



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Bedfordshire Police's response to the funding challenge

July 2013

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Bedfordshire Police: Executive Summary

Bedfordshire Police faces a difficult challenge. It has lower than average funding and a complex crime challenge compared to most forces of its size. As a small force, it also has limited opportunities for economies of scale.

The force has responded well to the funding challenge, developing a comprehensive programme of change and pursuing an extensive collaboration¹ with Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire Constabularies, and now progressing further collaboration in business support services with Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

Bedfordshire Police has performed well to achieve an above average reduction in crime over the spending review period. Having taken the range of steps HMIC would expect any force to take to become efficient and effective, Bedfordshire may soon struggle to identify where further savings can come from, with little option but to cut frontline police officer numbers further.

HMIC has concerns about the force's ability to maintain its service to the public when faced with further budget reductions in 2015/16.

Financial challenge

Bedfordshire Police has identified that it needs to save £19.4m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015).

This savings requirement is 16% of its overall budget, which is broadly in line with most other forces. However, HMIC considers that Bedfordshire Police faces a more difficult challenge than other forces. This is because it is already a low-cost force, it spends less on policing, and its officer costs are lower than in other forces. It is a small force with low financial reserves² and a challenging crime mix, which gives it limited room for manoeuvre.

Progress in making savings

Bedfordshire Police has planned how to save £20.3m by March 2015, which will deliver an expected savings surplus of £0.9m³. Given its success in making savings to date, HMIC expects the force to achieve its target.

1 HMIC defines collaboration as *“all activity where two or more parties work together to achieve a common goal, which includes inter force activity and collaboration with the public and private sectors, including outsourcing and business partnering”*.

2 Reserves are funds often used to pay for unforeseen events and balance liabilities.

3 The amount to save may not add up to the total due to rounding.

Changes to the workforce

All forces spend most of their money on staff costs (such as wages and overtime), and have had to reduce this expenditure in order to cut costs.⁴ Bedfordshire Police is no exception.

The force is reducing police officer numbers by limiting recruitment and holding vacancies. As a result, by the end of the spending review period, it plans to have 223 (18%) fewer police officers in Bedfordshire Police. This is a greater reduction than in most other forces, and means by March 2015 there will be just over 1,020 police officers keeping the people of Bedfordshire safe. This is a very thin 'blue line'.

Bedfordshire Police is protecting frontline posts as it makes these cuts. This is commendable. Between March 2010⁵ and March 2015, the proportion of police officers in frontline crime-fighting roles is planned to increase from 88% to 94%. This compares to an overall increase across England and Wales from 89% to 93%.

The force has also made some police staff redundant, and not replaced others as they have left. As a result, by the end of the spending review period, there will be 113 fewer police staff in the force. The number of police staff will reduce by 13% between March 2010 and March 2015. This is smaller reduction than that planned by most other forces.

Bedfordshire Police has protected the number of its police community support officers (PCSOs). The force will lose eight PCSOs (7%); which is a smaller reduction than that planned by most other forces.

Impact on the public

HMIC expects forces to make savings without damaging the policing service that the people of Bedfordshire receive. We monitor whether forces are achieving this by looking at recorded crime rates, and at the results of the victim satisfaction surveys which all forces conduct.

Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime⁶ (excluding fraud) fell by 18% in Bedfordshire. This is a good outcome, as it is considerably greater than the 13% reduction recorded across England and Wales as a whole. Victim satisfaction, however, remains at 82.1%,⁷ which is lower than in other forces.

Future challenges

Bedfordshire Police has made good progress in meeting its financial challenge. It has developed a detailed change programme which allows it to reduce costs while continuing to fight crime.

4 See *Adapting to Austerity*, HMIC, London, July 2011, p.13. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

5 We use 2010 as our baseline as many forces started to make staff reductions in anticipation of the spending review.

6 Crime excluding fraud as per the new classifications release in July 2013 by the Office for National Statistics publication.

7 $\pm 1.2\%$.

Plans for delivering further savings for 2015/16 were dependent on widening the collaboration with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Constabularies to include business support functions. Although this now will not proceed as originally planned (through no fault of Bedfordshire's own), the force is strongly committed to continuing to work with Cambridgeshire Constabulary to reduce their joint support costs further. At the time of HMIC's inspection, the force was making rapid progress to develop a revised savings plan; but understandably there was still more work to do.

