



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Northamptonshire Police's response to the funding challenge

July 2013

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Northamptonshire Police: Executive summary

Northamptonshire Police faces a smaller savings requirement than other forces. While the force has developed some innovative approaches to meet its funding challenge, it has struggled to deliver on performance.

HMIC has been monitoring Northamptonshire 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 Northamptonshire Police to deliver the further change necessary and provide an acceptable level of service to the public.

Financial challenge

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). This figure takes account of the force's funding and the additional costs for meeting work planned by the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

As a proportion of its overall budget (15%), this savings requirement is smaller than most other forces. Northamptonshire Police faces a comparatively moderate financial challenge. However, it is recognised that as a force with lower spending on policing than other forces and relatively low staff costs, identifying savings is not without its challenges.

Progress in making savings

Northamptonshire Police has planned how it will save £18.7m, and 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.

Changes to the workforce

All forces spend most of their money on staff costs (such as wages and overtime), and so have focused on reducing this expenditure in order to cut costs.¹ Northamptonshire Police is no exception.

¹ See *Adapting to Austerity*, HMIC, London, July 2011, p.13. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

It is reducing police officer numbers by limiting recruitment and holding vacancies; as a result, by the end of the spending review period, it plans to have 123 fewer police officers in Northamptonshire Police. This means the number of police officers is planned to reduce by 9% between March 2010² and March 2015; this is a smaller reduction than in most other forces.

Northamptonshire Police has not done as much as most other forces to protect frontline posts as it make 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 there will be 428 fewer police staff in Northamptonshire Police. The number of police staff is planned to reduce by 37% between March 2010 and March 2015. While this is higher than most other forces, 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 is planned to reduce by 32%. This is greater than the reduction for most other forces.

Impact on the public

HMIC expects forces to make savings without diminishing the service provided to the public. We monitor whether they are achieving this by examining crime rates, and the results of the victim satisfaction surveys which all forces conduct.

Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime³ (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%,⁴ 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 Northamptonshire Police 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, and in particular, how crime reduction can be improved and sustained.

2 We use 2010 as our baseline as many forces started to make staff reductions in anticipation of the spending review.

3 Crime excluding fraud as per the new classifications release in July 2013 by the Office for National Statistics.

4 ± 1.9%.

The challenge

Over the four years of the spending review, Northamptonshire Police has identified that it needs to find savings of £21.8m, which equates to 15% of its total expenditure⁵ (which in 2012/13 was £138.1m). The average amount to be saved by forces across England and Wales is 17%.

Progress in making savings: Years 1–2

The force successfully made 61% (£13.3m) of the total savings required by March 2015 in the first two years of the spending review period. It achieved this by:

- not recruiting any new police officers;
- reducing the number of police staff it employs; and
- forming a multi-force shared service centre with Cheshire Constabulary to provide aspects of its business support services (e.g. human resources).

Plans for Year 3–4

The force has plans in place to achieve further savings of £3.0m in 2013/14, and another £2.4m in 2014/15. This leaves a funding gap of £3.1m at the end of the spending review period. The force is confident that it will be able to close this gap; but at the time of inspection, its plans had yet to be formulated.

Looking beyond the current spending review

The force is only at an early stage of considering what savings it might need to make in the next spending review period (after March 2015).

The scale of the challenge in Northamptonshire Police

Although Northamptonshire Police faces a smaller savings requirement than other forces, it already has low costs, and this makes it harder to drive out further savings. This is because:

- it spends less per head of population than most other forces in England and Wales;
- it has a lower number of police officers per head of population than most other forces in England and Wales; and
- the cost of police officers and police staff per lower is broadly in line with most other forces in England and Wales.

⁵ Based on a baseline gross expenditure in 2010/11.

Demand

Forces face different levels of demand for the service they provide to the public. This section looks at three of the key indicators of demand to provide an overall impression of the challenges each force faces:

- the number of calls the force receives from the public;
- the number of crimes the force deals with; and
- the number of prosecutions (suspects charged with offences) the force brings.

