

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 ON FRIDAY 19 JULY 2024



HMICFRS

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary  
and Fire & Rescue Services

# State of Policing

The Annual Assessment of  
Policing in England and Wales

# 2023

His Majesty's Chief Inspector  
of Constabulary

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**His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and  
Fire & Rescue Services**

**State of Policing:  
The Annual Assessment  
of Policing in England and  
Wales 2023**

**Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 54(4A) of the Police Act 1996**



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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Restoring public trust and confidence</b>	<b>8</b>
The police service recognises the scale of the challenges it faces	8
There has been a national focus on improving vetting, rooting out corruption and challenging misconduct	10
Forces are investing more in neighbourhood policing	16
Most types of crime are on a long-term downward trend	18
The police are renewing their focus on addressing violence against women and girls	21
<b>2. Providing a service to victims and the most vulnerable</b>	<b>24</b>
More often than not, victims aren't satisfied with the service they receive from the police and criminal justice system	24
The police still aren't getting many of the basics right	26
Too few criminal investigations are leading to justice for victims	27
The police aren't keeping up with the challenges presented by fraud and cybercrime	29
The police need other agencies to play their part in preventing offending and reducing the number of victims	32
Too often, the criminal justice system isn't providing access to justice	33
<b>3. Setting up the workforce for success</b>	<b>36</b>
There are more police officers than ever, but there is a lack of experience	36
The police need a balanced workforce to be efficient and effective	39
An effective workforce needs strong leadership	42

<b>4. Funding the police</b>	<b>48</b>
Forces can still do more to provide a better service with their existing funding	48
The way police funding is distributed between forces isn't fit for purpose and needs to be revised	50
The Government should give police forces a multi-year funding settlement	53
The police need additional financial support for capital investments	54
<b>5. The inspectorate</b>	<b>57</b>
HMICFRS is helping to make communities safer	57
The inspectors of constabulary need more powers to influence change	59
There is a strong case for greater investment in the inspectorate	63
<b>Annex A: Our reports – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Annex B: About us</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Annex C: Our powers to inspect non-Home Office forces and other law enforcement agencies</b>	<b>74</b>

# Foreword

This is my second report to the Secretary of State, under [section 54\(4A\) of the Police Act 1996](#). It contains my independent assessment, as His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, of the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in England and Wales. It is based on the inspections we carried out between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

The police service in England and Wales has faced many recent challenges, but there remains much for it to be proud of. The model of British policing remains fundamentally sound. The power of the police isn't based on inducing fear, but on securing public co-operation and support. And the vast majority of police officers, staff, special constables and volunteers are wholeheartedly dedicated to serving the public and to doing the right thing. Once again, this year I have been struck by the professionalism that most of them show on a daily basis.

On 6 May 2023, the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III and Queen Camilla was one of the largest policing events in history. The coronation posed considerable challenges in respect of public safety and security. The service rose to the occasion and policed the event with distinction. The police operation involved all UK police forces, and officers from the British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. It kept more than 300 guests and hundreds of thousands of people in the crowds safe.

Sometimes, police officers make the ultimate sacrifice while striving to help the public. On 24 August 2023, Sergeant Graham Saville, of Nottinghamshire Police, gave his life in the line of duty while trying to save a distressed man who was on a train track. I send my deepest condolences to his family and colleagues for their loss.

## Contributions to my assessment

When compiling this assessment, I wrote to chief constables, [police and crime commissioners \(PCCs\)](#) and their equivalents and other interested parties. I invited them to give their views on the state of policing in England and Wales.

I received more than 100 thorough and insightful responses. Their views and the information they provided have contributed greatly to the evidence in this report. I am very grateful for their reflections.

The main source of evidence for this report comes from our inspections. In the past year we have published 87 reports about police forces. I offer my thanks to HMICFRS staff, who carry out and support these inspections. They are devoted public servants who carry out their duties with the utmost skill and professionalism.

