaluate their consultation exercises as standard practice. All consultation plans should include a section describing how forces intend to evaluate their activities, while general guidance and/or sources of further guidance on conducting evaluations should be contained in force consultation strategies.

Recommendation 4: That forces move away from centrally-managed postal surveys to more direct, face-to-face consultation in local communities. In seeking alternative methods, forces should consider the merits of models such as the public reassurance strategy, and the value of community intelligence that can be derived from local community meetings and events.

For the purpose of this inspection we defined the public as including not just lay members of the public but also wider external stakeholders, such as partner agencies, businesses, local and central

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1   Scottish Parliament Justice Committee, 4th Report, 2008 – *Report on the Effective Use of Police Resources*,
     www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/justice/reports-08/juro8-04-01.htm

government. Our primary focus was on how the views of the public can influence priority setting, either directly or through representative bodies or organisations. Furthermore, when talking about territorial areas in forces we have used the term division to denote divisions, local command areas and lower level territorial policing units.

In a previous report[2] we examined the way in which forces monitor and respond to users' views of the service they receive. For this reason we did not consider that aspect of police-public consultation in the current exercise. Therefore, when we talk about public consultation surveys we are <u>not</u> referring to quality of service surveys. Nor are we referring to the wider practice of community engagement, which involves greater participation and empowerment of the public in shaping services.

In carrying out this inspection we concentrated solely on the consultation processes of the forces themselves, rather than including the common agencies[3] under the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA). This was in order to exclude organisations whose main role is not to provide services directly to the public but to support the forces. Nor does our remit extend to inspecting the SPSA as a single corporate body. We did, however, consider the Scottish Police College (SPC) in its capacity of police training provider.

Finally, a word on the terminology used. The term 'community' pervades much of the literature and rhetoric in this area. And yet often its meaning can be ambiguous. For our purposes we have taken it to denote geographical proximity and have not assumed that it conveys any stronger sense of belonging. There is also commonly some confusion around the use of the term 'qualitative' when applied to performance measures. A qualitative measure is one that attempts to describe the properties or characteristics of something. Quantitative measures rely on numbers. Thus, while the finding that 'local and often minor criminal behaviour exerts a powerful influence on what the public think should be policing priorities ' is qualitative, the 'percentage of users who feel the police should concentrate on tackling low level criminality' is a quantitative measure.

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2   HMICS (2008) thematic inspection – *Quality of service and feedback to users of police services in Scotland.*
www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/225096/0060920.pdf

3   Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency (SCDEA); Scottish Police College (SPC); Forensic Services; Information Services - Criminal Justice; Information Services - ICT.

INTRODUCTION

"To recognise always that the power of the police to fulfil their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions and behaviour and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect."

One of the *Nine Principles of Good Policing*[4]

1. Policing by public consent has been the underlying philosophy of police forces in Great Britain since their inception in the early 19th century. Subsequent legislation, most notably the Justice Charter of 1991 and the Local Government in Scotland Act (2003), has sought to consolidate and enhance this relationship.

2. The 2003 Act introduced Best Value to local authorities, including police authorities, and established a statutory duty to be responsive to '*the needs of ... communities, citizens, customers, employees and other stakeholders, so that plans, priorities and actions are informed by an understanding of those needs*'. Its accompanying guidance sets out what is necessary to achieve '*responsiveness and consultation*': a methodical approach that reaches a wide range of stakeholders, is linked to regular planning cycles and whose results are used to plan, design and improve services. The same Act requires that public services, including policing, '*are planned and provided after consultation with community bodies and other public bodies responsible for providing those services...*' In this way, communities can be '*genuinely engaged in the decisions made on public services* [that] *affect them*'.

3. This inspection did not focus on community engagement as such, but was concerned with the extent to which people have a say in the priorities of their local force. The results of the last Scottish Crime and Victimisation Survey[5] imply that about six out of every ten of us are likely to have contact with the police at some point in our lives, either as victims or for some other reason. In its report on police call management Audit Scotland[6] estimated that Scottish forces received 5.8 million calls from the public in a single year. Similarly, Crimestoppers Scotland last year received over 13,300 'actionable' calls. Thus at a fairly fundamental level, and as a matter of course, a considerable amount of police activity is directed by information or requests for assistance from individual members of the public.

4. But these are by no means the only calls on police services. As we shall see, there are other external demands that affect what the police do, in addition to which they must be proactive in preventing crime. Forces therefore have little choice but to prioritise activities, and while important, public opinion is one of a number of influences they must consider.

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4 From the 19th century by C Rowan & R Mayne, in C Reith (1956) *A New Study of Police History*, London: Oliver & Boyd.

5 BRMB Social Research (2007) *2006 Scottish Crime and Victimisation Survey: Main findings*, Scottish Government.
   www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/200037/0053443.pdf

6 Audit Scotland (2007) *Police call management – An initial review*.
   www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2007/nr_070927_police_call_management_km.pdf

STRATEGIC PLANNING

5.   Strategic planning is the process by which organisations determine their future direction. It can take various forms, most of which are constructed around three component stages: assess the current internal and external situation of an organisation; identify and prioritise the goals necessary to get to where it wants to be; and, establish what actions and resources are needed to achieve them. Implementation and review stages typically complete the cycle.

6.   It is not our intention to elaborate on how each force conducts its strategic planning. More detail on this can be found in our 2005 report on performance management in the police service[7]. But in order to appreciate how public consultation might fit into the process, we describe some of the common underpinning methods and drivers below.

Evidential analysis

7.   Across the Scottish police service the main planning tool is the national intelligence model (NIM). Essentially a business model, the NIM assimilates information that allows managers to manage risk, determine priorities and allocate resources. The model itself stresses the important contribution of consultation evidence – from voluntarily supplied local community information to the results of formal perception surveys – to inform planning, and lists communities and members of the public among its primary 'source assets'.

8.   One of the outputs to emerge from this process is the strategic assessment. This provides an overview of current and long-term matters involving criminality or community safety, on the basis of evidential analysis. Emanating in turn from this are control strategies, establishing longer-term strategic priorities and feeding into strategic planning. Priorities identified in this way have traditionally tended to focus on operational objectives around crime, although the NIM can and should be applied more widely, to other aspects, of community safety and partnership working for example. Depending on the geographical level pinpointed, priorities may be directed at a single division or below (level 1), involve one or more forces (level 2), or be the responsibility of all forces in Scotland and beyond (level 3).

Discrete drivers

9.   In addition to these analytically derived priorities, police forces and services are obliged to respond to other priorities and recommendations, as follows:

• those national outcomes of the Scottish Government that are relevant to policing;

• priorities identified by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS); and

• the findings of performance audits, inspections and self-assessment.

10.   It is pleasing to note the work being done to co-ordinate and rationalise the various priorities under the Scottish Policing Performance Framework (SPPF)[8]. The SPPF contains a series of high-level objectives and outcome measures, including the Accounts Commission statutory performance indicators. Though not all are articulated as priorities *per se*, they are intended to reflect the main areas for activity and improvement for forces and common police services.

