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Merseyside Police has made good progress in meeting its financial challenge, finds HMIC

Over the period of this spending review Merseyside Police has shown itself to have a good track record in meeting the financial challenges and is planning for future challenges.

In a report published today, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has found:

Progress in making savings

- Merseyside Police has identified that it needs to save £62m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). The force has detailed plans on how it will save £58m of the £62m required by March 2015. The remaining £4m of savings will be offset through the planned use of reserves, should this be necessary.
- As a proportion of its overall budget this savings requirement of 16% is broadly in line with most other forces, but HMIC considers that Merseyside Police faces a particularly difficult challenge. It attracts a high central funding contribution but lower local funding than many other forces which means that central funding cuts impact significantly more compared to other forces. While its spending on policing is higher than most other forces, it has a higher number of staff, and the amount it spends on each officer and staff member is also higher than most other forces.

Workforce changes and protecting the front line

- The force is reducing police officer numbers by limiting recruitment and holding vacancies. As a result, by the end of the spending review period, Merseyside Police plans to have 516 fewer police officers. This means the number of police officers will reduce by 11% between March 2010 and March 2015; this is a similar reduction to most other forces.
- Merseyside Police 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 is planned to increase from 90% to 92%. This compares to an overall increase across England and Wales from 89% to 93%.
- The force has also made some police staff redundant (largely through voluntary redundancy) 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 is planned that there will be 403 fewer police staff in Merseyside Police. This means the number of police staff will reduce by 18% between March 2010 and March 2015; this is more than in most other forces. Merseyside plans to reduce the number of police community support officers (PCSOs) by 118 or 25%; this is more than in most other forces.

Impact on the public

- Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime (excluding fraud) fell by 10%, which is less than the figure for England and Wales (13%).
- Victim satisfaction remains high at 88.8%, which is higher than other forces.

Future challenges

- Overall the force understands the scale of the financial challenges ahead. It has detailed plans in place to deliver the savings required by the end of this current spending review. The force has also assessed future savings requirements and has high level plans in place to deliver them in line with the timeframe of the Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) Police and Crime Plan and current assumptions.

HM Inspector of Constabulary for the Northern Region, Roger Baker, said:

“Merseyside Police faces a more difficult financial challenge than most other forces. While its budget reduction is lower than that of most other forces, it receives more central funding but lower local funding than most forces. This means that central funding cuts impact more compared to other forces. Also it spends more on policing, has more officers, and expenditure on pay costs are higher than most other forces.

“The force has a good track record in meeting the financial challenges while at the same time delivering high quality community policing to those working and living in Merseyside. The force has high level plans in place for future challenges and is making sure that these have more detail. HMIC has confidence that these plans will be realistic and achievable.

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

The full report for Merseyside 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 $\pm 0.1\%$
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.