

**Cambridgeshire
Constabulary**
Catering
June 2004



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



HMIC Best Value Review Inspection Report

Contents

1. Executive Summary

2. Contextual Background

3. Judgement 1: How good is the Service?

- Are the service aims clear and challenging?
- Does the service meet the aims?
- How does the service compare?

4. Judgement 2: What are the prospects for Improvement?

- Does the Best Value Review (BVR) drive improvement?
- How good is the improvement plan?
- Will the force deliver the improvements?

5. Recommendations

6. Potential Good Practice

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 By virtue of section 1(1)(d) of the Local Government Act 1999, all police authorities in England and Wales are required to secure continuous improvement in the way they deliver policing functions within their police forces, having due regard for a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.1.2 Other public bodies such as local authorities, education authorities and fire and rescue services are subject to the Best Value regime. These 'Best Value authorities' are required to prepare a Best Value performance plan (BVPP) for each financial year, laying out a programme of Best Value Reviews (BVRs). The BVPP should contain a programme of all the BVRs undertaken and explain how they have contributed towards continuous improvement. The Audit Commission ensures that the BVPP is audited annually.
- 1.1.3 The wording of the Local Government Act 1999 places the onus for Best Value on 'authorities'; whilst this clearly encompasses police authorities, who are legally accountable, it also implicitly engages chief constables, as they are constitutionally accountable for the delivery of operational services. In this respect the execution of Best Value in policing differs from other services. Therefore, when this report addresses the roles and responsibilities of Cambridgeshire Police Authority, it will also be referring to the Chief Constable.
- 1.1.4 When a BVR is undertaken, the report, its improvement plan and subsequent implementation are inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). An inspection report is produced which is distributed to the Secretary of State, the police authority and the chief constable.
- 1.1.5 The police authority must show that it has adhered to the statutory requirements of the Local Government Act 1999 when conducting the BVR. These can be summarised as the 4 Cs (a fifth C for collaboration was introduced after this BVR was carried out).
- Challenge why and how the service is provided.
 - Compare performance with other organisations.
 - Consult with users, stakeholders and the community.
 - Ensure the service is exposed to Competition.

The purpose of independent inspections of BVRs is to enable the community to see if the ethos of Best Value is being realised, enable the the police authority and constabulary to see how well they are doing and take action, if necessary, to promote

good practice and for the Home Secretary to gauge the effectiveness of the Best Value regime.

- 1.1.6 The catering service in Cambridgeshire Constabulary was subjected to Best Value principles in May 2002 in order to facilitate the search for a new catering contractor to provide services from April 2003. This process commenced with the desire of the Police Authority to withdraw financial subsidies from the service. The HMIC Inspection found that although a BVR had been conducted, there was no final report, improvement or implementation plans to assess as would be expected. The Inspection examined the application of the 4 Cs - consultation, competition, challenge and comparison - in the review process. The objective for HMIC is to deliver two judgements based on its Inspection findings: how good is the service and what are the prospects for improvement? These judgements are supported by two recommendations which address deficiencies in the review process.

1.2 The 4 Cs

- 1.2.1 There is evidence of the application of the 4 Cs. Due to the unconventional way of reviewing the service (without an end report) and because the process was subject to financial stricture with the removal of the canteen subsidy, the full benefits of applying the 4 Cs to the service area were not realised.
- The challenge was subject to the assumption that canteen services would be provided.
 - Consultation was carried out, but limited to staff associations. Wider and in-depth consultation may have steered the review away from some ineffective aspects of the catering service, which now exist.
 - Good evidence of comparison was found linked to other police forces and similar governmental departments, which operate contracted catering.
 - The process was exposed to widespread competition with 13 potential service providers being involved at the outset. Rigorous analysis was carried out of the competing companies at each stage of the process.

1.3 The Judgements

- 1.3.1 HMIC concluded the service provided was **good**, but the prospects for improvement in the service were **poor**.

1.4 Recommendations

Recommendation 1
Her Majesty's Inspector recommends that clear processes are adhered to which enable BVRs to be conducted within a recognisable framework.

Recommendation 2
Her Majesty's Inspector recommends that reports are written for BVRs. These should contain an improvement plan and give clear guidance for implementation.