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7   HMIC (2005) *Managing Improvement: a thematic inspection of performance management in the Scottish police service.*
      www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/69582/0018021.pdf

8   HMICS (2008) *1st Annual report of the Scottish Policing Performance Framework (SPPF).*
      www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/253842/0075219.pdf

11.   Prevailing policy and legislation will also undoubtedly influence how forces direct their efforts and budgets. For example, it is the police who must by law investigate financial crimes even when other agencies[9] report these to the procurator fiscal. There are operational and moral imperatives too, that they must and will act upon. Few strategic assessments or public surveys will single out missing persons, for instance, as a high-risk area for policing. And yet the public would hardly expect fewer resources to be spent investigating those that do come to their attention. Similarly, forces spend a lot of money on the medical care of prisoners, not because it is a recognised priority but simply because they have to[10].

12.   Performance reporting against priorities typically looks at what has been achieved at the level of individual force. In practice, outcomes are dependent upon the actions of territorial divisions and/or departments. It is in divisions that the picture, particularly for operational priorities, becomes more complex. When not responding directly to calls from the public, the NIM is the main tasking and co-ordinating tool for divisional activity (although, as our recent report on police officer productivity[11] suggests, this is not always adhered to). Thus, activities here are driven by priorities emanating from both national frameworks and force strategies, as well as from their own assessments of local need and demand.

13.   Though community planning partnerships did not fall within the scope of our inspection, we did visit the East Ayrshire partnership early on in our own consultative phase. One of the more dynamic groups in Scotland, its consultation methods included a residents' survey, a residents' panel, four local community planning forums, a children and young persons' forum and a diversities/equalities forum. The local police were, we were told, very active and supportive of its work. We also invited comment from all 32 Scottish councils on their experiences with the police. Their replies (e.g. Highland, East Lothian and Dundee councils) spoke well of forces, and their commitment to partnership working and to joint consultation.

14.   The potential for the interests of forces and their divisions to diverge is clear, the situation lately further complicated by the advent of single outcome agreements (SOAs) between councils and Scottish Government. The initial SOA development and self-assessment toolkit advised that development '*start from evidence of the issues and challenges within the local area*'. Subsequent guidance from the Improvement Service states that community engagement will play a key part in this, and that '*SOAs should reflect the priorities in community plans ... developed through consultation with communities.*' However, as COSLA was still drawing up its Community Empowerment Action Plan on the public engagement element of the process at the time of writing, we remain unaware of what shape this will take. In the meantime, we believe that our recommendations will put forces in a better position to respond to what does emerge as well as help to enhance the standard of available evidence.

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9   HMICS (2008) thematic inspection – *Serious Fraud*. www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/222427/0059820.pdf

10   HMICS (2008) thematic inspection – *Medical Services for People in Police Custody*.
     www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/241086/0066923.pdf

11   HMICS (2008) thematic inspection – *Productivity of Police Officers*. www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/221579/0059564.pdf

CONSULTATION

15.   With the launch in 2007 of the SPPF, and more recently the introduction of our self-assessment inspection process[12], forces are increasingly being asked to demonstrate their responsiveness to public opinion when prioritising activities and assessing performance. As this report will show, the police service in Scotland continuously strives through consultation to reach the public at a number of levels, using various methods, either individually or in tandem with other organisations.

Consultation strategies

Key finding

Forces were at different stages of formalising their approach to consultation. Most force strategies tended to see consultation as one element in the wider context of engagement and reassurance, though rarely referred specifically to divisions where much of this activity took place. The result was an approach that often failed to provide consistent guidance and support, or to capture and share learning and good practice.

Recommendation 1: **That all forces develop a consultation strategy or reconsider their existing one, in light of the findings of this report. In particular, strategies must be clear about the purpose and use of all consultation going on throughout forces and their divisions and, without being overly prescriptive, should identify mechanisms for support, guidance and oversight.**

16.   Appendix A sets out the range of *regular* consultation exercises that forces carried out at the time of inspection. It is not exhaustive of all that they did; various individual surveys and evaluations were also conducted, for example in response to specific policing initiatives or to assist in developing policy. Nor did all the exercises necessarily feed into the central strategic planning processes. Nevertheless, in compiling this list a number of points arose.

STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

17. In the first instance, not all forces had an established consultation strategy in place. What strategies there were understandably saw consultation in the wider context of community planning (Northern's community planning reference document), reassurance (Strathclyde's public reassurance strategy) and/or engagement agenda (Fife's draft consultation strategy, Grampian's community engagement toolkit). In a slightly different vein, Lothian and Borders, draft 'engagement approach' looked to '*set consistent standards and procedures for consultation across the force in order to meet performance management objectives*'.

18. Dumfries and Galloway, together with its community planning partners, had recently participated in a council-commissioned review of engagement processes. One outcome was the development of a partnership community consultation framework, intended to ensure a *co-ordinated and consistent approach to community consultation*. Early indications were that while the force was happy to support this joint framework where it could, it would continue to conduct its own separate exercises for the time being. It was also in the process of considering whether to produce its own consultation strategy.

19. Of the remaining forces, Tayside's strategy was not available as it was under review, while Central Scotland expressed no immediate intentions to produce one.

Corporate planning and oversight

20. Of the five existing strategies, two had been produced relatively recently and two were in draft form. All had been drawn up by corporate/strategic headquarters' (HQ) departments, informed to varying degrees by consultation with divisions. Perhaps for these reasons, the extent to which divisions had adopted or were familiar with their contents was often unclear. Indeed we often found little sense of a corporate approach in forces, beyond the fact of there being a strategy where there was one.

21. There were some exceptions though. In Strathclyde, for instance, its centrally managed public reassurance strategy and consultation methodology had been adopted throughout the force. Another was the use of community consultation forms. We discuss these in more detail at paragraph 40 but in brief, several forces required all divisional police officers attending community meetings to complete standardised forms. These contained a set of prompts designed to ensure a degree of consistency to the policing questions asked and information gathered.

22. It was also apparent during our fieldwork that individual divisions and force HQ departments had little awareness of what consultation each other was doing, and few force strategies in their present form referred to any specific, individual consultation exercise undertaken by divisions. We have some sympathy with the view expressed by a number of staff – that it is difficult to gauge the appropriate level of central direction to wield when much day-to-day responsibility falls to individual divisions, where a lot of what divisions do involves agencies external to the force, and where the choice of method will depend on the audience and purpose of an exercise as well as the capacity of those doing it. We do feel, though, that this situation underscored the somewhat detached attitude of central departments towards divisional activities, and vice versa: central staff saw their consultation surveys as the main corporate exercise and the primary source of public views on force priorities; those in divisions, by contrast, were more concerned with matters arising from their own interactions with local people and were consequently less convinced of the relevance of central surveys.

23. In the context of the wide range of consultation going on, a further drawback of exercising little corporate oversight is that opportunities for planning, co-ordinating and rationalising exercises are missed. In our discussions with the Consultation Institute and Audit Scotland, both saw a lack of co-ordination as a shortcoming in forces.

24. In its draft strategy, Lothian and Borders acknowledged that insufficiently regular meetings and targeted feedback had led it to overlook opportunities for participating in partner initiatives and, thereby, of reducing 'consultation fatigue' amongst the public. To overcome this it intended to establish a system whereby its local authority liaison officers would be informed of all planned consultations through a single point of contact in the council. Similar arrangements were being considered to improve the flow of information between divisions and force HQ. To address the same problem, Fife had constructed a consultation diary to hold information on all its consultation events. In addition to basic descriptions of activities the database included details on times, dates, venues and lead officers, as well as how the resulting information should be fed into the planning cycle.