Collaboration can help Bedfordshire provide sound business support and operational support services (e.g. criminal justice units). However, the local policing service in Bedfordshire is at risk of being cut further in the future, as PCSOs are already the mainstay of the neighbourhood policing teams.

The force is fast approaching the position where it has exhausted the options it has for reducing its costs. There are very limited opportunities to further reduce expenditure after March 2015 without resorting to making significant cuts to frontline local policing. There is a danger that the service to the public will suffer as a result. HMIC will revisit Bedfordshire in the autumn to assess its progress in developing options to respond to future funding reductions.

The challenge

Over the four years of the spending review, Bedfordshire Police has identified that it needs to find savings of £19.4m. This is 16% of its total expenditure⁸ (which in 2012/13 was £110.1m). The amount to be saved by forces across England and Wales is 17%.

Progress in making savings: Years 1–2

The force successfully made 59% (£11.5m) of the total savings required by March 2015 in the first two years of the spending review period. It achieved this by:

- not recruiting any new police officers;
- reducing the number of police staff it employs (which it started to do in 2010);
- holding vacancies; and
- restructuring how the force delivers services through three community and partnerships teams, which now match geographic areas of the three local authorities in Bedfordshire (Bedford, Central Bedford, and Luton).

All of this activity generated a substantial under spend, which went towards building up the force's low reserves.

Plans for Year 3–4

The force has plans in place to achieve further savings of £4.5m in 2013/14, and another £4.3m in 2014/15. This represents an expected over saving of £0.9m at the end of the spending review period

Looking beyond the current spending review

The force has started to consider what savings it might need to make in the next spending review period (after March 2015).

As a small force, Bedfordshire Police has more limited opportunities for economies of scale. It is looking ahead to future collaboration opportunities with Cambridgeshire Constabulary. Although the force is heavily reliant on collaboration to deliver savings, it has also undertaken an internal business services review, aimed at improving its own ways of working. There is widespread enthusiasm for collaboration across Bedfordshire Police, but an acknowledgement that collaboration alone is unlikely to deliver the scale of savings that the force might need to achieve.

⁸ Based on a baseline gross expenditure in 2010/11.

The scale of the challenge in Bedfordshire Police

Bedfordshire Police faces a more difficult challenge than most other forces. Although it has a below average spending challenge, it has very limited room for manoeuvre, because:

- it spends less per head of population than most other forces in England and Wales, so is already low cost;
- it has a lower number of police officers per head of population than most other forces in England and Wales;
- as a small force, it has less opportunity to find internal economies of scale; and
- the cost of police officers per head of population is lower than most other forces in England and Wales (although the cost of police staff and PCSOs is broadly in line with others).

Demand

Forces face different levels of demand for the service they provide to the public. This section looks at three of the key indicators of demand to provide an overall impression of the challenges each force faces:

- the number of calls the force receives from the public;
- the number of crimes the force deals with; and
- the number of prosecutions (suspects charged with offences) the force brings.

12 months to March 2013	Bedfordshire Police	England and Wales
Emergency and priority calls per 1,000 population	83	134
Victim-based crime per 1,000 population	50.8	54.5
Prosecutions (charges) per 1,000 population	8.6	10.2

This table shows that in 2012/13, Bedfordshire Police received fewer emergency and priority calls from the public than other forces. This is not surprising given the size of the force. It dealt with fewer crimes per head of population, and supported fewer prosecutions.

The force has an unusual crime profile, which skews demand towards the south of the county in Luton. The types of policing challenges that the force faces in Luton are similar to those faced by much larger (and often better resourced) forces in large metropolitan environments. The force has to deal with serious and complex crimes, often perpetrated by gangs and organised crime groups. With a diverse population within the county, the force invests in a wide range of initiatives to build harmonious communities. Bedfordshire is frequently the location for public assemblies and marches, both of which place metropolitan demands on a small force.

How difficult is the challenge?

We assess that Bedfordshire Police faces a more difficult challenge than many other forces, because it is a small force with a challenging crime mix.

