Local audits of the probation service began in 1990. They have now been completed, or are nearing completion, in 50 of the 56 probation areas. They were designed to assess the effectiveness of the service at meeting its objectives.

The probation service is reaching the end of a period of uncertainty. Forced amalgamations and a national service were under consideration but have been rejected. The Criminal Justice Act received Royal Assent in July 1991 and the rules for cash limits will soon be clarified. Now the service has to manage a period of significant growth as it implements the government's policy of supervising more non-violent offenders in the community.

Management was another area of weakness identified in 1989. Since then progress has been made. Probation Areas continue to develop a more managerial approach. Systems to target field team activities are being widely applied and information systems are being used to support the process.

But some Areas need to strengthen their management systems still further. For example, staff assessment needs to focus more on staff development; the basis of central establishment charges from local authorities needs to be clarified to eliminate overcharging; and information needs to be developed more as a local resource. All of these require wider application of simple approaches, rather than the development of more complex systems.

Auditors have agreed a set of specific actions at a local level designed to improve service effectiveness. They will monitor progress from year to year.
INTRODUCTION

1 The probation service’s key functions are to provide information to the courts, to supervise offenders on court orders in the community, and to work with offenders in custody and on release. It also undertakes various duties for the domestic courts.

2 The service is adjusting its focus, reducing involvement with people who commit minor offences and increasing activities with people at risk of going to prison. To do this effectively, and give value for money, the service must target its activities, co-ordinating them with other agencies within the criminal justice system. Also it must develop and apply new ways of working with more difficult offenders. These changes in turn require it to be managed more actively.

3 Audits of individual probation areas were started by the Audit Commission in January 1990. This paper summarises the results. The audits were developed from the Audit Commission’s national report on probation The Probation Service: Promoting value for Money (HMSO, April 1989). They were designed to assess the effectiveness of the service at meeting its objectives.

4 The local audit projects were based on an audit guide. The guide contained 20 prepared modules and auditors selected those which were most relevant to local problems. Some concentrated on setting objectives and targets, others on information systems, and a smaller group on prototype Resource Management Information System (RMIS) projects. The audits provide a good basis for the qualitative assessment of the service today – but their varied scope does not always facilitate simple quantification. For the most part audits concentrated on ‘area-wide’ issues, and backed this up with information collected at ‘team level’. Work in prisons, work with juveniles and work with domestic courts were not included in the audit.

5 The audit guide drew special attention to the activities of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) in carrying out Efficiency and Effectiveness (E & E) inspections in some of the Commission’s audit areas. HMIP carried out ten such inspections in 1989, and subsequently produced a report Efficiency and Effectiveness Inspections in the Probation Service: The first year. (Home Office) The message to auditors was to tailor the choice of modules to dovetail with, or to build upon HMIP’s findings. As far as possible auditors were advised not to duplicate the work of the Inspectorate.

6 Audits have been completed, or are nearing completion, in 50 of the 56 probation areas. The audit of Inner London is currently being undertaken by the National Audit Office (NAO).

7 Since the publication of the 1989 report important developments have been proposed in the Criminal Justice System in general, and the probation service in particular. The Criminal Justice Act, which gained Royal Assent in July 1991:

- emphasises use of probation reports to help sentencing decisions in court;
- introduces new community based sentences, and encourages use of existing ones;
- introduces better standards of supervision especially for released prisoners;
- improves consistency of breach procedures for community penalties.

These changes directly affect the probation service.

8 In addition probation has had its own green and blue papers; Supervision and Punishment in the Community (Home Office, 1990), Organising Supervision and Punishment in the Community (Home Office, 1991). Central amongst the topics raised have been local control and cash limiting. The Home Office has now announced that there will be no national service, but that it ‘will encourage regional collaboration between services to improve value for money and in some cases, where this is clearly justified, the amalgamation of smaller services’. Cash limiting will be introduced from April 1992.

