



Inspecting policing
in the public interest

Thames Valley Police's response to the funding challenge

July 2013

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Thames Valley Police: Executive summary

Thames Valley Police faces a smaller savings requirement compared to other forces, but this is not without its challenge. The force has lower costs than many other forces, meaning it has had to work hard to identify more efficiencies in order to squeeze its costs down even further.

Thames Valley Police has made a very strong response to meeting its financial challenge over the last two years. It has limited the impact of the cuts on its frontline workforce in a way very few other forces have been able to achieve; protecting its crime fighting capability by driving out efficiencies in other areas. It is one of only four forces in England and Wales where the number of police officers in frontline roles is planned to increase.

In addition, the force has demonstrated excellent performance in reducing crime over the spending review period.

HMIC is confident that the force will be able to deliver its planned savings within this spending review by reducing costs while continuing to fight crime successfully.

Financial challenge

Thames Valley Police has identified that it needs to save £56.3m over the four years of the spending review (i.e. between March 2011 and March 2015).

This savings requirement is 12% of its overall budget, a much smaller proportionate reduction than that faced by most other forces. However, Thames Valley Police was a comparatively efficient force at the beginning of this spending review. It has therefore had to overcome difficulties in finding further savings because it spends less on policing than most other forces and has a lower number of police officers, so has a comparatively lower pay bill. The amount it spends on each officer is below that of most other forces, although the amount it spends on police community support officers (PCSOs) and staff members is broadly in line with most other forces.

Progress in making savings

Thames Valley Police has planned how it will save £56.3m and therefore has no outstanding funding gap.

Changes to the workforce

All forces spend most of their money on staff costs (such as wages and overtime), and so have focused on reducing this expenditure in order to cut costs.¹ Thames Valley Police is no exception.

¹ See *Adapting to Austerity*, HMIC, London, July 2011, p.13. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

The force is reducing police officer numbers by limiting recruitment and holding vacancies. As a result, by the end of the spending review period, it is planned that there will be 149 fewer police officers in Thames Valley Police. This means the number of police officers is planned to reduce by 3% between March 2010² and March 2015. This is a far smaller reduction to most other forces and the force should be commended for having taken effective steps to protect its crime fighting capability.

Thames Valley Police is protecting frontline posts as it makes these cuts. Once again, this is commendable. Between March 2010 and March 2015, the proportion of police officers in frontline crime-fighting is planned to increase from 88% to 92%. This compares to an overall increase across England and Wales from 89% to 93%.

The force has also made some police staff redundant and not replaced others as they have left. By 2015 it is planned that there will be 222 fewer police staff in Thames Valley Police. The number of police staff will reduce by 7% between March 2010 and March 2015. This is much smaller reduction than that planned by most other forces.

Thames Valley Police plans to do as much as it can to protect the number of its police community support officers (PCSOs). The force plans to lose 19 PCSOs (4%); which is smaller reduction than that planned by most other forces.

Impact on the public

HMIC expects forces to make savings without damaging the service provided to the public. We monitor whether they are achieving this by examining crime rates, and the results of the user satisfaction surveys which all forces conduct.

Over the first two years of the spending review, recorded crime³ (excluding fraud) rates fell by 21%. This is a very good outcome as it is considerably greater than the 13% reduction recorded across England and Wales as a whole. Victim satisfaction remains high at 87.6%.⁴

Future challenges

Thames Valley Police has made very good progress so far in meeting its financial challenge in this spending review period. It has implemented a comprehensive change programme, putting in place a sound and cost effective policing model. This means that the force is in a strong position to be able make the further savings required after March 2015, while, crucially, maintaining its high level of service to the public.

2 We use 2010 as our baseline as many forces started to make staff reductions in anticipation of the spending review.

3 Crime excluding fraud, as per the new crime classifications released in July 2013 by the Office for National Statistics.

4 ± 1.9%.

The challenge

Over the four years of the spending review Thames Valley Police has identified that it needs to find savings of £56.3m. This is 12% of its total expenditure⁵ (which in 2012/13 was £423.6m). The average amount to be saved by forces across England and Wales is 17%.

