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

Surrey Police has made very good progress in meeting its financial challenge. It has developed a detailed change programme, which will allow it to reduce costs while continuing to fight crime and the force has worked very hard to limit the impact of the cuts on its frontline workforce in a way very few other forces have been able to.

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

Progress in making savings

- Surrey Police has identified that it needs to save £28.4m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). The force has planned to save £27.8m and still has £0.6m to find - a small outstanding gap which is not a cause for concern.
- The savings requirement is 13% of its overall budget, which is a much smaller proportionate reduction compared to that faced by most other forces.
- However, as Surrey Police was broadly a low cost force at the beginning of this spending review, it faces a challenge to drive further efficiencies. It has had to work hard to find additional savings because it spends less on policing than most other forces and has a lower number of police officers, so has a comparatively lower pay bill. The amount it spends on each officer is below that of most other forces, although the amount it spends on police community support officers (PCSOs) and staff members is higher than other forces, and may provide opportunities for further savings.

Workforce changes and protecting the front line

- Surrey Police has found most of its savings by reorganising the workforce, reducing the number of managerial posts, streamlining support services, and collaborating with other forces.
- As a result, by the end of the spending review period, it plans to have 45 more police officers in the force – a planned increase of 2% between March 2010 and March 2015. At a time when most other forces have reduced officer numbers, this is an exception. It is commendable that Surrey Police has been able to achieve this.
- Surrey Police is protecting frontline posts as it makes these cuts. Once again, 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 94%. 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. Consequently, by the end of the spending review period, the number of police staff is planned to reduce by 109, or 5%, between March 2010 and March 2015. This is fewer than in most other forces.
- Surrey Police plans to do as much as it can to protect the number of police community support officers (PCSOs), and reports that it is maintaining its levels of

PCSOs. It is currently reviewing the neighbourhood policing model and is committed to maintaining a mix of PCSOs and officers within neighbourhoods.

Impact on the public

- Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime (excluding fraud) fell by 19%. This is a good outcome as it is considerably greater than the 13% reduction recorded across England and Wales.
- Victim satisfaction remains high at 85.8%, which is higher than in other forces.

Future challenges

- An area for improvement is in the way 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. Surrey Police's sanction detection rate (for crimes excluding fraud) is lower than in other forces. The force is aware of this and is working to improve how crimes are investigated and resolved.

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

“Surrey Police’s funding challenge is lower than most other forces. However, as a low cost force that spends less on policing compared to others, closing the funding gap is not without its challenges.”

“The force has made very good progress in meeting its financial challenge. It has developed a detailed change programme which will allow it to reduce costs while continuing to fight crime.”

“The force has worked very hard to limit the impact of the cuts on its frontline workforce in a way very few other forces have been able to. It has protected its crime fighting capability by driving cost reductions and savings in other areas. It is one of only four forces in England and Wales where the number of police officers in frontline roles is planned to increase, and the only force in which the total number of police officers will increase over the spending review period.”

“Crime in the county has fallen more than in most other force areas and satisfaction among victims of crime is above average for England and Wales. HMIC is confident that the force will be able to deliver its planned savings within this spending review and continue to fight crime.”

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

The full report for Surrey 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 $\pm 0.9\%$
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.