Response to the challenge

Over 80% of the police budget (on average) is spent on staff costs.⁹ It is therefore not surprising that forces across England and Wales plan to achieve much of their savings by reducing the number of police officers, police community support officers (PCSOs) and police staff employed.

Bedfordshire Police is no exception. It made an early start in 2010, when it slowed its recruitment of new police officers and police staff. The force plans to make 69% of its savings in this spending review period from its pay budget. This is a lower proportion than most other forces, and is a good indicator that the force is doing as much as it can to protect its crime-fighting capacity bearing down instead on what it spends on goods and services.

Changes to workforce numbers

The following table shows the force's planned changes to workforce numbers over the spending review period, and compares these to the change for England and Wales.¹⁰

	31 March 2010 (baseline)	31 March 2015	Change	Bedfordshire change %	England and Wales change %
Police Officers	1,246	1,023	-223	-18%	-11%
Police Staff	880	767	-113	-13%	-16%
PCSOs	116	108	-8	-7%	-17%
Total	2,243	1,898	-345	-15%	-13%
Specials	210	313	+103	+49%	+60%

Bedfordshire Police plans to lose more police officers than other forces, although it will lose fewer police staff and PCSOs.

Reductions in the number of police staff and PCSO posts are now less than the force reported to HMIC last year. The force originally predicted an 18% reduction in police staff numbers, and a 24% reduction in PCSOs. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire, elected in November 2012, has pledged to protect the number of PCSOs. He considers that they have a crucial role in delivering neighbourhood policing, which is provided through PCSO-only teams, supervised by sergeants.

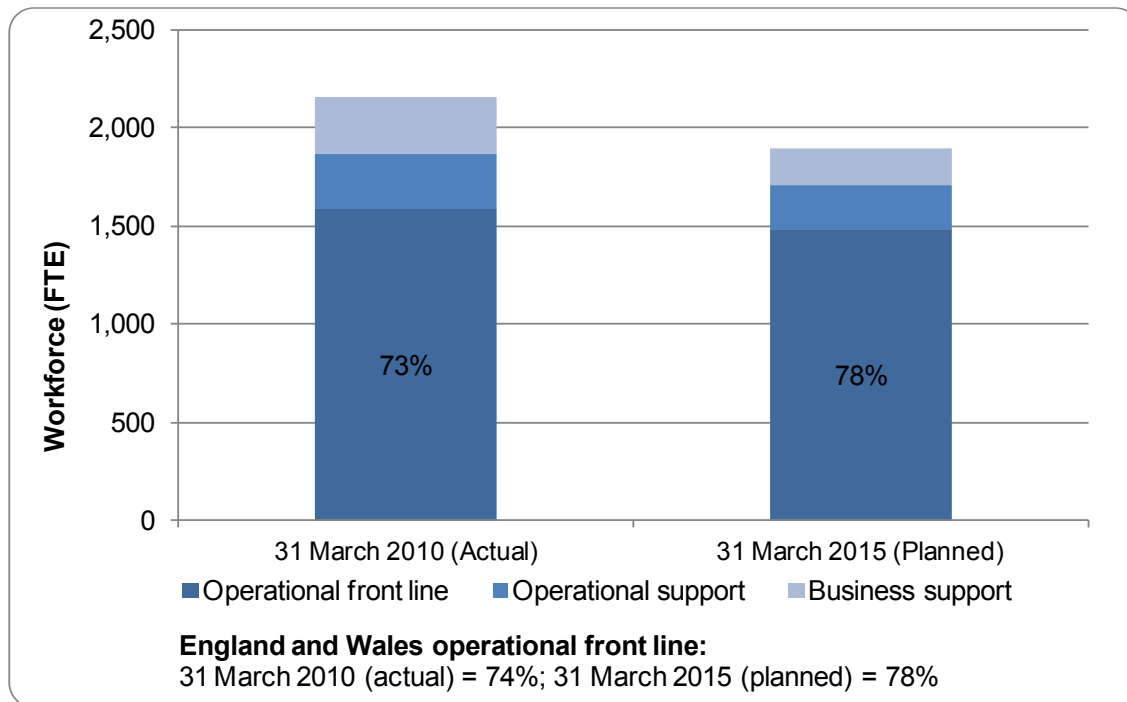
⁹ See *Adapting to Austerity*, HMIC, London, July 2011, p.13. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