12 months to March 2013	Northamptonshire Police	England and Wales
Emergency and priority calls per 1,000 population	130	134
Victim-based crime per 1,000 population	60.7	54.5
Prosecutions (charges) per 1,000 population	8.8	10.2

This table shows that, in 2012/13, Northamptonshire Police received broadly the same number of emergency and priority calls from the public as other forces. It has to deal with more crimes than other forces and it supports fewer prosecutions than elsewhere.

How difficult is the challenge?

HMIC considers that Northamptonshire Police faces a comparatively moderate financial challenge compared to other forces. There is no doubt that the force understands the scale of the challenges it faces. However, there is an outstanding funding gap, and as yet there are no specific plans on how this will be closed. HMIC is concerned about the force's ability to close this gap without impacting further on the service it provides to the public.

Response to the challenge

Over 80% of a police budget (on average) is spent on staff costs.⁶ It is therefore not surprising that forces across England and Wales plan to achieve much of their savings by reducing the number of police officers, PCSOs and police staff employed.

Northamptonshire Police is no exception. The force plans to make 92% of its savings in this spending review period from its pay budget. This is a much higher proportion than most other forces, and indicates that the force might not be doing enough to protect its crime-fighting capacity.

Changes to workforce numbers

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.⁷

	31 March 2010 (baseline)	31 March 2015	Change	Northamptonshire change %	Change for England and Wales %
Police Officers	1,343	1,220	-123	-9%	-11%
Police Staff	1,172	744	-428	-37%	-16%
PCSOs	164	112	-52	-32%	-17%
Total	2,679	2,076	-603	-22%	-13%
Specials	180	498	+318	+177%	+60%

Overall, the table shows that Northamptonshire Police plans to lose fewer police officers, but more PCSOs, compared to England and Wales. Although it will lose a higher number of police staff, this is mainly due to many of functions previously undertaken by the force (e.g. human resources and finance) now being provided by a multi-force shared service centre (with Cheshire Constabulary).

Northamptonshire Police is currently reviewing their rank mix to reduce the number of supervisory and management ranks. When implemented, this will maximise the number of constables.

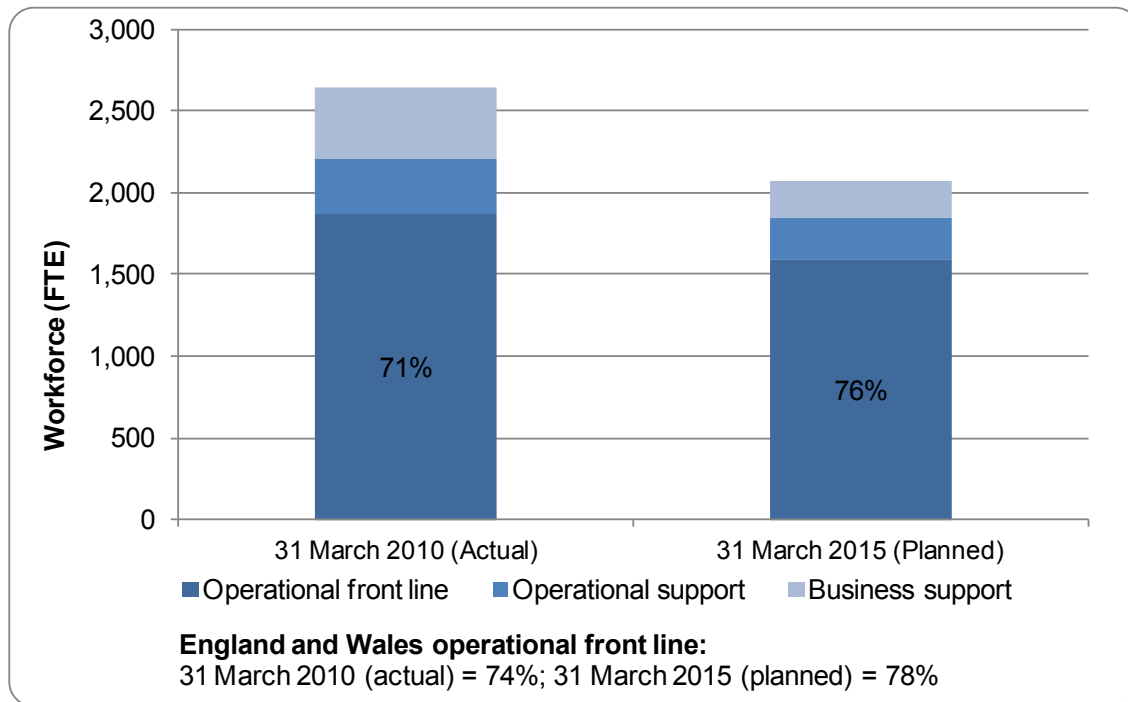
⁶ See *Adapting to Austerity*, HMIC, London, July 2011, p.13. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