Progress in making savings: Years 1–2

The force successfully made 59% (£33.4m) of the total savings required by March 2015 in the first two years of the spending review period. It achieved this by:

- limiting recruitment of new police officers;
- reducing the number of police staff it employs (which it started to do in 2010);
- changing the local policing model;
- collaboration; and
- centralising some support and corporate service such as performance management, finance and HR.

All of this activity has enabled the force to make significant savings and the frontline to be maintained.

Plans for Year 3–4

The force has plans in place to achieve further savings of £13.1m in 2013/14, and another £9.9m in 2014/15 and therefore has no outstanding funding gap.

Looking beyond the current spending review

The force has started to consider what savings it might need to make in the next spending review period (after March 2015); in fact the force's medium-term financial plan looks further forward to 2017/18.

Thames Valley Police has already identified other areas in which it can make further savings. It anticipates being able to protect its crime fighting capacity, preserving the service it provides to the public well into the next period of funding reductions.

⁵ Based on a gross expenditure baseline in 2010/11.

The scale of the challenge in Thames Valley Police

Although Thames Valley Police faces less of a savings requirement than many other forces, it nonetheless faces a particular challenge because:

- it spends less per head of population than most other forces in England and Wales;
- it has a lower number of police officers per head of population than most other forces in England and Wales;
- the cost of police officers per head of population is lower than most other forces in England and Wales, and
- the cost of PCSOs and of police staff is broadly in line with most other forces in England and Wales.

Demand

Forces face different levels of demand for the service they provide to the public. This section looks at three of the key indicators of demand to provide an overall impression of the challenges each force faces:

- the number of calls the force receives from the public;
- the number of crimes the force deals with, and
- the number of prosecutions (suspects charged with offences) the force brings.

12 months to March 2013	Thames Valley Police	England and Wales
Emergency and priority calls per 1,000 population	117	134
Victim-based crime per 1,000 population	49.8	54.5
Prosecutions (charges) per 1,000 population	8.0	10.2

This table shows that in 2012/13 Thames Valley Police received fewer emergency and priority calls from the public than most other forces. In addition it dealt with fewer crimes per head of population and supported fewer prosecutions.

How difficult is the challenge?

Thames Valley Police faces a smaller challenge with regard to saving money than other forces. However, as a force with an already low spend on policing as well as low pay costs, it is more difficult to find further savings. While aspects of its demand are lower than other forces, its proximity to London and the mix of large urban and rural areas brings additional demands.

Response to the challenge

Over 80% of a police budget (on average) is spent on staff costs⁶. It is therefore not surprising that forces across England and Wales plan to achieve much of their savings by reducing the number of police officers, PCSOs and police staff employed.

Thames Valley Police is no exception. It made an early start on this in 2010, when it slowed its recruitment of new police officers and police staff, and reduced the number of police staff. The force plans to make 67% of its savings from its pay budget. This is a lower proportion than in most other forces and a good indicator that the force is striving to protect its crime-fighting capacity - bearing down instead on what it spends on goods and services.

Changes to workforce numbers

The following table shows the force's planned changes to workforce numbers over the spending review period, and compares these to the change for England and Wales⁷.

	31 March 2010 (baseline)	31 March 2015	Change	Thames Valley Police change %	Change for England and Wales %
Police Officers	4,434	4,285	-149	-3%	-11%
Police Staff	3,000	2,779	-222	-7%	-16%
PCSOs	500	481	-19	-4%	-17%
Total	7,935	7,545	-390	-5%	-13%
Specials	408	800	+392	+96%	+60%

Overall, the table shows that Thames Valley Police plans to lose considerably fewer police officers, police staff and PCSOs than in other forces. It also plans to considerably increase the amount of volunteers in the special constabulary.