¹⁰ Workforce figures for March 2010 show the actual number of people working for the force in permanent posts on the 31 March in that year. People on long-term absences (such as maternity leave) are included in these 'actual' figures, but vacant posts are not. Workforce projections for March 2015 are for budgeted posts, so the actual number of people who will be working for the force at that point in reality may be different, because some posts will be vacant or filled by temporary staff. Forces' projections may also exclude people who will be on long-term absences. The difference between actual workforce numbers and projected numbers should therefore be taken as an approximate expected change.

Changes to the proportion of workforce on the front line

HMIC defines the people who work on the police frontline as: “those who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law”. It is important that as forces reconfigure their structures and reduce workforce **numbers**, they focus on maintaining (or if possible increasing) the **proportion** of people in these crime-fighting roles.

The following chart shows the change in the workforce frontline profile in Bedfordshire Police.¹¹

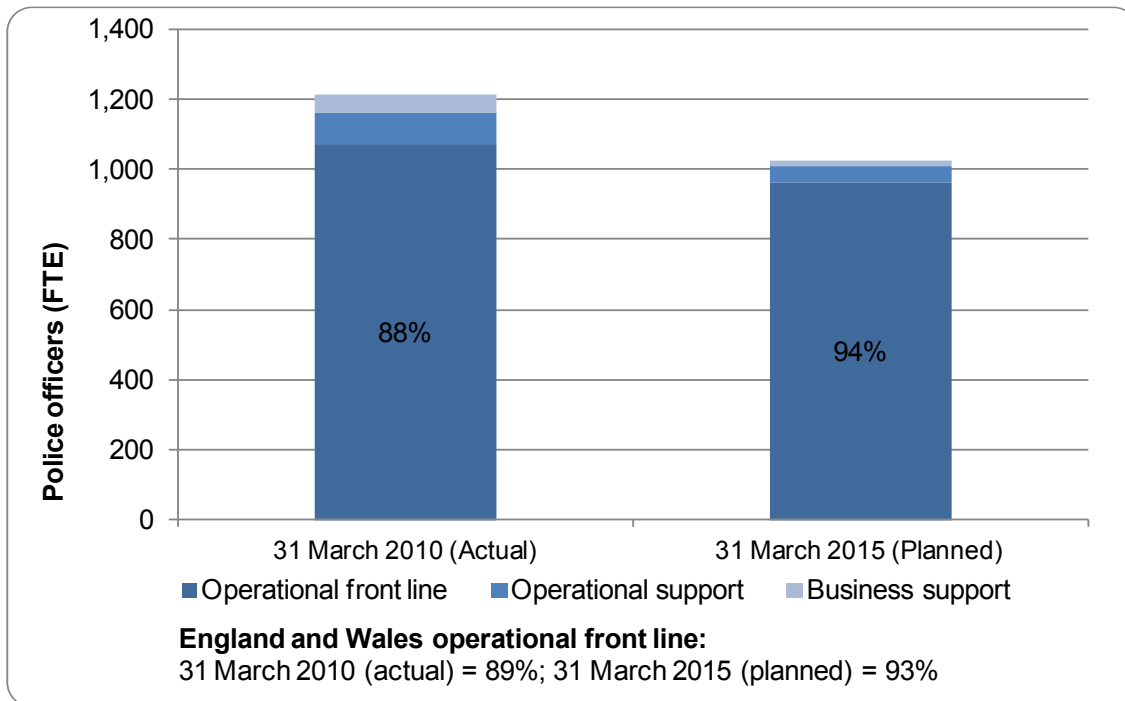


The **number** of officers, PCSOs and staff (i.e. the force’s total workforce) working on Bedfordshire Police’s front line is planned to reduce by 6% between March 2010 and March 2015 (from 1,583 to 1,486).

Over the same period, the **proportion** of Bedfordshire Police’s total workforce allocated to frontline roles is planned to increase from 73% to 78%. This is a strong indication that the force is working hard to protect its vital frontline staff as best it can. By comparison to the overall figures across England and Wales, where the frontline increases from 74% to 78%, the force is doing well.