25. We believe the use of a consultation diary or register to be good practice and would urge all forces to consider Fife's example. In our opinion it offers an extremely useful method of sharing information both internally and externally. Thought could be given to what form it should take (see below), and what additional information it might hold – e.g. named contacts for further information, links to meeting minutes, general findings, dates of future exercises and those of partner and voluntary sector agencies; as Lothian and Borders recognised, sharing such information with other agencies could help to identify opportunities for joint working. It may be advantageous to make its contents accessible to the wider public too, so that people could, if they chose, take part.

26. During the research phase of the inspection we spoke with the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC)[13]. Its main purpose is '*to provide a dissemination and support programme working with community planning partnerships and community learning and development partnerships*'. As part of this work, it has developed an electronic database planning and recording tool – VOiCE (Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement) – to help organisations to:

- plan community engagement and service user participation;
- conduct this effectively;
- monitor and record the process; and
- evaluate the outcomes.

27. The current version uses a generic template that draws on two established planning frameworks – the National Standards for Community Engagement[14] and the Learning, Evaluation & Planning (LEAP) framework[15]. We were given a demonstration of the database and were impressed by its capability and the scope to create bespoke elements for individual organisations. The system will be piloted over the coming two years. In the meantime it is available in its standard form free of charge to interested bodies. We look forward to seeing the findings of the pilot but in the meantime would encourage forces that have not already done so, to consider the VOiCE database or something similar.

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13 Scottish Community Development Centre: www.scdc.org.uk/voice

14 Communities Scotland (2005) – *National Standards for Community Engagement*. www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk/stellent/groups/public/documents/webpages/otcs_oo8411.pdf

15 Scottish Community Development Centre (2007) – *LEAP: a manual for Learning, Evaluation and Planning in Community Learning and Development*, revised edition, Scottish Government: http://leap.scdc.org.uk/

Key finding

At the present time few forces have oversight of all the consultation activities that they carry out. As a result, opportunities to inform planning, assist co-ordination, reduce duplication and share findings are being missed.

Recommendation 2: That, in order to make it easier to plan, co-ordinate and rationalise exercises, each force establish a central database for maintaining the details of its consultation activities. Forces should also consider to what extent this information could be made available to all staff, the police service as a whole, partner agencies and the public.

Professional guidance and support

28.   This lack of oversight perhaps inevitably detracted in turn from the degree of guidance and support available to staff carrying out consultation. Although some sources and examples of guidance were provided in the strategies and/or accompanying documents, the nature and extent of this varied: the most comprehensive set out a wide range of mechanisms for capturing views, analysing results and applying, disseminating and feeding back findings, as well as useful tips on how to evaluate exercises (Grampian and Strathclyde); others offered little practical advice, either describing a mix of methods and circumstances in which they might be applied or simply listing what exercises the force carried out.

29.   Only one force (Northern) advised its divisions overtly that, '*to ensure corporacy, the sharing of best practice and utilising available expertise, any consultation exercise should, in the first instance, be notified to the Policy and Co-ordination Unit*', based in force headquarters. This may have been due in part to the varying abilities of staff performing this role. Not all forces employed individuals with a specific background and remit in research or consultation skills. The majority looked instead to their analysts, strategic planning or quality systems staff, or even police officers to carry out these exercises in addition to their other duties. Many of these individuals had clearly built up a familiarity and proficiency in this area over time through experience and training. It is probably fair to say though that their remit rarely extended beyond conducting HQ surveys, and thus they were unlikely to be involved in, and indeed were often unaware of, consultation taking place in divisions.

30.   Another persuasive argument in favour of some form of central support is to be able to pass on findings, learning points and good practice. Several forces (Central Scotland and Lothian and Borders) spoke of how regular divisional commanders' meetings were useful for capturing good practice generally. In both cases, representatives of the HQ department with central responsibility for consultation would attend these meetings and so be in a position to capture any relevant points. However, in no force did we find a robust mechanism for recording or sharing this kind of information as a matter of course.

31.   At the time of writing it was too early to say what impact Grampian's recent appointment of a community engagement co-ordinator was having. It was anticipated that the post-holder would be the central conduit of advice, support and feedback for divisions, business areas and the force as a whole, bringing more consistency and rigour to all engagement activities in the process. We were also pleased to learn that a further aspect of the role was to identify and maximise opportunities to collaborate with community planning partners. We look forward to seeing how this innovative post develops.

32.   Another positive finding of the inspection was the very high awareness, throughout forces, of the National Standards for Community Engagement. Published in 2005, the Standards offer best practice guidance for '*engagement between communities and public services*'. Though aimed primarily at local authorities and their community planning partnerships, ACPOS has endorsed their use by the Scottish police service. In all forces, even those with no formal strategy, staff said that they considered the Standards when designing exercises.

33.   ACPOS has also set up a consultation working group, which is proving a valuable forum in which forces can share experiences and expertise. It comprises representatives from each force, the Scottish Institute of Policing Research (SIPR), Scottish Government and HMICS, and has been in existence since 2007. Much of its initial work has through necessity focused on developing quality of service measures for the Scottish Policing Performance Framework. More recently members have begun to consider the broader topic of consultation strategies and methods. We trust that this report will be a useful contribution to those discussions.

Skills and training

'*Specialist professional advice is available to groups involved in community engagement.*'

National Standards for Community Engagement indicator: **support** standard

34.   Following on from above is the need to ensure that staff responsible for consultation are not just knowledgeable about how to conduct exercises but also understand the merits and applicability of available methods. This may include not just police staff but also divisional officers and managers whose roles necessitate some degree of consultative skill. The latter are perhaps fairly well served by the Scottish Police College (SPC), which runs a number of courses aimed at probationers as well as more senior officers on community planning, consultation, engagement and reassurance. Less well catered for, it seemed to us, were police staff: while all are entitled to attend the SPC courses, the consultation element tended to be one part of what were invariably longer-running, operations-orientated exercises.

35.   Training in the consultation methods of the public reassurance strategy (see paragraph 67 onwards) is currently provided by the community safety team in Strathclyde. While the force's policy has been to train all its community police officers, including sergeants and inspectors, it has been happy to extend this to staff in other forces when asked to do so. As the model becomes more embedded in the force, instruction will continue to be offered. However, it is anticipated that this will be concluded some time next year. If others choose to adopt the strategy in the future, further thought will have to be given to how training might be provided.

36.   We believe it may be useful for the Scottish Police College to consider providing a course or courses, perhaps as part of its Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programme. The exact form and content needs further discussion, but we believe that the latter should include the benefits and limitations of the range of consultation and research approaches. A helpful addition would be guidance on how to conduct evaluations (see below). There is scope to draw on the professional expertise of SIPR, who have already expressed an interest in assisting forces either through direct input on the College's CPD programme and/or by establishing a good practice site on its website. We also met with representatives of the Consultation Institute and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). Both offer standard or bespoke courses on public consultation, engagement and allied topics, a number of which have in the past been attended by police staff.

Monitoring and evaluation

'*We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement.*'

National Standard for Community Engagement: **monitoring and evaluation**

37.   If forces are to become adept at identifying and sharing good practice, then they must evaluate what they do. For without some form of critical appraisal it is difficult to see how evidence of what is good or poor practice can be identified. As the National Standard above indicates, it is not just a case of monitoring whether certain practices are used or standards met, but of assessing too what is achieved by applying them. Both Fife and Northern constabularies' strategy documents spoke of an intention to conduct evaluations, while Grampian's toolkit went on to suggest ways in which this could be done. Though Strathclyde's public reassurance model contained a review stage, this dealt primarily with evaluating the impact of action in response to concerns identified through consultation.

