



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Responding to austerity

Thames Valley Police

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How well does the force provide value for money?

Overall judgment

Thames Valley has risen to the challenge of the spending review and continues to prepare for future funding reductions. Keeping communities safe remains at the heart of its approach.

Good

Summary

Thames Valley is on track to achieve its required savings of £58.9m over this spending review period, and to meet its further financial challenge in 2015/16. Importantly, the force is also looking beyond this period and is planning now for further funding reductions and future financial pressures.

HMIC is reassured by the level of detail that underpins Thames Valley's saving plans. It is also reassured that the force plans to be able to reduce costs significantly while continuing to fight crime and keep its communities safe.

The force has a good understanding of the issues facing it, and it has a comprehensive and well-managed strategy in place to achieve the required savings, while minimising as far as possible the impact on frontline policing. Within its plans, the force is focusing on non-pay costs and it has been able to achieve savings with a considerably smaller reduction in officer and staff numbers than other forces. At the same time, Thames Valley stands out as having increased the actual numbers of officers and staff in frontline roles. This is commendable and demonstrates both the ambition and commitment of the force to maintain the confidence of communities and to keep them safe.

Thames Valley continues to provide a high-quality policing service to its communities. Over the spending review period, the force has achieved the highest reduction in crime in comparison to other forces, it has low overall crime levels and maintains high levels of victim satisfaction.

To what extent is the force taking the necessary steps to ensure a secure financial position for the short and long term?

Outstanding

The force is in a secure financial position with clear plans as to how further savings will be achieved.

Plans are in place to achieve all of the savings needed in 2014/15 (£12.4m) and 2015/16 (£10.8m).

Resources are allocated to meet the priorities in the police and crime plan, reinvesting 34 officers and staff into local policing areas and child abuse in 2013/14

The force is developing detailed savings plans for 2016/17, with potential options for savings from collaboration and partnership, and it is about to commence planning for 2017/18.

To what extent has the force an affordable way of providing policing?

Good

The force has a well-established change programme with good chief officer oversight, and it has consequently achieved considerable savings during the spending review period.

The pace of the collaboration programme has picked up over the last year. In addition to the established collaborative arrangements, there are now developed plans for further collaboration.

Communication about the change programme rationale and understanding the culture of the organisation are in development.

To what extent is the force efficient?

Good

The force has a good understanding of demand, which draws on a range of information sources and is regularly refreshed.

The force's resource allocation method supports the implementation plan and budget.

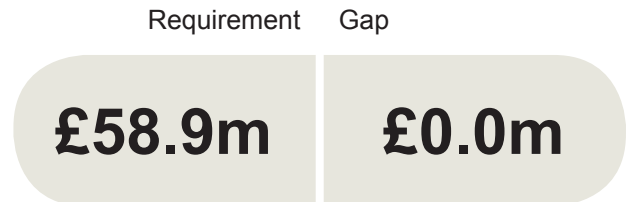
The force is currently working on refreshing the neighbourhood policing model.

Thames Valley has achieved a good quality of service to its communities by achieving high levels of crime reduction, overall low crime and high levels of victim satisfaction.

The force in numbers

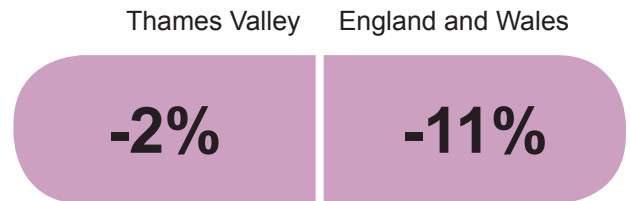
Financial position

The force's savings requirement



Providing policing

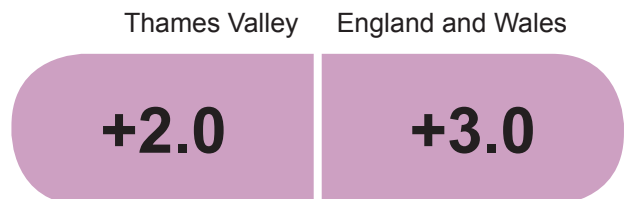
Planned change in police officer numbers 2010/11 – 2014/15



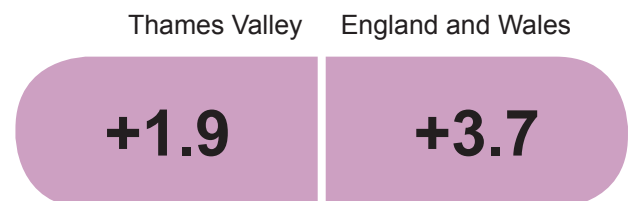
Planned change in total workforce numbers 2010/11 – 2014/15