¹¹ From 2010 Gwent, the Metropolitan Police Service, Wiltshire and North Wales police forces chose to code those officers and staff who are on long-term absence from duty due to maternity/paternity leave, career break, full-time education or suspension, and those on long-term leave, to their normal working role. This has the effect of increasing their workforce and frontline figures by up to 1%, compared to other forces.

The **number** of Bedfordshire’s police officers in frontline roles is planned to reduce by 10% from 1,070 in March 2010 to 962 in March 2015. However, the **proportion** of Bedfordshire’s police officers remaining on the front line will increase from 88% to 94% (as can be seen on the following chart). Once again, this is a strong indication that the force is protecting its frontline, and compares favourably to the increase (from 89% to 93%) that we see across England and Wales.



Collaboration

HMIC monitors forces’ progress on collaboration¹² because it offers the opportunity to deliver more efficient and effective policing.

There is clear enthusiasm for collaboration across the force, from the most junior to the most senior staff. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is committed to exploiting the saving opportunities that collaboration presents. Not only does he plan to extend collaboration with Cambridgeshire Constabulary, but he also sees the potential benefits of collaborating with other partners outside of policing.

Bedfordshire Police has well-established joint arrangements with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire Constabularies. The three forces jointly deliver a range of protective services, including police dogs, firearms and major crime teams.

In 2012, the three forces were exploring how they could expand their collaboration to include business support functions, in order to achieve greater savings. However, shortly before HMIC began this inspection, the Hertfordshire PCC decided to withdraw from the proposed business support collaboration. While this will inevitably limit the potential economies of scale, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire are continuing to develop plans for future collaboration in business support.

¹² HMIC defines collaboration as “all activity where two or more parties work together to achieve a common goal, which includes inter force activity and collaboration with the public and private sectors, including outsourcing and business partnering”.

Bedfordshire's savings plans are heavily reliant on collaboration. There is now increased uncertainty as to the scale of the savings that can be achieved.

For understandable reasons, at the time of the HMIC inspection Bedfordshire Police was unable to provide detailed information on how much it would save through collaboration in 2014/15. Overall, the force plans to achieve 25% of its savings requirement through collaboration during this spending review period, which is higher than the 7% figure for England and Wales.

Managing change

Reductions in police budgets have inevitably led to a shrinking workforce. HMIC expects forces also to have an eye within their change programmes on the longer term transformation¹³ which can help maintain or improve the service they offer to the public as they prepare for future funding reductions.

Bedfordshire Police has done a wider range of things to cut its costs than many other forces. It has a comprehensive change programme in place to deliver savings, and that programme is well managed. The steps the force has taken (or is taking) to reduce its costs include:

- an effective budget challenge programme, aimed at controlling costs;
- reshaping local policing so it aligns with local authority areas, to encourage partnership working and solutions to crime and anti-social behaviour;
- looking carefully at how it can cut waste and bureaucracy from its internal processes, freeing up police officer and staff time to better serve the public; and
- working with partners (like local authorities) to reduce the offending of those causing the most harm to the public. The force has experimented with the use of voluntary tagging as a means of preventing re-offending. Early results show this to be a cost-effective scheme.

How is the force engaging police officers, PCSOs and staff in the change programme?

Bedfordshire Police has explained the need for change to its staff well. They understand why savings must be made and are committed to working hard to maintain a good service to the public. However, there was some uncertainty amongst staff relating to the impending changes to the chief officer team and, in particular, a worry that this might lead to a change of direction.

Police staff and officers felt well informed about, and able to influence, the change programme through workshops, personal involvement in the programme, and having been given the opportunity to ask questions of senior management. There was some concern that there had been less information provided more recently. Staff associations

¹³ Transformation is a process of radical change that orientates an organisation in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness. It implies a fundamental change of character, with little or no resemblance to the past configuration or structure.

felt that although the force had provided a reasonable amount of information, they were less satisfied that their views had been fully considered.