1.5 Conclusion

- 1.5.1 The service in place is good, but different from that to which officers and staff had hitherto been accustomed. The Inspection noted that the initial resistance to the new canteen service has given way to apathy, with customers opting for alternative sources of sustenance. Operational feeding is good, but the catering facilities provided by the current contractor cannot hope to provide for large-scale operations; this leads the Force to seek alternative caterers and deprives the contractor of lucrative opportunities. As the Police Authority will not provide a subsidy to improve the service and it does not appear viable for the contractor to invest more capital, service improvement is highly unlikely. HMIC also notes that the contract between Cambridgeshire Constabulary and the contractor remains unsigned; this situation provokes a lack of clarity in the customer and client relationship that further inhibits the service.

2. Contextual Information

2.1 Force Structure

- 2.1.1 Cambridgeshire Constabulary is responsible for policing the county of Cambridgeshire, including the unitary authority of Peterborough. The Force area comprises rural elements such as Ely, March and Huntingdon and urban areas such as Cambridge and Peterborough. There are approximately 730,200 people resident in the county. This figure rises significantly when students return to Cambridge University and tourists visit the many attractions of the county.
- 2.1.2 It is anticipated that the population will increase by 134,000 to the year 2021 (8.5%), which is the highest of any county in the UK. The predicted national average growth is 6.9%.
- 2.1.3 The county has six crime and disorder reduction partnerships, involving Peterborough Unitary Authority, the County Council and district councils.
- 2.1.4 The Constabulary has three geographical policing divisions made up of 14 sector areas and two distinct commands for crime and community safety.
- 2.1.5 Personnel strength of the Constabulary at 31 March 2003 was 1411 full-time equivalent police officers, 185 special constables and 897 police staff. The Force's net revenue expenditure for 2003/04 is £99.148m.
- 2.1.6 The chief officer group consists of: the Chief Constable, who has been in post for two years; the Deputy Chief Constable, who was appointed in March 2004 and holds the operations portfolio; and the Assistant Chief Constable (Support), who has been with the Constabulary since December 2003. Best Value and catering sit with the ACC.

2.2 Service under review

- 2.2.1 Provision of catering in Cambridgeshire Constabulary has been via contract for 18 years. Prior to 1 October 2003 a full hot counter service was provided at three sites: Force HQ (Huntingdon), Thorpewood and Parkside police stations. The contract covered catering for operations, aid and other special events, which could be provided by the Force's own kitchens and consumed in the canteens. Pack-up meals were supplied and delivered to deployed officers as required. Furthermore, credit meals were available for officers abstracted from their base stations for training.
- 2.2.2 Cambridgeshire Police had a catering budget of £210k for 2002/03. Credit meals for training were provided at a cost of about £100k and a canteen subsidy was set at

£60k. The catering budget, provided by the Police Authority, is managed by the Estates Department.

- 2.2.3 In April 2003 the contract with Quadrant, the catering contractor was due to expire. The Police Authority decided to embark on a new tendering process for catering.
- 2.2.4 It was decided the Police Authority would withdraw the canteen subsidy from the bidding criteria in order to save £60k; users of the three canteens would have to pay market value for goods purchased. Credit meals would be withdrawn for officers on training duties, saving in the region of £100k. The new contract would provide catering for operations, mutual aid and special events which would be of an enhanced quality. Vending would be available at more sites.
- 2.2.5 A competitive tendering process was undertaken and a company called Eurest (Criminal Justice) won the contract in a competition with two other bidders. Eurest began catering for Cambridgeshire Constabulary on 1 October 2003.

2.3 Review Methodology

- 2.3.1 The Constabulary undertook the review or contract process between May 2002 - September 2003. The review team comprised staff from Executive Services Department, Estates Management and a consultation/challenge panel, with representatives from staff associations and unions participating. The Continuous Improvement Board (CIB) owns the BVR process and was regularly updated by the review team.
- 2.3.2 The Police Authority appoints two members to each BVR. One member will have experience of Best Value or the area under review, whilst the other will be gaining experience. The members act as a conduit between the Constabulary and the Authority, their role being to influence rather than direct. The police team conducting the review reports its findings directly to the Force executive level CIB. The CIB is chaired by the ACC and also has a Police Authority member on it. Decisions made at the CIB are fed into the Force Executive Group, where the ACC is also a member.
- 2.3.3 The review was cognisant of the four Cs as outlined in the introduction.
- 2.3.4 Comparison involved the consultation/challenge group looking at how catering services were provided in other police forces. This threw up a range of options; for example, some forces such as Suffolk still provided a hot counter service, whilst Bedfordshire had vending. The Force also had experience of other local catering operations on air bases and this influenced the comparison phase.

