



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Essex Police's response to the funding challenge

July 2013

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Essex Police: Executive summary

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, having saved 73% of the amount it must find by March 2015. 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 collaboration¹ 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.

Financial challenge

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).

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.

Progress in making savings

Essex Police has planned how it will save £44m and therefore has no outstanding funding gap.

Changes to the workforce

All forces spend most of their money on staff costs (such as wages and overtime), and so have focused on reducing this expenditure in order to cut costs.² Essex Police is no exception.

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

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 2010³ 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

HMIC expects forces to make savings without damaging the service provided to the public. We monitor whether they are achieving this by examining crime rates and the results of the victim satisfaction surveys which all forces conduct.

Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime⁴ (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%,⁵ which is again lower than in other forces. The new Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) are aware of these issues and have steps in place to improve the service delivered to the public.

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.

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

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

5 ± 1.7%.

The challenge

Over the four years of the spending review (March 2011 to March 2015), Essex Police has identified that it needs to find savings of £44.0m. This is 14% of its total expenditure⁶ (which in 2012/13 was £301.9m). The average amount to be saved by forces across England and Wales is 17%.

Progress in making savings: Years 1–2

The force successfully made 73% (£32.1m) 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); and
- moving to a new policing model where all services apart from neighbourhood policing are centrally delivered and managed.

This has enabled the force to make considerable savings and maintain the frontline.

Plans for Year 3–4

The force has plans in place to achieve further savings of £6.6m in 2013/14, and another £5.3m in 2014/15 and therefore has no outstanding funding gap.

Looking beyond the current spending review

The force has started to consider what savings it might need to make in the next spending review (after March 2015): in fact the force's medium-term financial plan looks further forward, to 2015/16.

The challenge for Essex Police in preparing for future funding pressures will be much greater if the existing savings plans are not achieved or they take longer to deliver.

The scale of the challenge in Essex

Although the requirement for savings is lower than in other forces, Essex Police nonetheless faces a particular challenge because:

- it spends less per head of population than most other forces in England and Wales;
- it has a lower number of police officers per head of population than most other forces in England and Wales; and
- the cost of police officers and police staff per head of population is lower than most other forces in England and Wales.

⁶ Based on a baseline of gross expenditure in 2010/11.

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	Essex Police	England and Wales
Emergency and priority calls per 1,000 population	91	134
Victim-based crime per 1,000 population	51.2	54.5
Prosecutions (charges) per 1,000 population	8.8	10.2

Essex Police receives fewer emergency and priority calls per head of population from the public than most other forces. In addition it deals with fewer crimes per head of population and supports fewer prosecutions.

How difficult is the challenge?

Although the overall savings requirement for Essex Police is lower than for most forces, it still faces a considerable challenge.

Response to the challenge

Over 80% of a police budget (on average) is spent on staff costs,⁷ 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, PCSOs and police staff employed.

Essex Police is no exception. It made an early start on this in 2010, when it slowed its recruitment of new police officers and police staff, and reduced the number of police staff. The force plans to make 74% of its savings from its pay budget. This is broadly similar to most other forces showing that the force is bearing down on both pay costs and on expenditure 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 Wales⁸.

	31 March 2010 (baseline)	31 March 2015	Change	Essex Police change %	Change for England and Wales %
Police Officers	3,606	3,236	-370	-10%	-11%
Police Staff	2,152	1,748	-404	-19%	-16%
PCSOs	445	362	-83	-19%	-17%
Total	6,202	5,346	-856	-14%	-13%
Specials	682	550	-132	-19%	+60%

Overall, the table shows that Essex Police plans to lose a slightly lower number of police officers compared to other forces; but will lose more police staff and PCSOs than other forces across England and Wales.

