

Police

authority

inspection

report

Cheshire

March 2010



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Executive summary

- 1 Cheshire Police Authority (the Authority) is performing well overall. It carries out its duties with diligence. Authority members are enthusiastic, skilled and well trained. They have a good understanding of policing challenges at a neighbourhood level and across the county and are confident in holding the Chief Constable of Cheshire Constabulary (the Constabulary) to account for providing an efficient and effective police service.
- 2 The Authority has high expectations of the Constabulary. It ensures the Chief Officer team has the capacity and resources to deliver on the objectives and priorities that they have agreed. A robust senior officer recruitment process reflects the Authority's vision and values. Working relationships with the Constabulary are effective with a good balance of support and challenge.
- 3 The Authority has a reliable picture of policing performance across the county. It complements data and information provided by the Constabulary with information from more independent sources. Members undertake area, neighbourhood and departmental visits to check out performance on the ground. There are many examples of the Authority's scrutiny and challenge driving better outcomes.
- 4 The leadership and influence of the Authority on the Policing Plan and priorities is clear, with examples in the 2009/10 Policing Plan and the draft 2010/11 Plan. The Authority is increasingly bringing the right degree of challenge and support to debates with the Constabulary about the strategic direction of policing in Cheshire.
- 5 The Authority knows its communities well. Authority members and officers talk to local people, listen to their concerns and respond by ensuring that the Policing Plan and local policing actions reflect what is important to them. The Authority has a strong commitment to addressing the needs of vulnerable people who are most likely to become victims of crime. It feeds back the outcomes of consultation and keeps people informed about how well the Constabulary is delivering against objectives and priorities.
- 6 The Authority drives a firm focus on providing a fair, equitable police service for Cheshire communities. This is helping to improve confidence.
- 7 The Authority actively promotes equality and diversity with partners and with the Constabulary. It is driving the Constabulary to recruit a more diverse workforce setting stretched targets. Numbers of women police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are rising in line with the agreed targets. However there are few women in senior positions. Progress is slower in recruitment of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff and the Authority itself is not representative of Cheshire communities. It could engage better with BME communities to increase its understanding of their concerns and needs and also provide good links through which to promote career opportunities in the Constabulary and the Authority.

Executive summary

- 8** Partnership working is very good. Partners value the Authority's contributions. Members have a high profile and promote action in areas such as tackling anti-social behaviour. The Authority works well with its criminal justice partners and has a key role in the Local Criminal Justice Board. Inviting partners such as the Probation and Courts Services to take part in Authority 'Have Your Say' public meetings is helping the public to understand how the criminal justice system works locally. This increases public confidence.
- 9** In April 2009 the number of councils in Cheshire reduced from nine to four and the county council was abolished. As a result the Authority has new members and remodelled partnerships to work with, including two new Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). Its good track record of effective partnership working is helping the Authority to integrate with the new structure.
- 10** Although partnership working is strong the Authority needs to do more to make sure that the benefits it gets from joint working justify its investments. There are some examples of achieving savings and better outcomes from collaboration with neighbouring police forces but this is largely opportunistic. The Authority would benefit from a thorough cost-benefit analysis of all partnership working.
- 11** The Authority is involved in developing protective services¹ and assesses and oversees some aspects of their delivery, for example tackling serious organised crime and counter-terrorism. However the strategic assessment of threat and risk¹¹ provided by the Constabulary is not sufficiently comprehensive to enable the Authority to be fully engaged in long-term planning. The Authority's scrutiny of protective services also needs further development.
- 12** Governance arrangements are sound and based on high ethical and professional standards. Members have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and receive effective training. The Authority expects high standards of them. Risk management is still developing. The Authority needs to improve its approach so that management of business risks is more central to oversight of the budget.
- 13** Budget setting is robust and the Authority has delivered efficiency savings. It is strengthening the focus on value for money and has clear aims to increase the efficiency of policing services, but it needs to pick up the pace of change in this area. Better integration of performance and financial information would allow the Authority to analyse more effectively the links between costs and performance and target improvements. The Authority is becoming more challenging about how the Constabulary uses resources, for example PCSOs. The Authority is driving the Constabulary to reduce sickness levels and this is increasing productivity. It could do more to make sure that police officer time is used as effectively as possible.
- 14** The Authority has a good track record of improving its approach and driving improvement in the Constabulary. It uses self-assessment well and has the skills and capacity it needs to address the areas for development identified in this report.