9 The Commission is grateful to the Association of Chief Probation Officers (ACOP), the Central Council of Probation Committees (CCPC), Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP), the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO), and the National Probation Research and Information Exchange (NPRIE) for their time, observations and encouragement.
**AUDIT FINDINGS**

10 The probation service poses particular problems for the auditor. Effectiveness is not easy to assess. While the service's top line objective is clear – to reduce offending – the information needed to measure success is not always to hand. The Commission therefore adopted a process model, focusing on six essential success factors, which are accepted by the profession to be associated with effective and efficient services. The results of the audits can therefore be summarised under six headings, reflecting the main areas in which the 1989 report made recommendations for change (Exhibit 1). Each heading is followed by the relevant conclusions of the 1989 report.

A. DEMONSTRATING EFFECTIVENESS.


11 The probation service's principal duty is to the court; to provide information relevant to sentencing decisions, and to carry out offender supervision. But the extent to which these services are requested is a matter for the courts, rather than the service itself. It is therefore to the courts that the service must demonstrate that it is targeting the right people and achieving the right outcomes. The 1989 study found that this was often not done well.

TARGETING THE RIGHT PEOPLE

12 The thrust of recent policy is for the pattern of sentences to polarise; stiffer sentences for serious or violent offenders, and less severe punishment for first time and minor offences. The probation service operates between these extremes; doing its best to avoid being asked to supervise petty offenders, and gradually making inroads into the group that, for lack of an alternative, would have gone to prison. If it is successful the service will have a caseload increasing in difficulty and reducing in size.

13 National statistics show that most probation areas are succeeding in moving towards this profile of work. The probation service is dealing with increasingly serious offenders. In 1980 25% of probationers were first time offenders and 22% had already had a previous custodial sentence. By 1989 only 14% were first time offenders, and 38% had been to prison at least once*.

*This may be attributable, in part, to better recording of previous offending and sentencing behaviour. But the change is too great to be fully accounted for by this.
Some Areas have made little or no progress in the last 4 years. But not all probation services are equally effective in targeting their caseload. One method of measuring change is to compare the proportion of probationers, who have previously been in prison, by Area, in 1986 with the proportion in 1989. This shows that, overall, a successful strategy is being pursued.

But not all probation services are equally effective in targeting their caseload. One method of measuring change is to compare the proportion of probationers, who have previously been in prison, by Area, in 1986 with the proportion in 1989. This shows that, overall, a successful strategy is being pursued.

The need for further progress is emphasised by Lord Justice Woolf's enquiry into the Strangeways disturbance. He questioned the need to imprison many of the gaol's low tariff offenders and emphasised the potential use of non-custodial sentences.

The local audits found that most Areas were using a risk of custody system but there are still around 20% that do not. Some areas target effort in other ways, for example concentrating on particular age groups or those...
who have already been to prison. But these do not have the refinement of a full risk of custody system. Team seniors within Areas that do not use a risk of custody system are less able to focus on outcomes. They do not have the means to inform team objectives and targets, demonstrate progress with particular courts over time, or relay policy to the magistracy and judiciary. It is difficult to understand why Area Headquarters staff should allow this position to persist.

SECURING THE RIGHT OUTCOMES

19 Probation work aims to contain offending. This can mean preventing further offences altogether, or at least reducing their frequency and gravity. There is an element of risk which will increase further as the service takes on more difficult offenders. Probation services cannot guarantee that offenders will not reoffend. Instead they need to estimate the risks of reoffending, and the immediate risk of custody and shape their recommendations accordingly (Exhibit 4).

20 Some of the problems with which offenders need help are difficult to address: drinking and drug abuse for example. Success is hard to measure, but there are techniques which can be used to assess the impact of particular programmes. In Oxfordshire, attitudes of sex offenders towards their offence are being measured before and after a course as a test of probation effectiveness (Exhibit 5, overleaf).

