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Cheshire Constabulary has made good progress in meeting its financial challenge, finds HMIC

Cheshire Constabulary report that they will be able to achieve the savings required and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) considers that is in a good position to move forward with further transformation to meet future challenges. The force has also been at the forefront of some innovative and constructive collaboration arrangements.

In a report published today, HMIC has found:

Progress in making savings

- Cheshire Constabulary has identified that it needs to save £36.8m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). The force has planned how it will save the whole of the £36.8m required by March 2015.
- As a proportion of its overall budget (18%) this savings requirement is broadly in line with other forces because the amount of money it receives is comparatively low, given the size of the population in Cheshire. The number of staff it employs is similar to other forces while the amount it spends on each officer is comparatively low, the amount it spends on each staff member is comparatively high compared to most other forces.

Workforce changes and protecting the front line

- The force is reducing police officer numbers by limiting recruitment and holding vacancies and as a result, by the end of the spending review period, it is planned there will be 241 fewer police officers in the force. This means the number of police officers is planned to reduce by 11% between March 2010 and March 2015. This is a similar reduction to most other forces.
- There is evidence that the force is successfully protecting frontline posts as it makes these cuts. Between March 2010 and March 2015, the proportion of police officers in frontline, crime-fighting roles is planned to increase from 89% to 93%. This compares exactly 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 (e.g. through retirements and resignations). As a result, by the end of the spending review period, it plans to have 417 fewer police staff in Cheshire Constabulary. This means the number of police staff will reduce by 27% between March 2010 and March 2015. This is considerably higher than in most other forces. The force plans to reduce the number of police community support officers (PCSOs) by 17, or 7%, which is fewer than in most other forces.

Impact on the public

- Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime (excluding fraud) fell by 10%, which is lower than the figure for England and Wales (13%).
- Victim satisfaction remains high at 88.9%, which is higher than most other forces.

Future challenges

- Cheshire Constabulary has planned how it will save the whole of the £36.8m required by March 2015. The force has now started to look beyond this spending review period and recognises that further radical transformation to its operating model will be necessary to meet the challenge of a further savings target after 2015. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has commissioned a detailed review of all activities to develop plans from 2015 to 2018.

HM Inspector of Constabulary for the Northern Region, Roger Baker, said:

“Cheshire Constabulary needs to cut spending by nearly £37m between 2011 and 2015. It already spends less on policing per head than most other forces, but it has broadly the same amount of police officers per head of population.

“HMIC is confident that the force can deliver the saving it needs, it has made a good start and has a strong track record in reducing its costs. It has been at the forefront of some innovative and constructive collaboration arrangements.

“HMIC considers that the force has a well-managed, comprehensive change programme, which balances the delivery of savings with improvements in service delivery and engages with staff across the organisation. Cheshire Constabulary is in a good position to move forward with further transformation to meet future challenges and has started a positive and ambitious programme to identify further savings.

“HMIC will continue to monitor the force for the remainder of the spending review period.”

The full report for Cheshire Constabulary, along with the national thematic review, can be found at www.hmic.gov.uk

Notes to Editors:

1. The thematic report ‘Policing in Austerity: Rising to the Challenge’ can be found at www.hmic.gov.uk
2. Victim satisfaction for this force has a confidence interval of $\pm 1.7\%$
3. HMIC’s July 2012 report ‘Policing in austerity: One year on’ and July 2011 report ‘Adapting to Austerity’ along with supporting materials can be found at www.hmic.gov.uk
4. In October 2010, the government announced that the central funding provided to the police service would reduce by 20% in the four years between March 2011 and March 2015.
5. Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest, and rigorously examines the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces to tackle crime and terrorism, improve criminal justice and raise confidence. HMIC inspects all 43 police forces in England and Wales together with other major policing bodies.
6. For further information, HMIC’s press office can be contacted during office hours from 8:30am – 5:30pm Monday – Friday on 0203 513 0600.
7. HMIC’s out-of-hours press office line for urgent media enquiries is 07836 217 729.