⁷ Workforce figures for March 2010 show the actual number of people working for the force in permanent posts on the 31 March in that year. People on long-term absences (such as maternity leave) are included in these 'actual' figures, but vacant posts are not. Workforce projections for March 2015 are for budgeted posts, so the actual number of people who will be working for the force at that point in reality may be different, because some posts will be vacant or filled by temporary staff. Forces' projections may also exclude people who will be on long-term absences. The difference between actual workforce numbers and projected numbers should therefore be taken as an approximate expected change.

Changes to the proportion of workforce on the front line

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”. 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 these crime-fighting roles.

The following chart shows the change in the workforce frontline profile in Northamptonshire Police.⁸

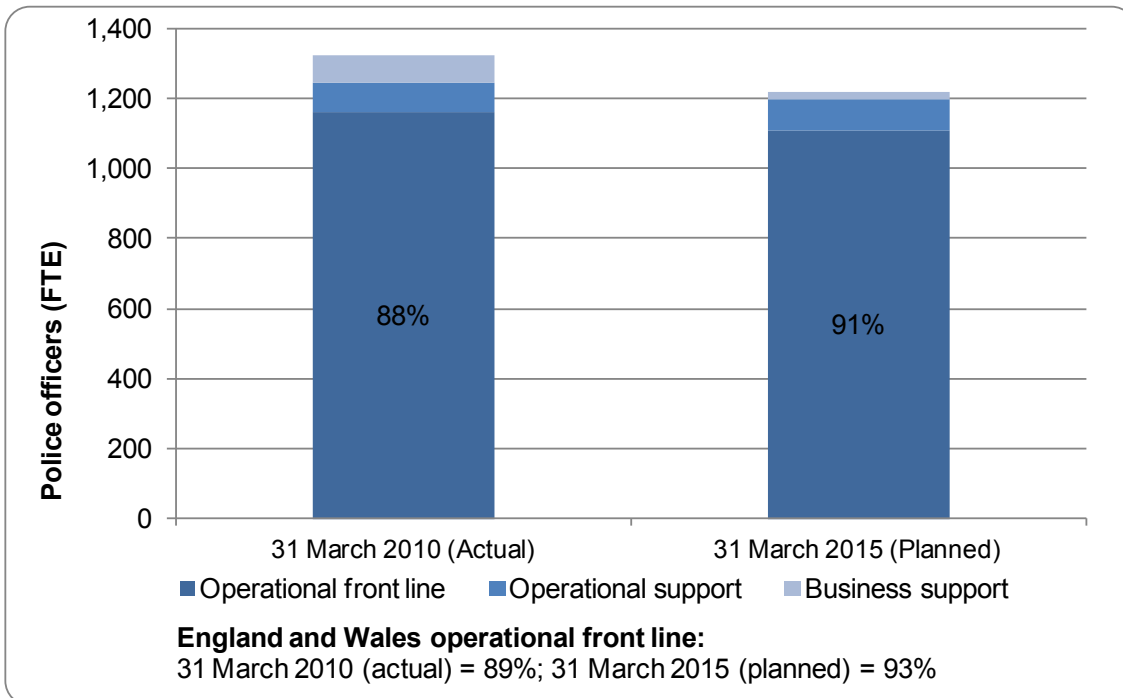


The **number** of officers, PCSOs and staff (i.e. of the force’s total workforce) working on the front line is planned to reduce by 15% between March 2010 and March 2015 (from 1,868 to 1,588).