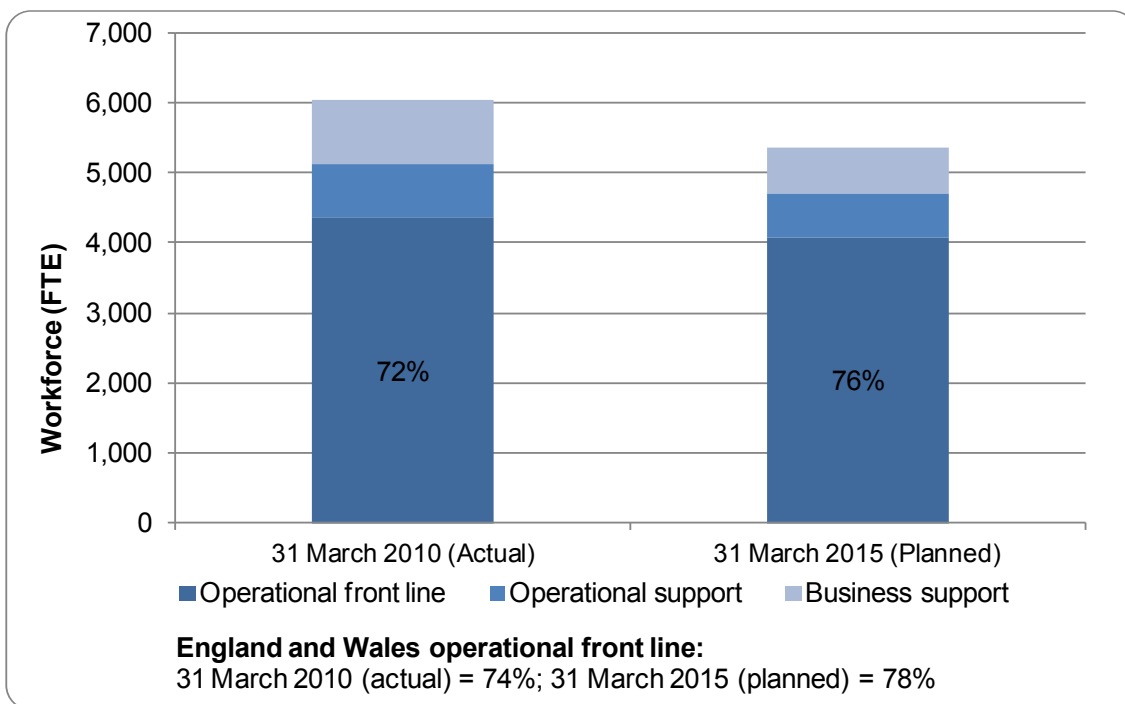
Changes to the proportion of workforce on the front line

HMIC defines the people who work on the police front line 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.

⁷ See *Adapting to Austerity*, HMIC, London, July 2011, p.13. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

⁸ 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.

The following chart shows the change in the workforce frontline profile in Essex Police.⁹

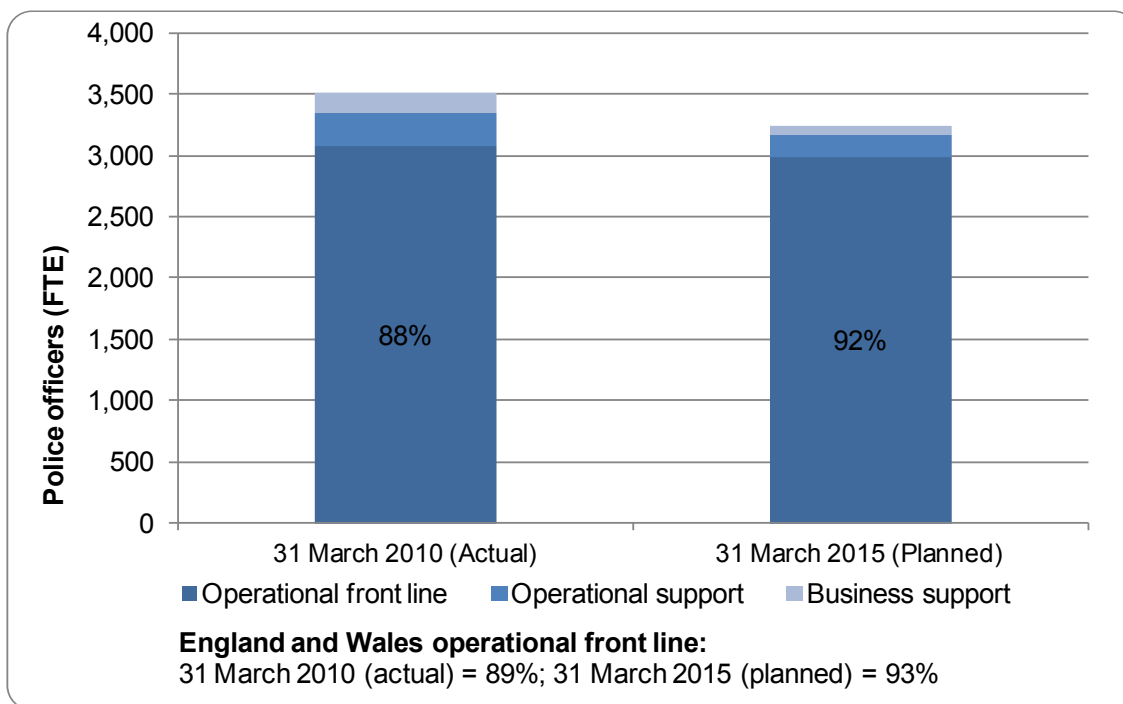


The **number** of officers, PCSOs and staff (i.e. of the force’s total workforce) working on Essex Police’s front line is planned to reduce by 6% between March 2010 and March 2015 (from 4,350 to 4,082).

