



Inspecting policing  
in the **public interest**

**Delivering the  
Policing Pledge**  
Executive Summary

# Executive Summary

## The Policing Pledge – and the role of HMIC

### The background to the Policing Pledge

The Policing Pledge is part of a radical programme of reform set out in the Government's Policing Green Paper, *From the Neighbourhood to the National*.

The Pledge explains what the public can expect from the police in a 10-point framework of national policing standards. The Pledge can also be tailored to meet the needs of local neighbourhoods.

There is more about the background to the Policing Pledge and a link directly to the Pledge itself at: <http://campaigns.direct.gov.uk/policingpledge/>

#### Our role at HMIC

HMIC has a role to play in letting the public know how far the Policing Pledge has become a reality, and between April and October 2009 all 43 police forces in England and Wales will be inspected on how they are delivering the Pledge.

In the meantime we have also done some

work to assess the progress that is being made, including:

- reviewing police force websites;
- conducting 'reality checks' on how the Pledge is working in practice; and
- visiting seven forces:
  - Avon and Somerset Constabulary;
  - Cumbria Constabulary;
  - Essex Police;
  - the Metropolitan Police Service;
  - Northamptonshire Police;
  - South Wales Police; and
  - West Yorkshire Police.

This work has helped to answer the question, 'Is the Policing Pledge being delivered to local people?'

## The Policing Pledge in more detail

### Fairness, dignity and respect

**Pledge Point 1** is about always treating people fairly, and with dignity and respect, ensuring that they have fair access to services and at a time that is reasonable and suitable.

### Our findings so far

#### Pledge Point 1

All seven police forces we visited had a clear direction from chief officers, together with a set of values that help underpin their commitment to provide a highly professional service. The forces all had clear diversity and equality strategies in place.

The forces had also carried out a range of reviews to assess and improve access to services.

We found some good examples of effective partnership approaches. These included:

- the use of the Single Non-Emergency Number by South Wales Police and Cardiff Council;
- the Southwest One initiative in Avon and Somerset – a joint project between the police, local councils and a private company which aims to provide shared and more accessible services for the public;

- the establishing of third-party reporting centres in Cumbria, which give local people more opportunities to report crime and raise community concerns; and
- the installation by some forces of automated translation services in a number of languages.

While forces are beginning to employ more sophisticated techniques to identify what customers actually want, there is a need to demonstrate more obviously and effectively that they are providing fair access and that they are taking account of the needs of diverse communities.

So although there were some good examples of getting through to harder-to-reach groups, there was little evidence of:

- the Pledge itself being translated into other languages; and
- formal consultation with minority groups or independent advisory groups on the Pledge itself.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) has identified incivility as one of the highest causes of customer dissatisfaction.

We have **not** found very effective practice in responding to dissatisfaction, nor evidence of any considerable capacity to capture, analyse and learn from experiences to support organisational learning.

### Creating better local policing websites

The local police force website is a way of engaging more effectively with local people and key to providing better access to information.

We are aware that there are real improvements in the look of many websites. However, at the time of the review, there were relatively few examples of:

- websites with strong visual impacts;
- easy-to-navigate websites; and
- good links.

### Community engagement and consultation

A major part of the Pledge relates to community engagement and consultation.

**Pledge point 2** refers to making sure that local people:

- know who their dedicated Neighbourhood Policing Team are;
- where they are based; and
- how to contact them.

**Pledge point 3** refers to making sure that local teams are visible and are not abstracted unnecessarily.

**Pledge point 4** indicates that Neighbourhood Policing Teams will respond to every message within 24 hours.

**Pledge point 7** relates to arranging regular public meetings to agree priorities at least once a month.

**Pledge point 8** refers to providing monthly updates on progress on local crime and policing issues, including providing:

- crime maps; and
- details of what action local police and partners are taking to make neighbourhoods safer.

### Our findings so far

Pledge point 2

We found strong evidence during our visits and on the websites about information being given on Neighbourhood Policing Teams. The work and role of the teams is generally well explained, often accompanied by messages from senior officers promoting and supporting Neighbourhood Policing.

Pledge point 3

Visibility in local areas proved rather more problematic in terms of assessing the amount of time teams spend in neighbourhoods.

Clear evidence was found of abstraction policies in all the forces we visited, but issues remain about:

- what counts as an ‘abstraction’; and
- how to monitor compliance.

While enthusiastic staff were often very positive about the time they were able to commit to their neighbourhoods, HMIC will take a robust look at this during our inspections in order to reassure the public that forces are delivering on their promise that staff should spend most of their time visibly working in neighbourhoods, or on work directly related to the neighbourhood.