Planned proportion of police officers on the front line 2014/15 vs 2010/11 (percentage points)



Planned proportion of total workforce on the front line 2014/15 vs 2010/11 (percentage points)





Efficiency

Police officer cost per head of population
2013/14

Thames Valley

England and Wales

£91.6**£117.7**

Workforce cost per head of population
2013/14

Thames Valley

England and Wales

£137.6**£168.1**

Change in recorded crime
2010/11 – 2013/14

Thames Valley

England and Wales

-25%**-14%**

Victim satisfaction 2013/14*

Thames Valley

England and Wales

88.5%**85.2%**

*Confidence intervals: $\pm 1.8\%$ for Thames Valley; $\pm 0.2\%$ for England and Wales.

Introduction

In October 2010, the Government announced that central funding to the Police Service in England and Wales would reduce by 20 percent in the four years between March 2011 and March 2015.

HMIC's Valuing the Police Programme has tracked how forces are planning to make savings to meet this budget demand each year since summer 2011. This report identifies what we found in this, our fourth year.

Our inspection focused on how well the force is providing value for money. To answer this question we looked at three areas:

- To what extent is the force taking the necessary steps to ensure a secure financial position in the short and long term?
- To what extent has the force an affordable way of providing policing?
- To what extent is the force efficient?

During our inspection we collected data and plans from forces, surveyed the public to see if they had noticed any changes in the service they receive from the police as a result of the cuts, and conducted in-force inspections. We also interviewed, where possible, the chief constable, police and crime commissioner and the chief officer leads for finance, change, human resources and performance in each force, and held focus groups with staff and other officers.

This provides the findings for Thames Valley Police.

To what extent is the force taking the necessary steps to ensure a secure financial position for the short and long term?

HMIC looked at the savings plans that forces have developed in order to meet the financial challenge of the spending review, and for the year after 2015/16. It is also important that forces look to the future beyond 2016 in their planning, so we also explored how they are starting to prepare for further financial challenges.

Financial challenge

Thames Valley Police has identified that it needs to save £58.9m over the four years of the spending review (between March 2011 and March 2015).

As a proportion of its overall budget, this savings requirement of 12 percent is lower than the value for England and Wales; however, Thames Valley Police was a comparatively efficient force at the beginning of this spending review and this meant it had to work harder than some other forces in order to find additional savings.

The scale of the challenge

Thames Valley faces a comparatively moderate challenge. While the force has a large budget, it spends less per head of population on policing, it has fewer officers, and expenditure on pay costs is lower per head than for most other forces. However non-pay costs per head are slightly higher than most other forces in England and Wales.

Savings plans for 2014/15 and 2015/16

In 2013/14, Thames Valley achieved its savings requirement and also achieved an additional £2.1m saving from areas such as property, transport and by holding vacancies. The savings were achieved with no effect on operational business or any impact on frontline officer posts.

In 2014/15, the force has identified savings of £12.4m and a further £10.8m in 2015/16. The productivity strategy sets out the force change programme and savings plan to balance the budget in both of these years.

Within its 2014/15 savings, the force has been able to deploy an extra 19 officers to local policing areas and a further 15 to child protection.

Outlook for 2016 and beyond

The force's plans for 2016/17 and beyond are less well developed but there is an agreed timeline for developing and refining these plans and the force is relatively confident that it can achieve the necessary savings. Because of the uncertainty of the financial position (both income and costs) for 2015/16 and beyond, the force is monitoring the political and economic environment. It is considering the impact of various factors over which the force has no control, but which could have a significant effect on the force's financial position (e.g., changes in pension provision, national insurance and council tax precept).

The force has identified possible savings options for 2015/16 and beyond in its productivity strategy. In 2015/16, the forecast budget position can be balanced without use of reserves, and over 80 percent of the planned savings are developed sufficiently that the force has confidence that they will be achieved. These assessments will be revisited in mid 2014 with the expectation that the position will be improved further. The force has identified opportunities for future savings from extended collaboration and partnerships, although at this time these are yet to be fully described. It is the force's intention to continue to protect local policing area officers from any future reductions.

Broadly, the force has considered the financial outlook for 2017/18 and will commence the detailed planning process with senior managers in July 2014 to inform the development of savings options for the next three years.

