

Bedfordshire Police
Divisional Boundaries
February 2004



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



HMIC Best Value Review Inspection

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 By virtue of Section 1(1)(d) of the Local Government Act 1999, all police authorities in England and Wales are required to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which the function of policing is exercised within their force area, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.1.2 Police authorities must prepare a Best Value performance plan (BVPP) for each financial year in accordance with orders and guidance issued under the Act. In particular, the authority must conduct reviews of its functions and publish a programme of the BVRs. Whilst it is clear the police authority has the legal accountability for Best Value, the chief constable is constitutionally personally responsible for operational service delivery. Consequently, they will have to work together to ensure that BVRs make a significant improvement to service delivery.
- 1.1.4 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is charged with the responsibility for inspecting all BVRs within the police service. The resulting reports are 'public' documents, and in every case a copy will be forwarded to the Secretary of State, the chair of the police authority and the chief constable or commissioner of the force concerned.
- 1.1.5 Reviewing authorities must demonstrate that they have challenged why and how a service is being provided; compared their performance with others; embraced fair competition to secure efficient and effective services; and consulted with local people, customers and stakeholders.
- 1.1.6 The purpose of independent inspection, and thus of this report, is to:
- Enable the public to see whether Best Value is being delivered;
 - Enable the inspected body to see how well it is doing;
 - Enable the Home Secretary to see how well Best Value is working;
 - Identify failing services where remedial action may be necessary; and
 - Identify and disseminate good practice.

1.2 Judgement 1: How good is the service?

- 1.2.1 Bedfordshire Police conducted a BVR of divisional boundaries between July and December 2002, as part of the ongoing BVR of Deployment. The subsequent HMIC inspection of the BVR concluded that the service provided was **Fair**.

1.2.2 Strengths included:

- Sound performance against key objectives under existing structures.
- The BCUs are fully engaged with partners as lead members of crime and disorder partnership groups participating in the delivery of local initiatives.
- There was integration of the BVR programme with other Force strategic developments.

1.2.3 The inspection found some areas in need of attention:

- The initial scoping became subject to 'scope creep'.
- A lack of effective financial information and analysis to inform the process.
- No clear rationale or terms of reference for the senior user.

1.3 Judgement 2: What are the prospects for improvement?

1.3.1 HMIC judged that the prospects for improvement were **Uncertain**.

1.3.2 Strengths included:

- Robust application by the review team of the 4Cs methodology.
- A balanced and articulate report led the Force to a transparent 'no change' outcome despite the pressure of external drivers for change.
- The ongoing positive working relationships between BCU commanders and local authorities despite the 'no change' outcome.

1.3.3 The inspection found some areas in need of attention:

- Performance against key objectives has not improved.
- There was no evidence of direct comparison with forces that have undertaken BVRs of boundary changes with a 'no change' outcome.
- In light of the limited community consultation, further engagement with the media could have been considered.
- There was no evidence of a 'critical friend' to the Police Authority to provide an independent challenge in such a significant area of potential change.

2 Contextual Information

2.1 Best Value Arrangements of the Bedfordshire Police Authority.

- 2.1.1 Bedfordshire Police Authority adheres to a defined and documented seven stage process for undertaking BVRs:
- Stage 1 - the review team is convened, terms of reference are agreed, a project plan is prepared and tasks are allocated.
 - Stage 2 - production of the scoping study/baseline assessment.
 - Stage 3 - involvement and consultation of internal and external stakeholders.
 - Stage 4 - production of the findings report.
 - Stage 5 - production of the costed options report.
 - Stage 6 - production of the costed performance improvement plan for the selected option and the implementation plan.
 - Stage 7 - monitoring of the Best Value implementation plan.
- 2.1.2 The Police Authority has an appointed member for Best Value, who sits on the scrutiny panel. It is to this panel that the final review report is presented.
- 2.1.3 Progress of the review and implementation of resulting recommendations are monitored every four weeks at scrutiny panel meetings. This process informs the strategy committee, which consists of Police Authority members and is tasked with developing and making recommendations to the full Authority on the strategic vision and objectives in the Best Value strategy. A senior service provider of a similar external service is identified as a 'critical friend'.
- 2.1.4 The Police Authority is currently reviewing its Best Value process to ensure that it is both inclusive and also incorporates lessons learned from previous reviews. It also aims to enhance community awareness of the Best Value process and facilitate community engagement

