



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Valuing the Police: Preparedness Inspection

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

Findings for Northumbria Police

What is the financial challenge in Northumbria?

Northumbria Police and Northumbria Police Authority reported that they are facing a **£67m** 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 18% of their gross revenue expenditure.

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

The force and authority clearly understood the scale of the financial challenge facing them, and have considered a full range of options in developing a plan to meet it. This included a lot of detail for year one (2011/12); annual financial milestones were also in place for all four years, and showed good understanding of year-by-year staff reductions, the level of reserves and non-pay savings.

In addition to addressing the comprehensive spending review budget reduction, the plan included savings to meet an overspend, which was agreed in 2009, to fund additional frontline police officers and staff. To help meet this extra financial challenge, the authority planned to use £35m of its reserves.

In early 2010, the temporary Chief Constable established five strategic business reviews to modernise service delivery, deliver policing as efficiently as possible, and reinforce the values, culture and behaviour of the organisation and its staff. At the time of inspection all business reviews had reported back to the programme board. Those which promised the most savings were being implemented first, with schedules in place for each one. Governance, programme and project management arrangements were all in place.

HMIC has some confidence that savings identified within the business reviews will be delivered. However, substantial savings from further police staff reduction or through collaboration will also be necessary if the force is to balance its budget; and while they and the authority were actively engaged in exploring the possibility of collaboration with local partners and other forces, progress towards effective regional collaboration was slower than they had hoped.

HMIC was also concerned that the plan relied on a significant rise in precept (the amount of council tax which goes to the force) in order to maintain frontline numbers beyond year one. Northumbria Police was the only force in England and Wales to rely on such a high percentage jump – and approval for this is outside of the force or authority’s control. Accordingly, they recognised the need to lobby central Government for support for this increase. There is therefore some unmitigated risk around the programme.

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

Northumbria Police planned to make the following changes to its workforce numbers.

	Police Officers	Police Staff	PCSO
31 March 2010 (actual)	4,187	2,096	438
31 March 2015 (proposed)	3,560	1,167	248

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?

The force felt it was best able to tackle local priorities and reduce crime by protecting its neighbourhood, response and local investigation functions. Beyond years 1 and 2 of the comprehensive spending review, however, this will become increasingly difficult, and the force’s focus may have to shift to maintenance of service delivery rather than of actual workforce numbers.

Because of the uncertainty around exactly how the funding shortfall for years three and four will be met (primarily because of its precept assumptions), it was difficult for the force to assess realistically what the impact of the savings will be on the public.

Both the authority and the force were committed to ensuring that their local communities were engaged and informed about the challenges they face, the proposals under consideration and the implications of decisions made. This commitment was evident throughout their plans, and they were constantly searching for new and innovative ways to reach the public.

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.

Northumbria's *Policing Plan* includes targets for reducing crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the coming year.