Summary



Outstanding

- The force is in a secure financial position with clear plans as to how further savings will be achieved.
- Thames Valley has achieved an underspend in 2013/14 and it has plans in place to achieve all of the savings needed in 2014/15 (£12.4m) and 2015/16 (£10.8m). The force has identified possible options for savings in 2016 and beyond in its productivity strategy, and work is progressing to develop these into detailed plans.
- Resources are allocated to meet the priorities in the police and crime plan, including reinvesting 34 officers and staff into local policing areas and child protection.
- The force is developing detailed savings plans for 2016/17, with potential options for savings from collaboration and partnership, and it is about to commence planning for 2017/18.

To what extent has the force an affordable way of providing policing?

HMIC looks at how the force is structured to provide policing. We ask if this is affordable as the force responds to its financial challenge. We look at what the force is doing to reduce its costs, how it is protecting officers and staff engaged in fighting crime and keeping communities safe, and how it is making the required changes through its change programme.

How the force provides policing

Thames Valley's policing structure is now well established, having changed in 2011. The force covers Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and each of the three assistant chief constables has responsibility for policing in one of the counties. The force is split into 13 local policing areas that align with local authority boundaries; they are then split into neighbourhoods that mirror parish boundaries.

The force will review this structure later in 2014 to ensure that it is still fit for purpose for the future. The review will include assessing shift patterns and evaluation of a borderless policing pilot (where resources are deployed on a force wide basis rather than confined to particular areas), as well as checking what the public expects and what can be achieved within a reducing budget.

Collaboration

HMIC monitors forces' progress on collaboration because it offers the opportunity to provide efficient, effective policing and it helps to achieve savings.

The pace of the collaboration programme with Hampshire Constabulary has picked up over the last year. In addition to the established collaborative arrangements (joint operations unit, ICT and information management), there are now developed plans for further collaboration in contact management and some criminal justice functions. Other areas are being considered, such as learning and development.

The Hampshire and Thames Valley collaborative arrangements are strong. The force is also working to develop wider collaboration with Surrey and Sussex, as well as other regional arrangements for organised crime and counter terrorism (e.g., the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit and the South East Counter Terrorism Unit).

In 2014/15, the force expects to spend 12 percent of its total net revenue expenditure on collaboration, which is broadly in line with the 11 percent figure for England and Wales. Collaboration is expected to contribute 16 percent of the force's savings requirement, which is higher than the 10 percent figure for England and Wales.

Managing change

Reductions in police budgets have led to a shrinking workforce. HMIC expects forces to look at longer-term transformation that can help to maintain or improve the services they offer to the public and to prepare for future funding reductions.

The force's change programme is mature, tried and tested. Its productivity strategy sets how the force will balance the budget in 2014/15 and 2015/16. There are several strands of work including:

- reducing bureaucracy within the force;
- zero-based budget;
- reviews of separate functions or areas of force business;
- a scrutiny panel to examine specific corporate issues and budget management in detail;
- savings that might be achieved through collaboration with other police forces;
- strategic resourcing training for managers and supervisors; and
- workforce modernisation opportunities.

This strategy has achieved considerable savings over the spending review period and the force continues to have a rigorous and professional approach to programme management.

The force identified that the main elements of its change programme during the current spending review are:

- structural change in local policing;
- collaboration with other forces;
- use of zero-based budgeting;
- improved procurement and contract re-negotiation; and
- making estates more efficient.

Thames Valley identified that the main elements of its change programme, as it responds to future financial pressures, will include:

- further collaboration with other forces;
- structural change in operational support;
- targeted patrol;
- improved call management; and
- structural change in business support.

How is the force supporting its workforce to manage change and effective service provision?

The chief officer team communicates regularly with the organisation through email, an electronic magazine to show what they have been doing and through online managers' briefings. In addition, a senior leadership forum brings together senior staff from across the organisation and provides an opportunity to discuss the challenges facing the force, the proposed change and the implications. This is a two-way process that enables senior staff to be actively involved in developing the force's approach. Staff praised the chief constable's approach to force communications and the variety of methods used to keep staff informed.

HMIC found a mixed picture in terms of staff involvement in the change process. Despite communication arrangements being in place, some staff and officers were unaware of issues facing the force and the rationale for the proposed changes being progressed. A number of officers and staff described morale as being low; while this may be a symptom of issues unconnected with the change programme, a number expressed the view that change was "being done to them" and that they had little or no opportunity to influence decisions. In a relatively large force, staff briefings can be an effective means of communicating. HMIC found that supervisors vary in how effective they are in passing on messages about the organisation and plans for the future.

