



Inspecting policing
in the **public interest**

Policing in austerity: One year on

**West Mercia Police
July 2012**

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About this review

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.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) carried out an inspection of all 43 police forces in England and Wales in Spring 2011, to see how they were planning to meet this financial challenge. When the results were published in July 2011 (search for 'Valuing the Police' on www.hmic.gov.uk), we committed to returning one year later to report on progress, and to assess whether there had been any impact on the service provided to the public.

A thematic report, *Policing in Austerity: One year on*, brings together the findings from all 43 forces and looks at the picture in England and Wales. We found that, across England and Wales:

1. Forces have risen to the financial challenge, balanced the books and largely maintained the service they provided to the public in year one;
2. Their plans show that over the whole spending review period (i.e. until March 2015), they are working to protect, although not preserve, frontline services;
3. As there are significant variations between force plans and performance, HMIC has some concerns about whether all forces can sustain this position;
4. Forces should ensure the changes they are making now transform efficiency and will provide a strong enough foundation to face future spending reviews.

This report summarises the findings for West Mercia Police, and is based on data provided by the force in February 2012.¹

HMIC will continue to monitor the progress made by the force, and to publish the results on our website (www.hmic.gov.uk).

¹ Figures are rounded (financial figures to the nearest million and workforce figures to the nearest 10) and financial figures are in cash prices.

Summary

The challenge for police forces and police authorities isn't just to balance the books, but to transform the way they deliver policing and make it more efficient, so that the public can continue to receive improving services.

West Mercia Police is the fourth largest police area in England and Wales and responsible for policing a diverse region of 2,868 square miles spanning three counties. It serves a population of 1,189,700 and has a medium-sized budget comparable to other similarly sized forces. The force has a history of achieving efficiencies that has stood it in good stead to address the financial challenge of the 2010 comprehensive spending review. As a result it is in a strong position to achieve its savings target by 2015.

Over the last few years, the force has undergone considerable structural change in response to the saving requirements. A new way of working is focused around meeting the needs of the public through re-designed processes that create efficiencies. It is also assessing whether it can make savings by reducing the number of buildings it uses, for instance by sharing offices with other public services.

Over and above internal change programmes, West Mercia is now in the latter design phase of an alliance with Warwickshire Police. The forces are collaborating to deliver policing services more efficiently and at the same time combining efforts to deliver significant savings. The detailed alliance plans have been approved by the police authorities and implementation of changes will start soon. There is a strong commitment from both forces and authorities to make it a successful and rewarding venture that will benefit local communities.

In light of the alliance, West Mercia Police was subject to a risk-based inspection by HMIC in February 2012 so that we could better understand its financial plans. The force was found to be in a good position to meet the majority of its savings target, and has sufficient reserves to meet any shortfall at the end of the spending review period.

Because of the changes it is making West Mercia Police will be able to not only balance the books but increase the proportion of its workforce in frontline, crime-fighting roles. By 2015 70% of its workforce will be on the front line, which is a lower proportion than most other forces. However, the proportion of police officers on the front line increases over the same period from 87% to 91%, resulting in a higher proportion of officers on the front line than other forces.

Unlike in England and Wales as a whole, where crime is falling, crime rates in West Mercia remain static. 85% of victims were satisfied with the service from West Mercia Police, which is a higher satisfaction rate than national figures.

The following sections of this report explore: money (how much West Mercia Police needs to save and its progress in achieving this); people (its planned changes to the number and type of its workforce and the effect of this on the front line); and the impact on services to the public. We have looked at these areas because they are important in helping the public, not only to understand how your force is meeting savings, but how it continues to improve the services you receive.

■ Money – meeting the savings

What is the financial challenge in West Mercia Police?

£37.7 million – the amount West Mercia Police will need to save between 2011 and 2015 (based on the force's calculations). There are ten forces in England and Wales with larger savings to make as a proportion of their overall budgets.

By Spring 2012, West Mercia had developed plans which outlined how it will achieve £31.8m (84%) of its savings requirement. The force is using reserves to balance its budget.



