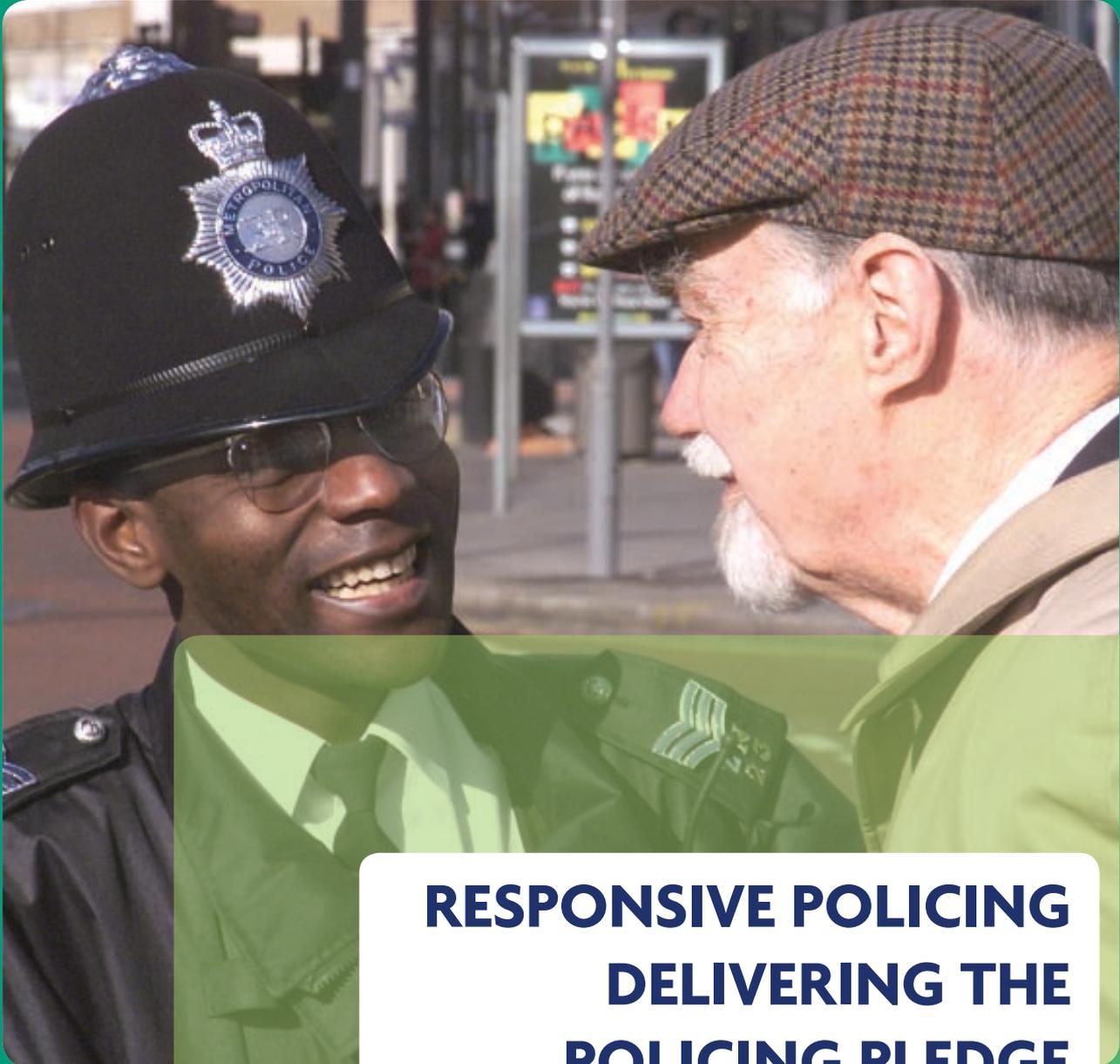




Inspecting policing
in the public interest



RESPONSIVE POLICING DELIVERING THE POLICING PLEDGE

Strategic Overview

The Pledge contains a mix of commitments by the police to the public on accessibility, availability, response and communication whether as a neighbourhood resident, caller, victim or dissatisfied person.

In the round it provides an indication of the general responsiveness of local police. It does not, at this stage, deal with all aspects of local policing, eg the investigation of crime or anti social behaviour, but rather provides ways for people to raise concerns and agree priorities with their local police.

Taken together these commitments, signed off by police chiefs in December 2008 are relatively demanding to deliver every day, everywhere, consistently.

It may not be surprising that three quarters of the 43 forces in England and Wales achieve a **fair** rating – a mixed delivery of the Pledge in its first year. This means a force has sometimes met, and sometimes missed, its promises to local people, leaving potential for improvement and greater consistency.

Two forces were graded **poor** and eight were graded **good**. Even those achieving a **good** grade showed minor dips in performance. A number of forces within the **fair** category have considerable progress to make. No forces were **excellent**.

The Neighbourhood policing commitments of accessible named officers and availability, together with first contact handling of 999 and non-emergency calls are relatively strong areas.

Following up calls to neighbourhood teams, dealing with dissatisfaction and agreeing contact with victims are weaker areas.

Forces with strong leadership, who check out what they do and fill gaps, can reasonably be expected to improve even further as they assess their service through the eyes of the public.



Inspecting policing
in the **public interest**

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Strategic Overview

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why the Pledge is important

Policing in the UK is historically founded on a proud tradition of 'consent', but forces in the 21st century require a much more active relationship with the public to win that mandate.

The Pledge is a set of expectations for the public in their everyday dealings with police, and a commitment which police forces have agreed to meet.