#### Pledge point 4

There was evidence of a real commitment on the part of staff to get back to members of the public quickly. However, it is also true that this is a difficult area to monitor. Essex Police is making good use of ‘mystery shoppers’ to improve performance. Elsewhere it is clear that staff are trusted to deliver. It makes sense that the organisation can confirm in a non-bureaucratic way that this commitment is being realised.

#### Pledge point 7

We saw good evidence of meetings taking place but considered that there was still a wide variation in terms of how the meeting was run.

### Running better meetings

Better meetings can demonstrate some or all of the following:

- the meeting is well attended having been advertised effectively;
- introductions are made, the purpose of the meeting is explained and the meeting is well structured;
- an easily accessible location with suitable facilities;
- professional, smart appearance and conduct of all police attending;
- a clear agenda and some formal record taken;
- the person chairing the meeting has the necessary skills to do so;
- literature is provided that includes information about partners as well as policing issues;
- systems or approaches for agreeing priorities are fair and transparent;
- there is effective report back on agreed priorities; and
- crime updates are provided with a clear context and commentary with actions on key themes.

We concluded that it was important for forces to be quite innovative in terms of working with partners and to use other meetings such as local surgeries, street briefings and even mobile police stations to meet local needs and requirements.

It is essential that whoever runs the meeting has the skills to do so. We witnessed meetings at both ends of the spectrum: one ran the risk of leaving people deflated and perhaps unlikely to offer information and support in future, whereas the other was an inspiring and productive event.

#### Pledge point 8

We found from the website reviews and visits that all forces have introduced crime mapping and some good practice exists, such as the e-cops electronic update in Cambridgeshire, in terms of providing updates on crime and policing issues. However, once again, this is an area for development, particularly with regard to consistency and sophistication.

## Contact management and response

**Pledge points 5 and 6** relate to the way forces manage external contact with callers, ensuring that their personal needs are assessed and managed.

Specific standards are set, for example aiming to answer 999 calls within 10 seconds, and giving explicit commitments about getting to people within 15 minutes in an urban area and 20 minutes in a rural area.

Pledge point 6 refers to answering all non-emergency calls promptly. There are some additional commitments:

- if attendance is needed, to send a patrol giving an estimated time of arrival; and
- if an individual is vulnerable or upset, aiming to be with them within 60 minutes.

Likewise, if the individual is calling about an issue which has been agreed as a local Pledge priority, attendance would be ideally within 60 minutes. Advice may be given or an appointment offered at a time that suits the caller.

### Improving feedback of information about crimes

An area for improvement is undoubtedly the need to have systematic ways of feeding back information on specific crimes, including:

- what has happened to those brought to justice; and
- details of what action partners are taking to make areas safer.

### Our findings so far

We identified a very strong customer service ethos among staff who deal with calls from the public on a daily basis.

Our visits revealed that staff have a good knowledge of the Pledge and an understanding of the key role they have to play in delivering it. All seven forces we visited demonstrated that they have a well-developed performance monitoring regime within contact management centres and a strong commitment to improving performance was very apparent.

Significant progress is being made in some forces on managing the demand of calls and introducing and marketing a Single Non-Emergency Number.

Detailed data will be examined during the forthcoming inspection work but for the year 2007/08, the average performance among the 41 forces where there are figures available was to answer 91.56 per cent of emergency calls within 10 seconds. This is a more tried and tested area of the business and, overall, most forces are performing reasonably well in answering emergency calls.

**Pledge point 5:** a more problematic area with point 5 is that of providing an estimated time of arrival. This is an area which will be subject to significant review during inspections.

**Pledge point 6:** we found some good work being done in respect of advice and guidance to staff concerning vulnerable or upset members of the public.

We also identified some excellent processes within contact management centres to ensure that neighbourhood priorities were instantly flagged to the staff. However, areas of challenge remain, including:

- a force being confident in estimating the time of arrival for a response unit;
- ensuring that calls relating to agreed neighbourhood priorities are responded to within the 60-minute target; and
- appointment systems, where they exist, are somewhat embryonic.

This is a critical area of work for forces as they develop their delivery of the Pledge and will be subject to further reality checking by inspection teams later this year.

Some forces have an advantage where they have developed software packages to support the flagging of pledge priorities and the tracking/monitoring of performance.

It would be extremely helpful if the National Policing Improvement Agency, supporting the Association of Chief Police Officers, could share best practice as soon as possible.

## Victim and customer care

**Pledge points 9 and 10** relate to victims of crime and customer care. The Pledge sets out that victims of crime have the right to be kept informed of progress and to agree how often this should take place, but certainly at least every month if they so wish and for as long as is reasonable.

Pledge point 10 refers to the commitment to acknowledge any dissatisfaction with the service an individual has received, within 24 hours of reporting it. An opportunity should be provided for anyone who is dissatisfied to:

- talk in person to someone about their concerns; and
- agree what will be done about these concerns and how quickly.

