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West Mercia Police has made good progress in meeting its financial challenge finds HMIC

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) considers that West Mercia Police has responded well to the spending review period and has made good progress in an ambitious and ground-breaking alliance with neighbouring Warwickshire Police.

In a report published today, HMIC has found:

Progress in making savings

- West Mercia Police has identified that it needs to save £36.6m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). The force has planned how it will save £34.2m of the required amount by March 2015.
- While as a proportion of its overall budget (17%) this savings requirement is broadly in line with most other forces, HMIC considers that West Mercia Police faces a difficult challenge. This is because the amount of money it receives is comparatively low, given the size of the population in West Mercia, and it has fewer officers and staff per head of population than most other forces (so a comparatively low pay bill).
- The amount the force spends on each officer and staff member is also lower than most other forces.

Workforce changes and protecting the front line

- West Mercia Police is reducing police officer numbers by limiting recruitment and holding vacancies. As a result, by the end of the spending review period, it plans to have 343 fewer police officers in West Mercia.
- 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 92% 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 (e.g. through retirements and resignations). As a result, by the end of the spending review period, it plans to have 203 fewer police staff in West Mercia Police.
- West Mercia Police plans to decrease the number of police community support officers (PCSOs) by 33%; which is a greater reduction than most other forces.

Impact on the public

- Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime (excluding fraud) fell in West Mercia by 16%, which is greater than the figure for England and Wales (13%).
- Victim satisfaction remains high at 85.1%, which is broadly in line with other forces.

Future challenges

- West Mercia Police's funding reduction is at a similar level to other forces in England and Wales, but it already spends comparatively less on policing than the average.
- The force has formed an alliance with the neighbouring Warwickshire Police. This is one of the most extensive and ground-breaking collaborations in the country and presents significant opportunities to make savings and improve capacity, resilience and service quality.

HM Inspector of Constabulary for the Wales and Western Region, Dru Sharpling, said:

"West Mercia Police faces a similar cut to spending as other forces, but already spends less than average on policing, so may find it more difficult to cut spending further."

"It has responded well and made good progress in an ambitious and ground-breaking alliance with neighbouring Warwickshire Police. The force has plans to find all but £2.5m of the savings it needs. It has money in reserves to bridge this gap, if needed, and the alliance places it in a better position to face future challenges."

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

The full report for West Mercia 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 $\pm 1.1\%$
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.