21 The probation service as a whole still does too little to measure its own effectiveness. And even where they do, they are slow to broadcast and publicise the results both for the local stakeholders and other probation services. There is a message here for managers – it is not enough for a service to do the work, it has to be communicated as well. Probation officers do not select their own clients. If the courts are to be persuaded to direct challenging offenders to the service, they must be confident that a professional job will be done, and its impact monitored. Far more could be done to ‘sell’ the service more effectively.

B. SPREADING GOOD PRACTICE.

Successful schemes and practices should be disseminated. The distribution of such schemes is currently very uneven, and strategies are needed which promote greater consistency.... There is a clear role for HM Probation Inspectorate in assisting this process'.

22 One of the more disappointing results of the audits is their confirmation
that ideas travel slowly in the probation service. They do not transfer quickly in the same area, let alone to other Areas. There are reasons for this. Schemes often only work because of the flair and initiative of the particular officer involved. Probation makes room for creativity, but it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to transfer that between posts or individuals.

23 This manifests itself in various ways. Auditors found divisions in metropolitan Areas which have not caught up with the practices of the more advanced ones in the same service. Some parts of the service make less use of modern probation techniques like the risk of custody schemes and participate less in joint group work between teams. They also tend to have poorer relations with outside agencies such as the police.

24 To address that problem, and to promote sharing between Areas, HMIP have started a programme of thematic inspections looking at a particular subject in depth (Exhibit 6). The results of these will be published to encourage Areas to adopt the best practice from elsewhere. Also these studies are assisting HMIP in the creation of a comprehensive set of national standards.

25 These thematic studies are in addition to the Internal Monitoring and Inspection (IMI) systems that the Inspectorate has required each Area to design. The idea is for each Area to establish arrangements that enable it to keep its policy and operation under systematic review, and to assure the quality of local service delivery.

26 A third strand is the E&E Inspections. HMIP plan to do these in each Area at least once every four years - with follow-up in the intervening period. This will be a vast improvement on previous attempts to scrutinise the effectiveness of local work.

Exhibit 6

HMIP THEMATIC INSPECTIONS

HMIP have started a programme of thematic inspections in which a particular subject is looked at in depth.
27 In addition NPRIE has been asked by ACOP to develop a national system aimed at publicising schemes which appear to reduce offending behaviour. One option is that NPRIE might act as a clearing house for receiving and publicising worthwhile initiatives. The difficulty, though, is to make NPRIE’s efforts penetrate local services and make an impact on the day to day work of teams.

28 The rate of spread of good practice has been disappointing in recent years. But there are signs that improvements will spread more quickly in the next two or three years as managers learn from each other about good practice and as the Inspectorate extends its role in line with the Home Office document Organising Supervision and Punishment in the Community.

C. DEVELOPING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS.

‘Developments depend on adequate monitoring, and each service should have an appropriate system. It is unnecessary to develop large complex systems; a better approach is to develop a flexible system tuned to local targets and objectives. Improvements in cost controls are also necessary.’

MANAGEMENT

29 Many Areas are well managed but there is still too much federalism in the probation service. That ‘F-word’ itself is rarely used. The phenomenon is variously described by such terms as ‘local ownership’ and ‘local solutions to local problems’. In both instances local means team rather than Area. But auditors’ abiding impression is that these were excuses for a lack of clear direction from the probation HQ. One auditor described the service as ‘administered’ rather than managed.

30 At the other extreme, auditors have written reports on a few Areas where they thought that the management style was too autocratic, and too dominating. In these cases there was a lack of attention given to ‘explaining the why’s of orders’. Field teams were expected to follow the lead of HQ without question.

31 A balance needs to be struck. While an element of local flexibility is desirable, there ought to be an area-wide policy for, amongst other things, target groups and research and information. Central management must have the means of assessing what is happening on the ground and have the means of knowing whether the service is making progress against its objectives.

32 The audits demonstrated conclusively that management by objectives was feasible and liberating, as long as sufficient time is invested in training. There is evidence that probation officers welcome well-constructed performance targets, and that Area morale is raised as a consequence.