West Mercia Police's four-year plan is based on the force saving £10m by March 2012 (i.e. in the first year of the budget reductions). The force reported that by December 2011 they had already saved £4.8m.

As well as funding from the Government, forces also receive money from local council tax. The police authority has decided to not increase the amount of money you pay for policing from your council tax in 2012/13. This is one of 20 forces in England and Wales where it will not change.

Within the force's plans are a number of assumptions on future costs, including pay increases, rate of inflation and the level of funding it will receive from council tax. If these change this may impact on the amount of savings the force has to find.

Forces will continue to develop the detail of their plans between now and 2015 and this may also affect the amount of savings required as they revise their assumptions, further develop the detail of their savings plans and update their financial plans as part of ongoing budget management.

People – reconfiguring the workforce

What is the impact on the workforce?

820 – the number of posts the force plans to cut by 2015. 240 of these will be police officer posts. This is a 10% reduction in police officer posts, the same as the reduction across England and Wales.

Because 81% of police budgets (on average) is spent on staff costs, it is not surprising that forces across England and Wales are planning to achieve most of their savings by reducing the number of police officers, police community support officers (PCSOs) and police staff they employ.

According to data provided by the force in February 2012, West Mercia is planning to make the following changes to its workforce between March 2010 and March 2015. By March 2012 the force will have achieved 60% of the required reduction of its workforce. (We use March 2010 as our starting point here because many forces started to reduce their workforce in the year before the funding cut was implemented, anticipating that they would have to make savings later on.)

	31 March 2010 (actual)*	Planned Change 31 March 2010 – 31 March 2015*	% change in West Mercia	% change across England and Wales
Officers	2,390	-240	-10%	-10%
PCSOs	280	^^	0%	-10%
Police staff**	1,720	-580	-34%	-19%

Notes:

2010 is a snapshot of the number of people in post and is taken from data supplied annually by the force to the Home Office, whereas the 2015 data is projected number of posts.

All workforce figures are rounded to the nearest 10; columns may therefore not add up.

In the workforce baseline data (March 2010), included within the non-frontline is an 'Other' function. This is made up of staff absent from duty due to maternity / paternity leave, career break, full time education or suspension and those on long-term leave (sickness, compassionate, special and unpaid leave). In March 2010 the 'Other' function made up 1 percent of the total workforce across England and Wales. The projected data for March 2015 was provided by forces, and forces have budgeted for this in different ways. As a result there will be some variability in this data when used for the purposes of comparisons.

** To note: police staff actual figures for 2010 include Designated Officers. Designated Officers are not included in 2015 estimated figures.

^^ Greater than 0 but less than 5.

What is the effect 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.”

70% – the proportion of the total workforce (i.e. officers, PCSOs and staff) West Mercia estimates will be working on the front line by 2015.

