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Northamptonshire Police has more work to do in response to its financial challenge finds HMIC

Northamptonshire Police faces a smaller saving requirement than other forces. It does not yet have a plan to close its funding gap in full. In addition, the force has struggled to deliver on performance.

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

Progress in making savings

- Northamptonshire Police has identified that it needs to save £21.8m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015). The force has planned how it will save £18.7m, it therefore still has £3.1m to find. This gap is a concern to HMIC, particularly as the force prepares for further funding challenges in the future.
- As a proportion of its overall budget (15%) this savings requirement is smaller than most other forces. The force faces a comparatively moderate financial challenge. However, it is recognised that as a force with lower spending on policing than other forces and staff costs that are broadly in line with England and Wales average, identifying savings is not without its challenges.

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 it is planned that there will be 123 fewer police officers. This means the number of police officers is planned to reduce by 9% between March 2010 and March 2015; this is a smaller reduction than in most other forces.
- The force has not done as much as most other forces to protect frontline posts as it makes these cuts. Between March 2010 and March 2015, the proportion of police officers in frontline, crime-fighting roles is planned to increase from 88% to 91%. This compares to an overall increase across England and Wales from 89% to 93%.
- The force has also made some police staff redundant and not replaced others as they have left; as a result, by the end of the spending review period it is planned that there will be 428 fewer police staff. This means the number of police staff is planned to reduce by 37% between March 2010 and March 2015. This is higher than most other forces but this is mainly due to many services previously undertaken by the force (e.g. human resources and finance) now being provided by a multi force shared service centre with Cheshire Constabulary.
- Due to the withdrawal of external partner funded police community support officers (PCSOs) posts, the number of PCSOs will reduce by 32%. This is greater than the reduction for most other forces.

Impact on the public

- Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime (excluding fraud) reduced by 3% in Northamptonshire, which is considerably lower than the 13% reduction recorded across England and Wales as a whole.
- Victim satisfaction with the service received is at 82.0%, which is lower than other forces.

Future challenges

- With an outstanding funding gap the force will need to identify further savings to balance its budget in this spending review period.
- The challenge will become greater as the force prepares for further funding reductions in 2015/16. When the force is developing plans for delivering further change and achieving savings, it is imperative that it takes account of the impact on the service to the public, in particular how crime reduction can be improved and sustained.

HM Inspector of Constabulary for the Eastern Region, Zoë Billingham, said:

“The force faces a smaller saving requirement than other forces. Whilst it has developed some innovative approaches to meeting its funding challenge, the force has struggled to deliver on performance.”

“HMIC has been monitoring Northamptonshire Police for some time. Although the force’s own crime figures for the last two months are more encouraging, HMIC has yet to see evidence of sustainable performance improvement. The force recognises the issue and is working hard to address the problem.”

“The force does not yet have a clear and overarching change programme, nor does it have a plan that will enable it to close the funding gap over this spending review period, unlike most other forces.”

“Faced with further budget reductions after March 2015 HMIC is concerned that it will be challenging for the force to deliver the further change necessary and provide an acceptable level of service to the public.”

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

The full report for Northamptonshire 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 $\pm 1.9\%$
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.