38.   Evaluation is a vital component of continuous improvement and securing value for money. However, as yet no force had a strategy for doing so or could offer evidence in support of its current methods. Nor is it enough simply to look retrospectively at trends in recorded crime figures for, as national surveys have repeatedly shown, falling incidence does not necessarily correlate with declining public concern. Both the National Standards and LEAP framework offer some basic pointers on how to conduct evaluations, while the VOiCE database provides a way of capturing and sharing such findings. And as mentioned above, there are a number of bodies, including SIPR, who are willing to share their expertise.

Key finding:

Evaluation is a critical stage in any process. Through our new force self-assessment inspection model, we will be looking for evidence that forces are assessing and reviewing their practices in all aspects of policing, including customer focus.

Recommendation 3: That forces evaluate their consultation exercises as standard practice. All consultation plans should include a section describing how forces intend to evaluate their activities, while general guidance and/or sources of further guidance on conducting evaluations should be contained in force consultation strategies.

Feedback to the public

'*We will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.*'

National Standard for Community Engagement: **feedback**

39.   Publicising the results of consultation is essential to encouraging and maintaining public participation. We were pleased to note that all existing force consultation strategies articulated this need. The best examples further recognised the importance of demonstrating the link between these and subsequent planning decisions and actions taken by the force. In reality though, practices differed little. Several forces (e.g. Northern and Lothian and Borders) spoke of having developed information-sharing protocols with partner organisations, for example '*to communicate relevant results with […] partners, particularly at a local level where the results can be used to address common concerns*'. But the most common mode of communication was the force website, on occasion (e.g. Tayside) hyperlinked to those of its local authorities. While all forces published annual performance reports, strategic or business plans setting out their priorities on their sites only four, including two with no consultation strategy, had done the same with their consultation results. And only one, Dumfries and Galloway, could be commended for overtly seeking to link the two.

40.   However, here again we saw a divergence between force headquarters' and divisional practice. The nature of the work of divisions brings them into greater direct contact with the public, and every such meeting is a chance to tell people what and how they are doing. In this vein, some forces used *community consultation forms* to prompt divisional officers attending meetings to provide certain updates. In Tayside, updates included a changing monthly corporate message and information on current performance, crimes and incidents, local road policing matters, local initiatives, and forthcoming events. Likewise, Grampian's intranet-based Corporate Messaging system ensured that divisional officers could share the latest news on key matters at meetings. Through its new Police and Communities Together (PACT) model, Central Scotland's community officers also have a mechanism for keeping the public up-to-date on current and future police activities. Other media used elsewhere included newsletters/community leaflets, newspaper articles, posters and DVDs.

41.   We appreciate that some methods are more costly, and different media more effective at targeting specific groups, than others. Evaluations of current practice and more sophisticated population profiling (see paragraph 50) could help to identify this. Whatever the process, feedback, and in particular feedback explaining how the public's views have contributed to police decisions, is a vital part of the cycle. Otherwise, people will see forces as unresponsive and be unlikely either to participate again or to encourage others to do so.

Formal consultation methods

42.   It is important to stress that few forces were equipped to carry out major surveys easily or optimally. As part of our initial question set we asked how much they spent per exercise. Not all could provide this information, but the replies we received ranged from £5,000 to £28,000 for a single run excluding staff costs. Typically they employed two key people to run the surveys, although one force relied on only one member of staff for its rolling programme. In all cases, managing the survey was only one aspect of these individuals' duties.

HQ exercises

43.   The public survey carried out by HQ departments was widely seen as the primary conduit for capturing public opinion on priorities. Much of the following discussion therefore centres on this. All forces except Grampian conducted the survey, to gauge public expectations and perceptions of crime, anti-social behaviour, policing style and reassurance. Invariably postal, they were run triennially (Central Scotland, Fife, Lothian and Borders), biennially (Northern), annually (Strathclyde) or on a more frequent rolling basis (Dumfries and Galloway, Tayside).

44.   With samples ranging from around 1,000 up to 6,000, the average response rate was a little over 30%. Though this is quite typical for postal surveys, it is still low enough to jeopardise the representativeness of samples. As research has long confirmed, different sections of the community will feel differently about what the police do or should be doing[16]. Therefore it is important that survey results purporting to represent an entire population, actually do so. Nevertheless, postal surveys remain attractive because they are often cheaper than other traditional survey methods. In terms of how often they took place, less frequent programmes may tie in with longer-term planning cycles but are unlikely to sustain a dynamic response to public demand. Conversely, the results of rolling surveys showed little change over time suggesting, in their current form at least, little return despite the greater investment.

45.   Other major exercises carried out by HQ departments were those aimed at minority groups. Extra effort can be necessary to reach sufficient numbers of, e.g. minority ethnic, disabled, younger/older, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender individuals, and those of minority faiths. For this reason it can make more sense to sample from the force area than from geographically smaller divisions. We discuss this at greater length below.

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16   Beck, K., Boni, N. and Packer, J. (1999) The use of public attitude surveys: what can they tell police managers? *Policing: an international journal of police strategies and management* 22(2), pp 191-216.

Sampling

'We will identify and involve the people and organisations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement.'

National Standard for Engagement: **involvement**

46. Sampling methodologies varied across forces. One (Tayside) drew its sample from edited electoral rolls at divisional level, while another (Strathclyde) intended to go down to multi-member wards. Two others (Central Scotland, Lothian and Borders) included local businesses as well as residents, the latter widening this further to include educational bodies, local authority groups and community groups. We recognise the good practice of sampling down to smaller geographical areas and in seeking to broaden the range of people consulted.

47. Several forces (Central Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife) had in the past supplemented their main surveys with the results of local authority citizens' panels. A number of divisions also used these panels. Citizens' panels have a number of advantages, not least that they comprise a purpose-built group of individuals willing to be consulted over a period of time. This tends to enhance response times and return rates, improving cost-effectiveness in turn. But they can have drawbacks too. First, if the panel is unrepresentative of the population, its results will be skewed. Second, agencies that participate in, but do not own, the survey may have little opportunity to influence its content or quality. Both were concerns raised by forces.

48. Uniquely for Scottish forces, Northern selected its samples using the ACORN[17] classification system, which categorises people on the basis of lifestyle variables and demography. In common with other forces, though, its subsequent analyses examined at most age, gender and the division in which respondents lived. This seems to us a missed opportunity. Most people recognise that communities are not homogenous and that individuals do not conform neatly and exclusively to groups defined along these lines. And yet when it comes to consultation, many persist in pigeon-holing individuals in this way.

49. Each Scottish force covers a distinct geographical area subdivided into command areas or divisions, the rationale being that they are aligned with existing administrative geographical boundaries. Thus, while there may be areas where the population mix is to some extent related to its location, e.g. a higher ethnic mix in cities, populations do not differ consistently according to the police force area in which they live. So, it might be argued that the priorities of a wealthy rural homeowner living in the Borders are more comparable with those of someone living in similar circumstances in Perth than with someone in a poor, urban location in the Borders. (This is simply an illustration, and other demarcations are more valid.)