33 Management by objectives requires clear central direction. Where this is lacking, too many targets can be set with the result that few are achieved.

INFORMATION

34 Information usually begins with the Information Officer (IO). Their duties normally include looking after team statistics, overseeing trends in caseload, and commenting on performance in relation to courts. They usually have responsibility for computing.

35 Many are well used and appreciated within the service; some are not. As well as serving management, the information officer has to be accepted by the teams. Auditors came across one service that was trying to get its committee to promote the information officer so that he could attend the SPO’s forum. The auditor suggested that the IO’s status might be better enhanced by circulating recent requests by teams for information. This would stimulate the slower teams into action.

36 In other places information recipients were criticised by auditors for being too easily satisfied. One report noted that ‘there is a reasonable level of satisfaction with the information service, possibly due to a lack of awareness of what is possible’.

37 There is no shortage of information in the criminal justice system; but it is a challenge to make it palatable and interesting. Several of the local audit reports therefore commented on information presentation, and how to improve it, rather than information content.

COST-INFORMATION

38 It is generally accepted that cost information has been primitive in the past. So for some time the Home Office has been sponsoring a development known as the Resource Management Information System. This blanket approach to assembling cost information is intended to work in all areas. Such a universal approach has inherent problems since the requirements of an
area with 50 officers or 500 officers are likely to be very different.

39 Auditors were aware of the background of RMIS in the service. 'It is to be hoped that RMIS will deliver the goods in terms of producing the right information but, despite six years work by management consultants, the Home Office and the Service at a very high cost, a system has still to be put in place' *

40 As a crude stopgap several auditors designed simple computerised resource management systems aimed at improving cost information. In one case the analysis revealed that the cost of different teams varied by £3 an hour above and below the average (Exhibit 7). Others pointed to areas of operation where money could be moved between budget heads to the overall benefit of the Area. Such data does not tell the whole story – but they help managers ask the right questions.

41 Staff account for between 70% and 80% of probation service costs. Auditors recommended that some form of timesheet system was the simplest and best way of keeping track of costs and productivity. Some Areas are reported to be introducing time recording systems now; others would do well to consider the advantages carefully.

42 Not all productivity improvements come from increasing staff efficiency. One auditor listed savings from accommodation improvements and early termination of probation orders for good progress. These are ways in which a demonstrably effective service can further improve its productivity.

43 All Areas have a number of field teams and it is at this level that management initiatives are taken. Auditors of some services encountered little knowledge of costs at team level, yet most costs are incurred by field teams, and there are very good arguments for making these units the centres of cost control. Several auditors recommended:

- establishing teams as cost centres;
- establishing the HQ as a separate cost centre;
- devolving time management control to SPOs.

44 Many auditors favoured this approach as being the one most likely to encourage the HQ to operate with lean staffing, and also to produce improvements in efficiency and economy at team level. Each service should review the ways in which it controls costs, to identify the scope for further delegation.

D. CLARIFYING LINES OF ACCOUNTABILITY.

*Quote from David Allonby’s introduction to CCPC’s 1990-91 annual report

Exhibit 7
COST PER HOUR (1989/90)
In one audit the costs of different teams varied by more than ±£3 per hour

![Graph showing cost per hour for different teams]

Source: Local Audit analysis of workload returns

45 At present magistrates make up the majority of the local Probation Committees which operate as the statutory employers of the probation service. They are responsible for ensuring that each probation Area carries out its duties efficiently and effectively. The organisation of Area Probation Committees is being reviewed as part of Organising Supervision and Punishment in the Community (Home Office, April 1991).

46 The Home Office does not exercise direct control over the policies set
by Probation Committees despite meeting 80% of each committee's annual expenditure via specific grant. From April 1992 this contribution is to be cash-limited. The Government's view is that if it contributes 80% of the cost it is entitled to expect that probation services will respond to its views on how that money should be spent.