## **Changes at the inspectorate**

In June 2023, HM Inspector Matt Parr CB left the inspectorate after nearly six years' distinguished service. As the lead for many of our inspections, Matt contributed to improvements in both police forces and fire and rescue services. I express my gratitude to Matt for his years of public service and I wish him every success in the future.

In 2023, we welcomed two new HM Inspectors (HMIs) and an assistant HMI. Between May 2023 and May 2024, Assistant HMI Shantha Dickinson joined the inspectorate on secondment from Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service. Shantha provided additional support for our fire and rescue service inspections and contributed to the wider work of the inspectorate. I extend my thanks to Shantha for her service.

In August 2023, HMI Lee Freeman KPM joined the inspectorate from Humberside Police. Lee holds the regional role for ten fire and rescue services, three regional police forces, non-Home Office and overseas forces, and is the senior responsible owner of PEEL and counter-terrorism inspections.

Also in August 2023, HMI Michelle Skeer OBE QPM joined the inspectorate from Cumbria Constabulary. Michelle holds the regional role for 12 fire and rescue services and 11 regional police forces. She is the senior responsible owner of our inspections on protecting [vulnerable people](#).

I extend a warm welcome to Lee and Michelle. The inspectorate will undoubtedly benefit from the wealth of experience they have brought with them.

In March 2024, HMI Wendy Williams CBE left the inspectorate after nine years of dedicated public service. Wendy was the regional HMI for 13 police forces and 11 fire and rescue services. She also led many impactful reports on cross-cutting criminal justice and joint inspections. Her work improved the service that the police and fire and rescue services provide to some of the most vulnerable people in society. I wish her all the best for whatever the future may hold.



**Andy Cooke QPM DL**

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary





# Summary

## The police are trying to rebuild public trust and confidence

In recent years, trust and confidence in the police have been brought into question by an array of [misconduct](#) and criminal acts committed by serving police officers and staff. To make matters worse, there is a general perception among the public that the police aren't doing a good job at tackling the crimes that affect local communities.

In my report last year, I used some stark language about the low levels of trust and confidence in the police. I make no apologies for this. The police service recognises the scale of the challenges it faces and is acting to rebuild trust and confidence.

Forces have been trying to make sure only the right people can join the police and stay in the police. They have been doing this by improving vetting, rooting out corruption and tackling misconduct. But there is still much that needs to improve and the service must continue to focus on this area.

The evidence is clear that neighbourhood policing is the most effective way to build community confidence. Forces have been using their increased officer numbers from the [Police Uplift Programme \(PUP\)](#) to invest in neighbourhood policing. Through our police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections, we are seeing this translate into better performance. We have begun [our 2023–2025 round of PEEL inspections](#). So far, preventing and deterring crime has been the best performing area.

The level of crime in England and Wales continues on a long-term downward trajectory. It should always be recognised that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it. Lower crime rates should help the public to feel more confident that the police are doing a good job.

But some crime types, such as violence against women and girls, are still highly prevalent in society. Forces are increasingly trying to prioritise tackling violence against women and girls. They have made some improvements, and this year's introduction of the [national operating model for investigating rape and other serious sexual offences](#) should help them to further improve. Both preventing these crimes and bringing offenders to justice effectively will continue to be a challenge for the police and other agencies for many years to come.

## Too many victims of crime are still being let down by the police and wider criminal justice system

Despite crime being on a long-term downward trend, it may not feel that way for many communities – especially in the most deprived areas. It is also no consolation for the millions of people who are [victims](#) of crime each year.

Victims want to receive a responsive, thorough and caring service from the police and criminal justice system. Unfortunately, too often, they are left disappointed by the response they receive. [In her '2022 Victim Survey', the Victims' Commissioner found](#) that 71 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the police response to their crime. Only 10 percent of respondents said they thought the criminal justice system was effective.

The main reasons victims are dissatisfied are clear:

- the police still aren't getting the basics right;
- outcomes of police investigations don't always meet victims' expectations; and
- too often, the criminal justice system isn't providing access to justice.