It was recently formulated and introduced in December 2008, when chief officers signed up to deliver it from January 1. The Policing Pledge focuses on aspects of neighbourhood policing and other policing services and provides an indication of responsiveness to some of the needs and concerns of local people. It touches on issues that matter.

Every force adapts its policing to its own area – its age and population profile and its patterns of crime. But it is clear from research that the public want to see consistent, high-quality policing. All the evidence suggests that providing a responsive service to local people in line with Pledge commitments is an important part of building public confidence.

As long as reality falls short of these aspirations, there is a compelling case for regularly providing the public with an independent account of the responsiveness of the service they receive.

Ultimately, if the public are convinced that police demonstrate they care about their concerns, there is likely to be a greater flow of information that will help the police to get better in fighting crime.

The HMIC review

In December 2008, police chiefs in England and Wales signed up to the Policing Pledge, a set of commitments for some of the services they give to the public, particularly those who contact them for help.

The individual points are relatively straightforward but they have proved an exacting overall standard for police to meet 24/7, 365 days a year – on aspects of neighbourhood policing, response to calls, victim care and the handling of public dissatisfaction.

To give an idea of the scale of the challenge, police dealt with about 10 million emergency 999 calls and recorded 4.7 million crimes last year. Nevertheless, forces have made the promises. The public are entitled to expect them to deliver.

HMIC has checked to see how much progress has been made. This inspection will enable the public to see their local force performance on these issues and compare it to others.

We have looked through the eyes of the public, interviewing police and the people they serve and using techniques of consumer ‘watchdog bodies’ – such as unannounced visits and ‘mystery shoppers’.

We have graded forces as **excellent** (green), **good** (yellow), **fair** (amber) or **poor** (red) – on the ten Pledge points and on three separate assessments of their efforts to use the Pledge to improve. We have also offered an overall grade for each force, and reached our conclusions applying professional judgement.

We have not awarded an **excellent** grade, as no force was assessed as consistently exceeding their Pledge obligations.

There were some **good** ratings, for forces which generally met the Pledge commitments, and a tiny number of **poor** performances, by forces which consistently failed on their promises.

By far the most common grade was **fair**, which equates to a mixed performance with some areas needing improvement. **Fair** service has good elements but lacks consistency. Of the forces achieving a **fair** grade some have only small improvements to make to attain a **good** grade, others have a greater distance to travel.

The public are unlikely to be impressed by a **fair** performance, if for no other reason than that is not sufficiently reliable for them.

However, given that forces have not made explicit promises in this way before, it would be optimistic to expect them to be **good**, or better, across the board in the

first few months of delivering the Pledge.

Consistent delivery in every locality is demanding. The **fair** grade means remedial action is needed in some areas. All forces in this category have work to do, some have greater challenges and have been so informed.

We can also see differences between performances in the different areas of the Pledge.

Police forces in England and Wales have put energy and resources into neighbourhood policing. This is consequently a relatively stronger area and it is likely, as the neighbourhood network gets stronger, that delivery of the Pledge points relating to it will sharpen.

The same is broadly true of the handling of 999 and non-emergency calls. This is already a relatively strong police area. Forces have generally taken steps to provide fair access to all, making adjustments, where necessary, in line with legal requirements.

The most concerning aspects of this Pledge review relate to better treatment of victims, improvements in the way police call back or arrange visits to the public, and more effective handling of dissatisfaction.

A core philosophy of the Pledge is that forces’ relationships with their public will move beyond responding, when they think they can, to reflecting the public’s needs and concerns about when, and how, they do so. Forces need to consult local people, listen, learn and shape services in response to need.

The Pledge presents police with the challenge to look at services from the outside in, and to be consistent. Planning and monitoring help with this. For instance, victims tend to be given the information police think they should get, when police are available to talk to them. They frequently fail to find out when, how and how often victims actually want to be updated.

There is no consistency in the way police call the public back, or make follow-up visits. In contrast to complaint handling there is no simple understood system for handling dissatisfaction.

The police service is action orientated and task-driven. Present it with a practical problem and it will usually solve it. The Pledge requires it to achieve something more – to organise itself around everyday public needs and learn from what people tell it. It demands, in short, responsive policing to public need.

If the service achieves this, it will find those critical Pledge promises easier to deliver and will reap the benefits.

The Pledge points

The full text of each Pledge point is used in the body of this report, but they can be summarised:

- 1 Respect the public, ensuring fair access to all.
- 2 Give name and contact details for neighbourhood teams.
- 3 Make sure the teams are 'visible', in neighbourhoods, at least 80% of their time.
- 4 Neighbourhood teams to respond meaningfully to messages within 24 hours.
- 5 Answer 999 calls in 10 seconds and get there safely within 15 minutes in urban areas and 20 minutes in rural areas.
- 6 Answer non-999 calls promptly. Get to 'vulnerable' and 'upset' callers, or those complaining about agreed local crime priorities, in an hour – or make appointments, which you keep, with other callers.
- 7 Arrange some form of public meeting at least once a month, to agree local priorities.
- 8 Provide monthly local updates on what police and other agencies are doing on crime and disorder.
- 9 Ask victims how they want to be updated, and do it at least once a month.
- 10 Deal with dissatisfaction effectively, acknowledging within 24 hours.

Detailed findings

An individual report has been produced for each of the 43 forces in England and Wales. These are available on the HMIC website¹.

This report reflects the national picture. We found that:

- No **Excellent** grades were awarded, so there is no green shading in Table 1.
- Eight forces delivered what they promised, most of the time, and only had a small number of areas to improve on. We have judged these forces to be **Good** at delivering the Pledge overall. They are shown in yellow.