47 There are two main issues arising from the introduction of cash limits: how to calculate the overall sum spent on probation and how to distribute it. The Public Expenditure Survey (PES) for 1992/93 will not be completed until late in the autumn and it is this that will determine the total probation budgets for the year starting April 1992.

48 The introduction of cash limits will involve resource equalisation between areas; the government has put forward proposals based on the phased introduction of a 'needs and workload' based formula.

49 Home Office plans include increasing the total real expenditure for probation by 25% over the four years starting April 1990. On average, probation committees added about a half of this to their budgets for 1990/91, and further amounts were added for 1991/92 causing many areas to outstrip Home Office expenditure plans.

50 A recent survey authorised by ACOP suggests that the budgets negotiated with local committees for 1991/92 exceed Government plans by £20 million (about 10%). The Home Office has said that it is investigating local area plans for 1991/92 'to see if planned growth is justified'. It has also said that Areas that enjoyed high growth in this year 'could find that this growth is not allowed for in the cash limit'. However, amongst the recent high growth areas are some of the poorest. The Home Office may seek to find a way of protecting some or all of their gain. Further discussions are planned between the interested parties to resolve this issue.

51 At least for the first three years a 2% year end flexibility is to be allowed. The Commission welcomes this recent development which should avoid any wasteful rush to spend spare cash at the year end.

52 If cash limiting works the way that the Home Office intends, it will go some way towards closing the gap between the wealthy areas and the poorer ones. In some cases it may provoke a radical rethink of how the service can be delivered. Services should now be assessing the implications for them of the financial changes in prospect, and assessing the need for consequential changes in their plans and programmes.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS

53 The support provided by local authorities for the probation service varies. Auditors have identified that in some places the relationship between the two is very close, elsewhere it is more remote.

54 When the metropolitan counties were abolished some services took the opportunity to become practically self-contained, for example North East London. Others continue to rely more closely on a local authority to provide services which are not considered viable in the area itself, for instance South West London Probation Service uses Kingston for payroll and accountability advice, although the service prepares its own accounts.

55 Probation Areas are charged a fee for any local authority services. Auditors have discovered instances where the Probation Committee is being over-charged because the local authority knows that costs charged to probation are 80% refunded by the Government.

56 With cash-limiting any unreasonable allocation of expense to the Probation Committee will be at the direct cost of the probation service. All probation Areas should use a simple form (Exhibit 8, overleaf) to ask the local authority to describe the time and cost of its work for the probation service, to help auditors judge the legitimacy of expense allocation. Such a form should be established well before any move to service level agreements for particular functions.

E. DEVELOPING SKILLS IN A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY SERVICE.

'As probation objectives change, it is important that staff skills keep pace.... Furthermore it should be made possible for services to grant-aid independent agencies and local community initiatives or contract out services where appropriate'.

57 The probation service puts a lot of effort into training and achieves more than most local authority services. But there are weaknesses which require attention. The Home Office has just
Published the results of an efficiency scrutiny of in-service training. (Home Office, 1991, Report of a Scrutiny of Probation in Service Training). This commented that ‘staff appraisal systems are poor and there is no common view of what constitute core skills for various grades’. The audits concentrated on three themes:

- Staff appraisal;
- Secondments from field teams;
- Contract management.

STAFF APPRAISAL

58 Most areas use a supervision system which involves monthly meetings between probation officers and their seniors, the senior likewise with the ACPO, and so on. The sessions, at least at PO/SPO level, concentrate on casework. This sits happily alongside traditional social work training and principles.

59 Existing supervision schemes would be more effective if they were complemented by a good staff appraisal system which focused more explicitly on strengths, weaknesses and personal targets, in keeping with the management by objectives theme (Exhibit 9). In this way the service can more easily check that training is aimed at the right people, at the correct time. One particular aspect of management that might be included is the degree to which probation staff are prepared to experiment and innovate.