The force is aware of gaps in communication and it is working on improving the organisation's capacity for cultural change. It has commissioned Durham University to survey staff in order to gain a better understanding of the issues that concern them and how staff involvement can be improved. The last staff survey was 2010; the results and action plans from the 2014 survey and evaluation should be available in November 2014.

How is the force achieving the savings?

Because around 80 percent of a police budget (on average) is spent on staff costs, forces across England and Wales plan to achieve most of their savings by reducing the number of police officers, police community support officers (PCSOs) and police staff employed.

However, we also expect forces to bear down on their other costs (non-pay) such as the equipment they buy, the accommodation and vehicles they use and the contracts they enter for services (e.g., for cleaning). Thames Valley plans to make 30 percent of its savings from non-pay; this is broadly in line with England and Wales.

Non-staff costs were identified by the force as being high, so they have been a focus of the savings approach. In particular, Thames Valley has made considerable reductions in costs for estates, purchasing and transport. The force has also reduced overtime and employee costs.

As with other forces, most of Thames Valley's savings come from reducing the workforce. Over the spending review, the force plans to achieve 70 percent of its savings requirement from its pay budget. This is broadly in line with other forces and demonstrates a commitment to minimising the impact on workforce numbers.

Thames Valley Police made an early start on this in 2010 when it slowed its recruitment of new police officers and police staff, and reduced the number of police staff.

The following table shows the force's planned changes to workforce numbers over the spending review period, and compares these to the change for England and Wales.¹

Please note, these figures are rounded.

	31 March 2010 (baseline)	31 March 2015	Change	Force change %	Change for England and Wales %
Police officers	4,434	4,357	-77	-2%	-11%
Police staff	3,000	2,869	-132	-4%	-17%
PCSOs	500	490	-10	-2%	-22%
Total	7,935	7,716	-219	-3%	-14%
Specials	408	700	292	72%	44%

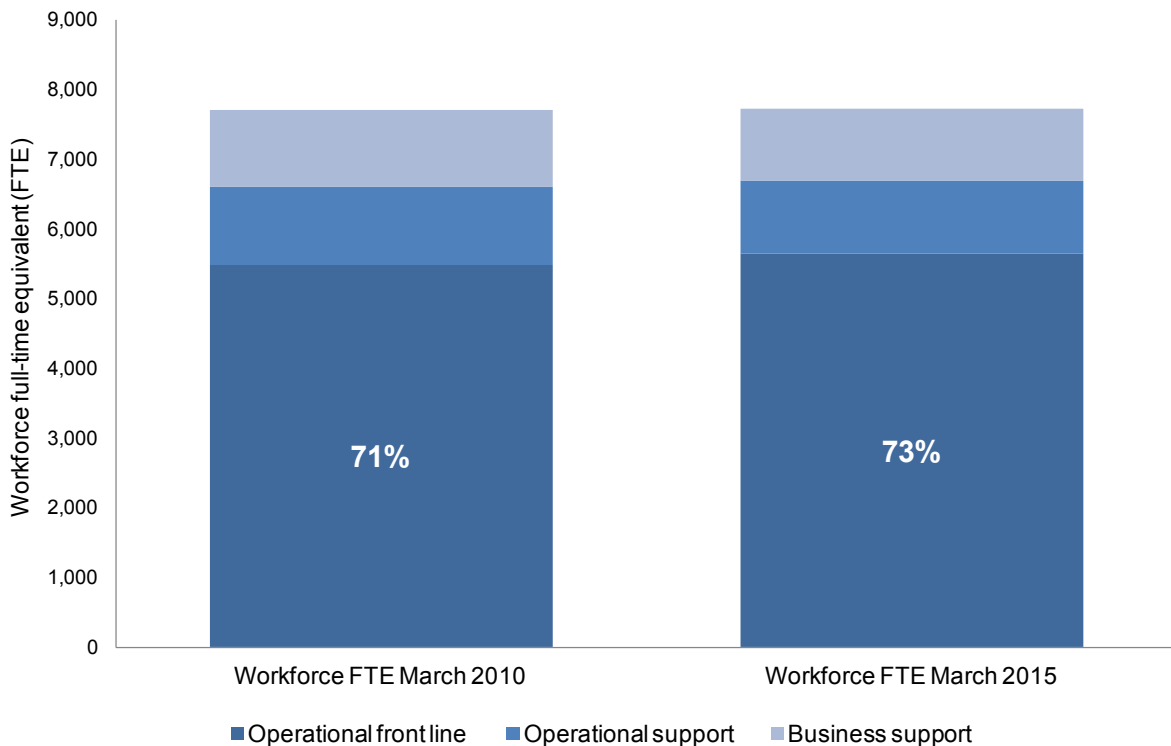
Thames Valley plans to lose considerably less of its workforce than most other forces in England and Wales, with smaller reductions in police officers, police staff and PCSOs. This is extremely positive and a credit to the force that it has been able to maintain staff numbers while achieving the required savings.