¹ Protective services include counter-terrorism, serious organised and cross-border crime, civil contingencies and emergency planning, critical incident management, major crime, public order, strategic roads policing and protecting vulnerable people

¹¹ The Constabulary-wide assessment of threat and risk based on the principles of the National Intelligence Model and drawing together the individual assessments by Borough Command Units and Headquarters' departments

Table 1 Summary of inspection scores

Key questions	Score
How does the police authority ensure that both it and the force have the leadership, capacity and capability needed to deliver good quality service outcomes on behalf of the public?	3
How effective is the police authority in scrutinising and ensuring the force delivers the priority services that matter to local people?	3
How well does the police authority achieve results through community engagement and partnerships to deliver its ambitions and strategic priorities?	3
How effective is the police authority in ensuring a clear and sustained focus on value for money to secure a good deal for the public?	2
Overall score	3

Setting strategic direction and priorities

How does the Police Authority ensure that both it and the force have the leadership, capacity and capability needed to deliver good quality service outcomes on behalf of the public?

- 15** The Authority is performing well in this area. The leadership and influence of the Authority is evident in the approach to setting policing priorities and it is strengthening its role. The Authority is clear about what matters to local people and makes sure that their concerns and needs are taken into account in the Policing Plan and priorities. It works with the Constabulary to balance local needs with regional and national priorities. Decision making considers the strategic assessments of threat and risk carried out by the Constabulary but these are not comprehensive enough to enable the Authority to be fully engaged in resource planning for the longer term. The Authority ensures the Constabulary's top team has the capacity and resources it needs to deliver the objectives and priorities that they have agreed. The Authority has high expectations of the Constabulary. It challenges its performance and as a result residents get a better service. The Authority's strong emphasis on good customer service is driving down complaints. Governance structures are effective and based on high ethical standards. The Authority promotes diversity and has a firm focus on providing a fair and equitable police service to all communities. It is pressing the Constabulary to increase the diversity of the workforce. The Authority itself is not representative of the communities it serves.

Strengths

- 16** The approach to strategic planning is sound and the Authority has increased its influence in recent years. It is actively involved in setting policing priorities and drafting the Policing Plan. Joint discussion days with the Chief Constable and formal panel meetings firm up priorities and targets. The Authority drives stretched targets with good results, for example improving performance in tackling serious violent crime. The Authority makes sure the Constabulary has the capacity and resources to deliver the Policing Plan.

- 17** The Authority understands the priorities of residents, partners and local businesses. Consultation events involve all members and most relevant Cheshire partnerships. In planning and setting the strategic direction with the Constabulary the Authority takes into account the views and concerns of local communities alongside national priorities and the professional views of police officers. For example, following analysis of the national business crime survey and its own local surveys, it introduced a focus on business crime in the 2009/10 Policing Plan with year-on-year reduction targets in the 2009-2012 Plan. From April to September 2009 there was a 32 per cent fall in business crime compared to the same period in 2008. Similarly, the Authority is insisting on anti-social behaviour having a higher priority in the 2010/11 Policing Plan because of its importance to residents.
- 18** In 2007/08 the Authority and the Chief Constable agreed an Ambition Strategy setting out their three-year vision for the strategic direction of policing in Cheshire. This outlined the investment needed to improve capacity and capability in areas such as protective services and to continue to strengthen Neighbourhood Policing. The Authority carried out extensive consultation on the Ambition Strategy proposals. It engaged the public well in the debate about what needed to improve and how the police budget should be spent. Communities had a wide range of opportunities to put forward their views. As a result the Authority had the support of the public in raising the precept by 17 per cent to fund improvements. The Constabulary has fulfilled its commitments to improving protective services and Neighbourhood Policing.
- 19** The Authority appointed a new Chief Constable in December 2008. The Authority and the Constabulary used the opportunity to review and restate their vision.
- 20** Working relationships between the chief officer team and the Authority are effective with a good balance of support and challenge. When it appointed the Chief Constable in 2008 the Authority was clear about the skills needed to deliver policing in Cheshire and the values that it wanted to uphold. As new senior officer appointments followed, Authority members took appropriate opportunities to influence and support a restructure of areas of responsibility and accountability of chief officers.
- 21** The Authority has a strong commitment to tackling inequality and disadvantage and clear ambitions to deliver a fair and equitable policing service. It provides good leadership in this area, challenging the Constabulary by, for example, monitoring and raising the profile of crimes involving people with a disability.
- 22** The Authority places great emphasis on good customer service, recognising its importance in increasing public confidence. The Authority receives detailed reports and analysis of all complaints. Members of the Staff Committee routinely sample complaints files and track individual cases with a focus on the most vulnerable victims. Diligent monitoring and challenge to procedures is bringing about significant improvements. During 2007/08 and 2008/09 complaints in Cheshire fell by 17 per cent - the fourth greatest percentage fall in England and Wales. Allegations against officers fell by a quarter. Of complaints referred to the Independent Police Complaints Commission 79 per cent were not upheld.