SECONDMENTS FROM FIELD TEAMS

60 Secondments within the service may be especially useful in smaller Areas, both to the management team and to the individual concerned. A succession of secondments is an effective way of maintaining a slim HQ structure. A secondment should be used to tackle a problem of importance to the Area, but one capable of resolution in one or two months of part-time work. They should not end up as working parties – nor emerge as periods during which the seconded officer pursues a pet interest.

Exhibit 8
CENTRAL ESTABLISHMENT CHARGES
A simple chart should be used to keep track of central establishment charges

Exhibit 9
PERFORMANCE REVIEW IN BERKSHIRE PROBATION SERVICE
In Berkshire Probation Service training needs are tied into team review and in turn to individual performance review

Source: Berkshire Probation Service
One auditor suggested that a 'within service' secondment could be an effective way to deal with three economy issues in the Area:

- secretarial staffing levels;
- better use of accommodation;
- more extensive use of ancillaries.

Each of these could be undertaken as a 'consultancy' exercise lasting 10 to 20 days, but costing less than employing a consultant. More importantly it would free the time of an ACPO to concentrate on other issues.

CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

Although the probation service cannot at present grant aid voluntary organisations, such as APEX (employment) the Stonham Housing Association and Narcotics Anonymous, it can and does buy specific services.

The government proposes to give Probation Committees a power to grant aid so as to encourage partnership with the voluntary sector. Voluntary organisations variously act as pressure groups, a national resource for experimentation and research, and as contractors. Establishing client-contractor separation – with the probation service as the client and the voluntary sector as the contractor – puts the main burden with the service. If this happens the service will need additional management skills; a further training need. (Exhibit 10)

F. WORKING WITH OTHER AGENCIES.

'If the role proposed in the Green Paper and Action Plan is to be fulfilled successfully, the service will need more effective working relationships with other agencies in the criminal justice system'.

While probation managers are very good at communicating amongst themselves, public relations in respect of an unglamorous clientele is always difficult, and most services could improve their performance.

One of the most significant developments of the last five years has been joint working between the police, education, social services, and the probation service to keep offenders out of the court system altogether. Diversification tactics can be shown to be highly effective in both cost terms and in preventing the development of a personal criminal record. The well-established work between the police and
of the probation service in Avon clearly demonstrates this.

67 The Audits found that not all police forces co-operate with probation to the level of the better ones. Some do not liaise over cautioning schemes at all. Others are slow to provide arrest information or criminal antecedents to probation staff. And there is little apparent pattern to explain why a joint operation is successful in one place, and not in another.

COURTS

68 Now that the Government emphasises the courts as the principal user of the probation service, even more attention will need to be given to the quality of reports and of court work in general. Probation staff recognise this. Team managers should review regularly the length and content of reports. In particular the description of the details of any proposed probation order should be checked.

69 Magistrates and judges may wish to influence 'conditions' for probation orders or courses for offenders. A more detailed plan for any proposed order will help to gain sentencers' confidence.

70 Such reports are either prepared by field probation officers or by specialist court teams. Auditors were generally impressed with the performance of specialist teams whose numbers are increasing. Such teams were also preferred by Magistrates and Judges. The reasons given were that court teams:

– could develop a better rapport with sentencers;
– were more easily able to give supporting evidence;
– could more easily respond to queries in court.

71 A separate and challenging issue is the response time to a sentencer's request for a report especially where there has been a finding of guilt after a trial, or a last minute change of plea. Lincolnshire Probation Service has recently broken new ground by guaranteeing a Crown Court report within two to three days in such circumstances – a vast improvement over the national norm of three to four weeks. Judges in Lincoln recognise that this service costs a premium, and use it no more than necessary (Exhibit 11).

72 A specialist court team will not work in every court. Some courts are too small, and handle too little business to warrant the specialism. For example, in Cumbria there are eleven benches and, on average, four hear fewer than four indictable cases a week. In South West London there are four Magistrates Benches of broadly equal size. Only two have specialist support. All four have exceptionally low rates of custody. But the lowest rate of all is in the Sutton Court which does not have a specialist team!

