



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Valuing the Police: Preparedness Inspection

**Thames Valley 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 Thames Valley 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 Thames Valley Police

What is the financial challenge in Thames Valley?

Thames Valley Police and Thames Valley Police Authority reported that they are facing a **£52.9m** 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 11% of their gross revenue expenditure.

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

The force and authority had already been planning for cuts for some time before the comprehensive spending review (CSR) announcement in Autumn 2010. Their final predicted funding gap (£52.9m) is based on a number of extremely prudent financial assumptions.

Thames Valley Police and their police authority were prepared for the forthcoming cuts. They understood the financial and organisational challenge they faced, and could build on a strong history of delivering against efficiency plans.

The force and the authority have a good plan in place to deliver significant savings. They have considered, and were taking forward, a broad range of options for reducing costs while safeguarding the level of service they provide to the public. They could also demonstrate a logical rationale for the approach that they had chosen. Although the well-developed work on collaboration with neighbouring force Hampshire Constabulary was intended to deliver a noteworthy £9m over the four-year CSR period, a new local policing model was due to deliver the largest proportion of savings.

The force and authority recognised that making changes costs money initially and so allocated funds to cover this. At the time of inspection the force and authority still had to find an outstanding £5.8m in the final year of the CSR period. However, they were exploring a number of options in order to close this remaining gap. HMIC has confidence that the force and authority will do so.

The force and authority designed a good system of programme management and governance to oversee progress. The authority is committed to ensuring that both the force and budget are handed over to the incoming Police and Crime Commissioner in good shape. This, coupled with the detailed and realised schedule of savings, gives HMIC confidence that the additional savings will be realised.

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

Thames Valley have planned that their workforce will change as follows:

	Police Officers	Police Staff	PCSO
31 March 2010 (actual)	4,434	3,000	500
31 March 2015 (proposed)	4,034	2,541	453

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.

March 2010 figures include 166 officers and 145 staff seconded from Thames Valley and other forces to carry out national and regional duties. They are externally funded, but paid through the Thames Valley payroll system. These numbers are not included within the March 2015 figures.

What will be the impact on service to the public?

The authority consulted with the public to understand their priorities for policing in Thames Valley. Through a focus group the authority sought to establish priorities in the context of cuts to funding. Anti-social behaviour (ASB) was identified as a public priority. The authority has included tackling ASB in its public-facing delivery plan but no specific target has been set.

The force and authority have made a commitment to maintain or enhance operational policing. They do not anticipate there being any changes to service delivery as a result of the funding reductions. The force has been engaging with local authorities in order to better understand the impact of cuts on partner funding and so they have a good level of understanding about the likely impact.

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.

Thames Valley's plan includes targets to reduce crime including areas of ASB.