It is important that as forces reconfigure their structures and reduce workforce numbers, they focus on maintaining (or if possible increasing) the proportion of people in frontline crime-fighting roles.

HMIC defines the people who work on the police front line as those who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law.

¹ Thames Valley workforce numbers include police staff within collaborative arrangements with Hampshire Constabulary (ICT and information management), and police officers and police staff within regional arrangements for organised crime and counter terrorism (e.g., the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit and the South East Counter Terrorism Unit).

The following chart shows the change in the workforce frontline profile in Thames Valley Police.



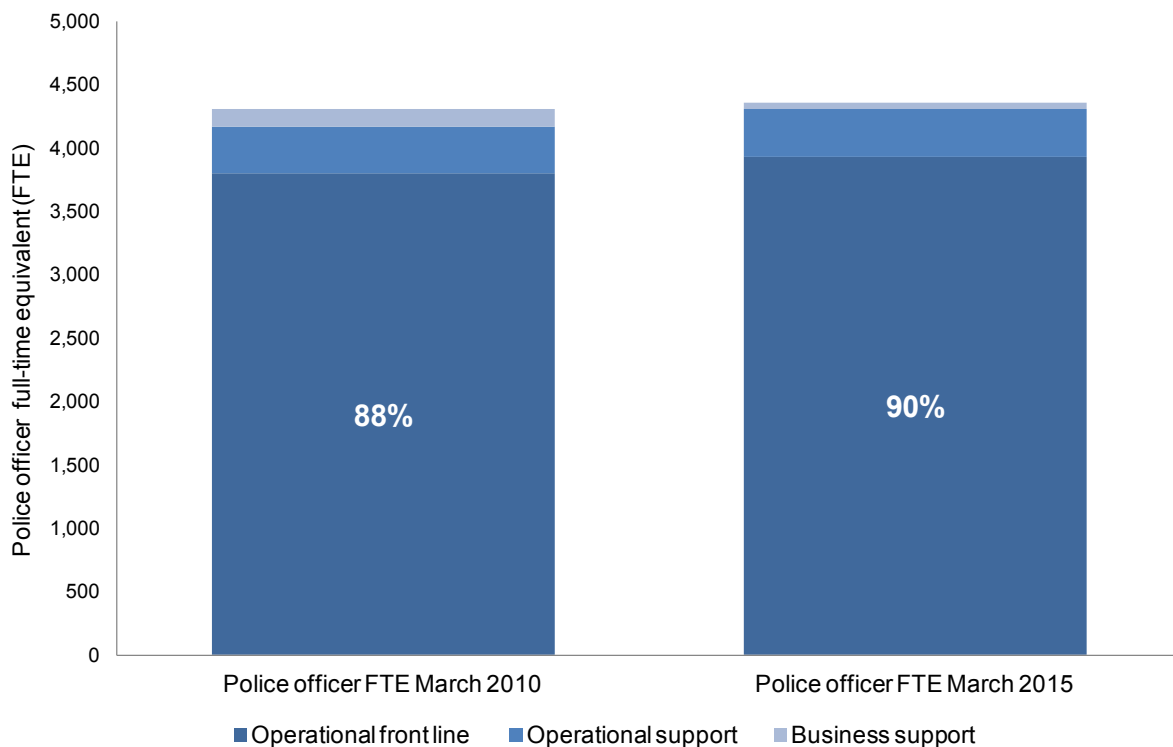
Note: England and Wales reports an increase in the proportion of workforce on the front line from 74 percent in March 2010 to 78 percent in March 2015.

The number of officers, PCSOs and staff working on the front line is projected to increase by 159 between March 2010 and March 2015 (from 5,489 to 5,648).

Over the same period, the proportion of Thames Valley’s total workforce allocated to frontline roles is projected to increase from 71 percent to 73 percent. This compares with an overall increase across England and Wales from 74 percent to 78 percent.

