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Northumbria Police has made very good progress in meeting its financial challenge, finds HMIC

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is satisfied that Northumbria Police has made very good progress in reducing its spending and has continued to maintain strong performance. The force is in a good position with strong leadership to continue to deliver savings while maintaining performance.

In a report published today, HMIC has found:

Progress in making savings

- Northumbria Police has identified that it needs to save £85.1m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). The force has planned how it will save £78.0m of the £85.1m required by March 2015.
- As a proportion of its overall budget (24%) this savings requirement is one of the highest requirements for a force in England and Wales. HMIC considers that the force faces a particularly difficult challenge due to the sheer scale of this requirement and its already low spending on police staff in comparison with other forces.
- However, because the amount of money it spends on policing per head of population is higher than most other forces and it has a higher number of officers and staff, there are opportunities to reduce costs and achieve savings.

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 that there will be 643 fewer police officers in the force. This means the number of police officers is planned to reduce by 15% between March 2010 and March 2015. This is a greater reduction than in most other forces. However, the number of police officers as at March 2010 was temporarily inflated to 4,187 reflecting the workforce growth plan at that time, to support the implementation of the neighbourhood policing model.
- 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 88% to 90%. 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) and as a result, by the end of the spending review period, it is planned there will be 777 fewer police staff in the force. This means the number of police staff will reduce by 37% between March 2010 and March 2015. This is higher than in most other forces. The force also plans to reduce the number of police community support officers (PCSOs) by 44 or 10%, 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 18%, which is higher than the figure for England and Wales (13%).
- Victim satisfaction remains high at 91.7%, which is considerably higher than other forces.

Future challenges

- Northumbria Police benefits from additional government funding above its police formula allocation.
- This is an important part of the force's funding and should it be removed, phased out or reduced this would have a significant impact on the force's ability to continue to deliver policing at current levels and to make future savings.

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

"Northumbria Police has had one of the largest financial challenges to meet, compared to other forces in England and Wales. With the demands from policing both urban and rural environments and having already low spending on its workforce, in HMIC's assessment, the force faces a more difficult challenge than other forces."

"The force has so far successfully reduced its spending as well as utilised reserves it had built up from under spending in previous years and through prudent financial controls. The force has planned how it will save £78.0m of the £85.1m required by March 2015. It therefore still has £7.1m to find and the force has a number of options to close this gap including the use of existing reserves."

"The force is performing well by reducing and detecting more crime as well as maintaining its high levels of victim satisfaction. This is strong evidence that the force is managing to make cuts without reducing the service it provides to the public. The Chief Constable has been able to meet the force's funding challenge while maintaining a commitment to protect visible policing services and fighting crime. However, with future funding challenges, this may become more difficult, but the force is advancing its planning to achieve further savings for 2015 and beyond."

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

The full report for Northumbria 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 $\pm 1.0\%$
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.