- 2.3.5 Competition is also evident in the review. This was in a purely commercial form via the tendering process that saw the competition opened up initially to 13 candidates. The review team conducted SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis on all companies involved at each stage of the tendering process.
- 2.3.6 Challenging the need for the service was not obvious. The review was started with some assumptions: the subsidy would go, canteen services would be provided, as would operational feeding. During the Inspection, it was explained that because the subsidy was only available to those staff who worked near a canteen it was not equitably applied to all staff in the Force. This prompted the Authority to remove it. Developing this theme might have led to the pivotal question, 'why provide canteens at all?' This does not appear to have been considered.
- 2.3.7 Consultation was carried out in a limited way with staff associations and unions being drawn into a consultation group. However, there was no survey of officers and staff either as an entire Force or within the individual sites where canteens were located. The staff groups involved were unaware of the Police Authority inclination to a subsidy-free canteen service whilst making their contributions.

2.4 Inspection Methodology

- 2.4.1 HMIC is statutorily responsible for carrying out BVR Inspections (BVRIs) within the police service. The purpose of the BVRI is to make two judgements. Firstly, how good is the service and secondly, what are the prospects for improvement?
- 2.4.2 The Inspection was carried out in May 2004 on behalf of Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Ronnie Flanagan GBE, MA. Prior to the publication of this Inspection report, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and the Police Authority were given the opportunity to comment on factual content.
- 2.4.3 During the course of the Inspection, eleven interviews were carried out gathering evidence from catering staff, customers, police officers, police staff and Authority members. Eight reality checks were undertaken and documentary submissions examined. The Inspection team developed a comprehensive knowledge of Cambridgeshire Constabulary's catering arrangements.
- 2.4.4 One of the principal objectives was to gauge the perception of those involved as to how good the service was and whether the BVR had facilitated improvements. This was then compared to HMIC's own observations and findings.
- 2.4.5 The findings of the Inspection were presented to the Police Authority at an interim challenge on 11 June 2004.

3. Judgement 1: How good is the Service?

3.1 Are the service aims clear and challenging?

- 3.1.1 The aim of the service is to provide refreshment facilities at three sites (Thorpewood, Parkside and HQ) for officers and staff situated within a convenient distance of the facilities, which operate without the benefit of a Police Authority financial subsidy. Hospitality catering should be provided at the three sites offering catering services. The service should also provide meals and supplementary refreshments for officers and staff engaged in operations, aid and special events.
- 3.1.2 HMIC observes that the aims of the catering service are clear, but due to the fact that Best Value principles were applied to an economy measure rather than to a service improvement, the Inspection concludes that the aims are sufficient rather than challenging.

3.2 Does the service meet the aims?

- 3.2.1 The chosen contractor provides canteen services at the three sites where their predecessor provided a full hot counter service. The style of service is now different, being variously described as 'grab and go' or 'deli-marché'. The service now is more of a convenience-oriented mode. The Police Authority does not pay a subsidy, so customers pay market price for the goods purchased. Hospitality is provided at these facilities with light refreshments and buffets delivered to conference rooms and offices on request.
- 3.2.2 Operational feeding can be provided by the current contractor. They have the capacity to respond to such requests in several ways according to the preference of the customer.
- 3.2.3 In the first instance, they can prepare packed lunches; secondly, the facilities at HQ can provide sit down meals for around 90 diners per hour; and finally a 'Re-energise' van can cook 90 airline style meals in an hour for deployed officers.
- 3.2.4 Furthermore, the contractor, Eures (Criminal Justice), is part of the Compass group, which supplies catering to a large number of government departments and private companies. These considerable resources are available to the catering manager. This means that he can supply meals in other larger facilities for greater numbers if necessary.
- 3.2.5 The Inspection found that a canteen service is being provided at three locations. However, the style of service is markedly different from what had gone before.

