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The use of targets in policing

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Foreword

On being asked by the Home Secretary to conduct a review into the use of targets in policing, I knew that it would be a significant challenge. I also knew, however, that the review would present an opportunity to examine an issue that had been a 'bone of contention' for many in policing in recent years, albeit the review was set very tight timescales in which to do this.

My personal views on the use of targets in policing are well known by many through my speeches, blogs and social media comments on the issue, and are consistent with the views that the Home Secretary has espoused in numerous speeches in the past. I decided from the start, however, that this review would be constructive for policing.

I did not intend to rehearse the arguments for/against the use of targets in policing to any great extent – there are clearly opposing views on this issue, heavily weighted towards those who do not support the use of targets, and I did not feel that repeating these would be particularly constructive. Instead I wanted to take the opportunity that the review presents to seek out good practice in an area that many forces are struggling with – developing an effective performance management framework that ensures accurate recording of data and at the same time empowers staff to make the right decisions for victims of crime.

I know from my own personal experience that it is not just targets that cause concerns and anxiety for many officers and staff, but it is a wider issue of how performance is measured and managed across policing. It is in this area that I believe this review can add value, and I believe that the recommendations, if implemented, will assist forces in navigating their way through what can be a complex landscape.

Many readers will recognise that policing does not take place in a bubble, it is part of a wider system, and the success or otherwise of forces is in many ways influenced by the performance of other organisations. Unfortunately, however, there was neither the scope nor the time within this review to consider in any great detail the performance management frameworks of other organisations or partnerships that have some common purpose with policing or whose activities influence policing activity, demand or outcomes.

Ultimately the main purpose of this review has been to identify 'what works' in terms of performance measurement and management in policing to ensure that the public, and victims, receive the best possible service and remain at the heart of policing activity. They must not be unintentionally forgotten in any desire to 'chase figures'.

Irene Curtis

Executive Summary

Policing needs to change to respond to the challenges of the future, including the changing nature of crime, the increasing range and complexity of demand, continued financial constraints and the rapid pace of technological change. As forces adapt to changing circumstances, performance frameworks will also need to adapt to help the police make decisions to meet these challenges – and to understand whether or not they are succeeding.

Numeric targets have seen extensive use in policing for many years, as part of both local and national police performance frameworks. The Public Service Agreements (PSAs) of the 1990s in particular created a slew of national targets in policing and across the public sector more widely. Since then, problems associated with targets such as 'gaming' and 'perverse incentives' have been well documented and targets have gradually been dropped by many forces. The last of the national targets in policing (for increasing public confidence and targets for response times, included in the policing pledge) were removed by the Home Secretary in 2010.

This review aims in the first instance to understand the extent to which targets – and their associated behaviours – persist and has involved desk research, interviews, force visits and a survey of police officers and staff. Over 6,000 people completed the survey and, while methodological limitations mean the results needs to be interpreted with caution, the fact that so many officers and staff took the time to respond is telling of how strongly many feel about this subject.

It is important at the outset to clarify the distinction between targets and measures. A measure (or indicator) is simply a source of information that can help users of performance data make informed decisions. A 'target' relates to a particular level of performance that is to be aimed for, met or exceeded over a period of time.

The review has found that most forces have generally moved away from the use of hard numeric targets, with a few exceptions. Target setting, however, appears to be not uncommon at sub-force level by those in supervisory roles.

What has come through most clearly in the review is the difference between performance cultures that are narrowly focused on 'chasing numbers' to the detriment of other aspects – and those that have developed a broader definition of performance, which supports evidence-based problem-solving and genuine improvement of services. The review has found that while the former was often associated with targets, the simple removal of targets by itself does not turn the one into the other. Over time, the priorities, processes and behaviours that develop under a target-driven regime can become entrenched – and the removal of targets alone is not sufficient to effect change.

The challenge forces face is to develop a performance framework that not only provides a good understanding of the business in order to help effective decision-making, but also enables individuals to be appropriately held to account, whilst ensuring that they remain focused on doing the right thing for the public and for victims and in an environment where they are empowered to do so.

This review has sought, therefore, to focus on the success factors for an effective performance culture. By doing so, it has identified a number of key themes:

Organisational purpose – measures need to reflect the purpose of the system and to provide useful information about how the 'whole system' is performing. For policing this means balancing crime measures with non-crime measures that help the police, police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and their partners understand how the system is working for the protection of the vulnerable, supporting victims, and responding to demand overall. Performance measurement frameworks therefore require a balance of input, process, output and outcome measures. Presently there is too much emphasis on police recorded crime and proxy measures that are easily quantifiable, yet which may not directly indicate whether performance is 'good'.