Changes to the proportion of workforce on the front line

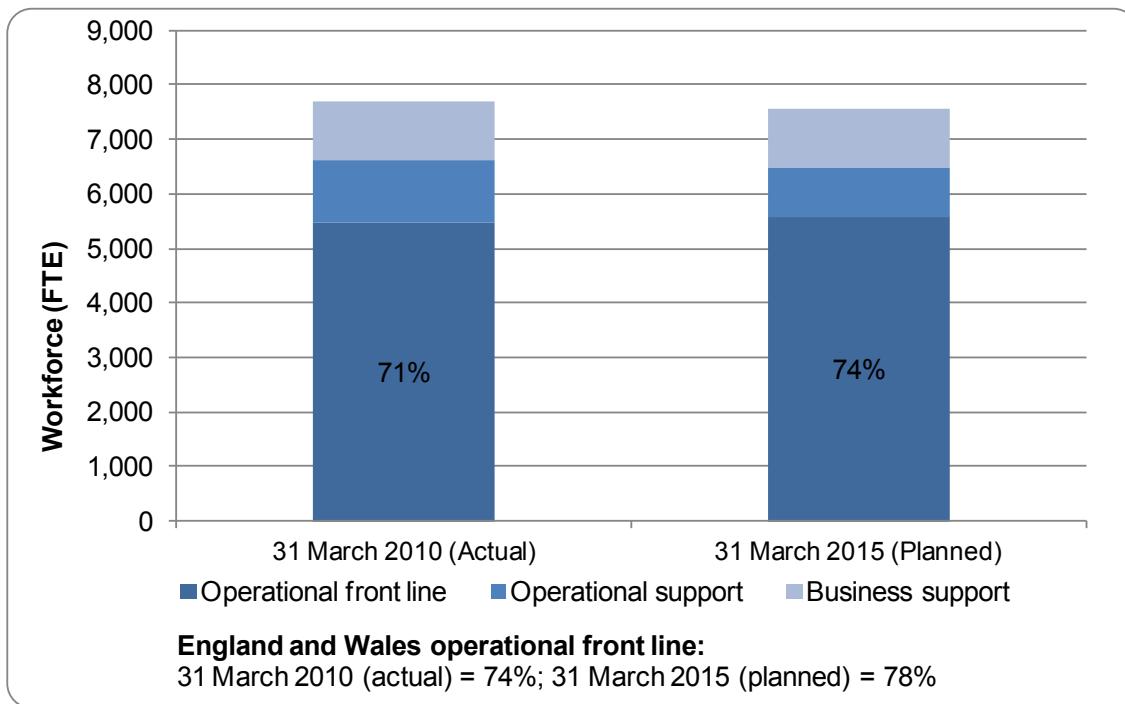
HMIC defines the people who work on the police front line as: *“those who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law”*. It is important that as forces reconfigure their structures and reduce workforce

⁶ See *Adapting to Austerity*, HMIC, London, July 2011, p.13. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

⁷ Workforce figures for March 2010 show the actual number of people working for the force in permanent posts on the 31 March in that year. People on long-term absences (such as maternity leave) are included in these 'actual' figures, but vacant posts are not. Workforce projections for March 2015 are for budgeted posts, so the actual number of people who will be working for the force at that point in reality may be different, because some posts will be vacant or filled by temporary staff. Forces' projections may also exclude people who will be on long-term absences. The difference between actual workforce numbers and projected numbers should therefore be taken as an approximate expected change.

numbers, they focus on maintaining (or if possible increasing) the **proportion** of people in these crime-fighting roles.

The following chart shows the change in the workforce frontline profile in Thames Valley Police.⁸