2.2 Force Structure

- 2.2.1 Bedfordshire Police covers an area of 123,500 hectares and serves a population of 566,399, comprising 224,616 households in 120 villages and towns. The county includes the urban areas of Bedford, Dunstable and Luton, smaller towns such as Ampthill, Biggleswade and Leighton Buzzard and a large rural area. To police this area the Force has an establishment of 1235 police officers. Some analysis of the organisational structure is therefore necessary to facilitate an understanding of the background and purpose of this review.

- 2.2.2 Bedfordshire Police is led by the Chief Constable with a chief officer team that consists of a deputy, an assistant and a director of finance, all of whom have separate and distinct organisational portfolio responsibilities. Territorial policing is delivered on three BCUs – North Bedfordshire, Central and Luton. Respective divisional headquarters are located at Bedford, Dunstable and Luton.
- 2.2.3 Current boundary arrangements have been in place since 1998. The previous structure (implemented in 1992) achieved full coterminosity with local authority boundaries but was modified as a result of resilience issues.
- 2.2.4 The present structure achieves full coterminosity only with the Luton Unitary Authority boundary. The Mid-Bedfordshire District Council area is served by North Bedfordshire and Central BCUs. North Bedfordshire BCU serves Bedford Borough Council area in its entirety and also the Mid-Bedfordshire District Council town of Biggleswade. This structure attempted to place local communities within the same policing area.
- 2.2.5 One of the drivers for coterminosity and a definition of the ‘service’ provided by Bedfordshire Police in line with the Best Value ethos is enshrined within the *Bedfordshire Police Local Strategic Plan 2003/05 – ‘Achieving the Vision’* which commits to...

‘Providing the best quality of service to promote a safe and just environment which reassures members of the public that they can go safely and confidently about their lawful business.’

... through the five strategic aims, to:

- Reassure the public.
- Reduce crime.
- Manage operational demand.
- Deliver through partnership.
- Excel in community and race relations.

2.3 Review Methodology

- 2.3.1 The review was undertaken by Bedfordshire Police between July and December 2002. The review team comprised one Best Value team member supervised by the head of Best Value.
- 2.3.2 The review team undertook scoping activity and prepared a report for the Police Authority, which selected the specific areas for the review, although no formal terms of reference were documented. The review focused on seven

key areas although the rationale for their selection is unclear and the review team had no input into the final decision-making process. These areas were:

- Organisational structure.
- Organisational performance.
- Information systems.
- Finance and estates.
- Partners and partnership working.
- Morale issues.
- Extrinsic considerations.

2.3.3 During the monitoring of the review by the scrutiny committee, the review team was tasked with further activity beyond the original scope. This led to 'scope creep' and highlighted the importance of setting clear and robust terms of reference at the outset.

Recommendation 1

Her Majesty's Inspector recommends that BVRs are supported by clear terms of reference to ensure focus and to define activity during the review process.
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2.3.4 The Assistant Chief Constable oversaw the review and the scrutiny panel provided formal direction during four-weekly meetings.

2.3.5 The senior user was the head of crime services although the rationale for his appointment was not recorded. He was the longest serving BCU commander and had experience of two divisional commands. His understanding of his role in the review was to ensure that the views of senior managers were represented and to ensure that the challenge was robust. As a Superintendents' Association representative he was a natural conduit for matters affecting his members.

2.3.6 The review was based on the application of the 4Cs as outlined in the introduction, thus ensuring that the review was carried out with due regard to comparison with other service providers, opening up the service to competition, challenging whether and how the service should be provided and consulting with stakeholders.