- Thirty three forces were delivering what they promised in some areas but fell below many of the elements of the Pledge in some way. We have judged these forces as **fair**, shown as amber.
- Two forces were not delivering what they promised in many areas and we have judged these forces to be **poor**, shown as red.

The distribution of overall grades was as follows:

Grade	Number of forces	Percentage (%) of forces
Excellent	0	0.0
Good	8	18.6
Fair	33	76.7
Poor	2	4.7
Total	43	100

The majority of forces need to improve their performance against several of the Pledge points to deliver, fully, what they promised, and a few are simply not achieving acceptable levels of service.

When we looked at which Pledge points were generally being achieved and which were not, we found that:

- Police generally treated the public with respect – as defined in the Pledge, with its emphasis on being ‘accessible’ to the public. They provided information on neighbourhood officers and most teams met regularly with the public.
- Most forces answered emergency calls quickly and responded to the vast majority of emergencies within the target times, safely.

- All forces provided reasonable information to the public about crime levels in their area.

However, there were weaker areas:

- In some areas, the public were not given the opportunity to agree priorities with police. On occasion, call handlers did not have the best available information about local priorities due to the nature of IT systems.
- Many forces did not ask victims when and how they should be informed about investigations. Most forces did not publicise what happened to offenders.
- All forces had a means for investigating allegations of misconduct by officers or staff. However, hardly any had a system in place for responding to public dissatisfaction, losing valuable information which could help improve the service. Acknowledging and resolving dissatisfaction is the single weakest Pledge point, with the highest number of **poors** – four forces – and the lowest number of **goods** – also four.

There is significant room for the majority of forces to improve the way they respond to local people’s priorities, keep victims informed and handle dissatisfaction. This latter area will become increasingly important. There has been a general rise in public complaints of police incivility – which we included in our review of Pledge point one with only half of forces scoring **good** for their systems to collect, assess and in turn, learn from reports of incivility.

In our force reports, we have given clear credit to those forces who have identified gaps and failings and tried to remedy them.

We will sound a cautionary note for those forces which – in their own view – have performed relatively well for years and do not appear to have made the Pledge elements a priority. They may argue that many are about communication rather than actions but communication between police and concerned members of the public needs to improve. A number of forces need to step up a gear. Others are pointing the way forward and showing that all can improve.

Using the Pledge to improve services for the public

There is significant room for the majority of forces to improve the way they follow up initial contact with police and handle dissatisfaction.

It is worth noting that the remedies in these weaker areas may not require significant extra resources. Rather, it is about changing the culture of police engagement with the public to make it more responsive to their needs.

We were particularly impressed by those forces putting themselves in the public's shoes and doing their own 'mystery shopping' to test their service and learn from the results.

As well as giving ratings on the individual Pledge points, we have offered three further assessments of the way forces have got to grips overall with the Pledge.

These findings are discussed on page 29, in the direction of travel section.

In essence, three questions were posed:

- What do the public say about their local police and is this information used to improve services?
- Has the force identified gaps in meeting their commitments and are they taking action?
- How strong was the leadership on the Pledge?

Generally, forces are weaker on demonstrating that public views shape service improvement. However, there is a broad correlation between forces rating well on questions two and three and those delivering relatively well on the individual Pledge points. Equally, forces with weaker ratings here tend to be weaker on delivery of the Pledge.

In other words, those with strong leadership, who check what they do and fill gaps, can reasonably be expected to improve even further as they assess their service through the eyes of the public. However, where these building blocks are not consistently in place, there will be a question over whether the Pledge can be delivered to the local public.

Conclusions

Overall, we were encouraged to find that many staff on the ground in many forces were committed to the Pledge principles and had some understanding of public needs.

The Pledge represents a promise made to be responsive on some, everyday policing issues. It is about things police have done with varying success for decades, but never in the context of an **explicit measurable set of promises**.

Often systems, processes and infrastructure lagged behind the aspirations of staff, making it technically difficult, for example, to identify local priorities when answering calls.

The investment necessary to enable forces to meet the Policing Pledge 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, may present a major challenge at a time of tighter budgets. Chief Officers and Police Authorities need to calibrate carefully their promise to the public when spending is constrained, to avoid raising expectations that prove hard to deliver.

However, if there is the will at the top many of the processes can be made to work to give the public a better service.

Overall, forces are weakest in 2 areas; in monitoring performance on the Pledge and on learning. HMIC is not advocating greater bureaucracy but, like any successful commercial enterprise, forces have to find ways of testing their delivery of commitments and understanding of what works, and what doesn't.

Next Steps

As a result of this inspection HMIC will highlight areas of emerging good practice. Those forces who have not performed well will be subject to further oversight. In coming months there may be an opportunity to reassess grades if delivery of the Policing Pledge changes.