The public have some fundamental and reasonable expectations of the police, which I refer to as the basics. These include:

- promptly answering the phone;
- attending incidents within a reasonable timeframe; and
- investigating all reasonable lines of enquiry and keeping victims informed.

Given the high demands the police face, it isn't always easy to provide these services. But too often, forces aren't doing as good a job as they should be.

In our last round of PEEL inspections, forces received the worst grades for how well they responded to the public and investigated crime. Since that round of inspections, forces and the Government have listened to us and have tried to make improvements. But despite the increased focus on this area, it isn't yet materialising into the improvements that are so clearly needed. In this round of PEEL inspections, we continue to see widespread poor performance in both areas.

One of the consequences of this poor performance is that too few criminal investigations are leading to an offender being charged or receiving an [out-of-court disposal](#). Since 2015, the proportion of victim-based offences that are brought to justice has been gradually decreasing. There is also a widespread and unjustifiable variation in performance between police forces. Some forces should be doing a better job at solving crime.

Access to justice is the hallmark of a civilised society, but the criminal justice system isn't working properly. Too often, justice is difficult to access. Although the number of prosecutions has been declining for many years, there are longer court backlogs and prisons that are fuller than ever. The Government should consider setting up a Royal Commission on criminal justice. Fundamental reform is long overdue.

## **The police workforce must be set up to succeed**

There are more [police officers](#) than ever. As at 31 March 2023, the number of full-time equivalent police officers in England and Wales reached an all-time high of 147,430 officers. By 30 September 2023, the figure dropped slightly to 147,098, representing 332 officers fewer than the peak. This has been a welcome investment in policing by the Government, which is helping forces to tackle crime and build public confidence in the police.

Many of these officers are still inexperienced and the full benefit of them joining the service is yet to be felt by forces and communities. In the year ending 31 March 2023, inexperience reached a peak, with 36 percent of officers having fewer than five years of service. The inexperience of these officers, combined with the resources that are required to train and supervise them, is one of the greatest challenges forces continue to face.

[Police staff](#) are equally as important as police officers. They perform crucial roles that help to prevent and detect crime. Some of these are public-facing, such as police community support officers, call centre staff and crime scene investigators. Some are less visible, but perform vital roles such as [digital forensics](#) investigators, financial experts and analysts.

Chief constables need to be able to hire the number of police officers and staff that they need for their local area. But the Government's police officer target is stopping them from doing this and is leading to forces having fewer staff than they need. I do acknowledge, however, that the PUP did include some funding to increase numbers of police staff. Yet there are still too many police officers working in roles that could be better or more economically performed by police staff. The target is now hindering efficiency and effectiveness, not helping it. The Government should abolish this target and allow chief constables the freedom to establish the balanced workforce they need.

Most police officers and staff join policing with the intention of positively contributing to society. They work tirelessly throughout their careers to help the public. The right conditions therefore need to be in place to help them to make that contribution.

At the time of writing, too many of them don't feel valued by the public, the Government or their force. Some have unacceptably high workloads and others aren't getting the support they need to develop and reach their full potential. This is having a significant adverse effect on morale and too many good people are leaving the service. Forces must do everything they can to better lead and support their officers and staff.

## Police finances are an area of increasing concern

There is still more that forces can do to provide a good service to the public with their existing funding. In our PEEL inspections, we have repeatedly found that forces' performance management and governance arrangements aren't good enough. This sometimes means they are providing a poor service to the public when they have sufficient funding to provide a good one. Forces also have many opportunities to improve their productivity. Technology in particular offers forces the potential to do more with less.

But the way that the police are funded is an area of increasing concern. The police funding formula is outdated and unfair. Funding should be distributed so that it goes to where it is needed most. But this currently isn't the case. Most of the funding for the police comes from two main areas: a central government grant and council tax bills.

Since 2013, government grants have been allocated to forces using the same out-of-date police allocation formula. Over the past 13 years, an increasing proportion of police funding is being raised from council tax. But the areas that need the funding most can struggle to raise money through increasing council tax, which increases inequality between forces. The Government should fix the funding formula at the earliest opportunity.

