

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 10.00 ON FRIDAY 29 MAY 2015



# Responding to Austerity: progress report

Bedfordshire Police

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## 1. Introduction: About the progress report

In the October 2010 spending review, the government announced that central funding to the police service in England and Wales would be reduced in real terms by 20 percent in the four years from March 2011 to March 2015.<sup>1</sup>

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMIC's) Valuing the Police Programme has tracked how forces have planned to make savings to meet this budget requirement. We published findings on this in July 2011, June 2012 and July 2013.<sup>2</sup>

The *Responding to Austerity* report, published in July 2014, in the final year of the spending review, looked at how forces have managed the considerable challenges to make savings so far. In order to consider this, we asked three questions:

- To what extent is the force taking the necessary steps to ensure a secure financial position for the short and long term?
- To what extent has the force an affordable way of providing policing?
- To what extent is the force efficient?

HMIC made a judgment as to the extent to which each force provides value for money in the context of current spending constraints. We rated each force in one of the following categories:

- outstanding;
- good;
- requires improvement; or
- inadequate.

Judgment is made against how well the force achieves value for money; it is not an assessment of the overall effectiveness of policing. In applying the categories HMIC considers whether:

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<sup>1</sup> *Spending Review 2010*, HM Treasury, 2010. Available from [www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2010](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2010)

<sup>2</sup> *Adapting to Austerity: A Review of Police Force and Authority Preparedness for the 2011/12–14/15 CSR Period*, HMIC, July 2011; *Policing in Austerity: One Year On*, HMIC, June 2012; *Policing in Austerity: Rising to the Challenge*, HMIC, July 2013. All available from [www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/](http://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/)

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- the way the force is achieving value for money is good, or exceeds this standard sufficiently to be judged as outstanding;
- the force requires improvement in the way it achieves value for money, and/or there are some weaknesses; or
- the force's provision of value for money is inadequate because it is considerably lower than is expected.

HMIC judged Bedfordshire Police as requiring improvement in its response to the spending review. We decided it would be monitored closely and the force revisited to assess its progress with developing and implementing a new operating model.

Two areas were specifically identified as requiring improvement:

- Has the force an affordable way of providing policing?
- To what extent is the force efficient?

During our re-visit we interviewed the deputy chief constable, force leads for finance, change, collaboration, call handling and response, human resources and discussed the force's progress with the police and crime commissioner. We also reviewed a number of documents provided by the force including its action plan in response to the *Policing in Austerity* inspection.

This report provides the findings for Bedfordshire Police.

## **2: Findings**

### **2.1 Summary**

**The force was re-visited in October 2014. The immediate areas of risk were being addressed as a matter of urgency and plans were in place to develop and implement the longer term approach to policing Bedfordshire. The force now needs to implement rapidly more detailed plans and provide assurance that these will be delivered in an affordable way while maintaining performance.**

Bedfordshire Police is on track to achieve its required savings of £20.8m over the spending review period. The force has faced a difficult challenge and is making progress towards achieving a secure financial position.

The force has ambitious plans for the future to improve policing and achieve good value for money. However, the force faces some significant policing challenges in the short term. It now needs to develop further and then implement its plans for improving policing in Bedfordshire in an affordable way more quickly, and in doing so it must ensure that policing services to the public remain effective.

The senior leadership team have a good grasp and understanding of the issues and areas that need to improve. The force previously reduced its police officer numbers to a level that put at risk its ability to provide effective policing and this had a serious impact upon performance. Under the leadership of the new chief constable, with oversight and scrutiny provided by the police and crime commissioner (PCC), it is now taking steps to increase its police strength to safer levels through the recruitment of 98 police officers.

HMIC has been encouraged in the progress made in developing the plan for the alliance with Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Hertfordshire Constabulary. This is a clear signal of the commitment to collaboration and to achieving future savings and improvements in policing across the three forces.

The force is moving in the right direction and the pace of change is increasing. However, the force continues to face a challenging level of demand with a fragile but improving level of staffing. HMIC remains concerned that the force has to make significant changes and improvements over a short time framework in a challenging context.

## **2.2 To what extent has the force an affordable way of providing policing?**

**The force is still developing a new way of working, called an operating model, which will provide an affordable and sustainable policing service. It has taken some initial steps to make necessary changes in areas that present immediate risk, such as increasing the police officer and police staff numbers in frontline posts. There are medium to long term collaboration plans being developed and these are expected by the force to provide further reassurance against future budget cuts. This includes ambitious plans to transform policing through improvements in information technology (IT), which will facilitate the change needed. However, a significant amount of work remains to be done to achieve the force's ambition.**

The force recognises critical interdependencies between discrete projects, particularly the three-force public contact project and how it influences local policing. However, it is concerning that Bedfordshire still has not identified a new target operating model with a clear implementation plan which identifies timescales, milestones and interdependencies. While it is understood that the force is working with consultants and progress is being made, the force would benefit from identifying a 'critical path' for its change programme to ensure it achieves its ambition.