2. FORCE GRADES

Table 1: Force Grades

FORCE	Pledge point 1	Pledge point 2	Pledge point 3	Pledge point 4	Pledge point 5	Pledge point 6	Pledge point 7
Avon and Somerset Constabulary	Fair						
Bedfordshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Fair
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	Fair						
Cheshire Constabulary	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
City of London Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Poor	Fair	Fair
Cleveland Police	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Good
Cumbria Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor
Derbyshire Constabulary	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
Dorset Police	Fair						
Durham Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Dyfed Powys Police	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Essex Police	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
Gloucestershire Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Greater Manchester Police	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Gwent Police	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
Hampshire Constabulary	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Hertfordshire Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Poor
Humberside Police	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Kent Police	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Lancashire Constabulary	Good						
Leicestershire Constabulary	Good	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good
Lincolnshire Police	Fair						
Merseyside Police	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Metropolitan Police Service	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Norfolk Constabulary	Fair						
North Wales Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Good	Fair
North Yorkshire Police	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good
Northamptonshire Police	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair
Northumbria Police	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Nottinghamshire Police	Fair	Good	Fair	Poor	Fair	Fair	Fair
South Wales Police	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
South Yorkshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good
Staffordshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Suffolk Constabulary	Fair						
Surrey Police	Fair	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good
Sussex Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair
Thames Valley Police	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Warwickshire Police	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Good
West Mercia Police	Good	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good
West Midlands Police	Fair	Fair	Poor	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
West Yorkshire Police	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good
Wiltshire Police	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
	Pledge point 1	Pledge point 2	Pledge point 3	Pledge point 4	Pledge point 5	Pledge point 6	Pledge point 7

FORCE	Pledge point 8	Pledge point 9	Pledge point 10	Using feedback	Identifying gaps	Leadership	Overall
Avon and Somerset Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Bedfordshire Police	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Cheshire Constabulary	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
City of London Police	Fair	Fair	Poor	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Cleveland Police	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Good	Fair
Cumbria Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Poor	Fair	Poor	Fair	Poor
Derbyshire Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Dorset Police	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair
Durham Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair
Dyfed Powys Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Essex Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Gloucestershire Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Greater Manchester Police	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair
Gwent Police	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Hampshire Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Hertfordshire Constabulary	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair
Humberside Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Kent Police	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Lancashire Constabulary	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Leicestershire Constabulary	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good
Lincolnshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Merseyside Police	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Metropolitan Police Service	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Norfolk Constabulary	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
North Wales Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair
North Yorkshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Northamptonshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Northumbria Police	Good	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Good	Good
Nottinghamshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
South Wales Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
South Yorkshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair
Staffordshire Police	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
Suffolk Constabulary	Poor	Fair	Poor	Fair	Fair	Fair	Poor
Surrey Police	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Good
Sussex Police	Fair	Good	Poor	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair
Thames Valley Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Warwickshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair
West Mercia Police	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Good
West Midlands Police	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair
West Yorkshire Police	Fair	Fair	Fair	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
Wiltshire Police	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Good	Good	Fair
	Pledge point 8	Pledge point 9	Pledge point 10	Using feedback	Identifying gaps	Leadership	Overall

3. CONTEXT

In its 2008 Green Paper – “From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing our Communities Together”² – the Government presented the Policing Pledge as part of the discussion about raising public confidence and satisfaction with the police service.

Following consultation the Policing Pledge was further developed into a set of ten Pledge points which all forces in England and Wales signed up to deliver by 1 January 2009.

These include a range of commitments by the police to the public on accessibility, availability, response and communication, whether as a neighbourhood resident, caller, victim or dissatisfied person.

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) was asked by the Home Secretary to assess how well forces were meeting those commitments.

HMIC examined all 43 forces between April and August 2009 and used a range of inspection techniques, including unannounced visits and ‘mystery shopping’ to test responses. We talked to the public, including at local community meetings.

We also consulted with key stakeholders, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Association of Police Authorities (APA), the Home Office, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) and the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit.

Representatives from these organisations offered valued support and guidance throughout the inspection.

We have asked, and answered, a number of questions under each of the ten Pledge points to illustrate our findings. We rated the performance of forces on a number of points as **excellent**, **good**, **fair** or **poor** (see Table 1 and Annex).

4. INSPECTION FINDINGS ON PLEDGE POINTS

Pledge point 1

Always treat you fairly with dignity and respect, ensuring you have fair access to our services at a time that is reasonable and suitable for you.

Was it clear where and when the public could get help?

Leaflets explaining police services, and where and when they were available, were on offer in stations and in premises such as libraries. Most force websites also included details. There were, variously, contact numbers, email addresses, addresses and maps for stations.

Was it equally clear to all sections of society?

Forces generally recognised they had to communicate with new and established black and minority ethnic (BME) communities in their areas. The Metropolitan Police Service and West Yorkshire Police have translated the Pledge into a number of languages.

However, there was little evidence elsewhere of forces speaking to Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs), or with local minority communities, on ways of improving in this area.

There were 'browse aloud' commands on websites for visually-impaired people and translation options were frequently provided.

Were the public asked when the police should be available?

Few forces had surveyed local people to ensure services responded to their needs. Opening hours were often dependent on the resources available rather than on what suited the public.

However, there were exceptions. Surrey Police, for instance, has consulted widely about opening hours for front counters and uses volunteers to keep rural police stations open.

Did the experience of visiting stations live up to the advertising?

In most cases, stations were open when leaflets and websites said they would be, though some did not, or had external phones which did not work. This included locations with busy nightlife.

Was it straightforward for the public at front counters?

Most staff on station front counters were polite, patient and compassionate. This is an undoubted strength of the service.

What about support for those with disabilities?

Station reception areas are fitted with automatic doors, ramps and lowered counters, as well as portable amplifiers for the hard of hearing.

Could staff deal with enquiries?

Most staff were capable and professional, though some lacked adequate skills and knowledge. In some cases, members of the public were sent from smaller to main stations to report a crime which staff at the first station should have been able to handle. In one case, for example, a victim making an allegation of domestic abuse was dealt with in this manner.

Conclusions

Most people rarely contact police. When they do, they want a simple process and a courteous and efficient response. Most staff understood this. Many forces assumed they were providing fair access for all communities but failed to ask whether, in practice, they reflected the needs of the public.