2.3.7 The review was driven by a number of external factors and was integrated into the ongoing BVR of Deployment. As such, there is evidence of integration of the BVR programme with other Force strategic developments.

2.4 Inspection Methodology

- 2.4.1 The purpose of an HMIC BVR inspection (BVRI) is to make two judgements at the conclusion of the inspection: first, 'how good is the service?' and second, 'what are the prospects for improvement?'. HMIC is statutorily responsible for carrying out BVRI's within the police service. This review was selected for inspection largely because of the HMIC recommendation to review the Force structure and the 'no change' outcome. The purpose of this inspection activity was to:
- Explore the robustness of key stakeholders' – both internal and external - engagement in the process.
 - Obtain an understanding of the areas of service improvement envisaged by the review.
 - Examine the rationale behind the selection of the 'no change' option.
- 2.4.2 The inspection was carried out between January - March 2004 on behalf of Her Majesty's Inspector Sir Ronnie Flanagan GBE, MA. Prior to the publication of this inspection report, Bedfordshire Police and Police Authority have been given the opportunity to comment on the factual contents.
- 2.4.3 During the course of the inspection 14 interviews were conducted, which gathered evidence from the ACPO team and the Police Authority, members of the review team, BCU commanders and county and borough/district council executives in order to obtain an accurate overview of the service being provided.
- 2.4.4 Numerous sources of documentation evidence were examined. These are referenced when appropriate; however, the main ones that merit mention are listed below:
- The BVR of Deployment incorporating divisional boundaries.
 - The BVR of the Divisional Boundaries Scoping Study.
 - Bedfordshire Police Local Strategic Plan 2003/05 – '*Achieving the Vision*'.
 - The Bedfordshire Police (BVPP).
 - The Essex Police BVR of Force Restructuring.
 - Various consultation documents prepared by the review team.
 - Various documents published on the Bedfordshire Police Authority website.
- 2.4.5 One of the principal objectives was to gauge the perception of those involved as to how good the service was and whether it was improving as a result of the BVR. This was then compared to HMIC's own observations and findings.

3 Judgement 1: How good is the service?

3.1 Are the service aims clear and challenging?

- 3.1.2 The Force took the decision to review its divisional boundaries following external pressure both from both HMIC in the 2000/01 Inspection of Bedfordshire Police and from some local authorities that desired greater coterminosity than existed at the time. Having deliberated this issue, the Force Executive determined that the Force's divisional boundaries should be subjected to robust application of the 4Cs as a proven and transparent process.
- 3.1.3 The Police Authority commissioned a scoping study. The review team provided a set of suggested areas on which to focus the work of the review, although the team was not engaged in the decision making process that determined the final scope of the work. The tasking of the review team with further work beyond the original scope led to 'scope creep'.
- 3.1.4 Prior to the interview phase the inspection team requested a copy of the BVR. A copy of the scoping study was provided during the interview phase of the inspection.
- 3.1.5 The scoping study set out:
- The methodology for examining the seven key areas defined by the Authority.
 - The options for change.
 - The way in which the 4Cs would be applied to the review of divisional boundaries.

The scoping study did not specifically define the aims and objectives of the review. There was a single overarching objective, which was defined at the start of the review document and would be achieved through examination of the seven selected areas:

'to examine a number of boundary arrangements in order to determine the model that would provide the most effective, efficient and economic policing service to the public of Bedfordshire.'

- 3.1.6 Although comparatively loose in its terminology the objective is sound as a driver for activity. The review team determined that achievement of this objective would be through examination of the seven areas based around application of the 4Cs methodology to each area. Where possible this methodology was applied robustly. The report then expanded on the current situation in each of the areas.

