



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Valuing the Police: Preparedness Inspection

**West Mercia Police
July 2011**

Purpose of the review

The Police Service, along with all other parts of the public sector, is facing its biggest financial challenge in a generation. This could be seen either as an opportunity to innovate and refresh – or as a reason to continue as is and see services cut back.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has been heavily involved in monitoring the Service's reaction and preparedness for cutting crime while reducing costs. As part of this, in Spring 2011 we carried out an inspection of all 43 forces and authorities in England and Wales, to assess:

- how they are planning to meet the financial challenge; and
- what the impact will be on the service they provide to the public.

This report summarises the findings for West Mercia Police. A thematic report, *Adapting to Austerity*, which brings together findings from all 43 forces, is also available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

Findings for West Mercia Police

What is the financial challenge in West Mercia?

West Mercia Police and West Mercia Police Authority reported that they are facing a **£34m** cash reduction to their budget over the four years of the comprehensive spending review period (2011/12–2014/15). In real terms (ie when inflation is taken into account), this equates to 14% of their gross revenue expenditure.

Are the force and authority prepared to meet this financial challenge?

The force and authority began planning as early as 2009 to change the way services are delivered to the public, and to make considerable savings. As part of this programme, they have already reduced the number of non-frontline police officers. They have also used carefully accumulated reserves to cushion the impact of the comprehensive spending review (CSR) budget reductions. This has given them extra time to re-design how they deliver service to their communities in a way that ensures continued performance and sustainable savings.

Since the CSR announcement in Autumn 2010, the force has displayed a clear understanding of the challenges ahead, and has considered many options in how to meet them. The force's plans adhered to tested programme management techniques, and included detailed timescales.

The force merged its CSR budget planning with the regional workforce collaboration programme in January 2011, and has been actively progressing a 'strategic alliance' with Warwickshire Police. The full details were not yet available at time of inspection, but this work had understandably slowed the overall pace of the change programme.

What will be the impact on the number of police officers and staff?

West Mercia Police planned to make the following changes to its workforce numbers.

	Police Officers	Police Staff	PCSO
31 March 2010 (actual)	2,391	1,715	279
31 March 2015 (proposed)	2,025	1,141	189

March 2010 figures have been used as the baseline, because most forces began a recruitment freeze in that year, and as a result workforce numbers started to fall. The proposed figures shown for March 2015 were provided to HMIC by the force in June 2011.

The force and authority's plans for the workforce will continue to be refined as the change programme progresses.

What will be the impact on service to the public?

The plan's emphasis was on increasing productivity, more efficient tasking and briefing, improving customer service, and making better use of resources. It focused on maintaining frontline flexibility (especially among response and neighbourhood officers). West Mercia Police aimed to ensure that the public will not notice any reduction in the service they receive from the force over the CSR period. This is stretching, given the number of staff and officer vacancies at the time of inspection.

The force has had a strategy for updating the public and partner agencies in place since September 2009. Public consultation evenings were held in January 2011, and the force and authority have conducted radio interviews and streamed a live webcast about policing priorities and the impact of the cuts. West Mercia Police clearly understood the priorities and expectations of its community, and public feedback had been collected but had not yet shaped the change programme to a significant degree.

Does the force have targets to reduce crime and ASB?

The first job of the police is to reduce crime and keep the peace; and in 2010, Theresa May, the Home Secretary, stated that she expects forces and authorities to make financial cuts while still reducing crime and without damaging the front line.

West Mercia's *Policing Plan* includes targets to reduce crime over the coming year. The police authority will monitor levels of ASB.