Recommendation 1

Forces/Police Authorities should review all communications and access arrangements developing a style which supports a responsive customer focused service.

Pledge point 2

Provide you with information so you know who your dedicated Neighbourhood Policing Team are, where they are based, how to contact them and how to work with them.

How well were neighbourhood team details publicised?

Photos, pen portraits and contact details were available on police websites, in newsletters, on notice boards, in the local press and at libraries. Blogs, podcasts, messaging services and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter were used. Overall, most forces gave details.

Were details accurate?

Not always. On some websites, local police team pages were poorly maintained, with out of date details and unobtainable numbers and email addresses. It was not always clear where teams were based. There were some excellent websites but the overall quality was inconsistent. Posters in public places were frequently out of date.

Conclusions

Most forces attempt to give comprehensive information about local teams, how to contact them and what their role is. However, staff should regularly check details are correct and up to date.



Pledge point 3

Ensure your Neighbourhood Policing Team and other police patrols are visible and on your patch at times when they will be most effective and when you tell us you most need them. We will ensure your team are not taken away from neighbourhood business more than is absolutely necessary. They will spend at least 80% of their time visibly working in your neighbourhood tackling your priorities. Staff turnover will be minimised.

Did neighbourhood teams understand this Pledge commitment?

Most were committed to being visible and familiar, in broad terms, with this point.

How, and how well, did they deliver the 80% promise?

Forces generally require officers to record periods when they are not on their 'patch.' However, we found confusion on what kind of absence had to be logged. Some forces also claimed it would be "too much bureaucracy" to monitor this area. Some team supervisors had little idea of whether their teams were meeting the requirement or not.

Did neighbourhood teams work when and where the public wanted them, and on important local issues?

Generally, they did. Avon and Somerset Constabulary and West Mercia Police, for instance, have patrols which cover times and locations where intelligence suggests crime and disorder occurs. Patrol plans are updated regularly and a red/amber/green traffic light system gives clear direction as to when and where police need to be.

Did the public see familiar faces in their teams?

In some areas people praised local officers who had been in post since neighbourhood policing was first introduced. A minority of forces, however, are facing a challenge in resourcing neighbourhood teams, and some suffered high staff turnover. In March 2009, in one large non-metropolitan force, teams had 10% vacancies overall, amounting to 66 police posts and 30 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

Conclusions

To achieve 80% visibility, forces concentrate on measuring 'abstraction'. However, this places the focus on managing internal resources, rather than on providing for public needs. Keeping teams stable and up-to-strength is vital.

Recommendation 2

Forces need to be able to demonstrate effective use and visibility of local teams.

Pledge point 4

Respond to every message directed to your Neighbourhood Policing Team within 24 hours and where necessary provide a more detailed response as soon as we can.

How did forces perform?

A handful responded within 24 hours to 100% of messages, but in most forces only between 50% and 75% were answered in this time. Some calls were never answered.

What was the most effective approach?

Forces which gave accurate contact details for individual officers did well when the officer was on duty, but officers are not on 24-hour duty. There were instances of messages left for an officer who had left a force. Using team phone numbers and group email accounts was less personal but staff considered it more effective.

Do forces monitor this point?

Some use 'mystery shoppers' to leave messages and then act on any failings identified. However, arrangements for ensuring a timely response to calls and messages were not rigorously enforced across all forces.

Conclusions

A previous HMIC report in 2008 – "Serving neighbourhoods and individuals"³ – recommended that forces improve ways of contacting neighbourhood teams. It is apparent that many forces have not done so. Responses are not being robustly monitored.

Recommendation 3

Forces need to ensure that systems to call back members of the public who leave messages for neighbourhood teams (within 24 hours) are robust.

Pledge point 5

Aim to answer 999 calls within 10 seconds, deploying to emergencies immediately giving an estimated time of arrival, getting to you safely, and as quickly as possible. In urban areas, we will aim to get to you within 15 minutes and in rural areas within 20 minutes.

How do forces answer 999 calls?

A relatively high percentage of 999 calls are answered within target time. Most forces aim for a 90% success rate and the best achieve 95% or more. In responding to calls, forces generally achieve good performance but, in some very rural areas, responding in 20 minutes is challenging. Forces also differed in their definition of what constitutes an ‘emergency’.

Do police respond safely?

The police service has worked hard in recent years to cut the number of accidents involving vehicles responding to 999 calls. There is a danger that striving for a 100% success rate will mean more casualties. Most staff understood safety concerns. They did not feel unduly pressurised to meet targets at the expense of safety, and were fully aware of the need to drive safely at all times.



Do they give reliable estimated times of arrival (ETAs)?

Only a minority of forces achieved this. North Yorkshire Police and South Yorkshire Police, for instance, have systems which automatically locate police vehicles or officers, on a systematic basis. This technology is being developed elsewhere. Most call handlers avoided the issue of an ETA by saying “We will get to you as soon as possible” or “We aim to be with you in a certain time”. For serious incidents, some preferred to keep the phone line open until police arrived.

Conclusions

Overall performance on calls is good but forces should strive to improve. They also need to do more to provide an estimated time of arrival. Reputable vehicle breakdown associations achieve this.

Recommendation 4

The Association of Chief Police Offices should examine, with the National Policing Improvement Agency, effective ways of giving the public estimated times of arrival when they call police.

Pledge point 6

Answer all non-emergency calls promptly. If attendance is needed, send a patrol giving you an estimated time of arrival and:

- If you are 'vulnerable' or 'upset' aim to be with you within 60 minutes.
- If you are calling about an issue that we have agreed with your community will be a neighbourhood priority and attendance is required, we will aim to be with you within 60 minutes.
- Alternatively, if appropriate, we will make an appointment to see you at a time that fits in with your life and within 48 hours.
- If agreed that attendance is not necessary we will give you advice, answer your questions and/or put you in touch with someone who can help.