Over the same period, the **proportion** of Northamptonshire Police’s total workforce allocated to frontline roles is planned to increase from 71% to 76%. This compares with an overall increase across England and Wales from 74% to 78%.

⁸ From 2010 Gwent, the Metropolitan Police Service, Wiltshire and North Wales police forces chose to code those officers and staff who are on long-term absence from duty due to maternity/paternity leave, career break, full-time education or suspension, and those on long-term leave, to their normal working role. This has the effect of inflating their workforce and frontline figures by up to 1% compared to other forces.

The **number** of Northamptonshire’s police officers in frontline roles is planned to reduce by 5% from 1,163 in March 2010 to 1,110 in March 2015, as the following chart shows. However, the **proportion** of these remaining on the front line is planned to increase from 88% to 91%. This compares to an overall increase across England and Wales from 89% to 93%.



Collaboration

HMIC monitors the force’s progress on collaboration⁹ because it offers the opportunity to deliver efficient, effective policing and help achieve savings.

The force is part of the East Midlands Serious and Organised Crime Unit (EMSOU) collaboration, and the multi-force shared services (MFSS) collaboration for some business support services with Cheshire Constabulary. The former is delivering savings and the latter is anticipated to deliver savings in the future. EMSOU is regarded as a success within the force, due to the additional capacity, capability and resilience the collaboration has provided.

There have been some teething problems with the move to the MFSS. Staff reported that while they understand the need to change and save money, the shared service approach has created more work for them, because the supporting IT system has not worked as well as anticipated.

The election of the PCCs in November 2012 has provided an opportunity for a fresh look at the approach to regional collaboration, to identify potential additional areas for development. The PCCs in the East Midlands have asked HMIC to review this on their behalf.

⁹ HMIC defines collaboration as “all activity where two or more parties work together to achieve a common goal, which includes inter force activity and collaboration with the public and private sectors, including outsourcing and business partnering”.

In 2014/15, the force expects to spend 5% of its total expenditure on collaboration, which is commendable, as it is considerably lower than the 11% figure for England and Wales. Overall, collaboration is expected to contribute to 12% of the forces savings requirement, which is higher than the 7% figure for England.

The PCC and his staff are exploring the potential for collaborating with other partners, such as local authorities. What this will mean for the current MFSS arrangements is unclear. The Chief Constable believes that savings from elsewhere could be significant, and the change should be radical and ambitious. However, there are currently no firm plans in place for how this will be achieved.

Managing change

Reductions in police budgets have inevitably led to a shrinking workforce. HMIC expects forces also to have an eye within their change programmes on the longer term transformation¹⁰ which can help maintain or improve the service they offer to the public and prepare for future funding challenges.

The force underwent a radical transformation of its workforce some years ago. This resulted in a significant number of police staff being appointed to positions that had traditionally been the preserve of police officers (for example, there are police staff investigators). The force made significant savings at that time. However, with the advent of this spending review Northamptonshire Police has had to focus on reducing police staff numbers to deliver the savings required.

The force developed the 'iCan Programme' (Improving Confidence and Affordability in Northamptonshire) to realise the required savings. This includes:

- re-structuring the force;
- collaboration;
- leaner (more efficient) working at a local level;
- reduction of staff through compulsory and voluntary redundancy; and
- compulsory retirement of police officers who reach 30 years' service.

Throughout the change programme, the way the force delivers its core business has been reviewed and redesigned to improve efficiency and effectiveness. There are a range of workstreams and projects underway which aim to improve the productivity of frontline staff (such as the custody review and mobile data project).

The PCC, who was elected in November 2012, is developing a number of innovative approaches, aimed at challenging the orthodoxy of how excellent policing services can be delivered. These include forging greater links with Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service; developing better partnership engagement to assist in tackling the causes of crime; introducing paid special constables, who would be contracted to work a minimum number of hours annually; and the development of wide-scale volunteering.

¹⁰ Transformation is a process of radical change that orientates an organisation in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness. It implies a fundamental change of character, with little or no resemblance to the past configuration or structure.

