



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Valuing the Police: Preparedness Inspection

**Cheshire Constabulary
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 Cheshire Constabulary. A thematic report, *Adapting to Austerity*, which brings together findings from all 43 forces, is also available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

Findings for Cheshire Constabulary

What is the financial challenge in Cheshire?

Cheshire Constabulary and Cheshire Police Authority reported that they are facing a **£35.4m** cash reduction to their budget over the four years of the comprehensive spending review period (2011/12–14/15). In real terms (ie when inflation is taken into account), this equates to 16% of their gross revenue expenditure.

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

The constabulary and authority clearly understood the financial challenge facing them. They have considered a range of options in developing a plan that can meet – and if necessary exceed – their budget cuts over the next four years.

The constabulary's plan is based around developing more efficient structures and processes, and protecting frontline services. It includes two major projects: to bring together and streamline back office services, and to make systems and processes more efficient and better at managing demand.

However, at the time of inspection some aspects of the programme were still under development. As such, the full details of changes to be made to the organisation were not available and could not be fully understood.

There was a clear governance structure in place to manage the programme, and chief officers were chairing regular meetings to ensure the plan is on track. Professionally qualified project managers were accountable for each key area of work. The police authority was kept well informed and was overseeing progress.

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

Cheshire Constabulary planned to make the following changes to its workforce numbers.

	Police Officers	Police Staff	PCSO
31 March 2010 (actual)	2,155	1,550	237
31 March 2015 (proposed)	1,893	1,050	215

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?

Cheshire Constabulary has consulted with the local community, and confirmed public support for the plan. The clear intention is to deliver savings while maintaining or improving services; however, they have not fully identified the impact of the proposed changes over the whole of the review period.

There was a clear focus in the plans on making working practices more efficient to help to deliver savings. However, the full extent of these efficiency measures had not been detailed. As a result, while some measures will have a positive effect (such as increased officer availability), the full impact of the changes was not yet known.

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.

Cheshire's *Policing Plan* includes objectives to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the coming year.