The number of Thames Valley’s police officers in frontline roles is planned to increase by 136 from 3,795 in March 2010 to 3,931 by March 2015, as the following chart shows. The proportion of officers remaining on the front line is projected to increase from 88 percent to 90 percent. This compares to an overall increase across England and Wales from 89 percent to 92 percent.

The following chart shows the change in police officers’ frontline profile.



Note: England and Wales reports an increase in the proportion of police officers on the front line from 89 percent in March 2010 to 92 percent in March 2015.

Summary



Good

- The force has a well-established change programme that has good chief officer oversight, with considerable savings achieved over the spending review period.
- The pace of the collaboration programme has picked up over the last year. In addition to the established collaborative arrangements, there are now developed plans for further collaboration in contact management and some criminal justice functions, with other areas being considered, such as learning and development.
- The force is using an evidence-based approach for much of its planning, with assistance from universities.
- Communication about the change programme rationale and understanding the culture of the organisation are in development.

To what extent is the force efficient?

HMIC looks at how the force understands the demands that it faces and how it allocates both financial resources and staff to meet these demands. We look at how these decisions are leading to effective results for the public; in particular, that police are visible and that they attend promptly when called, that they are fighting crime and keeping communities safe, and that victims are satisfied with the service they receive.

How well does the force understand and manage demand?

The force has a good understanding of demand. It has well-established processes in place to understand and manage the challenges it faces, and it undertakes an annual strategic assessment to understand these and to direct its activities. Fortnightly and daily management and co-ordination processes are in place, which enable resources to be allocated in response to immediate challenges and demands. These take account of specific demand (e.g. organised crime and human trafficking), as well as local needs. Force resources remain flexible and the key question applied is always 'is the resource in the right place?'

As a response to the rise in demand relating to people suffering from mental health problems, the force has a pilot taking place in Oxford that involves a mental health nurse having access to information to inform the police response. This project is for an agreed period of time and there is uncertainty about what happens when it ends. Also in place is a piece of work that is funded for the next 12 months where an analyst is working upon understanding the issues of demand in relation to mental health. The project is jointly sponsored by the force, Oxford City Council and by health partners.

How efficiently does the force allocate its resources?

The force has an effective approach to resource allocation. A simple formula based on three measures (crime, incidents and population figures) is weighted over three years to give the force its annual local policing area resource allocation. For example, this year, the Milton Keynes area has had more resources to reflect its housing growth. The force redeploys any additional officer capacity into local policing and priority areas. For example, last year, out of 34 additional officers 15 went into child protection.

At the daily management meetings staffing levels and resilience are discussed, and resources moved as required. The force-level daily management meeting is provided with numbers of staffing above minimum levels and is the ultimate decision-making forum for allocation of resources, as necessary. In the absence of any additional bids, staff work on their local tasking and enquiries, and are deployable to incidents.

The control rooms and enquiry centres have a good understanding of the force's demand

profile and have made arrangements to ensure that staff with the right skills are always available to meet this demand. The force has developed contingency plans through the development of a multi-skilled workforce which provides additional flexibility as staff can be deployed to a range of tasks. It has an appointments system that allocates non-urgent and minor crimes/incidents to local neighbourhood teams. When calls from the public come into the control rooms, they are allocated to units with the appropriate skills to deal with them.

The force's shift patterns are based on demand profiles, with a focus on crime prevention through a sound assessment of threat, harm and risk. For example, the force uses a problem-solving approach with 'troubled families' to reduce any potential threat. Neighbourhood policing teams have responsibility for dealing with lower-level crimes, and PCSOs make reassurance visits to victims. The force recognises that if the neighbourhood teams become response teams, the effectiveness of problem solving is affected. However, the neighbourhood policing model is to be reviewed this year, when better use of new technology and the public's views of what they want from the force will be examined.

The force's current efficiency is hampered by the lack of investment in IT. Control room, call handling and despatch IT is outdated and it cannot provide sophisticated management information, asset availability and deployment information. The force anticipates that its new records management IT system will improve this situation. Several measures are in place designed to improve future efficiency and capability.

How does the force respond and keep its communities safe?

The challenge for forces is not just to save money and reduce their workforce numbers, but also to ensure the choices they make do not have a negative impact on the service they provide to their communities. HMIC looked for evidence that keeping the communities safe is at the heart of the force's decision.