Do staff understand the Pledge point?

Most staff were determined to answer calls promptly and professionally. They generally understood the terms 'vulnerable' and 'upset', the neighbourhood priorities and, where in place, the appointment system.

What have forces done to make calling easier for the public?

Some forces, recognising public concerns about the cost of calls on 0845 and similar numbers have introduced non-profit making non-emergency 0300 numbers.

Are forces monitoring performance?

Local targets for answering non-emergency calls (known as 'primary calls') are frequently met and performance in communication centres is closely monitored.

There are examples of good practice. Thames Valley Police use 'Prime Time', a process which ensures that staff are on duty according to demand.

However, some forces are weaker when non-emergency calls are passed to other departments (so-called 'secondary calls'). In one force in one week in July 2009, 17% of non-emergency calls, some 1,300, were abandoned after being passed to the force enquiry centre or the crime bureau.

What difficulties have emerged?

Forces interpreted 'vulnerable' and 'upset' differently. Nottinghamshire Police use the terms 'vulnerable' and 'distressed', which have advantages. Overall, more should be done to raise awareness in staff of how distress may be manifested in people from different cultural backgrounds.

Did call handlers understand ‘agreed local priorities’?

Computer systems did not easily identify local priorities which can be vague; one example noted was ‘night time/day time economy’, a phrase which meant nothing to call takers but actually referred to street prostitution. Priorities were often slow to appear on databases used by call handlers. This meant that incidents which should have got a 60 minutes response were missed.

How did call handlers deal with appointments?

‘Diary’ cars – used by neighbourhood officers to attend appointments made by call handlers – are an example of good practice. This system is flexible enough to suit the needs of the public and call handlers find it straightforward.

However, some appointment systems were not working well. HMIC heard phrases such as “They cancelled the first two appointments but turned up for the third”, and “No-one turned up and we ended up going to the police station”.



What about calls which do not require a police presence?

Generally, staff could give advice or refer callers elsewhere, and had a wealth of information to enable them to do this.

Derbyshire Constabulary’s call takers aim to resolve incidents at first point of contact, taking ownership and responsibility for resolving queries and problems and for providing information.

If they cannot resolve an enquiry they ensure a message reaches the right member of staff and this reduces the use of voicemail. Staff enjoy the work as they have a wider problem solving role and are not just re-directing calls.

Conclusions

Dealing with calls has been a core police activity since telephones were invented and police are good at it. The Pledge introduces several new targets and guidance about callers who should get a prompt response. There was limited evidence of monitoring of performance to check that these new elements were being delivered. Forces must find sensible and practical working definitions of ‘vulnerable’ and ‘upset’ and establish more effective appointment systems.

Pledge point 7

Arrange regular public meetings to agree your priorities, at least once a month, giving you a chance to meet your local team with other members of your community. These will include opportunities such as surgeries, street briefings and mobile police station visits which will be arranged to meet local needs and requirements.

What is a public meeting?

In most forces, there is at least one formal meeting, typically held in a community centre, municipal hall or local library. Other contact, through informal street briefings and police surgeries at a supermarket or council office, also provide opportunities to meet with police.

Were they well publicised?

In some areas, they were. However, local teams must be more alert to what the public want, and adapt publicity accordingly. Some meetings were poorly attended but the inspection found consultation to find out why, and to try a different approach the next time, was limited.

What about those who cannot, or will not, attend formal public meetings?

Local initiatives such as 'Street a Week', where one street is targeted to get residents' views, or 'Five a Day', where staff speak to at least five local people every day, are examples of good practice. In Kent, in a trial, officers with Blackberries® talk to local people about their concerns and then automatically download the information to help inform priority setting.

How effective were meetings?

Some were of a refreshingly high quality, with good community representation and representation by councils and other bodies. They were well managed, with lively debate around local policing issues. Other meetings, however, were disappointing. Some went ahead without an officer from the neighbourhood team.

How, and how well, does priority setting work?

Approaches ranged from ad hoc agreements to the use of electronic voting systems. Often, priorities are not specific enough with insufficient detail of where or when crime or anti social behaviour is taking place. This made it difficult for call handlers to identify those needing a 60 minute response. Lancashire Constabulary and Bristol division of Avon and Somerset Constabulary have carried out audits of meetings and priority setting, to improve quality and consistency. This is good practice.

4. Inspection findings on Pledge points

In Bristol, in 2008, there were 37 Partners and Communities Together (PACT) meetings, with no two alike and attendance erratic. At times, police were the only agency present; at others, the PACT was part of a pre-existing community meeting with wider agendas.

The voting processes on neighbourhood priorities varied and half had no mechanism in place to make a decision.

In 2009, there is greater consistency. Meetings are clearly publicised, given plenty of notice and follow a set format. A step by step guide to priority setting was produced and there is a transparent record of decisions. A PACT Champion, an experienced neighbourhood officer – then ensures the priorities are acted on.

Conclusions

The way forward is a mixture of public meetings – advertised well in advance, straightforward, plugged into local concerns and well attended – and more innovative approaches to reach those reluctant to go to formal meetings. Chief officers should attend meetings unannounced to check how effective they are.



Pledge point 8

Provide monthly updates on progress and on local crime and policing issues. This will include:

- the provision of crime maps,
- information on specific crimes and what happened to those brought to justice, and
- details of what action we and our partners are taking to make your neighbourhood safer and information on how your force is performing.