Over the same period, the **proportion** of Essex Police’s total workforce allocated to frontline roles is planned to increase from 72% to 76%. This compares with an overall increase across England and Wales from 74% to 78%.

The **number** of Essex’s police officers in front line roles will reduce by 3% from 3,075 in March 2010 to 2,990 in March 2015, as the chart on the next page shows. The **proportion** of those remaining on the front line is planned to increase from 88% to 92%. This is a strong indicator that the force is taking steps to protect vital front line officers and is broadly comparable to the increase (from 89% to 93%) that we see across England and Wales.

⁹ 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 inflating their workforce and frontline figures by up to 1% compared to other forces.



Collaboration

HMIC monitors a force's progress on collaboration¹⁰ because it offers the opportunity to deliver efficient, effective policing and help achieve savings.

Essex Police has a well developed programme of collaboration with other forces, particularly Kent Police. There are well established structures and processes to manage these projects. A number of collaborations, such as those on serious crime and IT, are already in place and delivering financial benefits as well as improvements in capacity, capability and resilience. The two forces are in the process of implementing collaborative arrangements across all areas of support services e.g. human resources and finance.

In 2014/15 the force expects to spend 20% of its total expenditure on collaboration, which is considerably higher than the 11% figure for England and Wales. Overall, collaboration is expected to contribute to 17% of the force's savings requirement, which is higher than the 7% figure for England and Wales. This is a good outcome for the force. It is also an indicator of the success of working in partnership with Kent to provide policing services and driving out more savings than the forces could achieve on their own.

The election of PCCs in November 2012 has provided fresh impetus to regional collaboration. The PCC in Essex remains committed to the established collaboration with Kent, but is also keen to consider the potential benefits from wider collaboration opportunities, potentially across both the Eastern and South Eastern regions in the future.

¹⁰ 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".

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 transformation¹¹ which can help maintain or improve the service they offer to the public and prepare for future funding reductions.

Essex Police has a well established programme for delivering change. Prior to the current spending review, the focus of this was in making savings that were invested in additional frontline police officers.

Following the announcement of the spending review, the force focused on making the structural changes that it identified would be necessary to maintain or improve service delivery with a smaller workforce. The changes the force made were significant, involving the delivery of neighbourhood policing through local policing areas, while centralising all other services. At the same time, the force continued to pursue collaborative opportunities, particularly with Kent Police.

However, there were a number of teething problems with the revised local policing model, including some that impacted adversely on the forces ability to prevent and detect crime. The force realised that this was the case and has made a number of changes to the policing model as a consequence. For example, responsibility for investigating less serious, local crime was reassigned to neighbourhood teams to increase the capacity in this area and the locations of some of the bases from which response and patrol teams operated were changed.

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

Essex Police recognises that consultation with staff through the initial stages of the change programme could have been better. Although there was dialogue with the staff associations and with Unison (the main police staff trade union), HMIC found that consultation and engagement with the wider workforce was not as effective as it could have been.

Since then, the force has placed more emphasis on communicating with staff, for example through focus groups. Consideration is currently being given to the possibility of undertaking a staff survey, something that has not been done in Essex Police for a number of years.

¹¹ 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.

How effective has the response been?

Essex Police has made progress in meeting its financial challenge. The force has implemented major organisational change which, although ambitious, required adjustment early on as the new structures were not as effective as envisaged, nor did staff feel sufficiently engaged in the change. Essex has learnt from this experience, has adjusted the structures and is now looking to improve its service delivery.

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 had 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 services in order 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 in 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.¹² HMIC therefore examined how far the changes being implemented by the force had affected the visibility of the police on the streets of Essex.

In March 2013, Essex Police allocated 56% of its police officers to visible roles. This is three percentage points lower than it allocated in 2010, and is higher than the figure for most other forces (which was 54% across England and Wales).

Police visibility is further enhanced by PCSOs who principally support community policing. Looking at the proportion of police officers and PCSOs, the Essex Police allocated 59% to visible roles. This is four percentage points lower than it allocated in 2010 and is in line with the 59% figure for England and Wales.