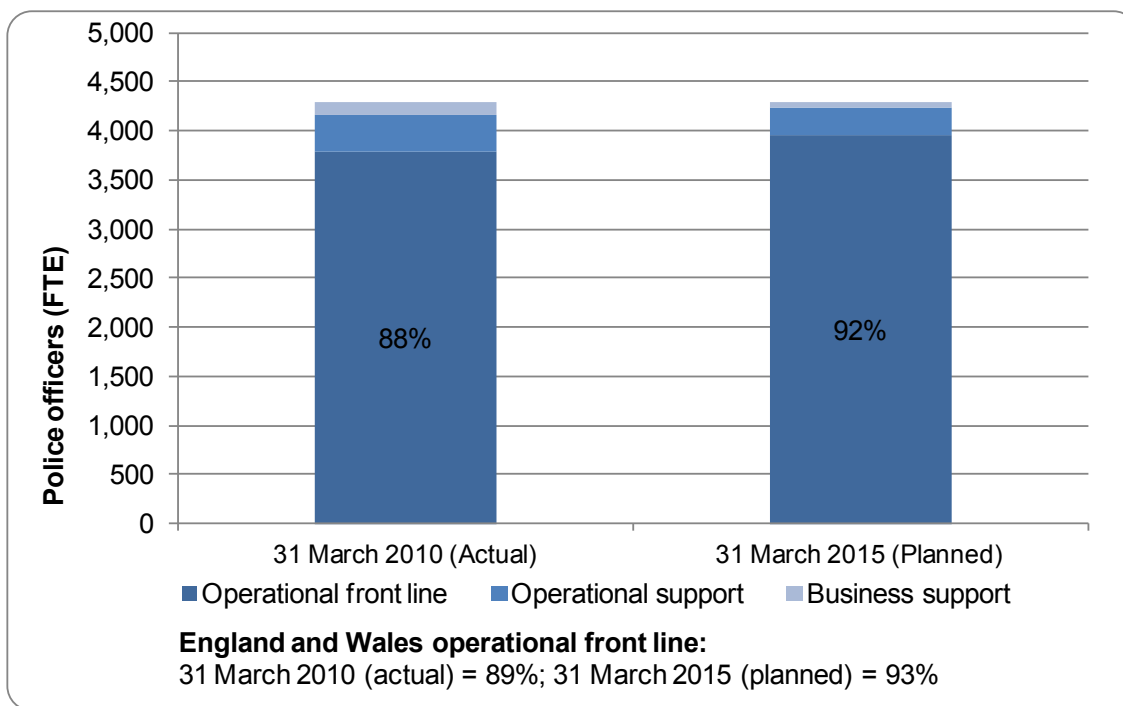


The **number** of officers, PCSOs and staff (i.e. of the force's total workforce) working on Thames Valley Police's front line is planned to increase by 1% between March 2010 and March 2015 (from 5,489 to 5,570).

Over the same period, the **proportion** of Thames Valley's total workforce allocated to frontline roles is planned to increase from 71% to 74%. This compares with an overall increase across England and Wales from 74% to 78%.

The **number** of Thames Valley's police officers in frontline roles is planned to increase by 4% from 3,795 in March 2010 to 3,952 in March 2015, as the chart on the next page shows. The **proportion** of those remaining on the front line is planned to increase from 88% to 92%. This is a strong indicator that the force is taking steps to protect vital frontline officers and is broadly comparable to the increase (from 89% to 93%) that we see across England and Wales.

⁸ From 2010 Gwent, the Metropolitan Police Service, Wiltshire and North Wales police forces chose to code those officers and staff who are on long-term absence from duty due to maternity/paternity leave, career break, full-time education or suspension, and those on long-term leave, to their normal working role. This has the effect of inflating their workforce and frontline figures by up to 1% compared to other forces.



Collaboration

HMIC monitors force's progress on collaboration⁹ because it offers the opportunity to deliver efficient, effective policing and help achieve savings.

Thames Valley Police has established a well-managed collaboration programme with Hampshire Constabulary to jointly deliver a range of services including information and communication technology, joint information management unit, firearms, police dog section and roads policing.

In 2014/15 the force expects to spend 11% of its total expenditure on collaboration which is in line with the 11% figure for England and Wales. However, collaboration will contribute to 16% of the force's savings requirement, which is above the 7% figure for England and Wales.

Managing change

Reductions in police budgets have inevitably led to a shrinking workforce. HMIC expects forces also to have an eye within their change programmes on the longer term transformation which can help maintain or improve the service they offer to the public and prepare for future funding reductions.

Thames Valley Police has the capacity and capability to deliver its savings plans. The force has invested wisely in a change programme team and there is a rigorous and professional approach to programme management which gives HMIC confidence that future plans can be delivered.