In addition to receiving a fair share of the total funding, forces need to have a reasonable degree of certainty about how much money they will receive over a period of a few years. This allows them to plan their spending and the services they will provide to meet community needs. It also gives them the best chance of being both financially resilient and effective at preventing and detecting crime. But for many years, forces haven't always had the medium-term financial certainty they have needed. The Government must do all it can to give forces more stable funding over a period of multiple years.

For many years, the police haven't received enough funding to help them make large capital investments, such as purchasing or renovating buildings and buying ICT equipment or vehicles. In response, the police aren't investing in all the assets they need to be efficient and effective. The police estate is ageing, and its ICT systems are often inadequate. Despite this underinvestment, forces are planning to increasingly use their reserves or borrow more money. This may be unsustainable in the long term. The Government should provide forces with regular additional financial support to help them make capital investments.

## **The inspectorate helps to make communities safer, but we need the right powers and sufficient funding**

Our work makes communities safer. Our inspections make a significant difference to how well forces can be held to account, and leads to them making improvements. Many members of the public and most police forces and police and crime commissioners find our inspections to be extremely valuable.

Police forces cannot be allowed to fail; the consequences would be too serious. Therefore, we continue to give support to those forces that aren't performing to a good enough standard. We do this through our enhanced monitoring process, called Engage. Forces may be placed into Engage when there are concerns about their efficiency, effectiveness or legitimacy that appear to need closer scrutiny. We ask forces to develop an improvement plan, support them through additional inspection and they receive support from stakeholders across the policing sector.

Since my report last year, four forces have made some substantial improvements and been moved back to routine monitoring. These are Cleveland Police, Gloucestershire Constabulary, Staffordshire Police and Wiltshire Police. Unfortunately, I have had to move West Midlands Police and Nottinghamshire Police into Engage because of serious concerns about their performance.

The police need more support to improve than we can give them with our current powers and funding. In my report last year, I recommended the introduction of some additional powers for the inspectors of constabulary. The previous Home Secretary said that legislative change wouldn't be possible within that Parliament. I remain resolute: these powers are required.

Our budget has become increasingly strained, having remained static at approximately £25 million a year for the past five years. This means the resources available to me have substantially declined in real terms at a time when the need for inspection is greater than ever.

All organisations need to prioritise, but the list of things we may soon be unable to do is growing increasingly unpalatable. And there is so much more that we could do to keep the public safe. I am recommending that the Government increases our budget by £13 million a year at the next spending review. This is a very small amount compared to the approximate £20 billion spent each year on the police and fire and rescue services. This would be a worthy investment to make sure forces improve, and ultimately, make communities safer.

# 1. Restoring public trust and confidence

## **The police service recognises the scale of the challenges it faces**

The police service in England and Wales is an institution that we, as members of the public, should be able to be proud of. I firmly believe that our police service is one of the best – if not the best – in the world.

The power of the police is dependent on public approval and respect. In my report last year, I had to give some difficult messages about the police service. This included raising concerns about the significant declines in public trust and confidence over recent years.

Trust in the police, notably the perception about whether officers behave in a lawful, ethical and fair manner, has been brought into question by an array of misconduct and criminal acts committed by serving officers. Public confidence in the police to do a good job, including understanding and dealing with the issues that matter to local communities, has also been in decline.

When I asked chief constables for their views, they highlighted a wide range of actions their forces are taking to reduce negative public perceptions of policing. These fell broadly into four areas that they felt could help improve public trust and confidence:

- being transparent with the public and showing a commitment to stopping unsuitable people from joining or remaining in the service;
- investing in neighbourhood policing to tackle local crime and engage with communities;
- improving how the police treat the public to make sure that all interactions and encounters are professional; and
- improving police performance by dealing with requests for service on [101](#) and 999 calls quicker and more effectively, and better investigating crime to get the right outcomes and support for [victims](#).