Setting strategic direction and priorities

- 23** The Independent Custody Visitors Panel works well. It ensures the proper treatment of those detained including the most vulnerable. A self-introduction scheme for Custody Visitors has increased take-up. The Authority acts on reports, tackling issues with the Constabulary and overseeing effectiveness through the Engagement Committee. In order to improve training and skills the Authority has established a regional Custody Visitors Group and led two regional conferences supporting learning and development across the North-West.
- 24** The Authority is ambitious to ensure the Constabulary workforce better represents the community that it serves. It receives regular updates on the workforce profile and monitors progress of the Representative Workforce Programme which includes police officers, PCSOs and Special Constables. The national target for the percentage of police officers from BME communities is 1 per cent by March 2010. The Authority stretched the target to 1.6 per cent because this is the percentage of its population which is economically active and from a BME community. In 2008/09 0.9 per cent of recruits were from a BME background. Recent figures show that this increased to 2.6 per cent in the first half of 2009/10. The Constabulary is meeting its targets for recruitment of women police constables and PCSOs but there are too few women in senior positions. The Authority is pressing the Constabulary to address this.
- 25** Governance arrangements are sound and improving. Satisfactory arrangements are in place to uphold high ethical and professional standards. The Authority reviews the Code of Corporate Governance each year and in 2008/09 improved its financial controls and scheme of delegation. This year the Standards Committee is strengthening its focus on ethical governance. The Audit Committee works well, providing effective governance of financial issues. People management policies that support the work of the Authority and the Constabulary are satisfactory. Members influence the People Strategy, which covers all aspects of people management needed to deliver the policing objectives contained in the Policing Plan. For example, when considering the strategy in April 2009 they rejected the proposed targets and set the Chief Constable some that were more stretching. The Constabulary consults Authority members about senior appointments and significant promotions.
- 26** Members have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and they have effective training. The Authority sets high standards for its members in terms of their personal performance. Following the changes to local government boundaries in Cheshire four new members joined the Police Authority. Two other members were also appointed last year following retirements. New members get a good induction. The 'customer journey' takes them through the policing response from call management to investigation and resolution of a case, giving them a good understanding of policing in Cheshire. Members have individual training plans, and a revised programme of Personal Development Reviews is underway. Joint training with other police authorities, for example for Standards Committee members and officers, helps to ensure consistency of approach and common standards of conduct.
- 27** Members get good support. The Authority executive office has skilled staff and has built capacity in areas such as research. Members are well briefed and have good sources of independent advice and information.

Areas for improvement

- 28** Assessment of threat and risks is not fully developed and this hampers the Authority's role in longer term planning and decision making about resources. In setting strategic direction and formulating its plans the Authority considers the strategic assessments of threat and risk provided by the Constabulary, for example supporting collaboration with neighbouring forces on tackling serious organised crime and counter-terrorism. However, until recently these strategic assessments were too narrowly focused on criminality rather than a comprehensive picture of wider threats and risks. This is changing. The Constabulary is working on a broader, overarching assessment and the Authority is getting more involved in longer term planning, for example in relation to deployment of staff during the 2012 Olympics.
- 29** The Authority has a good understanding of satisfaction levels in different communities gained from its own consultation and Constabulary reports. For example it has supported the Constabulary's investment in Customer Service Desks, which check out satisfaction at different stages from the first call to resolution of the case and break down responses to geographical areas and ethnic backgrounds. Latest figures show levels of satisfaction are improving for both white and BME service users. However satisfaction levels for BME service users remain lower and this gap is widening. The Authority is aware of this but could do more to address it.
- 30** The Authority is not doing enough to make sure the workforce of the Constabulary is increasingly diverse and better reflects the make up of Cheshire communities. In recruiting its own members the Authority makes efforts to widen the range of applicants. It uses, for example, the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) to help in recruitment and selection of independent members, and targets information about vacancies at organisations representing minority groups. However membership of the Authority is not yet representative of the communities it serves.

Performance scrutiny

How effective is the Police Authority in scrutinising and ensuring the force delivers the priority services that matter to local people?

- 31** The Authority is performing well in this area. Members are effective at challenging Constabulary performance and holding the Chief Constable to account for delivery of policing priorities. Good analysis of information from the Constabulary helps the Authority to identify trends, highlight under-performance and drive remedial action. This includes scrutiny of progress against the Policing Pledge, a national set of promises to the public which every force has signed up to, and the Local Area Agreement targets for the four areas of Cheshire. Members undertake area, neighbourhood and departmental visits to check out performance on the ground. As a result they have a reliable picture of policing performance. Scrutiny reviews involving the Authority and the Constabulary successfully target specific areas, improving outcomes and cost-effectiveness. The Authority has a good understanding of the critical factors that influence public confidence and works well with the Constabulary to address these. As a result confidence is increasing. The Authority is involved in developing protective services and oversees some aspects of delivery, but arrangements for scrutinising performance in this area are not robust enough.