How are police contacting the public?

HMIC noted some innovative approaches including monthly podcasts which could be downloaded from websites and 'You said – We did' features in newsletters. Cambridgeshire Constabulary has developed an 'e-cops' electronic update – providing email information to a list of subscribers. It is good practice to take advice from force media communications teams.

What information is supplied?

All forces provide web-based local crime maps and work is under way on a national crime mapping website to allow the public to compare crime levels across the country.

Does it meet public demands?

The public want to know more about crime and disorder and police action taken to tackle them. Police are strong on crime figures and maps. However, telling local people about criminals 'brought to justice' is more problematic. There has been a debate on how far police can publish details on those arrested; those put before courts and those convicted, focusing on whether publicity is proportionate to the crime, and whether it breaches offenders' human rights. Some forces take a robust approach. Cleveland Police has put details on its website of local people subject to anti social behaviour orders.

Conclusions

While some good examples of updates were noted, forces must give more information about the criminals they have caught. This is a key issue for police and other criminal justice agencies.

Recommendation 5

The Association of Chief Police Officers with the National Policing Improvement Agency, should support the work being led by Her Majesty's Court Service in developing – as a priority – an effective process to inform local people of offenders brought to justice.

Pledge point 9

If you have been a victim of crime agree with you how often you would like to be kept informed of progress in your case and for how long. You have the right to be kept informed at least every month if you wish and for as long as is reasonable.

Do forces understand this point?

A “Victims’ Code of Practice” (VCOP) outlining the service a victim can expect was introduced in 2005. This Pledge point reinforces the Code and encourages greater emphasis on talking to victims to improve and agree the service they get. We found widespread understanding of the code and the principle of keeping victims informed. Some forces have extended this obligation to cover those who have reported anti social behaviour or have been involved in a traffic accident.

Surrey Police is one of a number of forces who has taken it further and introduced ‘customer contact contracts’, whereby the investigating officer calls the victim and agrees a preferred method of and frequency of contact. The Metropolitan Police Service have set up ‘victim focus desks’ which, by March 2009, had improved monthly contact to victims to 84%.

What are the difficulties?

The quality of monitoring of contact with victims varies – between forces and at times within forces – and, in some cases, is poor. Lancashire Constabulary is one force which has recognised the importance of this area and has refined its systems accordingly. A ‘victim management log’ is automatically generated for each crime, with headings for a victim’s preferred contact details and preferred contact time.

Some supervising officers did not know about failures to consult victims and others openly admitted they did not always have time to complete the required number of quality checks on their staff. Effective supervision is vital on this Pledge point.

Conclusions

Forces generally treat victims well. The Pledge is about doing it better. There was generally poor performance in tailoring the way police work to individual victims’ needs. Some forces admit they simply do not focus on this area. Few victims interviewed by HMIC recalled any conversation about how they would like to be updated on the progress of their investigation, and how frequently.

Pledge point 10

Acknowledge any dissatisfaction with the service you have received within 24 hours of reporting it to us. To help us fully resolve the matter, discuss with you how it will be handled give you an opportunity to talk in person to someone about your concerns and agree with you what will be done about them and how quickly.

We want to do our best for you but if we fail to meet our Pledge we will always explain why it has not been possible on that occasion to deliver the high standards to which we aspire and you deserve.

How does the public think police handle their complaints about their service?

HMIC found many instances where people wanted the opportunity to discuss their concerns. Many said they did not feel part of the complaints process or have any influence. Some felt they were not taken seriously. One interviewee commented: "Some chief officer phoned me back but he just tried to fob me off".

How are forces responding to the Pledge point?

Systems to handle more serious complaints about police misconduct are well established, and frequently involve the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

Forces are now making it easier to make comment on alleged poor service, with 'online' forms for expressing complaints, compliments or dissatisfaction. A minority of forces monitor complaints at Basic Command Unit (BCU) and even neighbourhood level.

Are forces tackling dissatisfaction effectively?

Some good work was found. Hampshire Constabulary uses a database to record expressions of dissatisfaction received by police and can search for trends. Thames Valley Police also logs dissatisfaction and trawls for examples, from calls to the communications centre and from press articles. It recognises that, where service has been poor, contacting the complainant promptly and trying to make amends is key to recovering the situation.

Generally, though, these were exceptions. There was little evidence of effective recording and analysing of data on dissatisfaction, or that forces learned from it. Offering unhappy members of the public the opportunity to talk to someone in person about their concerns was unusual and many forces could not deal with complaints outside office hours.

The public appears generally more willing to complain about incivility and perceived failures to 'do the job properly'. Forces must recognise this.

4. Inspection findings on Pledge points

Conclusions

Forces must put the needs of the complainant at the heart of the process and understand the causes of dissatisfaction. There is currently limited feedback locally to officers about the causes of dissatisfaction.

Recommendation 6

As a priority, forces need to ensure effective, simple processes to establish 'customer contact contracts', and to resolve dissatisfaction.

5. DIRECTION OF TRAVEL USING THE PLEDGE TO IMPROVE SERVICES TO THE PUBLIC

As well as reporting on the delivery of each Pledge point, HMIC assessed and graded forces on the efforts they were making to improve their performance. These are shown under the columns headed Using feedback, Identifying gaps and Leadership in Table 1.

In essence, three areas were covered:

- Was feedback from the public sought through surveys and quality assurance programmes and is the information being used to improve service delivery. Were public satisfaction and confidence improving as a result? This is about learning from external sources.
- Had the force identified deficiencies in delivery of the Pledge and was it taking robust action to improve. This is about internal performance management and monitoring.
- Was the force's senior team, backed by the Police Authority, driving delivery of the Pledge, with training and communication of its principles to staff and the public? This is about leadership.