50. *Segmenting* 'customers' is a common business and marketing practice. It moves away from simply categorising individuals on the basis of single, traditional traits and instead identifies distinct population 'segments' in terms of lifestyle, behaviour, expectations, attitudes and demography. There are various existing classifications, such as ACORN and MOSAIC[18], which are in fact used by the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey as well as some English police forces. However, the police service in Scotland could benefit from running a segmentation exercise to identify its own distinct, police-relevant categories.

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17   ACORN – www.caci.co.uk/acorn/default.asp
18   MOSAIC – www.business-strategies.co.uk/

51.   There would be a number of advantages in pursuing this. Not least, a more in-depth and multi-dimensional picture of their communities would help forces to shape and target responses, activities or messages more appropriately and precisely. They would also be able to prioritise these accordingly, e.g. at those segments containing the highest proportions of the population (for widest impact), or those who are least impressed by the force or police service as a whole (raise lowest perceptions).

Consulting diverse groups

'*Fairness, equality and inclusion must underpin all aspects of community engagement, and should be reflected in both community engagement policies and the way that everyone involved participates.*'

A principle of the National Standards of Engagement

52.   One of the fundamental principles of the National Standards is that of inclusive consultation. Together and individually forces are committed to providing a service that engages and involves all members of their communities[19]. Their efforts are reinforced and supported by recent equalities legislation and duties with which all public authorities must comply.

53.   There were three key ways in which forces made additional efforts to achieve this. One was to extend their standard survey distribution lists (Fife and Central Scotland). For example, in its last wave Fife sought to further its reach amongst non-traditional respondents by posting out additional survey packs to a range of minority or hard-to-reach groups. Similar activity by Central Scotland earned the force a mention in the Scottish Government's evaluation of the National Standards[20]. As well as targeting a wider range of organisations, the force had invited views from partner agencies on the design and content of its survey. Consequently various changes were made to its layout, accessibility and distribution channels.

54.   Another way in which forces and divisions extended inclusion was through consultative groups – those existing in their own right, e.g. equality forums, or established for these purposes, e.g. community advisory groups. The third was to create liaison officer posts with direct links to 'diversity' groups. Further work was underway to establish youth fora (Central Scotland, Lothian and Borders and Fife), faith groups (Strathclyde), and community advisory groups and key individual networks (Grampian and Tayside). Until recently Northern had done little beyond its standard survey '*due to the very low proportions*' of minority groups in its communities. However we were pleased to learn that it had recognised the need for closer monitoring and consultative links with members of its minority ethnic communities, and was in the process of establishing community advisory groups.

55.   It should be emphasised that individuals of a common diversity background should not be presumed to share similar perceptions, or to hold contrasting ones to those of other groups, simply on this basis. The finding of the then Scottish Executive's Scottish Crime Survey minority ethnic booster sample – '*few marked differences*' on policing priorities between the minority ethnic and 'white' samples, but some divergence between the composite races of the minority ethnic sample – testifies to this. That is not to say that there may be no significant factors to distinguish groups, and it is clearly important to capture any such instances. It is, though, difficult to do so through surveys.

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19   ACPOS Diversity Strategy – www.scottish.police.uk/main/acpos/divstrat/main/mainpage.php

20   Scottish Government (2008) – *Evaluation of the National Standards for Community Engagement – Final Report.* www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/16085900/0

56.   Forces are committed to being fair, equitable and inclusive in their consultation. There are both similarities and differences in how they try to realise this and generally we support all efforts. We would, though, urge that more is done to evaluate the efficacy of approaches, so that what does or does not work can be understood and shared. For example, it is unclear if Fife's or Central Scotland's attempts to include more minority respondents actually achieved this, or whether advisory groups truly reflect the range of opinions they aim to represent.

Format and content

57.   Though the survey format does not necessarily limit forces to closed-response questions, most nevertheless relied on these. This was true not just of force surveys but also of those jointly conducted with local authorities and community planning partnerships. One perceived advantage of doing so is that it allows those setting questions to steer the agenda to a degree: pre-defined options can focus respondents' minds and, where need be, limit responses to what can realistically be achieved. Another is that the answers generated are easier to analyse, while a third is that many of the questions can be, and were, lifted from major government surveys such as the Scottish Crime and Justice, and Household surveys. The latter can be helpful in that it permits national comparisons to be drawn over a number of years. However, with the revised Scottish Crime and Justice survey now able to analyse results down to police force, if not divisional, area, we believe that more could be gained from force consultation that seeks locally relevant and practical public feedback. Thus they should go beyond simply quantifying problems (e.g. *do you think crime has risen, fallen or stayed the same over the last 12 months?*), to attempting to understand underlying reasons (e.g. *why do you believe crime has risen …?*) and, by implication, possible solutions.

58.   In fact there are a number of limitations to the closed-option format. By definition it restricts the nature and number of responses available, which are in turn more likely to be shaped by the views of the question setter than of respondents. By forcing people to tick an option they might not otherwise have chosen, the results risk being misleading or contrived. Other shortcomings specific to the force surveys we looked at are listed below:

Activities vs outcomes	Questions the validity of asking lay people *how* professionals should do their job. The 'more bobbies on the beat' debate illustrates this, where the higher visibility (activity) demanded by the public may be less effective in reducing housebreakings (outcome), say, than would less populist options such as crime prevention measures or intelligence-led policing (activities)
Emotional appeal vs professional approach	Mixing activities and victim focus can make respondents reply in predictable ways. For example, 'working with communities' or 'providing safety education in schools' are unlikely to emerge as public favourites when emotive options such as 'reducing violent crime' and 'protecting young children' are offered.

Putting words in mouths	Survey options that echo unhelpful, populist rhetoric, e.g. 'bobbies on the beat', 'anti-social behaviour' and 'fear of crime' can invite respondents to repeat these with little shared understanding of what they or the phrases mean.
Core role vs optional	Failing to differentiate between activities that the police must always prioritise, e.g. answering 999 calls, and others where there is scope for public choice.
Language + jargon	Some terminology can be confusing to, or interpreted differently by, members of the public. For example, how many understand the difference between motor vehicle theft and car crime, robbery and housebreaking? What does 'fear of crime' actually mean and 'anti-social behaviour' encompass?
Knowing what has been asked for	Changing the wording slightly can significantly alter the sense of responses. For example, the perceived 'most common' type of crime in a neighbourhood is not necessarily the crime that 'most worries' respondents or the one they are 'most concerned about becoming a victim of'. Nor are any of them necessarily the crime they would want the police to prioritise.

59. Piloting questions is a common way of minimising these types of problem. Some forces told us that they did this to some extent (Fife, Lothian and Borders, Strathclyde, and Tayside), but few regularly tested questions on non-police members of the public. While this may be due in part to borrowing piloted questions from other surveys, the examples above suggest that forces may do well to reconsider current practice. Another way of reducing the ambiguity of questions is to do pre-survey qualitative work. For some years now Lothian and Borders has run a series of divisional focus groups prior to its triennial, force-wide Partners' survey. This is a particularly useful technique in circumstances that demand the numerical certainties of a quantitative survey but require qualitative information to shape the questions.