A number of factors currently influence forces' choices of performance measures. For example, the Home Office requirement for victim satisfaction data includes a requirement to survey victims of vehicle crime, which many forces might otherwise not deem a priority. Similarly, feedback from Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) rightly carries significant weight with forces. However, concerns were expressed that HMIC scrutiny creates undue focus on quantitative data, inter force comparisons and league tables.

Decision making and problem-solving – measures should help the organisation make decisions about how to improve performance. Performance information should be seen as the raw material for further enquiry, to help managers understand problems, make good decisions and improve the system. This requires forces to take a problem-solving approach and continually review the questions they are asking about performance. There are some instances of good practice here but more forces need to challenge themselves that they are seeking out the right information and presenting it in the right format in order to help make improvements, not just 'monitoring' a raft of indicators.

Accurate data recording – is critical to good performance measurement. Forces need accurate data in order to understand what is happening in their area, to enable them to deploy resources effectively to prevent further crimes/incidents, and to enable the effective investigation of offences. The review found a high level of awareness of, and commitment to, ethical crime recording. However, comments from officers at various ranks show that performance pressures still exist that can result in less accurate data being recorded (despite the best efforts of others to negate these). One such source of pressure is the publication of police recorded crime data as a measure of police performance. In addition, accurate recording in accordance with the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) can sometimes appear at odds with officers' desire to use their discretion to seek proportionate, victim-based crime outcomes that do not criminalise individuals unnecessarily.

Accurate recording of incidents will also help forces to better understand demand and make useful comparisons between forces. It is acknowledged by many forces that there remains a gap in meaningful data on calls for service for matters other than crime.

A proportionate approach – an effective performance management framework should not create unnecessary layers of reporting or bureaucracy. Rather, it should align naturally with the organisation's decision-making and scrutiny processes, with the right level of information made available at the right time to those who need to use it. Many forces are in the process of establishing new performance approaches. Good practice is characterised by critically examining how information supports decision-making, and trusting professionals to do their jobs, rather than holding on to information as a 'comfort blanket'. The approach that still exists in some forces can drive inflexible ways of working, remove discretion from officers and generate unnecessary bureaucracy.

Leadership and culture – successfully embedding new approaches to performance management requires culture change. This begins with leaders communicating a clear vision linked to organisational purpose. It then needs leaders to 'walk the talk' – by setting the standards and culture and ensuring that the desired behaviours are consistently communicated, supported and appropriately recognised throughout the organisation.

All managers must have the skills and abilities to understand and interpret performance information and to use it effectively to make decisions. There is evidence of some managers being reluctant to let go of targets, often because it is the only experience they have of managing performance. Poor management behaviours can weaken morale and erode teamwork. Professional development needs to address all aspects of performance management, from understanding data to the 'softer' skills required for coaching and holding performance conversations.

Communication – the communication of performance measures should demonstrate a clear link to the organisation's purpose, and should allow everyone in the organisation to understand progress towards outcomes. Language used to describe performance should be commonly understood and consistent with behaviour. (Effective communication is also key to changing culture.)

Forces need to invest in the way performance is communicated – both internally and externally. Presently there is an over-reliance on top-down, one-way communication; staff must have a voice to feed back their views and concerns. Forces also need to ensure that messages and language are in line with practice.

The above themes are echoed in a draft set of guiding principles for performance measurement in policing, originally drawn up in 2014 by the national business area for performance measurement, and submitted to the review team. A key recommendation is that these be developed further and finalised by the College of Policing (working with the NPCC Coordination Committee for Performance Management) and taken forward for use across policing.

Recommendations

For chief constables:

- Chief constables should liaise with their police and crime commissioner to ensure that each of their force's performance measures identified within the police and crime plan link to the force's purpose, and should also ensure that force generated measures do likewise. They should also consider the potential negative impact of setting numerical targets, particularly for police recorded crime, response times and call handling. (Recommendation 1)

- Chief constables should ensure that the appropriate level of performance data is made available to managers throughout the organisation and that managers are provided with the necessary training to enable them to use and interpret data for effective decision making. (Recommendation 9)

- Chief constables should review the format of performance reports and the type of data contained within them, focusing on data that will help decision making and avoid 'knee-jerk' responses and the signals that the visual presentation of information can create. (Recommendation 10)

- Chief constables should ensure that force policies relating to crime recording provide clarity about the distinction between the need for accurate crime recording in accordance with the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) and the discretion of officers in relation to outcomes relating to a crime, while making clear the need for ethical standards. (Recommendation 11)