Many of the changes have had significant implications for individual members of staff (for example, the change to shift patterns). Police officers reported that they feel overly stretched and on occasions not in a position to give the best possible service to the public. The force recognises this concern and is reviewing the position.

How effective has the response been?

The force's response to the funding challenge has been well managed and led.

Impact of the changes on the public

The challenge for forces is not just to save money and reduce their workforce numbers, but to ensure the choices they make in deciding how to achieve this do not have a negative impact on the service they provide to their communities. HMIC therefore looked for evidence that the force has kept a consideration of the effect on the public at the heart of their choices.

Visibility

The work done by police officers and staff in visible roles (such as officers who respond to 999 calls, deal with serious road traffic collisions or patrol in neighbourhoods) represents only a part of the policing picture. Chief constables need to allocate resources to many other areas to protect the public, such as counter terrorism, serious and organised crime, and child protection (to name just three).

That being said, research shows that the public value seeing visible police officers on patrol on the streets, and that those who see police in uniform at least once a week are more likely to have confidence in their local force.¹⁴ HMIC therefore examined how far the changes being implemented by the force has affected the visibility of the police on the streets of Bedfordshire.

In 2013, Bedfordshire Police allocated 50% of its police officers to visible roles. This is the same percentage as it allocated in 2010, and is lower than the figure for most other forces (which is 54% across England and Wales).

Police visibility is further enhanced by PCSOs who, in Bedfordshire, deliver community policing. Looking at the proportion of police officers and PCSOs, Bedfordshire Police allocated 54% to visible roles. This is the same percentage as it allocated in 2010; and is again lower than the England and Wales average of 59%.

HMIC conducted a survey¹⁵ of the public across England and Wales to assess whether they had noticed any difference in the way their area is being policed. Of those people surveyed in Bedfordshire, 9%¹⁶ said that they have seen a police officer more often than they had 12 months ago; this is broadly in line with the 13% average across all survey respondents in England and Wales.

Of those people surveyed, 67%¹⁷ said they felt either as safe or safer in the areas where they live, compared with two years ago. This is lower than the figure for most other forces, which is 75%.

¹⁴ See *Demanding Times*, HMIC, London, 2011. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

¹⁵ The YouGov survey was carried out during a four-week period during March 2013. Satisfaction and confidence surveys are also carried out at a national level by the Crime Survey of England and Wales. These use larger sample sizes and are carried out quarterly over a rolling-year period. Some forces also carry out their own surveys of the general public. More information can be found at www.crimesurvey.co.uk, www.hmic.gov.uk or from force websites.

¹⁶ ±5%.

¹⁷ ±5%.

Calls for service

HMIC examined whether police forces are taking longer to respond to calls for help, as a result of their workforce reductions and other changes designed to save money. Forces are not required to set response times or targets, and are free to determine their own arrangements for monitoring attendance to calls, so information between forces is not comparable.

Between 2010/11 and 2012/13, Bedfordshire Police maintained the same target response times. Calls classed as 'emergency' should be responded to within 15 minutes; calls classed as 'priority' within 30 minutes.

Over that period, the force met its target response time for 'emergency' calls 82% of the time in 2010/11, 85% of the time in 2011/12, and 83% of the time in 2012/13.

For 'priority' calls, the force met its target 74% of the time in 2010/11, 78% of the time in 2011/12, and 81% of the time in 2012/13.

This is an improving picture over the last three years, and a good result for the force.

Crime

In 2010 the Home Secretary, Theresa May, set a clear priority for the police service to reduce crime.

During the first two years of the spending review, Bedfordshire Police reduced recorded crime (excluding fraud) by 18%. This compares favourably with the 13% reduction seen across England and Wales.

Compared to other forces, Bedfordshire achieved one of the highest reductions seen during the period. Victim-based crime (that is, crimes where there is a direct victim – an individual, a group, or an organisation) reduced by 18%, compared with 12% in England and Wales.

By looking at how many crimes occur per head of population, we can see how safe it is for the public in that police area. The table below shows crime and anti-social behaviour rates in Bedfordshire (per head of population) compared with the rest of England and Wales.

