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

Hertfordshire Constabulary has made good progress in meeting its financial challenge. The force is well positioned to meet future savings requirements while maintaining good performance. However, HMIC will monitor closely the impact of a recent decision to shelve some aspects of joint working with neighbouring forces.

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

Progress in making savings

- Hertfordshire Constabulary has identified that it needs to save £36.9m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). The force has planned how it will save £34.9m, it still has £2m to find.
- This savings requirement is broadly in line with most other forces and is 18% of its overall budget.
- The force financial challenge is in line with other forces. While it is a low spend and broadly low cost force there are opportunities to identify further savings, in particular where its expenditure is higher than 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 224 fewer police officers. This means the number of police officers in the county is planned to reduce by 11% between March 2010 and March 2015, which is a similar reduction to most other forces.
- The force 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 90% to 95%. 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 it is planned that there will be 274 fewer police staff. This means the number of police staff will reduce by 16% between March 2010 and March 2015; this is broadly in-line with most other forces. The force plans to reduce the number of PCSOs by 8%, which is smaller than that planned by most other forces.

Impact on the public

- Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime (excluding fraud) rates fell by 20%. This is a very good outcome as it is considerably greater than the 13% reduction recorded across England and Wales as a whole.
- Victim satisfaction remains high at 88.8%, which is higher than in most forces.

Future challenges

- Future savings plans hinged on further collaboration with Bedfordshire Police and Cambridgeshire Constabulary as well as private sector partnering (outsourcing) of business support office functions.
- The plans to take forward the business support functions on a three force collaboration basis have now been shelved. HMIC will wish to be satisfied that the decision does not impact adversely on the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in Hertfordshire. We will continue to monitor the position.

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

“Hertfordshire Constabulary has a savings requirement which is broadly in line with other forces. It has responded effectively to the funding challenge thanks to its strong and well led change programme which will allow it to reduce costs while continuing to fight crime.

“The force plans to have 95% of its officers in frontline roles by March 2015, one of the highest figures of all forces.

“The force delivers an excellent service to the public of Hertfordshire. Crime has fallen to a much greater extent than in other forces and the force records one of the highest levels of victim satisfaction in England and Wales.

“With a further round of savings to be found from March 2015, much of the force’s future change, savings and workforce plans relied on extending the collaboration with Bedfordshire Police and Cambridgeshire Constabulary. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) has recently taken the decision that the Constabulary will step away from the three force collaboration and instead pursue its own solution for business support services.

“While HMIC has confidence that the force is well placed for the future, the alternative approach that is now being developed in response to the PCC’s decision, is as yet untested. HMIC will continue to monitor the position.

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

The full report for Hertfordshire 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 $\pm 1.3\%$
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.