Some of the [police and crime commissioners \(PCCs\)](#) who wrote to me also said that, in addition to holding the chief constable to account, they were carrying out a range of activities to strengthen public trust and confidence. These included:

- better using community surveys to improve their understanding of local trust and confidence levels in local policing;
- providing funding to invest in neighbourhood policing and to re-open local police stations and front counters that had previously been closed; and
- developing improved, more representative community involvement that holds the police to account for their use of [stop and search powers](#) or use of force on people.

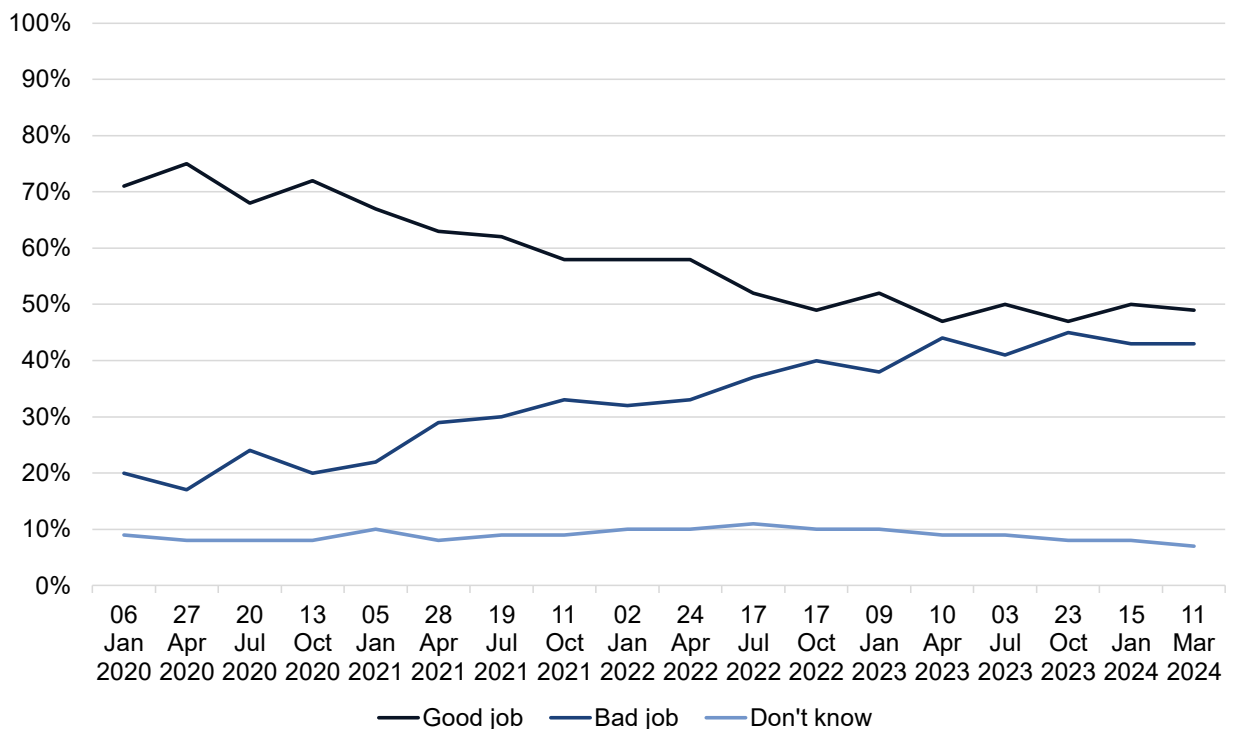
Both chief constables and PCCs recognised that forces need to get better at communicating with the public. They believe – as do I – that officers, staff and volunteers throughout England and Wales do a lot of great work all year round, and this should be shared and recognised more.

While there is so much that needs improving, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the future of policing in England and Wales. The British model of policing, based on the office of constable, policing by consent and operational independence, remains fundamentally sound. The vast majority of the workforce is dedicated to serving the public. And police leaders appear committed to resolving some of the greatest challenges facing the service.

