



Inspecting policing  
in the public interest

## **Valuing the Police: Preparedness Inspection**

**Essex 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 Essex Police. A thematic report, *Adapting to Austerity*, which brings together findings from all 43 forces, is also available from [www.hmic.gov.uk](http://www.hmic.gov.uk).

## Findings for Essex Police

### What is the financial challenge in Essex?

Essex Police and Essex Police Authority reported that they are facing a **£41.1m** 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 12% of their gross revenue expenditure.

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

Essex Police and Essex Police Authority have a strong history of delivering efficiency savings. Although the savings they now need to make are significant, they see them as achievable and as an opportunity to make positive changes.

The force and authority broadly understood the financial and organisational challenge facing them. At the time of inspection they were finalising details of how they would deliver the required savings through fundamental organisational change. However, the new operational policing model was not due to be implemented until 2011/12 and as a consequence the force did not expect any savings from this until 2012/13. The force planned to use reserves to help bridge the funding gap in the first year of the CSR period. The authority expressed some concern that the level of reserves might not be enough to cover potential risks going forward.

The force implemented a number of solutions to cut costs until savings from the new policing model are realised, such as reducing non-pay budgets, a recruitment freeze and voluntary redundancy. This has put the force in a strong position to deliver the savings needed. Plans for reconfiguration of the back office to complement the policing model were on the horizon. Once the force has reconfigured internally, it will look for opportunities to build on existing collaboration with Kent Police in order to generate further savings.

At the time of inspection the authority was undergoing internal changes, which meant their level of involvement in the financial planning varied. The force's planning was also at a slightly less developed stage than other forces. However, HMIC found strong governance and programme management in place. This, combined with the force's thoughtful approach to planning, gives confidence that the required savings will be delivered.

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

Essex have planned that their workforce will change as follows:

	<b>Police Officers</b>	<b>Police Staff</b>	<b>PCSO</b>
<b>31 March 2010 (actual)</b>	3,606	2,152	445
<b>31 March 2015 (proposed)</b>	3,248	1,632	362

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 plans to undergo a major restructuring. To provide flexibility to redesign the workforce some posts have been kept vacant. Therefore the figures shown above may be different to those provided to the public by the force. 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 new operational policing model still needed to be finalised at the time of the inspection. Therefore, the force and authority had only carried out limited work to understand the potential changes to service delivery and to communicate the likely impact of these to the public. Going forward the authority will need to ensure it progresses its plans to consult with local communities about the planned changes.

### **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.

Essex's *Policing Plan* includes targets to reduce crime and ASB in the coming year.