73 The variety of practice shows that various methods can be successful. Dedicated court work increases overall team costs by about 10% but appears to be preferred by the courts as principal users. If this helps them develop confidence in the service then the price may be worth paying.

SOURCE: Lincolnshire Probation Service
Another confidence booster is feedback to the courts on the progress of orders. Some Areas already do this for Crown Courts, for instance West Glamorgan and Buckinghamshire. The practice may need to be extended selectively to magistrates; for example all offenders with a risk of custody above a certain threshold, or all burglars. The best system will be one that ties this feedback to a review period in the casework record – the same data can then be used for both reports.

CONCLUSIONS

The Commission’s 1989 report noted that the service was moving its focus of activity, reducing involvement with people who commit minor offences and increasing activities with people at risk of going to custody. To do this effectively and give value for money it needed to target its activities, coordinating them with other agencies within the criminal justice system, and to develop and apply new ways of working with more difficult offenders.

The service continues to develop its role within the criminal justice system along these lines. It enjoys growing confidence that probation can be effective for higher tariff offenders and can reduce or eliminate their offending behaviour. This belief has been reinforced by a number of recent research projects. Innovative schemes continue to be developed. As a result, the courts have growing confidence in the service and recent statistics show that the service is gradually moving ‘up tariff’.

Auditors have tried to help the service move in that direction and to promote management improvements on the lines set out in the 1989 report. ACOP have recently conducted a poll of views on audits which revealed that a majority of areas thought that the audit had been worthwhile (Exhibit 12).

...the immediate task for the service should be to ‘bed-in’ the many developments that have taken place.

One overall impression from the audit reports is that the service continues to develop a more managerial approach. Systems to target field team activities are being widely applied and information systems are being used to support the process. These approaches have been encouraged by the Home Office Statement of National objectives and priorities in 1984, and the subsequent promotion of local statements.

These developments are taking place in an environment of continued change although the service is gradually moving into a more certain environment. The Criminal Justice legislation will have a profound effect; additional resources are being provided, cash limits are being introduced and grant aiding powers are being promoted. By the end of the year, Areas will know their targets for the first year of the system.

The Home Office has announced that there will be no ‘nationalisation’ of the service, and that any Area amalgamations, which may be triggered by the current review of local government organisations and functions, will be voluntary. This decision was made on the principle that a service undergoing radical financial change, should not be expected to take on organisational manoeuvrings at the same time.

One or two bits of the jigsaw remain out of place – including committee restructuring and RMIS development. Both are important if the service is to be managed effectively. Hitherto committees have been too large to provide the necessary strategic

ACOP SURVEY OF VIEWS TOWARDS AUDITS

A poll of CPOs revealed that a majority of audits were thought to have been worthwhile.
Auditors have agreed a set of actions with the service at a local level and, subject to resource availability, they will be checking progress in subsequent audit rounds.

Against this background the immediate task for the service should be to 'bed in' the many developments that have taken place. A number of Areas and a number of teams within other Areas have some way to go to reach the levels achieved by their counterparts. Some parts of the service are little changed from the 1970s. Some 20% of areas have not yet applied risk of custody scales to facilitate the targeting of their activity. In others the links to other agencies in the criminal justice system need to be improved and, more widely, the spread of good practice requires more effort. Better local publicity is also required in some areas.

Some areas also need to make their management systems more effective. Staff assessment needs to focus more on staff development, the basis of central establishment charges from local authorities needs to be clarified and information needs to be developed more as a local resource. A foundation to much resource management is the development of simple time recording systems. Indeed all of these management developments require wider application of simple approaches rather than the development of more complex systems.

In general, therefore, senior management should concentrate on reaching those parts of the service that others have not so far reached. This is a particular challenge for the larger probation areas where the distance from the front line to headquarters is that much greater.