Many chief constables and PCCs feel that forces should be doing more to inform the public of their actions and reasons for optimism. They also believe others who report on policing must take a balanced approach. I echo their calls.

It is too early to say whether the efforts of the service will have a lasting impact on improving measures of trust and confidence. Perceptions of whether the police are doing a good job have remained largely static since last year. But there are some signs in recent public opinion surveys they have stopped declining. Nevertheless, police leaders must not become complacent about the scale of the challenges they face.

**Figure 1: Proportion of adults in Great Britain who think the police are doing a good or bad job, between 6 January 2020 and 11 March 2024**



Source: [Are the police doing a good job?](#), YouGov

Police leaders also need to be aware that levels of trust and confidence aren't the same in all communities. Some communities, and certain demographics, such as Black people and women and girls, are less likely to have trust and confidence in the police. Sometimes, forces may need to target activities towards these groups, especially community engagement. I welcome the efforts of the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#) and the [College of Policing](#) in this respect. For example, the NPCC has developed the '[Police Race Action Plan](#)', which is designed to improve trust and confidence in policing among Black communities. This is valuable work, because forces need to show that they are there to serve everyone fairly and impartially.

### **There has been a national focus on improving vetting, rooting out corruption and challenging misconduct**

**Previously, the police have missed too many opportunities to stop unsuitable people from joining the service or remove them from it**

Almost all [police officers](#), [staff](#) and volunteers are dedicated public servants who would never contemplate committing [misconduct](#) or a criminal offence. Nevertheless, instances of police misconduct or criminality can have a devastating impact on the victim and their families. They can also have a lasting effect on the trust that communities have in the police. Trust isn't easy to repair; the public are much quicker to forgive lapses of competence than lapses of integrity.



There have been some abhorrent incidents that have brought trust in the police into question, most notably the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer. The police are there to keep us safe and the public should be able to trust they will always act in a lawful and ethical manner. Police leaders must do everything within their power to stop something similar happening again.

On 22 November 2021, the then Home Secretary commissioned the Rt Hon Lady Elish Angiolini LT DBE KC to lead an independent inquiry to understand how that off-duty officer was able to commit those horrendous crimes against Ms Everard. On 29 February 2024, [‘The Angiolini Inquiry Part 1 Report’](#) was published. Among other matters, the report examined the timeline of the officer’s whole career, vetting decisions, his overall conduct and the extent to which issues relating to his behaviour were known and raised by colleagues.

The inquiry found that, on multiple occasions, his vetting clearance shouldn’t have been granted and that criminal allegations against him weren’t investigated effectively. The inquiry concluded that he should never have been allowed to become a police officer and that opportunities to stop him continuing his career and offending were repeatedly missed.

The inquiry made 16 recommendations that are intended to make sure that everything possible is being done to prevent police officers from abusing their powers. We fully support all the recommendations and believe they should be implemented without delay. I join the chair of the inquiry, Lady Elish, in urging all those in authority in every police force to read the report and take immediate action.

But sadly, as Lady Elish identified in her report, many of the topics and findings aren’t new. We have been raising concerns about [abuse of position for a sexual purpose](#) for many years. As stated in [‘State of Policing 2022’](#), on too many occasions, forces have either failed to act or not acted quickly enough to address our recommendations. One example of this was the response to three causes of concern we issued to all forces in our 2016 PEEL legitimacy inspections. These covered vetting standards, recognising the problem of abuse of position for a sexual purpose and the set-up of counter-corruption units. Almost all forces were too slow to address our concerns.

### **The police service and the Government have acknowledged that things need to change as a matter of urgency**

On 18 October 2021, the then Home Secretary commissioned us to carry out an inspection of vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the police service. [In our subsequent inspection report](#), we said it was too easy for the wrong people to join and stay in the police. We made 43 recommendations – an unusually high number for one of our inspection reports. Some of these were new, but others focused on making sure the police were following existing guidance.

