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Press release

Embargoed until Wednesday 7 April, 00.01 hours.

Northern Constabulary and joint police board have effective partnership but some improvements could be made

Northern Constabulary and the Northern Joint Police Board have established many of the key elements of Best Value, although some areas could be further developed.

The *Best Value Audit and Inspection: Northern Constabulary and Northern Joint Police Board* is the second Best Value report on a Scottish police force and joint police board. It provides an overview of how both these bodies are meeting their best value duties and is a joint report from the Accounts Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland (HMICS).

HMICS's performance assessment of the police force shows that it has low crime rates and high detection rates in comparison to the Scottish average.

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary Bill Skelly said: "Northern Constabulary is performing well and the force demonstrates many of the elements of best value. A recent force review has led to a significant restructuring and the resources this freed up went towards frontline policing.

"The force could make changes in some areas. It should improve its performance monitoring and make sure it better shares the information and it should concentrate on meeting national targets for call handling and the submission of reports to the Procurator Fiscal and Children's Reporter."

The Accounts Commission found that the board has a strong awareness of its role and effectively scrutinises the force and holds the chief constable to account.

Chair of the Commission, John Baillie said: "The board has good working relationships with the chief constable and the force, and an effective partnership with them in achieving best value. It ensures that policing priorities are focussed on the needs of local communities. However, the board could develop its role by sharing good practice with other police authorities and forces and making sure it receives relevant performance reports from the force."

The Commission notes some evidence of inconsistencies in the relationships between the board and the four councils that board members are drawn from. At the moment local authorities report the work of the board back to the full council in different ways. It is important that the relationships between the board and the councils are clear, particularly in relation to the allocation and use of resources. Clarification of national guidance on the duties and responsibilities of boards and board members would help this.

The board and the force will now produce an improvement plan to show how they intend to address the findings.

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Notes to Editors

1. Douglas Sinclair and Bill Skelly will be available for interview on Tuesday 6 April. In his role as deputy chair of the Accounts Commission Douglas Sinclair will be able to talk about the best value performance of Northern Joint Police Board. Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary Bill Skelly will be able to talk about both the police force and Northern Joint Police Board.
2. The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975. The Commission checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend public money properly and effectively.
3. HMICS operates independently of police forces, police authorities and the Scottish Government and exists to monitor and improve the police service in Scotland.
4. A joint police board is made up of councilors from the local authority areas the force covers. In the case of Northern there are 16 members from Highland Council, four from Western Isles Council and two from Orkney Council and two from Shetland Islands Council. A joint police board is responsible for setting the budget for the force; ensuring that best value is attained and holding the chief constable to account. A police force provides police services in the force area.
5. Both the Accounts Commission and HMICS have the power to examine how well Scottish police authorities are delivering best value. HMICS also has a statutory duty to inspect police forces and report on their state and efficiency. Both organisations would have been entitled produce their own report on each police authority but this would have created duplication of work and is not in keeping with the spirit of the recommendations of the Crerar report and with the current drive to streamline scrutiny. Also a joint report gives the public an overall view of how well the police authorities in their area are meeting their duties to provide best value. It was decided that a joint report would be the most efficient way for both bodies to exercise their best value duties.