While there is much good work to improve the efficiency of policing services across the force, it is disappointing that there is no overarching strategy that links the change programme, finance and workforce strategies with service delivery. This is evident in the lack of understanding amongst the workforce (at all levels) as to the shared vision for the organisation; what is it aspiring to achieve and how.

How is the force engaging police officers, PCSOs and staff in the change programme?

The PCC and Chief Constable host leadership seminars for all staff, during which they describe their vision, plans and invite questions from officers and staff. They also encourage any member of staff to come forward with ideas about how the force could provide a better service to the public and make savings. This is a strong and effective way of communicating key priorities across the whole organisation.

Police officers feel they have been kept informed about change and the savings. They are satisfied that they have been given sufficient information through the intranet, briefings and staff forums. They also feel they are able to express their views openly and pose questions of senior and chief officers.

Police staff, by contrast, do not feel they have been given enough opportunity to influence change. They reported that they have not been involved in the change process or consulted, although they did feel that the redundancy process had been conducted fairly.

There remains a level of uncertainty about how the force will change, and what it will look like in five years time. While there is an appreciation throughout the organisation that this change is necessary, some staff have become unsettled, resulting in higher levels of staff turnover during recent months, particularly in some important areas. While there will inevitably be uncertainty about the future, it is important that a clear vision is articulated and, where possible, decisions communicated to all staff.

How effective has the response been?

Northamptonshire Police must now find savings to plug the funding gap in this spending review period. Although the force has delivered savings through workforce reductions, restructuring and innovation, HMIC has concerns about the force's ability to achieve further change while improving service delivery and performance.

HMIC is also concerned that until the force moves to a more affordable way of working, it faces a much greater challenge than other forces, and is less prepared to respond to further funding reductions while maintaining the policing service to the public.

Impact of the changes on the public

The challenge for forces is not just to save money and reduce their workforce numbers, but to ensure the choices they make in deciding how to achieve this do not have a negative impact on the service they provide to their communities. HMIC therefore looked for evidence that the force had kept a consideration of the effect on the public at the heart of their choices.

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 being 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.¹¹ HMIC therefore examined how far the changes being implemented by the force had affected the visibility of the police on the streets of Northamptonshire.

In March 2013, Northamptonshire Police allocated 57% of its police officers to visible roles. This is three percentage points more than it allocated in 2010, and is higher than the figure for most other forces (which was 54% 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, Northamptonshire Police allocates 60% to visible roles. This is two percentage points more than it allocated in 2010, and is broadly in line with the 59% figure for England and Wales.

HMIC conducted a survey¹² 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 Northamptonshire, 12%¹³ said that they have seen a police officer more often than they had 12 months ago; this is broadly in line with the 13% average across all survey respondents in England and Wales.

Of those people surveyed, 76%¹⁴ said they felt either as safe or safer in the areas where they live, compared with two years ago. This is broadly in line with the figure for most other forces, which is 75%.

11 See *Demanding Times*, HMIC, London, 2011. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

12 A YouGov survey was carried out during a four-week period during March 2013. Satisfaction and confidence surveys are also carried out at a national level by the Crime Survey of England and Wales. These use larger sample sizes and are carried out quarterly over a rolling-year period. Some forces also carry out their own surveys of the general public. More information can be found at www.crimesurvey.co.uk, www.hmic.gov.uk or from force websites.

13 ± 5%.

14 ± 5%.

Calls for service

HMIC examined whether police forces were 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 or record response times or targets and are free to determine their own arrangements for monitoring attendance to calls.

Northamptonshire Police did not provide information on this, and we are therefore unable to assess whether the changes the force has made have affected their ability to respond promptly when called.

Crime

In 2010, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, set a clear priority for the police service to reduce crime.

During the first two years of the spending review, Northamptonshire Police reduced recorded crime (excluding fraud) by 3%. This is a poor outcome when compared with the 13% reduction seen across England and Wales. Victim-based crime (that is, crimes where there is a direct victim – an individual, a group, or an organisation) reduced by just 2%, compared with an 12% reduction in England and Wales. Again, this outcome is of concern to HMIC.