- 3.2.6 Operational feeding is provided, but only in a very limited way. The Operational Planning Unit of the Constabulary finds that the limited capacity to feed large numbers of officers using the residual catering facilities does not meet operational necessities. Accordingly, they buy services from external suppliers that can satisfy their requirements. This arrangement effectively circumvents the measures the Police Authority envisaged for operational feeding.
- 3.2.7 The catering contract may fail to address this for two reasons. Firstly, it may not entitle Eurest exclusivity in the provision of operational catering. Secondly and fundamentally, Eurest are procrastinating about formally signing off the contract, working instead to a letter of intent. Eurest declined two invitations to explain its position to the Inspection; however, other impartial interviewees suggest that Eurest is dissatisfied with the viability of the service.
- 3.2.8 The facilities and services Eurest have put in place in support of the contract are not fully utilised. This is partly because people are exercising democratic choice in avoiding a service they do not like and partly because, whilst what on offer is good, it cannot cope with large volumes of diners or is unsuitable. The service does meet the aims in so far as catering services are being provided as the Police Authority intended, subsidy free. The key service components required by the contract are in place. The services that are actually provided are of a good standard.

3.3 How does the service compare?

- 3.3.1 During the Inspection all three catering sites were visited; the Inspection team also had prior knowledge of canteen services at these sites during the life of the previous contract. In addition, catering staff were spoken to during reality checks at the point of service and in formal interview. Most of these staff had been retained from contract to contract. Indeed, some of the staff have been engaged in canteen services with Cambridgeshire Constabulary for many years.
- 3.3.2 The Inspection noted the dedication of the staff and their commitment to their customers. Many users of the full range of catering services were spoken to formally and informally during the Inspection period and at other opportunistic times.
- 3.3.3 Before the current contract, all three canteens provided on-demand hot meals from a menu that included core dishes and specials. Sandwiches were sold either pre-packed or made to order, along with a variety of snacks and confectionery. Canned drinks and hot beverages were sold over the counter. All three sites had extensive kitchens and hot serveries, able to cater for larger numbers.
- 3.3.4 The new operation, which commenced on 1 October 2003, is totally different. It is based on the convenience/motorway service station model. A full hot meal menu no

longer exists; hot food is provided but choice is limited. There is an extensive range of pre-packed sandwiches and hot snacks. Branded snack food is prominent, as are large display fridges of soft drinks. Tea and coffee is supplied from drinks dispensers. The kitchens at Thorpewood and Parkside police stations have been de-commissioned. The most noticeable difference is the increase in price of goods following the withdrawal of the subsidy.

- 3.3.5 Under the previous contract, operational feeding was supplied in any of the Constabulary's canteens according to the needs of the event. In certain circumstances other locations outside the Constabulary's estate could be used when more appropriate. Estates Department held the catering budget and would pay Quadrant or any external venue for meals on an event by event basis. Provisions were also made to deliver snacks to officers deployed on operations. This took the form of a refrigerated vehicle chasing officers.
- 3.3.6 The pitch made by Eurest to secure the catering contract relied heavily on the services of a 'Re-energise' vehicle, essentially a van containing an oven able to cook 90 pre-packed airline style meals in an hour. This van could be pressed into service at short notice and cook meals en-route to where officers needed feeding. When drawing a trailer it can convey a range of supplies.
- 3.3.7 The expectations of what this vehicle would provide were overplayed by Eurest. Cambridgeshire Constabulary was left with the impression that it would provide high quality meals for virtually all occasions; this would have fulfilled one of the essential criteria of the bid. In reality, this resource is best suited to deal with spontaneous events and emergencies. Since the start of the contract, this van has never been deployed; consequently, the catering manager does not keep stocks of the meals.
- 3.3.8 When large-scale operational feeding is required, the Constabulary bye-passes the Eurest service and deals directly with preferred catering suppliers. This situation allows police officers to circumvent the Eurest catering manager and the Estates Department catering contract manager, who has to pay for hospitality from other providers without the opportunity of negotiating an agreement. This results in Eurest losing work and Cambridgeshire Constabulary paying often elevated prices to other caterers. Local Ministry of Defence bases and private company canteens are used on these occasions; perversely, these facilities are often run by other branches of Eurest.
- 3.3.9 Meals were provided free of charge for officers attending courses at HQ under previous contracts, but the Police Authority removed this from the terms of the new contract, saving circa £100k. Officers and staff who would have enjoyed these credit meals either use the new canteen service at their own expense and claim back necessary and reasonable costs if they are entitled under regulations.

3.3.10 During the Inspection five police buildings were visited. All had vending machines dispensing snacks and drinks; this appears to accord with the aims of the catering contract.