3.2 Does the service meet the aims?

- 3.2.1 HMIC has considered the broad aim of Bedfordshire Police to deliver efficiency and effectiveness in order to assess how the Force is performing. This involves testing the service against specific standards and evaluating how the Force actually measures delivery.
- 3.2.2 The final BVR report was completed in December 2002 and the inspection took place during February 2004. This allowed HMIC the luxury of time and hindsight to examine the success or otherwise of the 'no change' outcome. Examination of the seven areas yielded some considerations for improvement in both Force process and procedural issues, in each of the discrete areas and in the Force as a whole. The inclusion of financial information in the Divisional Boundaries BVR was limited and one such consideration was the implementation of a Best Value accountant who now prepares and analyses financial information for each BVR.
- 3.2.3 Taking each of the seven areas in turn:
- *Organisational Structure*
 - Boundary arrangements, coterminosity, divisional size and management team structures were examined.
 - The report identified that the Force had previously achieved coterminosity but that the arrangements had been untenable and had led to further restructuring to the current structure in 1999. This does not achieve coterminosity with local authority partners.
 - Divisional size is relatively small when compared nationally and divisional management team structures do not operate within a consistent model.
 - The Force is already undergoing a programme of major internal change.
 - *Organisational Performance*
 - The previous round of boundary changes was perceived to have led to a prolonged downturn in performance although the review team found little evidence of causal links.
 - At the time of the review, performance of each BCU was considered to be above its family average. The passage of time has shown some downturn in overall Force performance and this was evident at the time of the inspection.
 - Custody centre distribution was acknowledged to be 'top-heavy' in the south of the county.

- *Information Systems:*
 - The review identified 32 IT systems in operation and a further 17 under development.
 - Divisional boundary changes would necessitate the provision of external expertise to reconfigure some systems.
 - Historic data used to analyse trends and performance of some functions and to determine the resourcing requirements of some shift patterns would not be available.
- *Finance and Estates:*
 - The Force acknowledges that while the standard spending assessment is not perfect, it remains the most effective method of distributing divisional budgets.
 - Despite the potential for strategic differences between local authorities and BCU commanders when determining the allocation of CDRP funding, all parties acknowledge that existing working relationships are sound.
 - The Force has largely devolved financial issues to BCU level.
 - The 'no change' option involves no additional financial cost to the Force.
- *Partners and Partnership Working*
 - The Force achieves coterminosity in all but one of its local authorities, although this is not full coterminosity with BCU boundaries.
 - The existing working relationships between BCUs and local authorities is described as good.
- *Morale Issues:*
 - The Force determined that a move to a two-divisional model would jeopardise some existing posts and would affect the development of officers of chief superintendent rank.
- *Extrinsic Considerations:*
 - A boundary committee review had resulted in no change to the external boundaries.
 - At the time of the review it was envisaged that a Local Government review might result in local authority boundary changes in or soon after 2005, although this is now acknowledged not to be the case.
 - The location of future major house building works.

3.3 How does the service compare?

- 3.3.1 The comparison element is extensively documented in the final report and the review team was able to account for the way in which this activity was conducted.

3.3.2 Comparisons were drawn with 16 of the 39 BCUs in the BCU families that included the three Bedfordshire BCUs and six other forces. The rationale for comparisons with these other forces was not clarified sufficiently within the report but has since been explained and is valid. However, the report does not make specific mention of any comparison with Essex Police, which carried out a BVR of Force Restructuring in 2000/01 and was subsequently inspected by HMIC in December 2001.

3.4 Overall Judgement

3.4.1 HMIC grades the service inspected as excellent, good, fair or poor according to criteria laid out by inspection guidance. In light of the findings of the review and what was subsequently found by the inspection, Her Majesty's Inspector grades the service as **Fair**.