60. In contrast to Lothian and Borders, Fife drew focus groups from its local authority panel *following* the survey in order to discuss responses in more depth. The force has continued to pursue more discursive consultation methods, something we consider to be good practice. At the time of our visit it had recently purchased electronic handsets and software. More commonly used to gather quantitative data, these tools offer an electronic equivalent to the paper questionnaire: respondents register an answer by pressing the corresponding button on their handset, while the software allows results to be analysed immediately. Used like this they risk the same shortcomings outlined above. Fife instead used them at events to present initial questions to stimulate debate and challenge. Subsequent questions then evolved in line with qualitative themes emerging from the discussion.

61.   Where surveys seek to quantify, qualitative approaches are concerned with exploring, understanding and explaining often contradictory human experience, opinion and behaviour. Thus, qualitative methods can be a very powerful tool in their own right. In spite of this, few force departments used them in this way. Though some forces did give survey respondents the opportunity to insert their own comments in 'free text' boxes, we suggest that all forces consider what they could gain from conducting more qualitative exercises.

Informing priorities

'It is a relatively simple matter to describe the impact of the National Standards on improving community engagement practice ... demonstrating the impact of community engagement on service planning and delivery is less straightforward.'

Evaluation of the National Standards for Community Engagement[21]

62.   NIM guidance requires forces to consider a range of evidence in the planning process, including the results of consultation. However most, if not all, treated these findings as quite separate sources from their NIM assessments. Moreover, as forces have expanded their planning to encompass organisational priorities so more evidence has been added to the mix: internal performance reports (Dumfries and Galloway, Tayside), crime trends (Central Scotland), environmental scanning (Strathclyde, Northern), internal European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) business assessments (Central Scotland), the SPPF (Dumfries and Galloway, Lothian and Borders) and partner agencies' plans (Dumfries and Galloway).

63.   In our initial questions to forces, we asked how they chose which survey findings to feed into the planning process and how they weighted these against other evidence. Their responses raised two further questions: one, what value could be attributed to the findings and thus to their contribution to planning?; and two, what was the extent of their impact on plans?

64.   A common frustration of staff we spoke with during our fieldwork was insufficient time and/or resources to analyse survey results. As a result, with few exceptions little was done beyond basic frequency tables and some cross-tabulations by age, gender or force division. Moreover, with few significance tests being applied, analyses were largely descriptive in nature and lacking in statistical rigour. Thus in answer to our first question, in this form we think it unlikely that the surveys were revealing much of value. Combined with the possibility of unrepresentative samples, mis- or simply leading questions and ambiguous results, we would suggest too that their contribution to strategic planning was limited. What makes the situation harder is the fact that what weight *should* be attributed to survey results in the strategic planning process has never been established – a gap highlighted by the ACPOS NIM development team. In response to our second additional question we refer to the quote above. Certainly the forces themselves struggled to answer this, beyond explaining the process by which all evidence was reviewed during the planning process.

65.   Whatever their process, it is important that forces give further thought to how consultation results are considered when planning and to explain this in a way that is clear to the public. For if individuals are to have the motivation and confidence to engage with their local police, it is important they believe that what they say will be acted upon. Dumfries and Galloway's consultation day

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21   Scottish Government (2008) – *Evaluation of the National Standards for Community Engagement* – op cit.

appeared to work well in this regard. Every year, as part of its planning cycle Dumfries and Galloway holds a consultation day (as do Fife and Tayside) where participants, including force staff, partner agencies and the public come together to identify the force's strategic priorities. The event continues to be popular with all those involved. Indeed when asked, force staff said that with more time and money they would prefer to discard the survey format altogether in favour of more consultation events with smaller, local groups.

Key finding

We are not convinced that these surveys are capable of capturing the information necessary to inform strategic priorities. We question the value of continuing such exercises and suggest that a more locally directed and genuinely consultative approach be adopted. Before making our final recommendation, however, we go on to describe the activities of divisions and other local policing units. As we shall see, much of what we advocate in the recommendation, as well as answers to the questions raised above, may be found in the kinds of activity going on at these levels.

Consultation at divisional and sub-divisional level

66.   Information emerging from divisional or more local consultation was rarely overtly used to inform forces' strategic plans. This seems to us to be counter-intuitive, given that it is here that much of the significant consultation between the police and the public goes on. We have already alluded to divisions' use of local authority citizens' panels and so will make no further comment here. In general, the only other regular surveys that divisions might be involved in were those conducted under the auspices of community planning partnerships. One major exception was Strathclyde's use of the public reassurance strategy (PRS).

Strathclyde's use of the public reassurance strategy

67.   In a different approach from that of other Scottish forces, Strathclyde police's consultation method drew heavily on the public reassurance strategy. The strategy's purpose is to improve performance and public reassurance by '*integrating and focusing* [its] *work with partners to develop sustainable solutions to locally identified priorities that will create safer and more confidence communities.*' Its eight-stage model draws on research, community engagement and partner agency collaboration to identify and resolve local problems. Consultation here is seen very much as a regular activity that directly and routinely informs operational policing.

68.   The objective of the second stage is to consult directly with the public: '*to engage with local communities to establish an understanding of the issues that affect their quality of life and sense of security, thereby ensuring that they have a primary role in* [identifying and setting] *local priorities.*' As the PRS manual states, '*effective engagement with the local community is arguably the single most important part of the Reassurance Policing Model*'. In order to ensure that local communities have a primary role in shaping local priorities, it recommends that the following exercises are conducted:

- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS – a series of events targeting different groups to gain a broad cross-section of opinion. Includes established groups such as councils and resident associations, as well as additional events publicised through local media.

- SIGNAL INTERVIEWS[22] – face-to-face street interviews using a short, semi-structured schedule to elicit the nature of problems causing local people the greatest anxiety.

- ENVIRONMENT VISUAL AUDITS – conducted by local community police officers together with partner agency representatives, e.g. housing officers, in order to identify and quantify observable signs of physical and social disorder.

- KEY INDIVIDUAL NETWORKS (KINS) – a group of people who, by virtue of their occupation or role in the community, are more sensitised to their environment and therefore more likely to notice changes in the neighbourhood. Their principle purpose is to help identify community priorities and make observations on the impact of subsequent interventions.

69.   Community engagement events are a useful way of bringing together police and local people. For Strathclyde, the main purpose was twofold: to begin to identify local concerns and priorities, and to establish baseline data against which to assess improvement. The main instrument used to capture these baseline data was the force's *Have Your Say* survey. It contained 30 questions on concerns about crime, anti-social behaviour and quality of service, some of which had been borrowed from the government's Scottish Household and Scottish Crime and Victimisation surveys. The questions can be administered on paper, but where possible the force preferred to use electronic handheld sets. In this way questions could be addressed to the audience as a whole and their responses recorded immediately. Using this method, the force captured the views of over 4,000 people in one year alone.

70.   The ease with which larger numbers of people can be surveyed in this way is undeniable. And, anecdotally, participants are said to prefer its interactive format. However the survey itself has come in for some criticism in response to proposals that it be adopted nationally. We agree that it suffers from the kind of methodological limitations we have described elsewhere. For example, its electronic format necessitates that all questions are closed-response and limited to only five options per question. As a result the questions can appear limited, the response options too broad and unfocused with rarely the choice of 'other', 'don't know' or even 'not applicable'. Nor, in contrast to Fife's flexible format, can they be changed.