Strengths

- 32** Members scrutinise how the Constabulary is performing. They make sure that the Constabulary is delivering against Policing Plan objectives, the Policing Pledge targets and increasing public confidence. Relevant training and support from Authority staff helps them to challenge appropriately. They probe the information they receive, seeking more details in areas that cause them concern, and drive action by the Constabulary in areas that are not improving. Examples include more detailed breakdown of burglary and hate crime figures. The Staffing Committee recently requested more detailed breakdown of changes in staffing, including reasons for staff leaving, to better inform workforce planning.
- 33** Authority officers support members well. They provide good analysis of performance at county-wide and neighbourhood level and information from independent sources such as the British Crime Survey data and the Home Office iQuanta website. Good training helps members to challenge in specialist areas, for example there is a comprehensive training package on call handling.
- 34** Members take responsibility for making sure that they have a reliable picture of policing performance by testing the information they receive on the ground. Individual members are allocated to each of the 19 Neighbourhood Policing Units and visit every month. They visit area commands every six months. They discuss performance with commanding officers and speak to front-line staff. They also visit central departments. In this way they build a picture of what is happening locally and test how strategic decisions are playing out in communities.

- 35** Members record and discuss their findings from visits so that collectively the Authority has a good picture of policing across the county, placing it in a strong position to challenge the Constabulary. For example the Performance Panel challenges inconsistencies in performance across the county down to Neighbourhood Policing levels and urges better sharing of good practice.
- 36** The Authority is effective at holding senior officers to account. It is strengthening its approach, changing the personal objectives of the chief officer team to make them more measurable and better linked to policing objectives. For example each officer previously had a blanket target to increase confidence by 2 per cent, but the Authority has tailored this to better suit officers' specific roles and responsibilities, setting individual targets for 2010/11. The most common ground for complaint against officers in Cheshire is incivility, which accounts for around 25 per cent of all complaints. This year the Authority has given the Deputy Chief Constable a personal target to reduce such complaints.
- 37** The Authority monitors progress in delivery of protective services; it receives a twice yearly report. The Chair and the Chief Executive attend the CONTEST^{III} board. The Authority and the Constabulary have a critical incident protocol which includes the role of members. Challenge in this area is developing but currently rests largely with the Chair and Chief Executive.
- 38** Regular scrutiny reviews target specific areas for improvement. Task and finish groups involve the Constabulary and the Authority. The appropriate committee or panel oversees delivery of recommendations from reviews. Review topics are selected from the risk register or in response to members' concerns, for example members found, through departmental and area visits, that the approach to Constabulary training did not fit needs or deliver value for money. This triggered a review which found that too many people were not turning up for training events, there was a lack of understanding about what is compulsory and the Constabulary used too many external trainers. As a result of implementing the review's recommendations training is better targeted. The Stop and Search review led to better understanding and challenge of reports by members and better communication with the public about their rights. The environmental review led to energy-saving approaches such as automatic close down of computers.
- 39** The Authority influences Constabulary targets to drive higher performance. In an area of good progress such as citizen focus the Constabulary has been content to keep targets as they are but the Authority has insisted on raising them further. Staff Committee members have driven improvement in absence management by stretching targets. Cheshire is now a top performer when compared to similar areas for both police officer and staff absence and in the top ten nationally. This improvement saved around 5,000 days of officer time in 2008/09, increasing productivity and value for money.

^{III} The Government's counter-terrorism strategy 'CONTEST' is based on a policy that can be summed up in four words: Prevent, Pursue, Protect and Prepare

Performance scrutiny

- 40** The Authority promotes equality and diversity in partnership work and provides good leadership for the Constabulary, raising issues and challenging outcomes. Members sit on the Diversity Monitoring Review Group and challenge in areas such as Stop and Search and hate crime reporting. Challenge about discrimination against young white males in an area of deprivation resulted in actions to improve engagement with this group. Equality Impact Assessments are routine and in November 2009 the Authority approved for consultation a single equality scheme.
- 41** The Authority has a strong and well-established citizen focus. Members have a good understanding of the Policing Pledge and what it means for Cheshire. They regularly assess performance against the Pledge and receive monthly updates. The recent HMIC inspection of the Constabulary found that performance against the Pledge was 'fair' overall. The Authority and Constabulary are taking forward improvement actions. The Authority supports the Constabulary's investment in areas to improve customers' experience, such as Customer Service Desks to give a single point of contact for victims of crime and Operation Quest which introduced an appointments system.
- 42** Members understand what drives public confidence in Cheshire and are alert to how this can change. For example the staff survey in May 2009 showed that overall satisfaction with Cheshire Constabulary as an employer is high - above the public sector norm. However police constables are most likely to express dissatisfaction and least likely to have regular performance appraisal. The Authority Staff Committee recognised the potential impact that this can have on their interactions with the public and consequently on confidence. They are pressing the Constabulary to take action and reviewing progress. The Authority receives regular updates from the Constabulary on confidence and public satisfaction surveys. The Service Improvement Panel holds the Constabulary to account for improvements. Members play their part in dealing with potential threats to the reputation of the Constabulary from adverse publicity and in raising positive stories in the local media. Authority community engagement events focus on raising confidence.