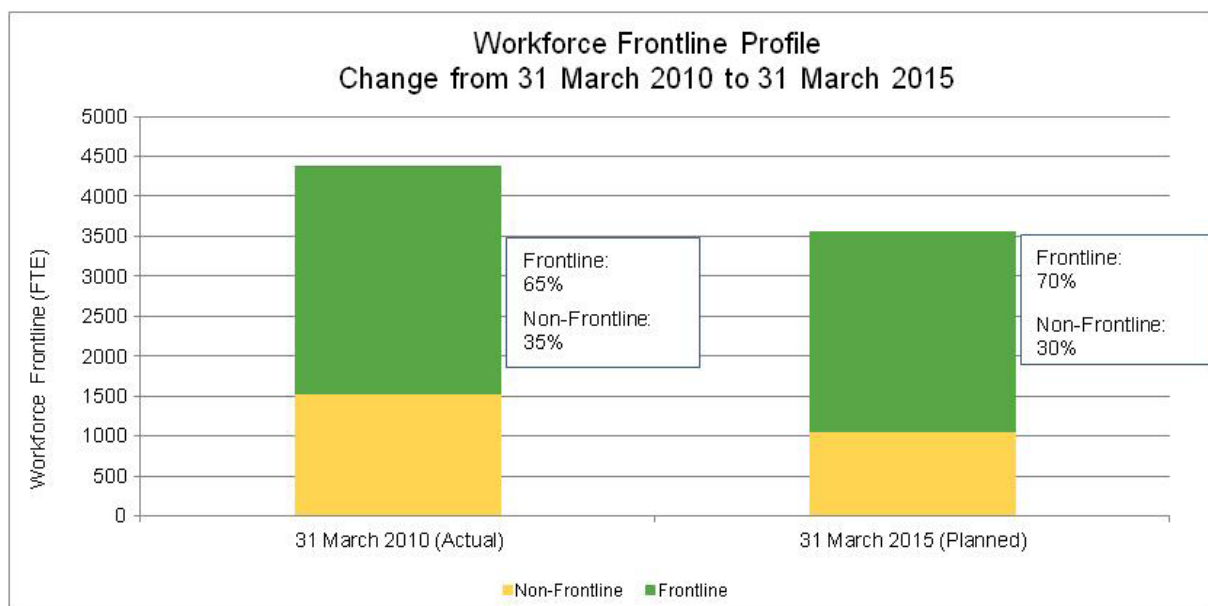
91% – the proportion of police officers specifically the force estimates will be working on the front line by 2015, which is a four percentage point increase when compared with 2010.

Number and proportion of officers, PCSOs and staff in frontline roles

The **number** of officers, PCSOs and staff (i.e. the force’s total workforce) working on the front line reduce from 2,870 in March 2010 to an estimated 2,520 by March 2015.

Based on these figures, the **proportion** of West Mercia Police’s total workforce allocated to frontline roles will increase from 65% to 70%. This compares with an overall increase across England and Wales from 67% to 74%.

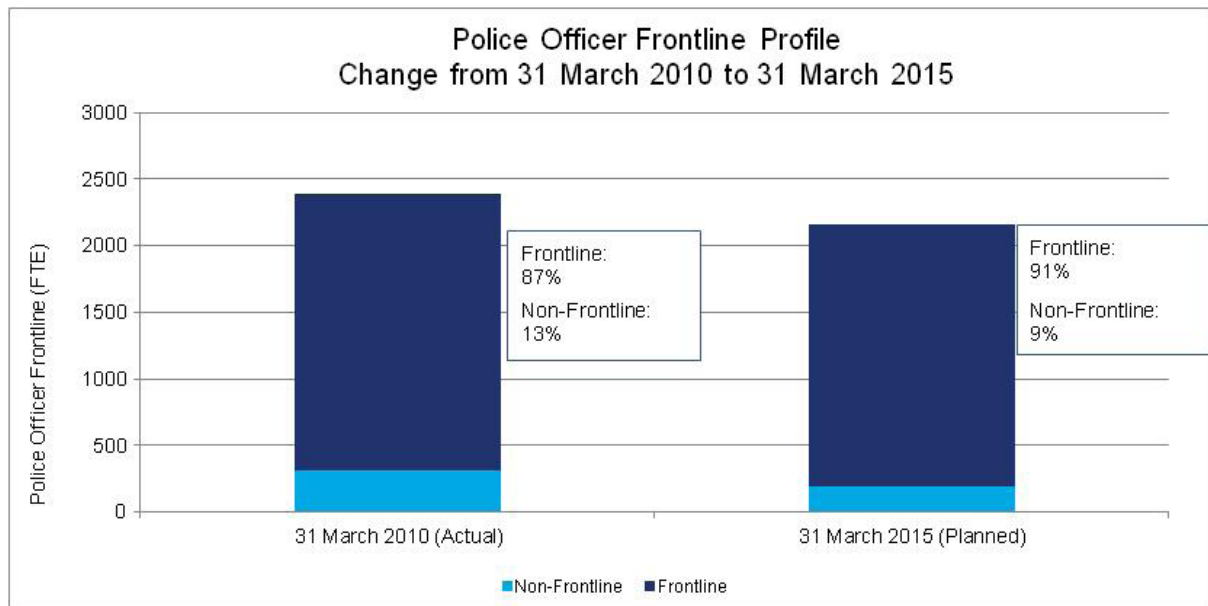
The following chart shows the change in the workforce frontline profile for West Mercia.