- Chief constables should ensure that their performance measurement and reporting processes are free from any unnecessary bureaucracy, particularly where frontline staff are required to complete returns to justify activities (rather than being held to account). This should also extend to any internal auditing relating to data-gathering processes (such as crime recording). (Recommendation 13)

- Chief constables should review their forces' incentive and recognition systems to ensure that appropriate recognition is given for desired behaviours and non-quantifiable activity, including examples of good professional judgement. (Recommendation 14)

- Chief constables should review their performance and development review (PDR) processes to ensure that they properly recognise the breadth of work undertaken by officers and staff (including non-quantifiable work), with objectives that focus on contribution and behaviours rather than numerical targets. (Recommendation 16)

- Chief constables should ensure they clearly communicate the force's approach to performance, making clear the links between performance and purpose. Communication should promote two-way engagement, giving staff a voice and demonstrating consistency between messages and practice. (Recommendation 17)

For PCCs:

- PCCs should ensure that when developing their police and crime plan, any performance measures used link to their force's purpose. They should also consider the potential negative impact of setting numerical targets, particularly for police recorded crime, response times and call handling in their police and crime plans. (This reiterates the recommendation made by PASC[1].) (Recommendation 2)

- During their consultation and communication with the public, PCCs should seek to create a vision of policing success for their communities which is broader than a reduction in police recorded crime figures. (Recommendation 18)

For the Home Office:

- Following its current survey of forces to gather views on victim satisfaction data, the Home Office should review whether the requirement for forces to submit victim satisfaction data as part of the annual data return should be downgraded to a voluntary collection or, amended, to ensure the crime types reflect priority areas. (Recommendation 3)

- The Home Office should consider taking back ownership of the National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR), reviewing it and bringing it into line with the standard for crime recording to create a single transparent recording framework. If this recommendation is taken forward, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) should consider whether the NSIR and NCRS portfolios could be combined under a single lead officer. (Recommendation 12)

For HMIC:

- In terms of the presentation of data in HMIC reports and other documents:

  a. Comparative data (such as Most Similar Force data, comparisons with national averages etc.) should be presented in such a way as to ensure that any limitations (such as lack of statistical significance) are immediately clear, and

  b. The use of qualitative performance information in addition to quantitative data should be emphasised. (Recommendation 4)

- Following the introduction of the annual inspection process (PEEL), HMIC should clearly communicate how any revisions to the Crime and Policing Monitoring Group (CPMG) process will operate, so that forces clearly understand the purpose of the process as well as the criteria for escalation. (Recommendation 5)

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1 *Caught red-handed: Why we can't count on Police-Recorded Crime statistics,* House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (PASC)*,* Thirteenth Report of Session 2013–14, HC 760, 9 April 2014

- HMIC should consider how best to promote the sharing of good practice in relation to performance measurement/management systems and processes that may be identified during the course of future HMIC inspections. (Recommendation 19)

For the College of Policing:

- Using the existing draft effective principles for performance measurement, the College, working with the NPCC Performance Management Coordination Committee, should develop a broader set of principles for performance management for use by all forces, linked to a common view of performance and service delivery. (Recommendation 6)

- The College should also work with the NPCC to identify good practice in terms of balanced measures to accurately capture both crime and non-crime, qualitative police demand (such as safeguarding and public protection work as well as concerns for safety and welfare). (Recommendation 7)

- The College should work with the NPCC lead for contact management who is in the process of reviewing the 2010 National Contact Management Principles and Guidance and make recommendations for an improved set of diagnostic indicators for contact management. (Recommendation 8)

- The College should ensure that the skills needed for performance management are built into the model of leadership and management training and development being taken forward as per Recommendation 6 of the Leadership review[2]. These skills should also be considered as part of the national standards for selection and promotion as per recommendation 9 of the Leadership review and considered by the Defining and Assessing Competence (DAC) team. (Recommendation 15)

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2 Leadership Review, College of Policing, June 2015 http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/ Development/Promotion/the-leadership-review/Documents/Leadership_Review_Final_June-2015.pdf

Conclusions

The initial remit for this review involved exploring the use of targets in policing and gaining an understanding of their effects. It quickly became clear, however, that the use of numerical targets is just part of a wider issue around effective police performance management in general.

Many forces recognise the 'dangers' around the use of targets and appreciate the need to move beyond target-driven performance management, but there appears to be a lack of understanding, and consistency about what should be used instead. Evidence was found of a number of forces that had made a conscious effort to move away from the target-driven performance culture, but continued to use and present performance data in an unhelpful format, such as the use of binary comparisons with 'up' or 'down' arrows. This risks causing those using the data to make judgements about apparent differences or 'directions of travel' which may not be significant, potentially leading to unnecessary 'knee jerk' reactions intended to address perceived problems. Well-intentioned but potentially flawed behaviours such as these can also be caused by league tables, and even the positioning of categories of performance data within a 'data package' can influence mindsets about priorities. It is essential, therefore, that forces not only remove numerical targets from their performance frameworks, but that they consider the wider potential impacts of how performance information is presented.