The force has responded positively to a reduction in police officer numbers and has put in place a recruitment programme to achieve a substantial increase in numbers. In real terms, over a period of six months, the police establishment has increased by 35 per cent and is now 18 per cent<sup>3</sup> over establishment. This provides improved resilience to the frontline and these resources have had a positive impact upon frontline staff morale.

The force has ambitious plans to increase the number of special constables from the March 2010 baseline figure of 210 to 300 by March 2015. This will bolster further the delivery of frontline policing within neighbourhoods and thereby increase visibility and reassurance.

The quality improvement programme (QIP) is using 'lean principles' to re-design the organisation; consultancy support is also being used to develop the new operating model. The programme has already reviewed staff allocation against demand to public protection, crime, local policing and joint protective services covering the three- force area which includes the provision of the following resources; major crime; firearms; dogs; roads policing; operational planning; and scientific support.

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<sup>3</sup> Figures are rounded to nearest whole number

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In October 2014 police officers were moved to the newly formed domestic abuse investigations unit (DAIU) more than doubling the size of the team and bringing together safeguarding procedures and the capacity and capability to bring offenders to justice. This should ensure that the victim receives an improved quality of service, for example, by knowing who is dealing with their case from the beginning to the end of the investigation.

The force has reviewed the allocation of police officers to specialist roles and returned a small number to neighbourhood policing and these officers are now embedded in priority neighbourhood areas. The force plans to increase further the number of neighbourhood staff as response officer numbers are restored. This will improve overall police officer visibility in local communities and further strengthen joint partnership working. Additional police community support officers (PCSOs) have also been recruited and further recruitment is planned to restore the PCSO establishment.

From July 2014, Bedfordshire Police led the eastern region specialist operations unit (ERSOU). Specialist services such as the firearms unit and scientific services have been remodelled to streamline management structures and provide more efficient service delivery across the three force alliance. This has delivered 5 percent savings in 2014/15, compared to the previous year outturn, and a further 5 percent is planned for 2015/16.

The ambitious plans for the three-force alliance with Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Hertfordshire Constabulary are overseen by the three chief constables and PCCs and there are robust governance and scrutiny processes in place.

The force understands the importance of communication during an extended period of change and has employed a new communications lead and who has been reviewing how the chief officer team reach all staff within the organisation to ensure they are listening to concerns and providing reassurance; briefing on key changes for the force and three force alliance. The forces' 'streetwise max' training has provided an opportunity for senior officers and staff to deliver key messages on change; engage and consult and this has received positive feedback.

## **2.3 To what extent is the force efficient?**

**Bedfordshire Police has some significant challenges to overcome to improve efficiency. The alliance plans are ambitious and there is some evidence of transformational change beginning to take place. However, the force still does not currently have the capacity to deal with all its demand effectively or efficiently and is now developing a new operating model to address this.**

During the annual business planning cycle police forces work with statutory and non-statutory partners and the community to understand the most important issues and prioritise them so that resources are focused on those that cause the most harm and risk to communities. This is known as the strategic assessment. A control strategy, derived from the strategic assessment, sets out the principal priority areas to deploy resources effectively and invest in preventive work to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour according to risk. At the time of inspection the force did not have an effective strategic assessment or control strategy and this posed a significant challenge. The force recognised this and it has been working with the College of Policing to develop a strategic assessment. In October 2014 it put in place a control strategy so that it can provide further clarity and direction on deployment of resources to address threat, risk and harm.

The force recognises that it needs to fully understand its demand profile so that it can be more efficient in the way that it manages its service to the public. Since July 2014 a demand assessment has been produced, which analyses crimes, incidents and appointments to assist in efficient resource allocation. This is supplemented by a demand modelling tool called 'INSPIRE', which shows demand from individual to geographical level. However, more work needs to be done to fully understand the demand profile so that the analysis can be used to inform and test different configurations of demand and determine the best model for the future.

There are further opportunities for Bedfordshire to reduce demand on its services by working with partners so that the most appropriate response is provided. For example through the development of a mental health triage model to ensure that vulnerable individuals are identified early. At the time of the re-inspection, NHS trusts were bidding for the tender to provide this response but the provider had not yet been identified.

While the force has responded to the immediate risk of reduced capacity through the recruitment of police officers, PCSOs, special constables and force control room staff, it is unclear what investment the force has made in preventive work to reduce demand. The force has some crime reduction initiatives such as 'hot-spotting' and 'predictive policing'; however, there is a concern that it may not be tackling longer term issues. For example, through a co-ordinated approach with partners, to divert potential young offenders and provide successful routes to reduce re-offending.