Effective leadership and communication are a sound foundation for reshaping the culture of forces. Over half (56%) of forces were rated as **good** on 'Leadership'.

Slightly fewer forces – 40% – were rated as **good** at 'Identifying gaps'. This suggests forces were generally able to look at what they do, spot gaps and attempt to fill them.

The area in which forces performed least well was in 'Using feedback' to improve performance, with 19% of forces achieving a **good** rating. This fits with the theme of findings under the Pledge points – that forces were relatively weak in looking outwards, placing themselves in the public's shoes, understanding how they can better serve local people and putting their learning into day-to-day practice.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Forces/Police Authorities should review all communications and access, developing a style which supports a responsive customer focused service.
- 2 Forces need to be able to demonstrate effective use and visibility of local teams.
- 3 Forces need to ensure that systems to call back members of the public who leave messages for neighbourhood teams (within 24 hours) are robust.
- 4 The Association of Chief Police Officers should examine, with the National Policing Improvement Agency, effective ways of giving the public estimated times of arrival when they call police.
- 5 The Association of Chief Police Officers with the National Policing Improvement Agency, should support the work being led by Her Majesty's Court Service in developing – as a priority – an effective process to inform local people of offenders brought to justice.
- 6 As a priority, forces need to ensure effective, simple processes to establish 'customer contact contracts', and to resolve dissatisfaction.

7. ANNEX

Methodology

HMIC has been inspecting police forces in England and Wales for over 150 years and is well placed to understand how police forces work. Our remit has recently changed and we now inspect 'in the public interest'. This particular inspection took place between April and August 2009.

It became apparent in the preparation for this inspection that the experiences of staff, and thoughts and concerns of individual customers, as well as the responses to policing from within local communities, needed to be taken into account. With that in the mind and to supplement the interviews conducted with individuals and focus groups, a programme of reality testing was included in the inspections in order to observe how services were delivered by staff.

- **Frontline staff.** Included in all 43 inspections was a requirement for inspectors to interview radio operators, telephone switchboard staff, and local neighbourhood PCs and PCSOs. The experiences and views of those staff who routinely deliver front line services gave some valuable perspectives on how the Pledge should be practically implemented.

For instance, their experience of the diverse backgrounds and range of people who visit police stations and seek help from desk staff, and how these customers' needs should be catered for.

- **Mystery Shoppers.** An important view of the customer's experience can be gained by inspectors becoming customers, or 'mystery shoppers' as the technique is sometimes known. This involved the inspectors attending public meetings held by the police, visiting police station enquiry desks, sending emails to local neighbourhood police teams, and reading force websites. All of these experiences helped inform inspectors on how the Pledge was being delivered by police forces.
- **Speaking to users of police services.** It was crucial to the inspection to understand the quality of the service received by people such as victims of crime and those with complaints about the police. A number of such customers were spoken to and their views and comments used to get a balanced understanding of how services were delivered by the police.

Grading police forces

HMIC, in assessing forces, used grading criteria developed following the early scoping work (see the HMIC report “Delivering the Policing Pledge – Early Findings”)⁴ and through consultation with key stakeholders.

To help understand which parts of the Policing Pledge are strong and which areas need more work, a series of grades has been used. Every force has received a grade (**Poor**, **Fair**, **Good** or **Excellent**) for its execution of each of the 10 Pledge points. Three other areas concerning the ways in which forces have monitored and guided Pledge delivery have also been graded.

EXCELLENT

Exceptional performance which is consistently above and beyond the required standard.

GOOD

Meeting the standard, although there may be minor dips in performance.

FAIR

Performance is variable and falls short of the required standard. Remedial action is needed.

POOR

Performance fails to meet an acceptable level. Immediate remedial action is needed.

These 13 separate colour-coded grades were then added together and an overall grade was arrived at for each force (see Page 12). To ensure consistency of approach the process was overseen by the regional Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMIs) who chaired moderation meetings. National moderation, also attended by key stakeholders, was chaired by HMI Jane Stichbury and concluded forces’ final gradings.

Detailed reports were sent to forces to enable lessons to be learned and remedial action to be taken, with there now being much work in progress. A summary report for each force can now be viewed on the HMIC website¹.

Any potential good practice witnessed during inspection has been flagged to NPIA for full evaluation and inclusion on the communities of practice for local government website⁵.

8. ENDNOTES

1. HMIC website
<http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic/>
2. Policing Green Paper “From the neighbourhood to the national: policing our communities together”

Policing Green Paper: Chapters 1 – 2
http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/police-reform/Policing_GP/green-paper-part-1?view=Binary

Policing Green Paper: Chapters 3 – 8
http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/police-reform/Policing_GP/green-paper-part-2?view=Binary

O'r Gymdogaeth I'r Wlad Gyfan:
Plismona ein Cymunedau Gyda'n
Gilydd:
A Welsh language version of the Policing Green Paper, published by the Home Office in July 2008.
http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/police-reform/Policing_GP/police-green-paper-welsh?view=Binary
3. Neighbourhood Policing and Developing Citizen Focus thematic report “Serving neighbourhoods and individuals”
<http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic/Inspections/neigh-police-phase-2/prog-inspec-phase2?view=Binary>
4. “Delivering the Policing Pledge – Early Findings”
<http://inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic/inspections/thematic/policing-pledge/policing-pledge-early-finds.pdf?view=Binary>
5. “Communities of practice for local government” website
<http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/>



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