The findings of this review show that what appears to work most effectively is where leaders focus on the right mix of performance measures to understand the complex and changing nature of demands on policing; and where they set a culture that creates an environment where officers and staff are empowered to use their professional discretion to do what they believe is right for victims; a culture which encourages the accurate recording of information which is then presented in a meaningful way to managers to enable them make effective decisions and deploy resources effectively to ensure that crime is prevented, and that where crimes do occur, victims get the best possible service from their staff.

The review found lots of examples of good practice, however, there wasn't one force that could be held up as having achieved the 'perfect' performance management framework. Many are making great strides in achieving change in these areas, but they also admit that this is still very much work in progress. Some forces have achieved a significant cultural shift towards a much more balanced approach to performance management where officers and staff genuinely feel empowered to 'do the right thing'. Some have invested in their leaders, helping them to understand the data better and supporting them to reframe their performance conversations by asking different questions and using meaningful, contextualised measures and narrative that provide an accurate picture of performance.

Whilst there are some informal networks across forces, it is apparent that much of this innovative work is occurring in isolation – currently there is no coordinated mechanism for forces to share good practice or develop fresh approaches. Similarly, there is little in the way of national guidance or training on effective police performance management, and uncertainty about the way forward.

The recommendations in this review are intended to support forces in continuing their journey towards developing an effective performance framework; one that not only provides a good understanding of the business in order to assist effective decision-making, but also enables individuals to be appropriately held to account, whilst empowering them to do the right thing for the public and make the right decisions to support victims of crime.

Annexes

- **Annex A: Terms of reference**

- **Annex B: Methodology**

- **Annex C: Letter to chief constables**

- **Annex D: Questions for forces**

- **Annex E: Letter to PCCs**

- **Annex F: Fieldwork schedule**

- **Annex G: Durham 'Plan on a Page' and Performance Management Framework**

- **Annex H: Findings from the survey**

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- **Annex J: The impact of targets – evidence from desk research**

- **Annex K: Glossary of terms**

Annex E: Letter to PCCs

Police Superintendents' Association of England and Wales
Cymdeithas Uwcharolygyddion Heddlu Cymru A Lloegr

10 June 2015

Dear Commissioner

Review of Police Targets and their Impact

As you are probably aware, I have been asked by the Home Secretary to conduct a comprehensive review of the use of police targets. I have attached a copy of the terms of reference for the review for your information. You will see that my review will cover the 43 Home Office forces and will not only examine the use of targets and their impact, but will also seek to identify good performance management practices that can be shared with others. I am keen that my report will have a strong focus on the latter point.

I wish to make it clear from the outset that the terms of reference specify the review will examine the use of targets, i.e. specific numerical targets that are attached to performance measures, rather than performance measures themselves, which of course are essential for effective performance management.

I am aware of the potential sensitivities of this review in relation to the roles of both chief constables and police and crime commissioners. In announcing the review, the Home Secretary was clear that this is not an attempt to fetter chief constables in their use of data to understand and manage the operational challenge of policing. Nor is it a rebuke to crime commissioners who use information to set the strategic direction of their force and hold their chief constable to account. The focus will be squarely on numerical targets (across all areas of policing) and their effect on behaviour, discretion and bureaucracy, and also good practice relating to alternative performance management models.

In order to complete the review it is my intention to undertake extensive consultation with officers and staff at all levels within the service, and also with other key partners such as police and crime commissioners, College of Policing, HMIC and others. This will be supported by research and fieldwork.

In light of the timescale for the review, which is due for completion by early September, and the limited resources available to me, I don't anticipate that I will be able to personally visit every force. It would be helpful, therefore, to get an early sense of where each force is at in relation to their performance management framework (and more specifically whether numerical targets are used) before the fieldwork phase of the review commences.

To assist with this, I would be grateful if you could provide me with a picture of the use of targets in the area you serve. Specifically, it would be helpful to understand if numerical targets are used and, if so, how they are used including whether they are driven by yourself, the chief officer team, or at a more local level. If targets are not used in your force, what drove this decision? Finally, it would be good to understand how performance is measured in your force. Please could you attach examples of recent performance documents (electronic version if possible) and any other useful information, including, if relevant, any details of the targets that are used.

I have also written to your chief constable in similar terms and would greatly appreciate your response to Reviewofpolicetargets@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk by Wednesday 17 June.

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