



Uncharted waters ahead for police service

The police service faces major challenges in the years ahead from reduced budgets, fewer officers and more complex crime, according to a report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC).

The inspection looked at how police forces use their resources now and how they plan to do so in the future. This comes at a time of great financial uncertainty for the police service, with the outcome of the review of the funding formula yet to be announced and the overall level of funding to be announced for the next Spending Review not due until November.

HMI Mike Cunningham, who led the inspection, said:

“Police forces have been through change on an unprecedented scale since 2010. It is a tribute to the leadership of the police service and to officers, PCSOs and staff in all forces that the service has, on the whole, been able to absorb that change while measured crime has continued to fall and public satisfaction with the police has been maintained.

“The next five years will be more challenging for forces as they strive to make further reductions in budgets and workforce, while dealing with increasingly complex crime. Policing is entering uncharted waters.

“Forces have made great strides in assessing the current demand for their service, however they need to improve their ability to forecast demand. Only by achieving this level of understanding can forces make informed decisions on how to make best use of their resources. Typically forces think in terms of numbers of officers and staff when developing workforce plans, rather than their skills and capabilities that will be required in the future. They need to start building their capability now, informed by a clearer understanding of future demand.”

This inspection looked at how well forces understand the demand for their service and how well they match their resources to that demand and provides an assessment of their efficiency. The report is accompanied by separate reports on each force, based on inspections carried out from March to June 2015 and data provided by forces on their spending plans for future years. HMIC graded five forces as ‘outstanding’, 29 were ‘good’, eight as ‘requires improvement’ and for the first time, one force has been found to be ‘inadequate’.

Most forces have a good understanding of the current demand for their service and they know their current capacity (the costs and numbers of their workforce). They do not understand their current capability (what skills their workforce has).

Forces have little understanding of their future demand and the capability they need to meet it. The future planning and modernisation that is taking place in forces is driven by capacity – how much money forces will have and how many people they can afford to employ, rather than what forces are likely to have to do.

Forces need to improve their understanding of future demand and link it to their financial and organisational planning, so that they are in a fit shape to face their future challenge.

Forces IT needs to improve considerably – HMIC has commented on this in previous reports. Too many systems are weak and ageing, and the service is not optimising the use of IT to make them more efficient.

Forces are planning large reductions in their budgets and workforce, but at the time of the inspection both the outcome of the Spending Review and the Government's consultation on changes to the police funding formula were unknown. The robustness of forces' financial planning varies considerably and forces are planning large reductions in their reserves in the years ahead. The reductions in forces' workforces are likely to lead to a further erosion in neighbourhood policing.

As forces' budgets reduce further, those forces which are less efficient could become financially unsustainable or operationally unviable; even efficient forces could become financially unsustainable or operationally unviable if their funding does not match the plans of the police and crime commissioner. There is a need for a set of proxy measures to provide early warning signs of forces under significant stress – that work needs to happen quickly and HMIC will play its full part in it.

Although the scale of the challenge is considerable, if forces embrace the challenges ahead, they could emerge in better condition – more focused, more efficient, better trained and better matched to the demand they will face.

Notes to Editors:

1. The five forces which were found to be 'outstanding' were:
 - Cheshire;
 - Durham;
 - Lancashire;
 - Norfolk; and
 - West Midlands.

2. The eight forces which were found to be in the 'requires improvement' category were:
 - Bedfordshire;
 - Cleveland;
 - Dorset;
 - Dyfed Powys;
 - Lincolnshire;

- Northamptonshire;
 - South Yorkshire; and
 - Surrey.
3. The force graded inadequate was Humberside.
 4. All other forces were assessed as 'good'.
 5. Last year the Valuing the Police programme inspections found that five forces were 'outstanding', 35 were 'good' and three forces were graded as 'requires improvement'. None was found to be 'inadequate'.
 6. Individual assessment reports are available for each of the 43 police forces in England and Wales.
 7. As part of its annual inspections into police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL), HMIC's Efficiency programme assessed how a force maximises the outcomes from its available resources. We reviewed both the financial and workforce planning of police forces whilst examining wider questions of cost, capacity and capability. Our inspection focused on the overall question, 'How efficient is the force at keeping people safe and reducing crime?'

To answer this question HMIC looked at three areas:

 - How well does the force use its resources to meet demand?
 - How sustainable and affordable is the workforce model?
 - How sustainable is the force's financial position for the short and long term?
 8. As part of the inspection, a survey of 26,458 people was carried out by IPSOS MORI, looking into public satisfaction with the service provided by their local police force, and whether they considered it provided value for money:
 - 54 percent thought the range of services offered by the police in their local area had remained about the same;
 - 8 percent of respondents thought the visibility of the police in their local area had improved, 44 percent thought it had stayed about the same and 36 percent thought it had got worse; and
 - 7 percent of respondents thought the presence of uniformed officers had increased locally, 52 percent thought it had not changed and 31 percent thought it had fallen.
 9. This report will be followed by reports into the remaining strands of the annual PEEL assessments - Effectiveness and Legitimacy - of all 43 police forces of England and Wales which will be published early in the spring. The judgments in this report will be counted towards the next HMIC PEEL assessment, published next year.
 10. Forces were given a four-year settlement in October 2010 which equated to a 20% reduction in central government grant over the spending review period. This level of reduction has increased subsequently due to government announcements such as the spending round announcement in 2013. The level of central government funding for policing for 2014/15 was reduced by 5.75% in real terms from the 2013/14 baseline.
 11. HMIC's 'Value for Money' reports and supporting information can be found at <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publications/policing-in-austerity-meeting-the-challenge/>
 12. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest, and rigorously examines the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces to tackle crime and terrorism, improve criminal justice and raise confidence. HMIC inspects all 43 police forces in England and Wales together with other major policing bodies.
 13. For further information, HMIC's press office can be contacted during office hours from 8:30am – 5:30pm Monday – Friday on 0203 513 0600.
 14. HMIC's out-of-hours press office line for urgent media enquiries is 07836 217 729.