Number and proportion of police officers in frontline roles

Looking specifically at police officers: the **number** of officers working on the front line will reduce from 2,080 in March 2010 to an estimated 1,970 by March 2015. The number working in non-frontline roles will also reduce (from 310 to 190).

Based on these figures, the **proportion** of West Mercia police officers allocated to frontline roles will increase from 87% to 91%, as the following chart shows. This is higher than the figure for England and Wales, which is 89%.



Public – reviewing the services you receive

What proportion of police officers and police community support officers are visible and available to the public?

70% – the proportion of police officers and PCSOs which West Mercia allocates to visible roles (such as officers who respond to 999 calls, deal with serious road traffic accidents or patrol in neighbourhoods). This is greater than England and Wales figure.

HMIC defines ‘visible’ as police employees who wear uniform and mainly work in public and ‘available’ means police officers and PCSOs who are actually ready for duty (i.e. as opposed to being on a training course, attending court, off shift, on leave or sick, etc).

It is important to note that the work done by those in visible roles 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).

Research has shown that people who see the police at work in uniform at least once a week are more likely to have confidence in their local force (see our 2011 report *Demanding Times*, available from www.hmic.gov.uk).

HMIC recently looked at whether West Mercia has police officers available when they are most likely to be needed, a repeat of a survey which we last carried out in 2010. This showed a decrease in the proportion of police officers and PCSOs available in visible roles at key times.

How is the way you can access policing services changing?

Forces are exploring different ways in which the public can access policing services. They are making more use of the internet and social media to communicate with people and reviewing the number of face to face access points they need.

By 2012 West Mercia will reduce the number of front counters by one and also decrease the number of other locations (e.g. libraries or local authority buildings) where you will be able to physically access policing services by one, compared with 2010.

Has there been any change in crime levels over the last year?

There was no change in recorded crime levels overall in West Mercia between years ending December 2010 and December 2011 (compared with a 3% fall across England and Wales).

The first job of the police is to reduce crime and keep the peace; and in 2010 the Home Secretary Theresa May stated that she expects forces and authorities to make financial cuts while still reducing crime, and without impacting on the front line.

Based on the number of crimes per 1,000 people recorded in the 12 months to December 2011, the force came 11th out of 42² forces (where first equals lowest crime rate).

The table below shows how rates of crime changed between years ending December 2010 and December 2011. (ASB is not included because data is not available for the same time period; however, HMIC has examined how this problem is tackled in West Mercia in a separate report, which is available on our website.)

Type of crime	Difference between years ending Dec 2010 and Dec 2011 in West Mercia	Difference between years ending Dec 2010 and Dec 2011 across England and Wales
All crime	0%	-3%
Victim-based crime*	-1%	-2%
Robbery	5%	3%
Burglary	-6%	-1%
Criminal damage & Arson	-9%	-9%

*This category includes all crime where there is a direct victim – either an individual, a group, or an organisation.

We have chosen these types of crime to give an indication of the nature of offending in West Mercia. For information on the frequency of other kinds of crimes in your area, go to www.hmic.gov.uk/crime-and-policing-comparator where you will find more detailed information. You will also find links to the force's own website, where it publishes the latest crime figures.

2 City of London Police is not included

Does the force's own survey work show any change in public satisfaction with the service they provide?

As forces reconfigure their resources to meet the budget challenge it is important that they understand the impact on service delivery. One way of measuring whether this is changing is by tracking how satisfied the public are with the overall service they receive when they seek police assistance.

The overall victim satisfaction for West Mercia is 85%, which is greater than the rate for England and Wales as a whole³.

³ This is a statistically significant difference.