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## **HMIC Recognises Hard Work Pays Off But Big Challenges Are Ahead**

Chief Constable Colette Paul today welcomed two separate reports that recognise both the funding challenge facing Bedfordshire Police and the significant efforts the force is making while also managing to reduce crime year on year. Commenting on the reports published today, she said:

“These reports demonstrate just how well Bedfordshire Police continues to fight crime and protect the public against a backdrop of challenging cuts. Our force is required to find £19.4m over four years (2011 to 2015 – 16) and I am pleased the HMIC recognises that we have responded well to the financial challenges and are on track to reduce costs whilst at the same time protecting the frontline and significantly reducing crime.

Since I arrived at Bedfordshire Police just two and a half weeks ago I have been overwhelmed by the determination and ability shown by all our staff to find new and creative ways to meet these challenges. We have cut costs while improving our performance; less crime means fewer victims and that is something we should all be very proud of.

Looking ahead we do face new challenges but we are determined to work hard to identify opportunities to meet them. The HMIC acknowledges Bedfordshire Police has lower than average funding and a complex crime mix compared to most forces of its size. So again, the fact that we have an 18% reduction in crime over the last two years is testament to our hard working and dedicated staff.

A recent staff survey has shown that achieving these goals as we transform our business has had an affect on staff morale and rather than shy away from this we have chosen to look and listen carefully to how our people feel and do something about it. We will continue to monitor this and check on our progress. The good news is that the survey shows 71.9% of our staff go beyond what is expected of them to help the organisation succeed and I thank them for that. 74.8% of staff also understand that we must change to meet our performance and financial challenges and those efforts have been noted by the HMIC as well. As I look to the future I want Bedfordshire Police to be seen as an ‘employer of choice’, which equips people with the right tools and the right skills to do the job in order that we continue to fight crime and protect the public and this is something I am confident we will achieve.

As our public would expect our aim now is to ensure we have as many officers as possible on the front line delivering to the people of Bedfordshire and I expect to see this number grow. I also want to increase the number of Specials and volunteers who are vitally important members of our policing family and a recruitment drive to encourage new members is underway. In the future we will be looking at the need to recruit police officers too. Finally partnerships and further collaboration will be an important part of our future as we try to maintain and boost our capabilities and the force needs to more fully embrace diversity to reflect the communities in which we work.”

Olly Martins, Police and Crime Commissioner said: “HMIC’s report provides authoritative third party verification of the representations I made to our local MPs ahead of the government’s Spending Review, setting out the severe financial and policing challenges we face in Bedfordshire. Sadly the Spending Review announced last month means we’re still going to have to cut £7.5million by 2016.

HMIC's report suggests that Bedfordshire Police is one of the most efficient and effective forces in the country, and has so far been able to reduce its budget while improving performance. This is confirmed by today's official figures showing crime has again fallen in the county faster than the national average. But HMIC also says we are vulnerable in the face of further funding reductions because there is nowhere left to cut except the front line, expressing concern about the force's ability to maintain its service in these circumstances.

That's why I have today written to the Home Secretary saying that, on the basis of our acute policing needs, we should get the amount the funding formula says instead of being docked between £2m and £3m each year. In addition we should be allowed the flexibility to increase our council tax by £5 per household until we reach the average, without having to hold a referendum each year, as opposed to the mere 2% rise we were allowed this year.

I appreciate this may not be a very popular move with Bedfordshire's tax payers and it would only reduce the cuts we need to make by 1/10th. But our precept, or the amount people pay for policing through the council tax, is well below the national average of what is paid in other forces and many people I speak to tell me they are prepared to pay a little more to protect front line policing."

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