HMIC recognises that the force faces performance challenges throughout a significant period of change ahead and needs to ensure clear leadership and governance is maintained. Bedfordshire's recent rise in crime is a concern. Compared to similar forces, known as its 'most similar group', the force is not performing well and while this increase is relatively recent, the force has not yet embarked upon major change and performance which is a risk during the implementation of any change programme.

The chief constable has made a firm commitment to improve victim satisfaction in Bedfordshire and the force has a strong focus on victim needs and has adopted a mnemonic called CARE<sup>4</sup>, to ensure that victims receive timely contact, updates on the investigation and appropriate signposting to other agencies who can provide more tailored support. During the past year victim satisfaction has improved by 1 percent and it is clear that the chief constable is focused upon further improvement in the quality of service delivered to victims.

The force control room is not performing as well as it should be. This is concerning as this is often where the public makes first contact with the police and it is important to ensure that a quality assessment of their needs is conducted and the right resources are deployed at the right time. In the short term it is encouraging to see that the force has invested in additional staff including: domestic abuse tactical advisors; an additional sergeant to advise call takers and dispatchers on the application of the national decision making model; and a developing service desk.

However, the full benefit of these changes will take time to realise as staff train and attain the necessary competency level. The service desk reviews call for service that can be dealt with over the phone or through an appointment system; currently between 25 to 28 per cent of calls are resolved in this way, however it is envisaged that more calls will be dealt with further reducing demand on response officers. Historically the force has not changed the way that it has dealt with telephone crime for a number of years but now sees an opportunity for more efficient ways of working. The imminent implementation of an appointment system called 'Smartstorm diary' for the three-force alliance will further improve the quality of service delivery.

The abandoned call rate has shown improvement and 999 calls are now answered within time at 87 per cent (previously 81 per cent); 83 per cent of 101 calls are answered within the target time. Managers in the control room told inspectors that they had noticed an improvement in morale due to the increase in staffing and the subsequent improvement in performance. Staff also commented that following a period of time when rest days had been cancelled and overtime compulsory they had started to see 'more feet on the ground' and felt clear about the direction of the

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<sup>4</sup> C is contact with victims; A is agree with them how you will do this; R is refer victims to other agencies that can help; and E is empathise with their needs.

force. Staff also said that it had taken some time for the force to move from prioritising serious acquisitive crime to the protection of vulnerable people. This has been a significant change for the organisation.

The development of a force control room working collaboratively has been agreed in principle, but the model has not yet been identified. Effective and efficient management of demand at first point of contact is critical and has an impact upon the overall efficiency of the force. HMIC expects to see significant progress in this area so that opportunities are seized and service delivery assured for the future.

Response times are also showing some improvement. Plans include basing immediate response vehicles in rural areas, which will be facilitated by the use of more agile working through increased use of mobile data and the recruitment of additional officers. The force is in the process of developing a performance framework and managers anticipated further improvements.

Bedfordshire has benefited from the Home Office Innovation Fund of £8.4 million awarded to the three-force alliance in 2013. The force has invested in IT to allow officers to access information remotely with the aim of improving efficiency and quality of service to victims. This includes the planned roll-out of body-worn video devices to all frontline staff.

The force expects to see a change of culture through more remote and flexible working enabled by the new technology and intends to develop and review management information to ensure the full benefits of the technology are achieved. Project Athena is a shared IT system for crime, intelligence, custody and case preparation aimed at realising significant efficiency and financial savings and is expected to be implemented across the three-force alliance during the last quarter of 2015. Officer and staff response to the new technology and agile working opportunities has been good and morale has improved as a result of this tangible investment. HMIC looks forward to seeing the impact of the improved IT upon the quality of service delivery.

Bedfordshire is placing considerable reliance on: collaborative working with the alliance; its internal quality improvement programme; and on programme Metis to increase its efficiency and enable it to provide a better service with fewer resources. This transformational change will take some time to achieve.

### **3: Next steps**

HMIC is now continuing with its new all-force annual inspections, called the PEEL (police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy) assessments. We will continue to consider the extent to which police forces provide value for money, but will do so in future in the context of an overall inspection of police efficiency and effectiveness.

Success depends on developing the required plans in detail and speeding up the pace in order to address HMIC's concerns and to secure a more certain future for Bedfordshire. Following a further assessment of the quality improvement process in March 2015, HMIC will return to the force in May and July 2015 to review the force's progress and seek assurance on behalf of the public that plans the force has outlined are being implemented and the level of risk has reduced.