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Essex Police has made progress in meeting its financial challenge, finds HMIC

Essex Police has made progress in meeting its financial challenge and has developed a detailed change programme which will allow the force to reduce costs. However, the force has had to make some adjustments to its existing plan as it had adversely affected the force's ability to reduce and detect crime.

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

Progress in making savings

- Essex Police has identified that it needs to save £44m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). The force has planned how it will save £44m and therefore has no outstanding funding gap.
- This savings requirement is 14% of its overall expenditure and this is a smaller proportionate reduction than faced by most other forces.
- Essex's position is not without challenge as it has below average spend on policing per head of population compared with other forces in England and Wales, so it will be harder to drive out further savings.

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, there will be 370 fewer police officers in Essex. This means the number of police officers is planned to reduce by 10% between March 2010 and March 2015; which is broadly in line with the reduction in most other forces.
- Essex Police is protecting frontline posts as it makes these cuts. This is commendable. Between March 2010 and March 2015, the proportion of police officers in frontline crime-fighting roles is planned to increase from 88% to 92%. 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 2015, it is planned that there will be 404 fewer police staff in Essex Police. This means the number of police staff is expected to reduce by 19% between March 2010 and March 2015; this is a bigger reduction than is planned by most other forces.
- Essex Police is not protecting the number of police community support officers (PCSO), as it plans to decrease the number by 83 (19%); which is a greater reduction than that planned by most other forces.

Impact on the public

- Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime (excluding fraud) fell by 3% in Essex. This is considerably lower than the 13% reduction recorded across England and Wales as a whole.
- Victim satisfaction with the service received is at 79.5%, which is again lower than in other forces.

Future challenges

- Essex Police has made progress in meeting its financial challenge and has developed a detailed change programme which will allow the force to reduce costs. However, the force has had to make some adjustments to its existing plan as it had adversely affected the force's ability to reduce and detect crime.

HM Inspector of Constabulary for the Eastern Region, Zoë Billingham, said:

“Essex Police has a smaller savings requirement compared to other forces. However, it has one of the lowest levels of spend on policing and has correspondingly fewer officers per head of population. This presents a challenge for the force; in order to close its funding gap and achieve greater efficiencies Essex has had to work harder than other forces.

“Essex Police has made progress in meeting its financial challenge. However, there has been an adverse impact on the service it provides to the public as a result of some of the changes it has made. This is now being addressed.

“The force has well established collaboration arrangements, particularly with Kent Police. It is delivering a higher proportion of its savings requirement through collaboration when compared to other forces, which is commendable.

“Maintaining a high standard of policing has recently been a challenge for the force. The new Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner are fully aware of this issue and are already taking steps to improve the service delivered to the people of Essex.

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

The full report for Essex 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 $\pm 1.7\%$
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. HMIC's out-of-hours press office line for urgent media enquiries is 07836 217 729.