

Data used in HMIC's Value for Money datasets

The Value for Money (VfM) datasets are made up of Home Office crime, survey and staffing data as well as Chartered Institute of Public Finance (CIPFA) annual financial returns. This note explains: how the data was checked and by whom; issues in the interpretation of data; and future development.

Data checking

All the data contained in HMIC's VfM datasets, with the exception of anti-social behaviour incident data, has been subject to administrative checks either by the Home Office, CIPFA or HMIC. Most of our effort goes into checking resources data: expenditure and staff numbers (which accounts for around 80 percent of costs).

We use a two-stage process. First, we identify any statistical outliers, and ask forces to resubmit their data if it is wrong. Once this process is complete, we issue draft data around mid August. Forces are asked to review their data again, and HMIC will highlight any outstanding queries. Forces have a last chance to re-submit their data to the relevant organisation – CIPFA or the Home Office – before we provide the final data to forces in early October each year.

Interpretation of the data

The bulk of data is sourced from other organisations, so forces were not required to provide much in the way of additional data. Providing information from different sources however means that sometimes a few pieces of data don't fit perfectly. This problem affects two main areas:

Differences in definitions

CIPFA and Home Office data for total numbers in the workforce can differ. CIPFA takes average staff numbers over the year, while the Home Office takes a snapshot at the end of each financial year.

There are also differences in the types of staff included: CIPFA include contractors and temporary staff as well as traffic wardens. We have tried to get the categories to match as closely as possible, and by excluding traffic wardens CIPFA data more closely aligns with Home Office data.

Differences in the level of detail

The financial information provided by CIPFA complements the staffing data provided by the Home Office. It provides additional information on unit costs, overtime and non-staff costs. It's useful, but it has drawbacks: mainly that no adjustment is made for additional costs incurred by some forces with extra responsibilities (the obvious example is counter terrorism).

To overcome this drawback in the financial data, the data also shows workforce numbers separating local policing – which are comparable – from national policing.

Treat large differences with caution

In compiling the data we have noticed that for some forces there are significantly more staff in one function (possibly because these forces are organised differently from others), which is often offset by significantly fewer staff in another function; for example for the custody and criminal justice unit functions. Caution is needed where you spot these patterns; it may be that the two functions need to be considered together.

Care is also required in comparing functions which some forces have contracted out to other organisations. For example, some forces have contracted out the custody or IT function, so staff numbers will be lower. The finance data indicates whether this is the case by showing higher custody or IT costs for supplies and services.

Lastly, take care when looking at large changes in trend data. We draw your attention to two:

- **Financial trends** for a four-year period are provided and sometimes you may notice that data drops to zero in one year. This is due to missing data in the CIPFA returns. We have only gone back to forces where there is missing data for the latest period.
- **Staffing trends:** The changes in workforce data over time also show some large variations over the three-year period. Some of the larger changes may be due to checking of recent data – but we have not asked forces to check data from three years ago.

Some other points

Most of the information is standardised by comparing per 1,000 population. Differences can sometimes be looked at in more than one way. For example non-staff costs are provided per 1,000 population and also as a percentage of staff costs. We provide non-staff costs as a percentage of staff costs for two reasons. First, it is a better indicator for non-staff costs, since most (but not all) non-staff costs are influenced by the size of the workforce; premises costs are a good example. Second, dividing by staff costs also acts as a deflator

and therefore provides a better comparison. For example, premises costs are higher in London, but so are staff costs.

Looking to the future

The datasets are based on existing data, but we are also exploring using a new return, which has now been available for two years: the Police Objective Analysis. This has been developed by force finance staff, and we now have data for 2009/10 actuals and estimates, as well as 2010/11 estimates. We aim to make as much use of these data as possible in the future, once data quality has been fully assessed.

If by using the data you have any suggestions on how the datasets can be improved, we are eager to hear from you. We can be contacted at haveyoursay@hmic.gsi.gov.uk.

Official Statistics

The Value for Money datasets are an Official Statistics output and are prepared by CIPFA on behalf of HMIC under the principles set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Most of the data have previously been published. The workforce by function data have been verified, although they are closely associated with the National Statistics police service strength dataset collected annually by the Home Office as part of the Annual Data Return (ADR) process.

The following data are also collected as part of the ADR process, but have not undergone the same verification processes as the other data, namely data on 999 calls, joiners and leavers from the police service, numbers of officers with over 30 years service, sickness and long term absence, and officers on restricted and recuperative duties.

Data on numbers of anti-social behaviour incidents is provided, but is not subject to the detailed checks that normally apply for National Statistics publications. The data should not therefore be used for making comparisons between forces and may be subject to change.

Statisticians in the Home Office have been consulted on the development of these Value for Money datasets and they are published with the agreement of the Home Office's Head of Profession for Statistics.