71.   It is perhaps surprising that a strategy that recognises the value of speaking directly with people in order to understand their concerns, should resort to cruder methods of measuring impact. The explanation may lie in part with the prevailing penchant for numerical indicators of performance. However, the PRS guidance itself advises that any quantitative performance monitoring assessments be supplemented with qualitative evidence. Indeed in an early evaluation of the PRS in the Saracen area of Glasgow, Strathclyde did just this. First, it used the Strategy's NIM-based EPIC (enforcement, prevention, intelligence and communication) template to monitor what actions had been carried out to achieve the area's priorities. Then the force's community safety department drew up a questionnaire to ascertain whether KINS members had noticed any improvements as a result.

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22   Based on research by Dr Martin Innes, the Signal Crime Perspective argues that he way people perceive risk, worry and fear can be shaped by various factors and is not determined solely by the volume of crime in an area. Furthermore, the degree of fear and anxiety can be profoundly affected by the presence of anti-social behaviour and other social disorders that blight communities.

72.   A recent report by Lothian and Borders highlighted similar difficulties in evaluating the work of its community beat officers (CBOs). Here too the proposed solution was to record qualitative details of the engagement process and effectiveness of subsequent action plans: '*the creation and maintenance of KINS, which will include recording the location and date and outcome of street surgeries along with the scanning and assessing elements of their SARA* [scan, analysis, response, assessment (again based on NIM principles)] *plans, together with any feedback given to the community as part of that process, should form part and parcel of ... progress reports*'[23]. We agree that gathering qualitative evidence is a helpful way of assessing and understanding impact, and believe that the kind of qualitative methods used in the initial stages of the PRS would be just as suitable for evaluating its outcomes.

73.   The survey element aside, we believe there is a lot to recommend the PRS approach. First, it requires that interviewers speak directly to people. To us the principle of talking to people in person, on location, is a sound one. One advantage is that it gives not just residents but also people visiting or working in the area the opportunity to express their views, thereby building up a more holistic picture. Assisted by the kinds of questions in the signal interviews – e.g. where and when do the things that cause you fear occur, who is involved – the PRS allows views and experiences to be explored and perceptions challenged. The KINS too offer another layer of local intelligence, particularly in assessing the impact of interventions. And though not consultation *per se*, the visual audits provide further confirmatory evidence.

74.   It is also important that the process works both ways – the police and other agencies must be ready to have their preconceptions countered, while respondents must be prepared to explain why they feel the way they do and to understand the pressures and constraints under which local services operate. Again, the interactive format of the PRS allows this to happen.

75.   A further positive aspect of the model is that working with partner agencies plays an integral part. Survey evidence[24] confirms that for many communities it can be lower level disorderly behaviour, such as dog fouling or fly tipping, that causes distress. Members of the public are not always aware of whose role it is to deal with such matters and often assume that it falls to the police. By working together in the community, partner agencies will be able take directly on board both their concerns and responsibility for addressing them. More formally, the community planning partnership and single outcome agreements agenda require that partners work together. Aspects of the PRS may offer a way forward. In fact, it may help to provide answers to many of the other points we have raised in this report, for example around corporate guidance, support, monitoring and evaluation and feedback mechanisms.

76.   Although only one force (Fife) overtly referred to the public reassurance strategy in its own consultation strategy in truth most, if not all, had embraced the same underlying tenets. This was evident from the deployment by other forces of neighbourhood, community or beat officers, the establishment of local consultative mechanisms such as key individual networks (KINS), community advisory groups (CAGs) or street surgeries, and/or the use of visual audits and the signal crimes

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23   Lothian and Borders Police – Neighbourhood policing and the community beat officer, February 2008

24   Various force public surveys.

methodology. A number of divisions or more local policing units have looked to the Chicago Alternative Policing Model (e.g. Fife, Lothian and Borders) in designing their community policing models, while Central Scotland has recently introduced Police and Communities Together (PACT). Here again, the main features include beat meetings, KINS and visual audits that bring the police, partner agencies and the public together in order to derive '*a shared understanding of [the public's] needs (within limitations), not simply a police perspective of their expectations*'.

77.   As the Justice Committee concluded, as long as community consultation remains a guiding principle in their approaches to community policing, '*it is important to leave room for forces to be flexible and innovative ...*'[25]. We concur, but would add that evaluation of the various models in use in Scotland would help to determine the most and least successful elements.

78.   Finally, the PRS guidance states that the public's choice of priorities '*will rarely coincide with the issues that dominate police strategic assessments and force control strategies*'. This is significant as it highlights that crimes such as counter-terrorism and serious and organised crime, which remain top policing priorities for all forces, are not always a high-level priority for local communities despite the threat they undoubtedly pose. The police service must therefore work carefully to strike the proper balance in response to competing demands.

Consultation by any other name

79.   Formal methods aside, probably the majority of consultation that goes on between forces and the public is in the form of meetings. Police officers in territorial divisions attended a plethora of regular external meetings and groups, the extent of their presence and role dependent on the nature of the forum. Below is a summary of some of the main kinds:

- Local area committees and community/local planning partnership meetings
- Area community safety co-ordinating/partnership groups/area planning partnerships
- Community regeneration partnerships
- Ward/beat meetings
- Community council meetings and other community/civic forums
- Locality management/planning forums
- Safer town/town centre management meetings
- Scrutiny panels
- Other multi-agency forums, e.g. drug and alcohol action teams, child services/protection groups
- Tenants' and residents' association meetings/Neighbourhood Watch schemes
- Pubwatch schemes
- Crime prevention/community safety panels.

80.   Sitting beside or below these are other ad hoc and/or more localised teams and initiatives bringing police and communities into yet further contact. Indeed in one year alone, one force (Dumfries and Galloway) recorded officers attending 198 public meetings and 536 committee meetings over and above the usual round of community or area planning forums. Though their

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25   Scottish Parliament Justice Committee 18th *Report, 2008 – Report on Inquiry into Community Policing*
      http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/justice/reports-08/juro8-18.htm

precise purposes and remits may overlap or diverge to varying degrees, all are essentially concerned with sharing information, views and expertise in order to improve the wellbeing of communities. And all aim to achieve this by consulting in person with attendees, be these members of the public, representative bodies, partner agencies or government.

81.   We recognise that in the context of consulting to understand the priorities of local people, the community meeting format has some limitations. Not least are the somewhat low rates of attendance by members of the public and the high turnover amongst their representatives. Furthermore, the primary aim of these meetings is to inform the activities of the multi-agency group they serve, most often the local authority or its community planning partners. Even so, a great deal of information generated would certainly be relevant to the wider business of constituent agencies. Acknowledging this, a number of forces (Northern, Fife, Grampian and Tayside) had, or were in the process of producing, standardised *community consultation forms* on which attending officers could record pertinent points and actions arising. Additional information captured in this way differed by force and ranged from details on the purpose and audience of meetings, through partner agency satisfaction with police activity, to community tension indicators and intelligence to be entered on the Scottish Intelligence Database (SID). One force also retained nil returns as an audit trail for occasions on which no matters '*worthy of police interest*' were raised. In all cases, the information did not just rest with the source division to be acted upon but was forwarded on to HQ departments, either on paper or electronically, to be considered in the force planning process.

82.   Of the remaining forces, Central Scotland and Lothian and Borders reported little success with similar schemes, the former having discarded theirs, the latter considering a re-evaluation. In Strathclyde some divisions either had or were intending to establish a system, while Dumfries and Galloway was content to rely on more informal mechanisms of data capture.