Areas for improvement

- 43** Members are not involved enough in setting priorities for protective services and managing performance. They are not using the information released to them effectively enough to drive improvements. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman scrutinise performance, particularly around the areas of risk and preparedness, in line with national guidance, but there needs to be greater understanding and capacity to scrutinise performance across the Authority.

Engaging with communities

How well does the Police Authority achieve results through community engagement and partnerships to deliver its ambitions and strategic priorities?

- 44** The Authority is performing well in this area. Reliable profiling means that it knows its communities well and understands where the most vulnerable and potentially disadvantaged groups are. Using a good range of approaches the Authority finds out what matters to local people. It makes sure that the Policing Plan and local policing actions reflect this. It regularly reviews its approaches to community engagement, evaluating them for cost and impact. The Authority actively promotes equality and diversity with partners and with the Constabulary. It has clear aims to make local policing services more accessible and is driving improvements. Members have a high profile in the county, and the Authority is well represented on relevant partnerships. Partners understand its role and value its contribution. This helps it to have a good understanding of the challenges in local communities and offers good opportunities to work with partners to deliver joint objectives such as increasing public confidence and reducing fear of crime. The Authority works well with its criminal justice partners and has a key role in the Local Criminal Justice Board. However it needs to develop a more strategic approach to make sure that it gets the maximum benefits from its investment in partnerships. It also could do more to reach the comparatively small BME groups that are often isolated in the mainly white communities of Cheshire.

Strengths

- 45** The Authority has a strong commitment to finding what communities need and want from the police service. It has a comprehensive Community Contact Plan and uses a good range of approaches to capture public opinion. These include 'Have Your Say' meetings, surveys and focus groups. It delivers joint consultation events with the Constabulary and public service partners. The Safer Communities Programme surveys of 6,000 citizens about what concerns them in their local area also include local policing priorities. As a result the Authority knows what people think is important. It acts on their concerns by supporting local officers on neighbourhood initiatives and by influencing the Policing Plan to make sure it takes account of residents' priorities.
- 46** Community engagement involves potentially excluded and vulnerable groups. The Authority holds specific focus groups involving, for example, young people, older people and gypsies and travellers. The Authority is building connections with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community through specific meetings which also involve the Constabulary. It pays attention to the needs of local people who are likely to be most vulnerable to crime, for example increasing training for officers in domestic violence following consultation with victims. The Authority has assessed the processes in place to make sure that vulnerable people reporting incidents of anti-social behaviour are protected and has sought more regular data for the Performance Panel.

Engaging with communities

- 47** Work with young people is good. Effective events capture their views and tell them about policing services and their rights and responsibilities. The Speak Out conference involved young people aged 14-16 from different backgrounds. Young people helped design and deliver the event. Evaluation showed most people who attended (93 per cent) thought the day was good or very good. The recommendations from the event aimed to give young people more influence and more confidence in the police. As a result PCSOs have received extra training in engaging with and understanding the needs of young people. The Authority has a Children and Young People's Strategy Group which has driven take-up of the national initiative for safer schools, securing six officers to work in schools supporting partnership and Authority community safety priorities. Members of the Young People's Panel visit police stations to suggest improvements and put together the UpBeat website.
- 48** The Authority actively promotes equality and diversity with partners and with the Constabulary. It supports the IAG well, raising its profile and making sure that it is fully consulted. This has given the IAG a more effective and influential role with the Constabulary.
- 49** The Authority feeds back to the community how it has reacted to the concerns that they have expressed. Through meetings, newsletters, 'You Said, We Did' campaigns and its website it reports what it has done as a result. It makes it clear how public consultation has influenced the Policing Plan and local policing action. The Authority pays attention to the impact on communities of policing operations, for example major drug raids. Authority members take part in Constabulary Gold Groups to exchange information about critical incidents and address community impact.
- 50** The Authority evaluates community engagement to make sure it is fit for purpose and good value for money. Concerned that attendance at 'Have Your Say' events was falling it consulted a focus group of around 100 people and as a result decided to keep and improve the events. It used touch screen kiosks in post offices in 2008 but analysis showed that they did not provide good value for money and so the Authority stopped using them.
- 51** Partnership working is very good. Members have a high profile in Cheshire. Partners understand their role and value the Authority's contributions. Authority members sit on three out of four Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) executive boards. The Authority has a strong role in all four CDRPs and all four Children's Trusts.
- 52** Members have a sound understanding of how partnership objectives integrate with and impact on policing priorities. In Cheshire East the Authority takes a leading role in community engagement for the CDRP. In Cheshire West and Chester the Authority's lead member for partnerships chairs the 'stronger communities' group. Through its role on the CDRP the Authority has collaborated effectively with partners in Halton on consultation events with the local community, reducing duplication of effort.
- 53** The Authority makes a good contribution to the Local Criminal Justice Board. It has a key role on the community engagement group developing strategy and delivery plans. It involves criminal justice partners such as Probation and Courts Services in 'Have Your Say' events.