3.4 How good is the service under review?

3.4.1 HMIC judges the service under review to be **‘Good’**.

4. Judgement 2: What are the prospects for Improvement?

4.1 Does the BVR drive improvement?

- 4.1.1 The BVR of catering is more accurately described as the application of Best Value principles to a management decision. The subsequent situation did not come about by conducting a full BVR. Instead, the Police Authority used the opportunity presented by the expiration of the Quadrant contract to remove certain features from the catering service; Best Value was then applied to the invitation to tender and award process. Once the new catering arrangements commenced, the Best Value process ended.

4.2 How good is the improvement plan?

- 4.2.1 There was no review document or improvement plan guiding activity. A letter of intent and an unsigned contract exist between Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Eures, but these are end articles and do not constitute an improvement plan.

4.3 Will the force deliver the improvements?

- 4.3.1 The onus of delivery does not rest with Cambridgeshire Constabulary as service delivery is the responsibility of the contractor. Essentially, now that the Police Authority has awarded the contract to the best-suited company, it has little accountability for actual service delivery. If the service were not good enough, then the Constabulary and Authority would have the right to revisit the subject, but this is somewhat short of an operational delivery of improvements.
- 4.3.2 The Inspection looked at the service from a customer's point of view and found that the goods provided were of a high quality and reasonably priced. In comparison, it is similar to catering provided in more modern motorway service stations and a little cheaper. However, it is not the service that staff are used to and it is certainly more expensive. The catering manager (who has worked in Cambridgeshire Constabulary for many years) and numerous and varied people from the Constabulary acknowledge that the new canteen service is unpopular. Many people are 'voting with their feet' and making alternative arrangements for food. Eures is consequently losing around £4000 pm on the contract.
- 4.3.3 There are regular meetings between Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Eures where they monitor the canteen service via a service level agreement. This process involves scoring the service over a number of areas ranging from the quality of the menu to the appearance and ability of the staff. The documents examined during the Inspection indicate a steady and consistent improvement in the quality of the service.

- 4.3.4 The contract appears to include operational feeding. However, either Cambridgeshire Constabulary is not bound to receive this exclusively from Eurest, or sections of the Constabulary are deliberately ignoring it. The Constabulary goes to external providers for large events because the facilities as they stand within the Force cannot accommodate large sittings. Accordingly, the current catering operation cannot adequately manage the number of meals in the time necessary for requirements of larger operations and events. Therefore, other facilities are used and paid for separately. Effectively, this deprives Eurest of the opportunity to provide lucrative larger operational feeds. Eurest do provide smaller scale operational feeds and packed lunches. An order for such a service was observed during the Inspection. It is apparent that the operational needs of the Constabulary were not properly considered when the new contract was drawn up.
- 4.3.5 The 'Re-energise' van was oversold during the tendering process. Whilst it is an innovative piece of equipment and a valuable resource which could greatly assist during extended and emergency operations, police officers simply do not like the food. Organisers of operations request packed lunches in preference to the 'Re-energise' van, which has stood idle since the contract began. The Inspection noted that the services of this van may have been exaggerated when Eurest was presenting its bid.
- 4.3.6 Whilst the catering service has been transformed, it is not clear whether or not the changes were designed to introduce a better service. The canteen facilities offered a subsidised meal service during office hours to those officers and staff who worked within reach of the three sites with canteens. This was of no benefit to those people working at remote places and on shift work. When the subsidy was provided it was not on an equitable basis. What is clear is that the process has saved nearly £160k by ending the subsidy and training meals (although £44K was granted to Eurest for refurbishments).
- 4.3.7 As the new style canteens are unpopular and this side of the operation is losing money for Eurest, it cannot be seen as an improvement despite the products being of a good quality and reasonably priced. Similarly, the operational feeding only works for small feeds and pack-ups; the Operational Planning Unit looks for outside help, as the in-house operation cannot meet its needs. Furthermore, the mobile catering solution, the 'Re-energise' van, has been summarily rejected. This decision was taken by staff below chief officer level.

4.4 What are the prospects for improvement?

- 4.4.1 HMIC judges that the prospects for improvement in the service are **'Poor'**.

5. Recommendations

Recommendation 1
Her Majesty's Inspector recommends that clear processes are adhered to which enable BVRs to be conducted within a recognisable framework.

Recommendation 2
Her Majesty's Inspector recommends that reports are written for BVRs. These should contain an improvement plan and give clear guidance for implementation.

6. Potential Good Practice

- 6.1 Whilst the process undertaken by the Constabulary does not conform to a typical BVR, it does serve as a good example of how Best Value principles can routinely permeate policing and management processes.