12 months to March 2013	Rate per 1,000 population in Bedfordshire	England and Wales rate per 1,000 population
All Crime (excluding fraud)	56.4	61.4
Victim-based crime	50.8	54.5
Burglary	8.0	8.2
Violence against the person	9.8	10.6
Anti-social behaviour incidents	45.1	40.7

The force reports that it is continuing to improve performance following the implementation of the new operational policing model in October 2012, with particularly strong improvements in reducing crimes of violence and violence with injury.

It is important that crimes are effectively investigated and the perpetrator identified and brought to justice. When sufficient evidence is available to identify who has committed a crime, it can be described as detected.

Bedfordshire Police's sanction detection¹⁸ rate (for crimes excluding fraud) for the 12 months to March 2013 is 25.2%. This is below with the England and Wales sanction detection rate of 27.0%.

We have chosen these types of crime to give an indication of offending levels in Bedfordshire. For information on the frequency of other kinds of crimes in your area go to www.hmic.gov.uk/crime-and-policing-comparator.

Victim satisfaction surveys

An important measure of the impact of changes to service delivery for the public is how satisfied victims are with the overall service they receive when they seek police assistance.

In the 12 months to March 2013, 82.1%¹⁹ of victims were satisfied with the overall service provided by Bedfordshire Police. This is lower than the England and Wales figure of 84.6%.²⁰

The force is aware that it needs to work to improve the rates of victim satisfaction across the county, and this is a priority area for the force.

Changes to how the public can access services

Forces are exploring different ways in which the public can access policing services. Bedfordshire Police is maintaining its number of police stations and front counters.²¹ At the time of inspection, the force was developing plans to reconfigure its buildings and premises it uses, which may include police stations and front counters. In the medium to longer term Bedfordshire sees opportunities to partner with the local authority as part of the force's strategy to maintain a physical presence in the community.

The force is making greater use of the internet and social media to communicate with the public. As more and more people become accustomed to engaging with large commercial and public organisations in different ways, the force is planning to offer the public different ways to contact them. For example, it is:

- continuing with its appointments system, which sees officers visit the public at times agreed by them for non-urgent matters. Last year, the force scheduled 14,000 appointments, which helps with planning and enables the force to ensure it has as many staff as possible available to help the public at the busiest times; and
- developing greater use of online reporting and crime tracking.

¹⁸ A sanction detection is a 'solved crime' where a suspect has been identified and notified as being responsible for committing that crime and what the full implications of this are, and has received an official sanction. Official sanctions include charges, cautions, penalty notices, offences taken into consideration (TICs) and cannabis warnings.

¹⁹ ± 1.2%.

²⁰ ± 0.2%.

²¹ A police building open to the general public to obtain face-to-face access to police services.

Conclusion

Bedfordshire Police has responded well to the funding challenge, and is on track to meet its savings requirement. Within its change programme, it has undertaken most of the activity HMIC would expect a force to do in order to reduce its costs and deliver savings while protecting the front line and maintaining service delivery.

However, the options open to Bedfordshire to deliver further savings are increasingly few. While the force continues to work to identify further cost savings through collaboration, there are limits to what this can deliver, and it will become ever more difficult to continue to protect frontline police officer numbers. HMIC has concerns about the force's ability to maintain its service to public when faced with continuing funding reductions. We will revisit the force in the autumn to assess its approach for long-term savings options, and continue to monitor progress closely.

In October 2010, the Government announced that central funding to the Police Service in England and Wales would reduce by 20% in the four years between March 2011 and March 2015.

HMIC's Valuing the Police Programme has tracked how forces are planning to make savings to meet this budget demand each year since summer 2011. This report identifies what we found in this third year.

Our inspection focused on three questions:

1. How is the force responding to the budget reduction?
2. What is the impact for the workforce and the public?
3. How is the force managing current and future risks?

To answer these questions, we collected data and plans from forces, surveyed the public to see if they had noticed any changes in the service they receive from the police as a result of the cuts, and conducted in-force inspections. We also interviewed the Chief Constable, Police and Crime Commissioner and the chief officer leads for finance, change, human resources and performance in each force, and held focus groups with staff and other officers.

National findings and patterns across all 43 forces are given in our thematic report, *Policing in Austerity: Rising to the Challenge*, which is available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

This report provides the findings for Bedfordshire Police.