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Devon and Cornwall Police has made good progress in meeting its financial challenge, finds HMIC

Devon and Cornwall Police has made good progress in meeting its financial challenge and has developed a detailed change programme which will allow it to reduce costs while continuing to fight crime.

In a report published today, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has found:

Progress in making savings

- Devon and Cornwall Police has identified that it needs to save £53.5m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). The force has planned how it will save all of the £53.5m it needs by 2015.
- The force has identified that it needs to save £53.5m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). As a proportion of its overall budget (17%) this savings requirement is broadly in line with most other forces, however, HMIC considers that the force faces a difficult challenge.
- This is because the force already spends less in comparison to most other forces; it has a lower number of staff per head of population so has a comparatively lower pay bill; and the amount it spends on each officer and staff member is also lower than most other forces.

Workforce changes and protecting the front line

- 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 is planned that there will be 466 fewer police officers in the force.
- The force plans broadly to protect 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 remain the same at 93%. 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 (e.g. through retirements and resignations). As a result, by the end of the spending review period there will be 332 fewer police staff – a reduction of 16% between March 2010 and March 2015, which is broadly in line with most other forces. The force plans to decrease the number of police community support officers (PCSOs) by less than 1%, which is fewer than most other forces.

Impact on the public

- Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime (excluding fraud) fell by 2%, which is significantly less than the figure for England and Wales (13%).
- Victim satisfaction remains high at 84.4%, which is broadly in line with other forces.

Future challenges

- The force has tackled some issues arising from restructuring, which has allowed it to manage performance better.
- In addition, the force has assessed future savings requirements and is starting to plan savings to 2016/17.

HM Inspector of Constabulary for the Wales and Western Region, Dru Sharpling, said:

“Devon and Cornwall Police faces a significant challenge. It has lower than average funding and has had to make savings prior to the spending review. As a result it may struggle to protect the frontline compared with other forces.

“While overall crime levels are low, the force is challenged by a large geographic area to police and, as reported by the force, has significant increases in the population over the summer months (from 1.7m to around 11m).

“Last year, HMIC reported that the force was at risk of not delivering an efficient and effective police service to the public. Since then the force has taken a firmer grip on its change programme, altered structures that were not delivering for the public and improved performance.

“There is still work to do, but the force is in a much stronger position to manage further spending reductions.

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

The full report for Devon and Cornwall Police, 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 $\pm 1.6\%$,
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.