4. Judgement 2: What are the prospects for improvement?

4.1 Does the BVR drive improvement?

- 4.1.1 Best Value legislation under the Local Government Act 1999 requires forces to demonstrate that they considered why they provide a service under review and alternative ways that it can be delivered.
- 4.1.2 This review generated five options for change to the Force's BCU boundaries to achieve coterminosity with local authority boundaries and a further 'no change' option. The Police Authority discounted two of the change options at the scoping stage as being unrealistic and the remaining four options were promulgated to internal and external stakeholders for consultation. Each option was presented in terms of the advantages and disadvantages in respect of each of the seven areas for review and where appropriate, comparisons with other forces and BCUs were applied to them. Information provided by these other forces and BCUs was utilised robustly to inform each of the change options.
- 4.1.3 The challenge element was conducted regularly throughout the review by the Police Authority vice chair and the scrutiny panel. Although the Bedfordshire Police Authority website mentions the inclusion of 'critical friends' to achieve robustness and independence with each review, there was no evidence that advice from such an individual or group was sought to provide an independent challenge alongside the Police Authority during this BVR.
- 4.1.4 The review team sought challenges to the way in which existing boundary arrangements provided an efficient and economical service to the communities of Bedfordshire. In addition to the internal challenge provided by the Police Authority, the review team sought challenge through a series of interviews with senior staff members, staff associations and service delivery experts. The review team secured external challenge through officers in other forces that had undergone boundary change processes and through consultation with a range of key countywide service providers such as the CPS, the Local Education Authority and district/borough councils. The external challenge process also addressed the issue of coterminosity through an assessment by the crime and disorder manager for a CDRP family member.
- 4.1.5 The Police Authority and the review team acknowledged the difficulties in securing effective external competition for this review. It would appear inappropriate to subject the areas of boundary changes and services provided by police that can only be delivered by police officers, to a competitive process. This is in part a reflection of the difficulties in applying the Best Value principles to a review of structures.

4.1.6 Evidence from stakeholders interviewed during the inspection confirmed that the consultation element was applied robustly during this review. The advent of the review was publicised internally and written submissions from all staff were accepted, scrutinised and where appropriate, incorporated in the report. External consultation was extended to town and parish councils that would be affected by any boundary changes but was not carried out widely within the communities of Bedfordshire. The review team did not consult with the community. Evidence was gathered from the Force survey manager that anecdotally revealed that the Bedfordshire public is relatively unconcerned about the positions of divisional boundaries and that their identities lay within their nearest town in either 'the north' or 'the south' of the county. The review team participated in one media interview but there is no evidence that any media involvement beyond this was considered.

4.1.7 In order to determine whether the review actually drives improvement, it is necessary to examine the seven prescribed areas in light of the application of the 4Cs:

- *Organisational Structure*
 - The general national trend is to achieve coterminosity with local authority boundaries and there has been a reduction in the number of non-coterminous BCUs.
 - Larger BCUs – in terms of geographical size, population and establishment – have proved viable elsewhere nationally.
 - There is little scope for management savings, as the intermediate levels of management evident in some other forces do not exist in Bedfordshire. Adopting a different set of force boundaries would not diminish the establishment of divisional management teams; it would merely necessitate their redistribution.
- *Organisational Performance*
 - Despite adopting the 'no change' option using the rationale that any change in organisational structure presents a risk that may adversely impact performance, some areas of Force performance had decreased by the time of the inspection. Albeit with the benefit of hindsight, this fact renders much of the analysis undertaken for the review invalid. This is, however, not a criticism of the review methodology, which involved a robust examination of current and projected performance.
 - The Police Performance Assessment Framework will limit the value of historic performance information.
 - The overall provision of 24-hour inspecting cover and superintending function resilience would not change under any of the 4 options.
 - The last round of boundary changes brought changes to the policing styles within the county. Some proved unsustainable and since this time there has been no overarching review of policing styles.