Prevention is at the heart of Thames Valley Police's activity. The force-level daily management meeting routinely assesses incidents over the previous 24 hours. This assessment includes analysing whether crimes could have been prevented or predicted. The force is increasingly aware of the harm factors resulting from domestic abuse, mental health issues and alcohol. These factors are discussed at force performance meetings and understanding is developing.

The force receives approximately 700 emergency calls and 3,400 non-emergency calls a day into its control rooms and enquiries department. The force has set challenging call answering targets, which it exceeds. The target in 2013/14 was to answer 90 percent of calls within 10 seconds, and the force achieved 94.5 percent. The target in 2013/14 was to answer 90 percent of 101 calls within 40 seconds, and the force achieved 92.4 percent.

To ensure that the force is giving appropriate focus to responding to calls in a timely manner, the force has strong supervision arrangements in place. A manager assesses at each stage of the process to ensure that the force is providing the right level of response to a call from a member of the public. Non-urgent calls and enquires are forwarded to appropriate units to deal with through appointments, which are supervised by local line managers.

Data relating to the nature and volume of call demand are fed into the performance management process and are considered together with the performance of response, neighbourhood and specialist teams. From initial call receipt through to outcome/closure there is clear ownership of the incident/enquiry together with attendant accountability. Mechanisms are in place to hold staff to account for the progress and quality of response.

Calls for service

HMIC examined whether Thames Valley Police is taking longer to respond to calls for help as a result of its workforce reductions and other changes designed to save money. Forces are not required to set response times or targets and are free to determine their own arrangements for monitoring attendance to calls, so information between forces is not comparable.

We found that over the four years since 2010, Thames Valley had maintained the same target response times of 15 minutes for calls classed as ‘emergency’ (also known as Grade 1) in an urban setting; and within 20 minutes for calls classed as ‘emergency’ in a rural setting. Over the same period, calls classed as a ‘priority’ (also known as Grade 2) had a target response time of within 60 minutes.

The following table compares the force’s performance in 2010/11 to 2013/14.

Calls for service	2010/11	2013/14
Percentage of urban emergency calls on target	78.4	82.1
Percentage of rural emergency calls on target	84.5	86.0
Percentage of priority calls on target	70.7	79.8

Over the spending review period the force has been able to improve its response to both emergency and priority calls.

Visibility

The work done by police officers and staff in visible roles (such as officers who respond to 999 calls, deal with serious road traffic collisions or patrol in neighbourhoods) represents only a part of the policing picture. Chief constables need to allocate resources to many other

functions in order to protect the public, such as counter terrorism, serious and organised crime, and child protection (to name just three).

That said, research shows that the public value seeing visible police officers on patrol in the streets, and that those who see police in uniform at least once a week are more likely to have confidence in their local force. HMIC therefore examined how far the changes being implemented by the force had affected the visibility of the police in the Thames Valley area.

In 2014, Thames Valley Police allocated 59 percent of its police officers to visible roles. This is 2.4 percentage points higher than the number allocated in 2010, and higher than the figure for most other forces (which was 56 percent across England and Wales).

Police visibility is further enhanced by PCSOs, who principally support community policing. Looking at the proportion of police officers and PCSOs, Thames Valley Police allocated 63 percent of these staff to visible roles. This is 2.1 percentage points higher than it allocated in 2010, and higher than the 60 percent figure for England and Wales.

HMIC conducted a survey¹ of the public across England and Wales to assess whether the public had noticed any difference in the way their area is being policed. Of those people surveyed in Thames Valley, 13 percent said that they have seen a police officer more often than they had 12 months ago; this compares to 12 percent of respondents in England and Wales.

Furthermore, 86 percent of respondents in Thames Valley said they felt safe from crime where they lived, compared to 84 percent of respondents in England and Wales. Finally, 13 percent said they felt safer from crime than they did two years ago, compared to 9 percent of respondents in England and Wales.

Crime

In 2010, the Home Secretary set a clear priority for the police service to reduce crime. Between 2010/11 and 2013/14 (which includes the first three years of the spending review), Thames Valley Police reduced recorded crime (excluding fraud) by 25 percent, compared with a reduction of 14 percent in England and Wales. Over this period, victim-based crime (crimes where there is a direct victim, such as an individual, a group, or an organisation) reduced by 24 percent, compared with a reduction of 14 percent in England and Wales. These are some of the highest reductions seen across all forces in England and Wales.

Looking just at the last 12 months, recorded crime (excluding fraud) reduced by 3 percent, which is greater reduction than the figure for England and Wales (a reduction of 1 percent).