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

12 months to March 2013	Northamptonshire Police crime rates per 1,000 population	England and Wales crime rates per 1,000 population
All Crime (excluding fraud)	65.6	61.4
Victim-based crime	60.7	54.5
Burglary	9.7	8.2
Violence against the person	11.9	10.6
Anti-social behaviour	45.2	40.7

Northamptonshire has not achieved the levels of crime reduction seen in other forces. While the force has made significant reductions in violent crime, there has been worrying increases in other crimes, notably domestic burglary and theft from vehicles. Victim-based crime, although decreasing, is considerably higher than Northamptonshire Police's most similar forces,¹⁵ and represents one of the highest rates in England and Wales. The force has put in place a number of measures to improve and sustain performance, seeking advice from peers and drawing on expertise from the College of Policing.

¹⁵ Forces are grouped with other forces that are considered to be most similar, sharing similar demographic characteristics. This assists in making better comparisons with other forces.

The force identifies that the changes to the force structure and reducing numbers of police officers and staff is a contributing factor to its poor performance. The further planned reductions in police officer numbers can only add to the force's challenge of achieving sustained performance improvement.

It is important that crimes are effectively investigated and the perpetrator identified and brought to justice. When sufficient evidence is available to say who has committed a crime, it can be described as detected.

The Northamptonshire Police's sanction detection rate¹⁶ (for crimes excluding fraud) for the 12 months to March 2013 was 21.7%. This is lower than the England and Wales sanction detection rate of 27.0%.

We have chosen these types of crime to give an indication of offending levels in Northamptonshire. 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 to service delivery for the public is how satisfied victims are with the overall service they receive when they seek police assistance.

In the 12 months to March 2013, 82.0%¹⁷ of victims were satisfied with the overall service provided by Northamptonshire Police. This is lower than the England and Wales figure of 84.6%.¹⁸

Changes to how the public can access services

Following a review of the front counters and enquiry desk officers (EDOs) in 2012, Northamptonshire Police are not planning to reduce the current provision. The PCC is commissioning work to consider what front counter¹⁹ provision should look like for the 21st century; at this stage there are no firm plans.

16 A sanction detection is a 'solved crime' where a suspect has been identified and notified as being responsible for committing that crime and what the full implications of this are, and has received an official sanction. Official sanctions include charges, cautions, penalty notices, offences taken into consideration (TICs) and cannabis warnings.

17 $\pm 1.9\%$.

18 $\pm 0.2\%$.

19 A police building open to the general public to obtain face-to-face access to police services.

Conclusion

Northamptonshire Police faces a smaller savings requirement than other forces. There is no doubt that the force understands the scale of the challenges it faces. However, unlike most other forces it could not provide HMIC with a clear description of how it is going to close the funding gap in this spending review period, or how it will face up to the challenges of the next round of budget reductions.

The force has developed some innovative approaches in its response to the funding challenge, but it continues to find it difficult to provide the level of service to the public that it should.

The force recognises that it has a significant problem with performance, and is fully committed to addressing it. Based on the force's own data, there has been a reduction in reported crime for the period April to June 2013. This is encouraging; but it is too early to say whether this improvement will be sustained.

HMIC is therefore concerned by the scale of the challenge Northamptonshire faces, the inadequacy of its plans to plug the funding gap in this spending review period, and its ongoing underperformance in terms of keeping the people of Northamptonshire safe.

HMIC will continue to monitor Northamptonshire's change programme and plans for further cost reductions.

We will also revisit the force in the autumn to review its long-term savings options, and assess the sustainability of its early improvements in keeping the people of Northamptonshire safer.

In October 2010, the Government announced that central funding to the Police Service in England and Wales would reduce by 20% 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 third year.

Our inspection focused on three questions:

1. How is the force responding to the budget reduction?
2. What is the impact for the workforce and the public?
3. How is the force managing current and future risks?

To answer these questions, 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 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.

National findings and patterns across all 43 forces are given in our thematic report, *Policing in Austerity: Rising to the Challenge*, which is available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

This report provides the findings for Northamptonshire Police.