Areas for improvement

- 54** The Authority needs to take a more strategic approach to partnership working. A thorough cost-benefit analysis will help it to achieve greater value for money and a bigger contribution of partners to delivery of Authority objectives. The Authority is aware of this and has carried out a review of partnership working which has led to recommendations for improvement and a new Partnership Strategy and action plan for 2009-2012.
- 55** There are some good examples of the Authority engaging with Cheshire's BME communities, such as specific focus groups to find out the concerns of Muslim women. However it needs to do more to reach minority groups. This would help the Authority to connect with and better understand their concerns and needs. It would also provide opportunities to promote careers in the police service.

Value for money and productivity

How effective is the Police Authority in ensuring a clear and sustained focus on value for money in order to secure a good deal for the public?

- 56** The Authority is performing adequately in this area. Budget setting is robust. The Authority is developing its understanding of supply and demand profiles. It challenges the Constabulary about deployment of resources in some areas and is concentrating more on increasing productivity, for example by driving down sickness levels. However it needs to do more to ensure that police officer time is used as effectively as possible. The Authority is making sure the Constabulary delivers efficiency targets. It is extending its financial planning and working with the Constabulary to achieve greater efficiencies in coming years in the face of expected budget threats. It could do more to improve value for money for taxpayers. There are examples of collaboration bringing savings and better performance but this is largely opportunistic. The Authority needs to develop a more strategic approach so it is clear about what it is trying to achieve, to make sure collaboration brings better outcomes for the public at an acceptable cost. Overall closer integration of performance and financial information would help the Authority to better understand how performance and costs link. The Authority does not make enough use of benchmarking to learn from others. Risk management is developing but needs to be more robust, especially in managing the budget.

Strengths

- 57** The Authority has a good understanding of the financial challenges facing the Constabulary. Members challenge financial information appropriately. They probe the quality of information and seek more detail in areas of concern; for example better analysis of the use of temporary staff and cost of agency staff is enabling the Finance Panel to challenge human resources management.
- 58** Members have a good understanding of current spending patterns and costs. The Finance Panel scrutinises the budget every three months, checking spending and challenging levels of efficiency savings. When the 2008/09 first quarter review showed a projected overspend of £1.4 million, robust intervention resulted in realignment of the budget, reversing the trend.
- 59** The Authority drives the delivery of efficiency savings - £7.9 million in 2008/09 against a target of £6.7 million. The council tax precept is below average for similar areas despite the significant rise in 2008. The Authority and the Constabulary are planning for more efficiency savings next year and onwards because of anticipated economic constraints. In June 2009 they set a £28 million savings target for the following four years. They are realigning base budgets to reflect changing demand and moving to a three-year budget cycle.

- 60** Members are driving a stronger focus on value for money, for example reducing sickness and integrating teams such as traffic police and response teams to increase productivity. Members recently approved a new value for money strategy for 2010-2013 based on increasing productivity and performance and reducing costs. It links clearly to the 2010-2014 Medium Term Financial Strategy and targets the priority areas for savings, although the strategy is not yet underpinned by a firm action plan. Members have also made sure that value for money is a key priority in the Policing Plan.
- 61** The Authority challenges the Constabulary to be more efficient, for example providing strong challenge around the implementation and use of mobile data systems following concerns that the approach was not maximising efficiency savings and productivity. The Authority and the Constabulary are delivering a Transforming Business Services Programme which involves a comprehensive review of all back office services to identify efficiency savings and creation of a Shared Business Services Centre. Members with relevant experience sit on the programme board and are both supportive and challenging.
- 62** The Authority influences the use of resources, for example through scrutiny of PCSO deployment and overtime payments. The Staff Committee oversees the delivery of the Constabulary's People Strategy. The Authority also monitors and encourages the use of Special Constables.
- 63** The Authority influences the moving of resources to increase efficiency and support better service delivery. It approved the Constabulary's investment of around £1 million in Customer Service Desks which took the burden of contacting victims and other callers away from warranted officers and into a dedicated customer facing unit in each area. This has increased customer satisfaction and freed up officer time.
- 64** Members take tough decisions in relation to influence over the Chief Constable's spending and allocation of resources. Planned savings over the next three years involve radical review of staff posts. The current 'middle office review' means that managers must present a business case to justify filling vacancies. The Authority has also used its influence to ensure that some tasks currently carried out by civilian staff, for example firearms licensing, are brought back into the responsibility of local policing teams. This increases the productivity of policing teams, saves staff costs and provides the public in rural areas with more contact with uniformed officers, which consultation shows that they want.
- 65** Through its support for collaboration with other police forces the Authority is increasing capacity and saving money. Examples include secondments of staff to the regional Counter-Terrorist Unit and North-West Serious Organised Crime Task Force. Cheshire is the lead authority on the North-West Motorway Police Group which manages incidents and detects criminals across the North-West motorways. This has improved response times from 15 minutes in Cheshire before the creation of the group to an average across the entire network of nine minutes. The Constabulary is one of 14 forces in a consortium delivering forensic examination services. This collaboration has reduced Cheshire's costs by 15 per cent. It has also jointly procured internal audit and treasury management services with the Cheshire Fire Authority.