⁹ HMIC defines collaboration as "all activity where two or more parties work together to achieve a common goal, which includes inter force activity and collaboration with the public and private sectors, including outsourcing and business partnering".

How is the force engaging police officers, PCSOs and staff in the change programme?

Thames Valley Police's change programme has been widely communicated to officers and staff. Chief officers have a good working relationship with staff associations such as Unison and the Police Federation who feel engaged in the change programme. A new staff survey is being designed as there has not been a force wide staff survey or cultural audit for two years. When describing the culture of the force, some staff described it as having an 'open and can do' attitude which has been retained throughout the change programme. Staff agree that there is a wealth of information about the changes taking place in the force if people are interested.

How effective has the response been?

The force's response to the funding challenge has been very well managed and led. The majority of the changes impacting on the workforce have already taken place. The local policing model was implemented two years ago and collaboration is now firmly established.

Thames Valley Police has made a very strong response to meeting its financial challenge over the last two years.

Impact of the changes on the public

The challenge for forces is not just to save money and reduce their workforce numbers, but to ensure the choices they make in deciding how to achieve this do not have a negative impact on the service they provide to their communities. HMIC therefore looked for evidence that the force had kept a consideration of the effect on the public at the heart of their choices.

Visibility

The work done by police officers and staff in visible roles (such as officers who respond to 999 calls, deal with serious road traffic collisions or patrol in neighbourhoods) 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).

That being said, research shows that the public value seeing visible police officers on patrol in the streets, and that those who see police in uniform at least once a week are more likely to have confidence in their local force.¹⁰ HMIC therefore examined how far the changes being implemented by the force had affected the visibility of the police on the streets of Thames Valley.

In March 2013, Thames Valley Police allocated 58% of its police officers to visible roles. This is one percentage point higher than it allocated in 2010, and is higher than with the figure for most other forces (which was 54% across England and Wales).

Police visibility is further enhanced by PCSOs who principally support community policing. Looking at the proportion of police officers and PCSOs, Thames Valley Police allocated 62% to visible roles. This is one percentage point higher than it allocated in 2010 and is higher than the 59% figure for England and Wales.

HMIC conducted a survey¹¹ of the public across England and Wales to assess whether the public had noticed any difference in the way their area is being policed. Of those people surveyed in Thames Valley, 9%¹² said that they have seen a police officer more often than they had 12 months ago; this is broadly in line with the 13% average across all survey respondents in England and Wales.

Of those people surveyed, 77%¹³ said they felt either as safe or safer in the areas where they live compared with two years ago. This is broadly in line with the figure for most other forces which is 75%.

10 See *Demanding Times*, HMIC, London, 2011. Available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

11 A YouGov survey was carried out during a four-week period during March 2013. Satisfaction and confidence surveys are also carried out at a national level by the Crime Survey of England and Wales. These use larger sample sizes and are carried out quarterly over a rolling-year period. Some forces also carry out their own surveys of the general public. More information can be found at www.crimesurvey.co.uk, www.hmic.gov.uk or from force websites.

12 ± 5%.

13 ± 5%.

Calls for service

HMIC examined whether police forces were taking longer to respond to calls for help, as a result of its workforce reductions and other changes designed to save money. This analysis relies on force collected data. HMIC found that Thames Valley Police does not set any targets for attendance times, but routinely monitors response to immediate and urgent calls. These times are subject of scrutiny by chief officers on a weekly basis. However, HMIC cannot provide any information to the public on this issue.

Crime

In 2010 the Home Secretary, Theresa May, set a clear priority for the police service to reduce crime.

Between 2010/11 and 2012/13 (the first two years of the spending review) Thames Valley Police reduced recorded crime (excluding fraud) by 21% compared to 13% in England and Wales. In comparison to other forces this was among the highest reductions seen over the period. Over this period, victim-based crime (that is, crimes where there is a direct victim – an individual, a group, or an organisation) reduced by 21% compared with 12% in England and Wales.

