



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Valuing the Police: Preparedness Inspection

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

Findings for Suffolk Constabulary

What is the financial challenge in Suffolk?

Suffolk Constabulary and Suffolk Police Authority reported that they are facing a **£13.5m** 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 10% of their gross revenue expenditure.

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

Suffolk Constabulary's expenditure per head of population is the second lowest of all English and Welsh forces. The scale of the challenge that Suffolk faces in closing the funding gap is greater than many other forces, given its relatively low cost. The funding challenge has existed for some time and as a result organisational 'fat' has already been trimmed. This has left the force with fewer options for making cuts and less room for manoeuvre.

The force and authority clearly understood the financial challenges they face. Suffolk's plan identified how savings are to be realised through two key elements: collaboration with Norfolk Constabulary and the introduction of a more efficient local policing model.

Suffolk plans to make significant savings through its collaboration with Norfolk Constabulary where the two forces will share their business support (eg human resources, IT and finance), operational support (eg joint custody provision) and protective services (e.g. tackling serious organised crime) functions. The Suffolk and Norfolk collaboration proposals are some of the most ambitious and well planned in the country.

Suffolk Constabulary has developed a cost reduction plan that identified where and when the savings are expected to be realised over the next four years. This included key saving milestones which the force and authority were monitoring through effective governance arrangements and programme management. At the time of the inspection, cashable efficiencies for some elements of the cost reduction plan were still being quantified. The force and authority planned to use reserves to help achieve the required budget reductions in the first two years of the period. There is a slight risk that if the planned savings from workforce reduction are not achieved then reserves will have been exhausted by 2013/14, and there will be a savings gap of approximately £4m remaining.

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

Suffolk have planned that their workforce will change as follows:

	Police Officers	Police Staff	PCSO
31 March 2010 (actual)	1,246	971	173
31 March 2015 (proposed)	1,178	861	167

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.

It is the Chief Constable's intention to retain the current number of PCSOs. However, this is dependent upon other partners (eg local authority) decisions to continue the funding. 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?

Suffolk Constabulary and Police Authority were committed to protecting visible frontline policing and to improving police availability to the public. However, at the time of the inspection some of the cost reduction plans were still at an early stage, so it was not possible for the force and authority to be clear as to the likely impact of the planned cuts on the service to the public. Feedback from local public consultation had influenced policing priorities for the next four years.

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.

Suffolk's *Policing Plan* prioritises reducing levels of crime and ASB.