Areas for improvement

- 66** The lack of a sufficiently wide assessment of threat and risk makes it difficult for the Authority to ensure that resources are sufficiently directed towards need and that staff are deployed and used as efficiently as possible in all areas. The new strategic assessment that the Constabulary is working on is broader in context and aims to give a more comprehensive picture.
- 67** Risk management is still developing. The Chair of the Audit Committee takes part in the Constabulary risk management group. The Authority and the Constabulary have risk registers in place and align them to show common risks. However the use of risk registers to manage and mitigate risks is not robust. Reports to the Authority identify relevant risks but members do not give them enough consideration. Members need more training in risk management, and risk needs to have a more central role in financial management.
- 68** The Authority could make better use of benchmarking to identify good practice and learn from what works elsewhere. Some performance outcomes and costs are benchmarked with similar areas and the Authority is starting to use HMIC value for money profiles. However, it could compare outcomes, performance and especially costs more rigorously with other police authorities and public organisations to highlight areas for improvement.
- 69** Better integration of performance and financial information would allow the Authority to understand costs and performance in a more sophisticated way. It could then make more informed decisions and have a better understanding of the areas where value for money could be improved.

Next steps

- 70** We expect Cheshire Police Authority to address the areas for improvement identified in this report and secure targeted and continuous improvement. In doing so, the Police Authority should have regard to the wider improvement planning, support and intervention set out in the Home Office's performance framework and landscape for policing.
- 71** We will publish an interim national report shortly drawing on the findings from the first ten inspections. It will identify thematic issues relevant to all police authorities, helping to secure improvement and sharing of good practice. The Police Authority should refer to and use this report in shaping its improvement planning.

Appendix 1 – Context

The Region

- 1 The county of Cheshire covers 946 square miles and is home to around a million people. Of these about 3.3 per cent are from BME communities mainly of Asian, Chinese, Indian or Caribbean heritage. This is lower than the North-West average of 5.4 per cent. Cheshire also has a significant resident and transient gypsy and traveller population. After a sharp increase in recent years numbers of Eastern European migrant workers are falling. Cheshire is a county of contrasts, with some very affluent areas but also pockets of real deprivation. Around a fifth of the population are 16 years of age and under. The number of older people is growing rapidly, with the number of people aged over 85 predicted to double by 2026.
- 2 The number of people unemployed is rising in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and overall employment levels are above the regional average.
- 3 There are large rural areas including the Pennines in the east and the Dee Estuary in South Wirral. The main urban areas are the industrial towns of Ellesmere Port, Widnes, Runcorn and Warrington in the north and the county town of Chester. Chester is a major tourist destination and has a rapidly growing new university.
- 4 There are good transport links with the M6, M56 and M62 crossing the county. This makes it easy for local people to travel to work across the North-West, for example to Manchester and Merseyside. It also has an impact on crime, with criminals travelling into the area from the major cities. Road safety is also a serious issue. The number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads is well above the average for England.
- 5 In April 2009 the number of councils in Cheshire reduced from nine to four – the county council was abolished. The county now has four unitary councils. These are Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton (made up of Widnes and Runcorn) and Warrington. As a result the Authority has new members and remodelled partnerships to work with.