Key finding

The public reassurance approach has much to recommend it, advocating as it does on the ground, face-to-face engagement with people visiting, living or working in an area. In so doing it directs forces to work with partners to identify and tackle locally relevant priorities, and to evaluate the outcomes of their activities. In essence it sees consultation as an everyday tool of local community policing, rather than an occasional corporate exercise. We also believe that there is merit in forces formally recording and analysing the main themes arising from local meetings, which we see as a valuable strand of consultative evidence and a useful audit trail for subsequent decisions and actions.

Recommendation 4: That forces move away from centrally-managed postal surveys to more direct, face-to-face consultation in local communities. In seeking alternative methods, forces should consider the merits of models such as the public reassurance strategy, and the value of community intelligence that can be derived from local community meetings and events.

Conclusions

83. In this report we have recommended that consultation to inform policing priorities be carried out locally below force level, in person and with partners, and be an integral feature of community policing however it is defined. The role of the force we see as primarily one of centralised strategy and planning, oversight and support. Nationally, the ACPOS consultation working group's remit does and should includes sharing findings and good practice across the police service, as well as identifying opportunities for rationalising exercises and harmonising questions where appropriate.

84. With the advent of community planning partnerships and single outcome agreements has come a further administrative layer to priority setting. Sitting at council level, and therefore coterminous with most police divisions, here too the focus is on the local. All partnerships, made up of local public services and community bodies, are obliged to produce joint action plans and to do so on in consultation with the public.

85. It is important that local processes continue to develop, strengthen and perhaps more crucially, coalesce, as partners work together to establish their single outcome agreements. Initial guidance suggests that locally generated public consultation did not play a particularly large part in informing the first iteration of SOAs. Nor was there an obligation to consult with communities, beyond their elected members and agencies, in order to validate them. At the time of writing we were still awaiting direction from COSLA on the future for partnership consultation. What is produced will inevitably affect how forces, and particularly their divisions, approach their own strategic planning in the future. It will also have implications for how public consultation across partner agencies might best be conducted. In our opinion, the recommendations set out in this report will mean that forces are in a stronger position to respond to what eventually emerges.

Appendix A

The following table provides a snapshot of the consultation exercises that forces and divisions were engaged in. It is by no means exhaustive of all that they did. For example, all will be involved in a range of community meetings but not all of these have been listed under each force. Nevertheless, it confirms our contention that a great deal of consultation between the police, the public, and other partner agencies and stakeholders goes on, much of it very much as part of the routine business of policing.

SCOTTISH POLICE SERVICE: FORCE CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

Police force	Central	Local	Planned
Central	Triennial community policing survey Partners' survey processes to extend 'action reach' Specialist engagement action for hard to reach groups identified through National Standards for Community Engagement Young persons fora Quality assurance surveys	Area commands organised focus groups or engaging with partners Local authority citizen panel	
Dumfries and Galloway	Quarterly quality of service survey (inc. priorities) Community Voice using volunteers to consult on priorities Posters in shopping areas Diversity unit surveys Force Consultation Day	Community constables	
Fife	Three-yearly community perceptions survey Annual quality of service survey Community planning partnership and Fife people's panel (all partners) and focus groups Community advisory groups Fife youth forum Fife People's Panel Big Shout Regular meetings/information sessions at police headquarters	Local area committees Area community safety co-ordinating group Be Safe Be Secure road shows Ward meetings Safer Town meetings Community forum	Currently developing a survey to consult with stakeholders and partners
Grampian	Monthly service users force-wide telephone survey Faith key individual networks SurveyMonkey exercise on force service centre users and disability impact survey Single equality scheme consultation Lay advisory groups Diversity groups engagement	Community council meetings Area network meetings Community planning questionnaires Citizens' panels Community safety survey Residents' survey Planning for Real® consultations Youth forum	Equalities forum Development of key individual networks Young Scot Police Direct

SCOTTISH POLICE SERVICE: FORCE CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

Police force	Central	Local	Planned
Lothian and Borders	Partners survey (prefaced by focus groups) Engagement with young people Customer satisfaction surveys Hate crime engagement Local authority panels/citizen's panels Web chats	Community planning partnerships Engagement with young people Capital Partnership model Neighbourhood partnerships Local Area Committees Local authority panels/citizen's panels Community beat officer/community constables Scrutiny panel meetings Community councils Partnership working	
Northern	Public consultation postal survey with partners	Supporting local community councils and community planning --> local divisional policing plans. Three-tier approach to consultation reflecting NIM levels Diversity consultation	
Strathclyde	30 'corporate' questions using interactive handsets or paper version - Have Your Say Quality of service surveys Community safety diversity unit consultation	30 'corporate' questions using interactive handsets or paper version - Have Your Say Community advisors Key individual network groups Citizens' panels Community planning partnerships Community safety partnerships Youth partnership Rural partnership Safe as Houses Community links Town centre management Community health care partnerships Complainer feedback Campaign against violence Diversity groups Local, face-to-face interviews 'determine specific information about local priorities' Civic forum	
Tayside	Monthly quality of service survey Public perception survey Community advisory groups (CAGs) Local businesses consultation, e.g. Dundee's co-ordinated anti-crime network Schools events led by Tayside's wildlife officer Diversity officer consultation Management days inv. community partnerships	Public consultation forms at community meetings Community advisory groups (CAGs) Community planning partnerships Local businesses consultation, e.g. Dundee's co-ordinated anti-crime network Schools events led by Tayside's wildlife officer Community safety partnerships Community liaison officers	

Appendix B
Methodology and Acknowledgements

Our thematic reports are prepared after careful and focused scrutiny of the subject matter. Further details of our inspection methodology can be found on our website, but in brief it typically consists of a set of initial written questions directed at forces and police services, followed up with fieldwork visits and interviews. In addition we consult other organisations and individuals with a professional interest or excellence in the area. The result is a concise report that presents our overall findings, highlights good practice and puts forward a set of recommendations for improvement.

The project initiation document (PID) was adapted from our standard inspection format based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model. It was sent, together with a set of inspection questions, to each of the Scottish forces and the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA). We also circulated the PID to, and invited comments from, the following organisations: ACPOS secretariat, the various police service staff associations, clerks to police boards and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

Fieldwork interviews with staff in central departments and operational divisions were conducted in all forces. We are grateful for the valuable assistance of the nominated liaison officers who co-ordinated these interviews, and to all who took part in the inspection. We are also grateful for the helpful contributions we received from other organisations and departments whom we consulted during the inspection. These included the following: police and police-related (ACPOS NIM development team, ACPOS Community Safety, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) policing board, Merseyside police authority); local government (Audit Scotland, East Ayrshire community planning partnership, COSLA); the Scottish Government (National Standards for Community Engagement team, the National Community Safety Co-ordinating team, Justice Analytical Services); academic (Scottish Institute for Policing Research, University of Newcastle, University of Edinburgh); other public sector (Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), Victim Support Scotland, Scottish Consumer Council); and other professional bodies (the Consultation Institute, the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)).

In the final report we have described the practices we observed during this inspection. Where we felt that what we observed was particularly innovative or robust we have highlighted this as good practice. We also identified specific opportunities for further improvement, which we have set out in four recommendations.

The inspection was carried out by Dr Emma Fossey of HMICS and Ms Hayley Kelly on secondment from Grampian Police, supported by other HMICS staff, under the direction of Malcolm R Dickson QPM, the then HM Assistant of Constabulary.