- Although not ideal, the current custody arrangements represent the optimum arrangement in respect of travelling time and prisoner processing.
- *Information Systems:*
 - Most of the options would involve some one-off changes to Force IT systems.
 - Airwave implementation was a matter of months away at the time of the review and based on past experience, any requests to change radio frequencies would have presented difficulties. Boundary changes post-Airwave would seem the most appropriate option.
 - Coterminosity would facilitate better data alignment between divisions and CDRPs, although in practice both this and the advantage of economies of scale for some functions are balanced by disadvantages of redeployment of some police staff and data comparisons between historical and new structures.
 - Realignment of divisional boundaries will not affect the Force IT training requirement.
 - Resourcing requirements were carried out relative to areas rather than divisions during the Force shift pattern review in 2001. These structures could be translated to each of the boundary change options with relative ease.
- *Finance and Estates:*
 - The existing standard spending assessment that relates the funding received by forces to the policing needs of the area and its population is not perfect but meets current needs. This would be impacted by any moves to another structure.
 - Income generation would be relatively easier within a fully coterminous structure.
 - The existing levels of budgetary devolvement allow BCU commanders to prioritise expenditure. Changes to the divisional boundaries would necessitate a review of the Force's position on budgetary devolvement. Consultation has revealed consensus on a number of financial benefits within a two-division structure such that it would permit greater devolvement of resources and control from the centre.
 - The police estate has been the subject of a separate BVR. Boundary changes would not necessitate significant changes to the estate, although operational need would determine some of the lesser estates and logistical requirements.
 - Consultation and comparison has shown that a human resources professional on BCUs with significant establishments allows the BCU commander to focus on service delivery. Bedfordshire aims to achieve this position.

- *Partners and Partnership Working*
 - Views of local authority partners were diverse but none was in favour overall of the existing structure.
 - Mid-Bedfordshire District Council was most affected by the existing lack of coterminosity. Although the council's desire was for a three-division coterminous structure, the north-south structure was the most favoured if this could not be achieved.
 - There are valid concerns about enclosing unitary authorities and district councils within the same BCU, although comparative evidence has shown that the arrangement works elsewhere.
 - Adoption of the new Bedfordshire structure would fully achieve full coterminosity with LSPs and local authorities. Even this arrangement would highlight differences between the second tier authorities.
- *Morale Issues:*
 - There are currently only five chief superintendent positions in Bedfordshire Police and a perception that any decrease in their number would impact the Force's ability to attract high calibre staff for these posts.
 - The consultation and comparison processes indicated that police staff workload would remain, regardless of the location of divisional boundaries.
 - In light of the loss of experienced staff from Bedfordshire Police to the London forces and Bedfordshire's difficulties in replacing them, the perceived potential fall in morale that can be associated with boundary changes is of enhanced significance. The Force is cognisant of the issues that arose in Hertfordshire, which was forced to change divisional boundaries twice in a relatively short period of time following boundary changes with the Metropolitan Police.
- *Extrinsic Considerations:*
 - The Local Government Review, expected in or after 2005, will not take place in the foreseeable future.
 - There is no evidence to suggest that the Force will be impacted by regionalisation issues.
 - The Bedfordshire County Structure Plan 2001 provides for an increase in the number of dwellings, the majority of which will be in Mid and North Bedfordshire. Bedfordshire Police will need to provide for the enhanced service delivery required by an increase in population.

4.2 How good is the improvement plan?

- 4.2.1 BVRs should contain an improvement plan based on findings and recommendations. It should be clear what needs to improve, why, how the improvements will be delivered and in what timescale. It should contain

challenging targets designed to deliver continuous improvement that will raise the level of service. The costs and benefits should be laid out along with targets, milestones for improvement and clear lines of accountability.

- 4.2.2 This BVR did not produce an implementation plan as the two recommendations did not yield issues that were capable of been taken forward.

4.3 Overall Judgement

- 4.3.1 In order to arrive at a judgement regarding the prospects for improvement in the service under review, HMIC assesses the evidence presented by the review, supporting documentation and further evidence resulting from the inspection process. The judgements are 'excellent', 'promising', 'uncertain' or 'poor'.
- 4.3.2 Having due regard for the areas mentioned above, Her Majesty's Inspector concludes that the prospects for improvement in this service are **Uncertain**.

5 Recommendation

Recommendation 1
Her Majesty's Inspector recommends that BVRs are supported by clear terms of reference to ensure focus and to define activity during the review process.