The Police Authority

- 6** Cheshire Police Authority is one of 43 Police Authorities in England and Wales. It is responsible for securing an efficient and effective police force for Cheshire and holding the Chief Constable to account. The Authority's vision is 'To ensure an efficient and effective police service that is built on neighbourhood policing, tackles all levels of criminality, and makes the citizens of Cheshire safe and feel safer.' It aims to:
- assist in achieving a consistently high performing force;
 - ensure improvements in performance and scrutiny, underpinned by robust governance structures and appropriate members' support;
 - provide better and more effective engagement with stakeholders;
 - improve partnership working (with the Constabulary and externally); and
 - be a community leader in policing and community safety.
- Its organisational values are: independence, accountability, honesty and integrity, inclusiveness, fairness and respect.
- 7** The Authority supports Cheshire Constabulary in its ambition of 'Making Sure that the People of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Are Safe and Feel Safe'. The Authority and Constabulary have developed objectives which describe their priorities for the delivery of services in 2009/10. These are:
- Objective 1 – Increase public confidence in policing;
 - Objective 2 – Respond effectively to the public when in need;
 - Objective 3 – Work in partnership to create strong and vibrant communities;
 - Objective 4 – Prevent and Investigate Crime and Disorder;
 - Objective 5 – Protect Vulnerable People; and
 - Objective 6 – Protect the public from Serious and Organised Crime and Terrorism.
- 8** The Police Authority has 17 members, including nine councillors from the four local councils and eight independent members. The Chair is an independent member. The Authority has eight staff led by the Chief Executive.
- 9** The Authority approved a budget of £172.9 million with £52.5 million from precept (local taxation) and £0.92 million from reserves to fund one-off expenditure.

Appendix 1 – Context

The Constabulary

- 10** Cheshire Constabulary has 2,142 police officers and 1,900 police staff including 237 PCSOs. It has 276 Special Constables. Cheshire has three basic command units – north (Halton and Warrington), Cheshire West and Cheshire East - and 19 Neighbourhood Policing Units.
- 11** Crime in Cheshire is falling with good decreases in areas such as vehicle crime, criminal damage and business robbery. In 2008/09 the constabulary recorded 75,013 crimes, which was a fall of around 6 per cent on the previous year's total. The detection rate was around 29 per cent. However the Constabulary is not currently achieving its targets for reducing serious violent crime.
- 12** In 2008/09 the Constabulary received 140,478 emergency calls (an average of 384 a day) and 328,599 non-emergency calls. It exceeded the target of 90 per cent of emergency calls answered in ten seconds.
- 13** The confidence level - people who 'believe the police and local council are dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in the local area' was 48.9 per cent in 2008/09. This is a rise of four percentage points on the previous year but Cheshire is still not a high performer when compared to similar policing areas. The percentage of users satisfied with the service they received has improved significantly in recent years.

Appendix 2 – Methodology

- 1 This report summarises the joint Audit Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary findings from the inspection of Cheshire Police Authority which took place between September and December 2009.
- 2 In July 2009, the Audit Commission and HMIC published the Police Authority Inspection framework
- 3 The inspection framework comprises four assessment areas:
 - **Setting strategic direction and priorities** – How does the Police Authority ensure that both it and the force have the leadership, capacity and capability needed to deliver good quality service outcomes on behalf of the public?
 - **Scrutinising performance outcomes** – How effective is the Police Authority in scrutinising and ensuring the force delivers the priority services that matter to local people?
 - **Achieving results through community engagement and partnership** – How well does the Police Authority achieve results through community engagement and partnerships to deliver its ambitions and strategic priorities?
 - **Ensuring value for money (VFM) and productivity** – How effective is the Police Authority in ensuring a clear and sustained focus on VFM in order to secure a good deal for the public?
- 4 The Inspection team drew on a range of evidence to form judgements against each of the four assessment themes. This included key documentation that the police authority uses to run its business, interviews, focus groups, observations and reality testing with key police authority partners and stakeholders.
- 5 Each assessment theme was scored separately on a scale of 1 to 4 and is combined into an overall score. The scores of 1 to 4 for each theme represent the following descriptors of performance.

Score	Descriptor of performance	Public reporting
1	Police authority does not meet minimum requirements for this theme	Performs poorly
2	Police authority meets most of the minimum requirements for this theme with some exceptions and areas of concern	Performs adequately
3	Police authority exceeds minimum requirements for this theme	Performs well
4	Police authority significantly exceeds minimum requirements for this theme	Performs excellently

Appendix 2 – Methodology

- 6 An accredited peer member inspector and a senior officer from a police authority supported the joint inspectorates during this inspection
- 7 We have integrated quality assurance throughout the planning, fieldwork and reporting stages of the inspection. In particular, a quality assurance panel of the joint inspectorates ensured the consistency and robustness of the inspection team's judgements before the publication of reports. A suitably qualified peer joined the quality assurance panel as an observer.
- 8 HMIC and the Audit Commission are grateful for the support and co-operation of the Police Authority, its staff and officers, during the inspection.

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission

1st Floor
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4HQ

Telephone: **0844 798 3131**

Fax: 0844 798 2945

Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946

www.audit-commission.gov.uk

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Audit Commission

1st Floor
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4HQ

Telephone: **0844 798 1212**
Fax: 0844 798 2945
Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946

www.audit-commission.gov.uk



HMIC

Ground floor
Allington Towers
19 Allington Street
London
SW1E 5EB

Telephone: **020 7035 5713**
Fax: 020 7035 5184

www.inspectorates.homeoffice.gov.uk/hmic