¹ Sample sizes for each force were chosen to produce a confidence interval of no more than ± 6 percent and for England and Wales, no more than ± 1 percent. Forces' differences to the England and Wales value may not be statistically significant.

By looking at how many crimes occur per head of population, we can see an indication of how safe it is for the public in that police area. The table below shows recorded crime and anti-social behaviour rates in Thames Valley (per head of population) compared with the rest of England and Wales.

12 months to March 2014	Rate per 1,000 population	England and Wales rate per 1,000 population
Crimes (excluding fraud)	55.5	61.1
Victim-based crime	49.5	54.3
Sexual offences	1.1	1.1
Burglary	6.1	7.8
Violence against the person	8.5	11.1
ASB incidents	16.0	37.2

It is important that crimes are investigated effectively and that the perpetrator is brought to justice. When sufficient evidence is available to identify who has committed a crime, it can be described as detected. Thames Valley Police’s detection rate (for crimes excluding fraud) for the 12 months to March 2014 was 25 percent. This is broadly in line with the England and Wales sanction detection rate of 26 percent.

We have chosen these types of crime to give an indication of offending levels in the Thames Valley force area. For information on the frequency of other kinds of crimes in your area, go to www.hmic.gov.uk/crime-and-policing-comparator.

Victim satisfaction surveys

An important measure of the impact of changes is how satisfied victims are with the overall service they receive when they seek police assistance.

In the 12 months to March 2014, 88.5 percent (± 1.8 percent) of victims were satisfied with the overall service provided by Thames Valley Police. This is higher than the England and Wales figure of 85.2 percent (± 0.2 percent).

Changes to how the public can access services

Forces are exploring different ways in which the public can access policing services.

As part of its estates strategy within the savings plans, the force consulted with the public and partners about its front counter service. The force has three different tiers of police stations: 24-hours, extended hours, and four hours per day over three days a week (or a

variance of that pattern). It also has volunteer-run bases. All station locations and opening times are advertised and there a number of bases for staff, which are now public access. The numbers are expected to decrease as demand reduces as the public make greater use of other means of accessing police services such as online.

Over the spending review, the force has plans to close two police stations and to reduce the number of front counters from 60 to 50. However, the force has 14 access points shared with partners agencies where police services can be accessed. These access points are located mostly in libraries, with one in a council building and one on a hospital site.

In addition, neighbourhood officers are widely involved with their local communities. Each team has a dedicated page on the force internet site that includes information on local priorities and the action being taken, and each neighbourhood holds a patrol plan that includes a requirement for involvement. These are monitored by the diversity officer who ensures that involvement cuts across communities; in the last year the diversity officer has also considered isolated communities such as people with disabilities, people from gypsy, Romany and traveller communities and the elderly.

Neighbourhood teams are also being encouraged to make good use of social media. The force encourages officers and PCSOs to use Twitter and the Thames Valley Alert system, which are used by departments across the force to: keep communities updated, offer crime prevention advice, appeal for witnesses, advertise involvement opportunities, and keep communities informed of what is happening.

In the last year, the corporate communications department has also supported local areas in 'tweetathons' and live online forums for communities to talk to area commanders.

A contact management business case has been agreed with the police and crime commissioner and this will review how the public can contact the force. It should enable the force to know its communities, to understand and assess vulnerability, and to create transformational change at a level where the public will really see the difference.

Summary

Good

- The force has a good understanding of demand, and it has an annual assessment at a strategic level, which is regularly updated locally.
- Resource allocation methods support the plan and budget.
- Currently working on refreshing the neighbourhood policing model.
- Current efficiency is hampered by lack of historical investment in IT but several elements are underway for the future to improve efficiency, including patrol and status messaging, borderless trial, and improving technology.
- Thames Valley has achieved good quality of service to its communities with high levels of crime reduction, overall low crime and high levels of victim satisfaction.

Our judgments

HMIC uses four categories for making judgments, two are positive and two are negative. The categories are:

- outstanding;
- good;
- requires improvement; and
- inadequate.

Judgment is made against how well the force provides value for money, it is not an assessment of the overall effectiveness of policing. In applying the categories HMIC considers whether:

- the way the force is providing value for money is good, or exceeds this standard sufficiently to be judged as outstanding;
- the force requires improvement in the way it provides value for money, and/or there are some weaknesses; or
- the force's provision of value for money is inadequate because it is considerably lower than is expected.