If the Pledge is not fulfilled, there is a commitment to provide an explanation as to why it has not been possible to deliver the high standards of policing to which the service aspires on that occasion.

## Our findings so far

We found some very good examples of the care and approach to victims. One force visited holds Beacon status in delivering the Victims' Charter.

Supervisors monitor the victims' code of practice and some forces have implemented clear standards of performance conduct and professional behaviour. There was also evidence of holding teams and individuals to account if necessary. We are also aware of some developing ideas such as 'customer contact contracts'.

Overall, we found that there was a clear commitment, once a person had been charged, to provide continuing contact with victims and generally high levels of service were provided by victim care units. However, there appears to be a lack of consistency or effective arrangements to monitor compliance earlier in an investigation.

A few forces which are particularly strong in terms of their approach to Citizen Focus policing encourage feedback from the public and use that feedback to improve their services. Critical to this approach is that the public can make their comments relatively easily, for example by using weblinks from the police force home page, from quality of service pages or from the Pledge itself.

There are some examples of forces taking quick action to address any dissatisfaction or concerns. HMIC found that while all forces have well-established systems for dealing with what has been traditionally referred to as 'complaints against the police', there was little evidence of a systematic approach to managing general dissatisfaction.

We found it particularly challenging to find any robust evidence of forces acknowledging dissatisfaction with the service within 24 hours of it being reported. This will be a further area for testing during inspection but it is felt at this stage that where any systems exist, they are currently embryonic.

It is important that the service recognises that as long as this remains the case, forces are missing an opportunity.



About half of all complaint allegations relate to incivility, yet it was apparent from some focus groups run by HMIC that there was little local awareness about which issues were being raised by local people in terms of dissatisfaction – or how to resolve them.

It is important that this information is available to front-line officers and communicated quickly in order that they may respond and improve the levels of service and the perceptions of policing.

## Overall context

### Leadership and governance

The commitment to the Policing Pledge was given in 2008 that it would be delivered by the end of December 2008. The Association of Police Authorities (APA) and police authorities locally have an important role in holding forces to account and in encouraging partnership support.

We found that there was strong leadership and personal commitment to the Pledge at chief officer and operational level.

Communication about the Pledge was introduced very rapidly so it is not surprising that some gaps in delivery were identified.

The service is now measured against one key target: increasing public confidence that the police and local councils are dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour. Delivering on the Policing Pledge is identified as an important step towards realising improvement in confidence. It is important that forces understand the progress they are making and some form of monitoring of each aspect of the Pledge is therefore essential. So far, few are monitoring delivery of what has been pledged.

Progress would be even faster, if forces learn from each other – an example would be that of using common IT programmes to support the monitoring of the Pledge.

There was considerable variation about the overall governance arrangements. Again, it is important that police authorities are able to hold their force to account and likewise, within the force, it is important that the Pledge is not seen to be only for Neighbourhood Policing staff or contact management centres – it needs to be fully integrated across all business areas.

Although the title is ‘Policing Pledge’, it is absolutely critical in terms of overall confidence that partners are brought into all the work associated with making neighbourhoods safer. This is an area of work that is currently under-developed.

### Strategy and policy

Comprehensive communication strategies were evident in all the forces we visited, often co-ordinated with recent national publicity under the ‘Justice Seen, Justice Done’ programme. Awareness and understanding of the Pledge varied. Contact management and Neighbourhood Policing staff were very knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Elsewhere in the organisation, awareness levels were below acceptable.

Communications targeted at the public were quite proactive in some areas but remain to be fully exploited in others, and this will be tested during inspection.

Forces would be advised to check their overall communications strategy and processes for monitoring delivery of the Policing Pledge.

### Early conclusions

The Policing Pledge is a promise to the public about the standards of service they can expect.

The Police Service is already starting to implement the 10 points of the Pledge – but as we point out, awareness, understanding and implementation of the Pledge does vary across the seven police forces visited.

We found that many staff were extremely enthusiastic and committed.

However, there are a number of areas that need to improve, including:

- having a proper consistent communications programme for the public;
- using reality testing and sharing best practice much more dynamically;
- assessing and assuring the amount of ‘visibility’ time that policing teams spend in neighbourhoods;
- better contacts with victims before an alleged suspect is charged (although higher levels of service were provided post-charge); and
- better local awareness about issues raised locally as priorities and the reasons for dissatisfaction – also feedback on how they have been resolved.

The Policing Pledge is a commitment to the public. Early signs from HMIC scoping work are encouraging; however, there is no room for complacency. Forces need to ‘step up a gear’ and focus their efforts to ensure that the Pledge becomes a reality.

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