HMIC conducted a survey¹³ of the public across England and Wales to assess whether the public had noticed any difference in the way their area is being policed. Of those people surveyed in Essex, 8%¹⁴ said that they have seen a police officer more often than they had 12 months ago; this is broadly in line¹⁵ with the 13% average across all survey respondents in England and Wales.

Of those people surveyed, 70%¹⁶ said they felt either as safe or safer in the areas where they live compared with two years ago. This is broadly in line with the figure for most other forces which is 75%.

¹² See *Demanding Times*, HMIC, London, 2011. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

¹³ A 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.

¹⁴ $\pm 5\%$.

¹⁵ Due to confidence intervals a force is considered broadly in line if it is $\pm 5\%$ the average for respondents surveyed.

¹⁶ $\pm 5\%$.

Calls for service

HMIC examined whether police forces were taking longer to respond to calls for help, as a result of its 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.

Over the three years from 2010 to present, Essex Police had maintained the same target response time of within 15 minutes for calls classed as 'emergency' (also known as grade 1) in an urban setting and within 20 minutes for calls classed as 'emergency' in a rural setting. Over the same period, calls classed as a 'priority' (also known as grade 2) had a target response time of within 60 minutes.

Over that period, the force met its target response time for urban 'emergency' calls 88% of the time in 2010/11, 84% of the time in 2011/12, and 82% of the time in 2012/13. The force also met its target response time for rural 'emergency' calls 85% of the time in 2010/11 and 84% of the time in 2011/12 and 2012/13.

In respect of 'priority' calls, the force met its target 90% of the time in 2010/11, 86% of the time in 2011/12 and 80% of the time in 2012/13.

Since its initial restructure the force has made some adjustments to where response officers are based and this may help the force to attend more of its calls within target time and halt the deterioration in how it responds to emergency and priority calls.

Crime

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

Between 2010/11 and 2012/13 (the first two years of the spending review), Essex Police reduced recorded crime (excluding fraud) by 3% compared with 13% in England and Wales. Compared to other forces, this was among the lowest reductions seen over the period. Over this period, victim-based crime (that is, crimes where there is a direct victim – an individual, a group, or an organisation) reduced by 2% 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 Essex (per head of population) compared with the rest of England and Wales.

12 months to March 2013	Rate per 1,000 population in Essex	England and Wales rate per 1,000 population
All Crime (excluding fraud)	56.3	61.4
Victim-based crime	51.2	54.5
Burglary	8.2	8.2
Violence against the person	10.3	10.6
Anti-social behaviour	32.3	40.7

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

Essex's sanction detection¹⁷ rate (for crimes excluding fraud) for the 12 months to March 2013 is 24.6%. This is below than 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 Essex. 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 on 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, 79.5%¹⁸ of victims were satisfied with the overall service provided by Essex Police. This is lower than the England and Wales figure of 84.6%.¹⁹

Changes to how the public can access services

Forces are exploring different ways in which the public can access policing services. Essex Police is planning to close 21 front counters²⁰, three shared access points²¹ and 16 police stations between 2010 and 2015. As more and more people become accustomed to engaging with large commercial and public organisations in different ways, the force too is planning to offer the public different ways to contact them. For example, Essex Police is:

- continuing to improve its use of social media channels including Twitter and Facebook; and
- starting to consider the needs of different demographic groups as it develops alternative options for accessing police services.

17 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 included are: charges, cautions, penalty notices, offences taken into consideration (TICs) and cannabis warnings.

18 ± 1.7%.

19 ± 0.2%.

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

21 A non-police building open to the general public to obtain face-to-face access to police services. For example, shared facilities with council services (e.g. libraries or offices), the fire service or other partners.

Conclusion

Essex Police faces a smaller savings requirement than other forces, but this is not without its challenge. It has developed a detailed change programme and has well established collaboration arrangements, particularly with Kent. In the first two years of the spending review the force has delivered 73% of the savings required and has plans to cover the entirety of its savings requirement.

Reductions in staff over the spending review are broadly in line with other forces, and the force is focusing on business support roles. It is taking steps to protect, as best it can, frontline police officers and staff.

Maintaining a high level of service to the public is a significant challenge for the force. The reduction in victim-based crime in Essex has been less than that seen in most forces, the detection rate is below the England and Wales average and satisfaction among victims of crimes also compares poorly with other forces.

The force has undergone considerable restructuring over the past year and implementation has not been without its difficulties. However, the force has taken action to address these issues and improvements are already evident. The arrival of the new Chief Constable and the election of the PCC brings new opportunities for improvement. Both are determined to improve the policing service provided to the people of Essex.

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 Essex Police.