By looking at how many crimes occur per head of population, we can see how safe it is for the public in that police area. The table below shows crime and anti-social behaviour rates in Thames Valley (per head of population) compared with the rest of England and Wales.

12 months to March 2013	Rate per 1,000 population in Thames Valley	England and Wales rate per 1,000 population
All Crime (excluding fraud)	56.2	61.4
Victim based crime	49.8	54.5
Burglary	7.1	8.2
Violence against the person	8.6	10.6
Anti-social behaviour incidents	18.4	40.7

It is important that crimes are effectively investigated and the perpetrator identified and brought to justice. When sufficient evidence is available to say who has committed a crime, it can be described as detected.

Thames Valley's sanction detection rate¹⁴ (for crimes excluding fraud) for the 12 months to March 2013 is 24.9%. This is below the England and Wales sanction detection rate of 27.0%.

We have chosen these types of crime to give an indication of offending levels in Thames Valley. For information on the frequency of other kinds of crimes in your area, go to www.hmic.gov.uk/crime-and-policing-comparator

¹⁴ A sanction detection is a 'solved crime' where a suspect has been identified and notified as being responsible for committing that crime and what the full implications of this are, and has received an official sanction. Official sanctions include charges, cautions, penalty notices, offences taken into consideration (TICs) and cannabis warnings.

Victim satisfaction surveys

An important measure of the impact of changes to service delivery for the public is how satisfied victims are with the overall service they receive when they seek police assistance.

In the 12 months to March 2013, 87.6%¹⁵ of victims were satisfied with the overall service provided by Thames Valley Police. This is higher than the England and Wales figure of 84.6%¹⁶.

Changes to how the public can access services

Forces are exploring different ways in which the public can access policing services. There are 25 police stations across the Thames Valley area – the same number as in 2010. Over the four year period the number of front counters¹⁷ where the public can access the police will have reduced by two. However, the force is planning to open 13 new shared access points¹⁸ between 2010 and 2015.

The force is making greater use of the internet and social media to communicate with the public. As more and more people become accustomed to engaging with large commercial and public organisations in different ways, the force too is planning to offer the public different ways to contact them. For example Thames Valley is:

- continuing to improve its online services and use of social media channels including Twitter and Facebook; and
- encouraging communities to use the Thames Valley alert system to keep them informed about policing in their local areas.

15 \pm 1.9%.

16 \pm 0.2%.

17 A police building open to the general public to obtain face-to-face access to police services.

18 A non-police building open to the general public to obtain face-to-face access to police services. For example, shared facilities with council services (e.g. libraries or offices), the fire service or other partners.

Conclusion

Thames Valley Police faces a smaller savings requirement over this spending review period compared to other forces but its low cost base presented a challenge from the outset.

The force plans to achieve its savings with significantly fewer reductions in its workforce (both police officer and staff) than most other forces. At the same time it has continued to have a strong focus on service delivery and crime, achieving higher levels of satisfaction and greater reductions in crime than most other forces.

The decisive action that the force has taken over the last two years to bear down on its non pay costs, protect its frontline workforce and reduce crime is impressive.

The force has demonstrated one of the strongest responses to the funding challenge that HMIC has seen in England and Wales.

In October 2010, the Government announced that central funding to the Police Service in England and Wales would reduce by 20% in the four years between March 2011 and March 2015.

HMIC's Valuing the Police Programme has tracked how forces are planning to make savings to meet this budget demand each year since summer 2011. This report identifies what we found in this third year.

Our inspection focused on three questions:

1. How is the force responding to the budget reduction?
2. What is the impact for the workforce and the public?
3. How is the force managing current and future risks?

To answer these questions, we collected data and plans from forces, surveyed the public to see if they had noticed any changes in the service they receive from the police as a result of the cuts, and conducted in-force inspections. We also interviewed the Chief Constable, Police and Crime Commissioner and the chief officer leads for finance, change, human resources and performance in each force, and held focus groups with staff and other officers.

National findings and patterns across all 43 forces are given in our thematic report, *Policing in Austerity: Rising to the Challenge*, which is available from www.hmic.gov.uk.

This report provides the findings for Thames Valley Police.