I believe it is fair to say that both the police service and the Government have acknowledged that things need to change, and that they need to change quickly. Since our report, they have been acting to implement our recommendations. On 11 May 2023, [we published a review of forces' progress](#) against the 43 recommendations and 5 [areas for improvement](#) we gave in that report. We found that forces had made some good progress, but that some of the responses from forces hadn't been detailed enough.

In our review, we estimated, with a reasonable degree of confidence, that at least 90 percent of recommendations had been, or were likely to be, addressed by the deadlines we had set. We found that [appropriate authorities](#) were making better initial assessments of the severity of allegations against police officers and staff, and that these were supported by sound written rationales. This led to forces identifying more cases of [gross misconduct](#) from the outset. We also found that forces had made improvements in respect of how they collected corruption-related [intelligence](#).

In 2023, following the inspection of 12 forces, we published reports on forces' individual progress. We inspected four forces for vetting only, and gave them a grade for this area. We inspected eight forces on their vetting and workforce counter-corruption policies and practices, and gave them a single combined grade. For those 12 forces, we gave the following grades:

- 2 good;
- 7 adequate; and
- 3 requires improvement.

In our vetting inspections, we found many forces were good at managing their vetting demands and at establishing which posts needed enhanced levels of vetting. Some forces were also good at identifying disproportionality in their vetting decisions. But we also found some areas for improvement. These included making sure the correct levels of vetting were in place throughout the whole workforce. We also found instances where forces didn't record sufficient rationale in support of their decisions.

In our counter-corruption inspections, we found many forces were good at identifying different types of corruption and the threat they posed in line with national guidance. For example, many forces were good at recognising that abuse of position for a sexual purpose constituted serious corruption. We also found some areas where forces could improve. For example, many forces didn't make sure their counter-corruption units had enough resources to spend time proactively collecting and analysing intelligence.

On 20 July 2023, the College of Policing introduced its updated '[Vetting Code of Practice](#)'. The code sets out the standards expected in vetting practices and decision-making. The revised code should help forces to identify people who are unsuitable to join or continue serving in the police.

On 31 August 2023, [the Government announced changes to the rules governing police officers' disciplinary, vetting and performance processes](#). The proposed changes included:

- responsibility for chairing misconduct hearings to sit with senior officers;
- a presumption of dismissal for cases of proven gross misconduct;
- a statutory requirement to hold and maintain vetting, with a clarified route to remove officers who fail to do so;
- a list of criminal offences which upon conviction automatically amounts to gross misconduct;
- a presumption of accelerated hearings for former officers and special constables; and
- the streamlining of the performance system.

On 7 May 2024, reforms relating to the composition of misconduct panels came into force through [The Police \(Conduct\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2024](#). These reforms should help forces to remove personnel who have failed to uphold the required standards of professional behaviour. I agree that chief constables should play a fundamental role in deciding whether personnel should be allowed to continue serving in their forces.

At the time of writing, details of the remaining reforms and whether they will still come into effect were yet to be determined.

### **The police have conducted integrity screening on all officers, staff and volunteers**

On 23 January 2024, the NPCC published the outcome of [its largest ever integrity screening project](#), which it carried out in response to one of the recommendations in [our inspection report on vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the police service](#). It checked more than 307,000 officers, staff and volunteers against the [Police National Database](#), a data store of operational policing information and intelligence provided by individual forces. The database was searched for information held about the police workforce that would help to identify and deal with those personnel whose conduct had fallen below the required standards.

Of the over 307,000 people checked, 461 were referred to an appropriate authority for a further decision based on the information the search uncovered. Of those:

- 97 required no further action;
- 139 triggered further vetting clearance;
- 128 triggered management intervention; and
- 88 triggered a disciplinary investigation.

The number of police officers, staff and volunteers who triggered some further action was very low, which represented less than 0.2 percent of the total workforce. This further suggests that most police officers, staff and volunteers are dedicated public servants who carry out their duties and behave in a way that meets expected standards – both professionally and in their personal lives.

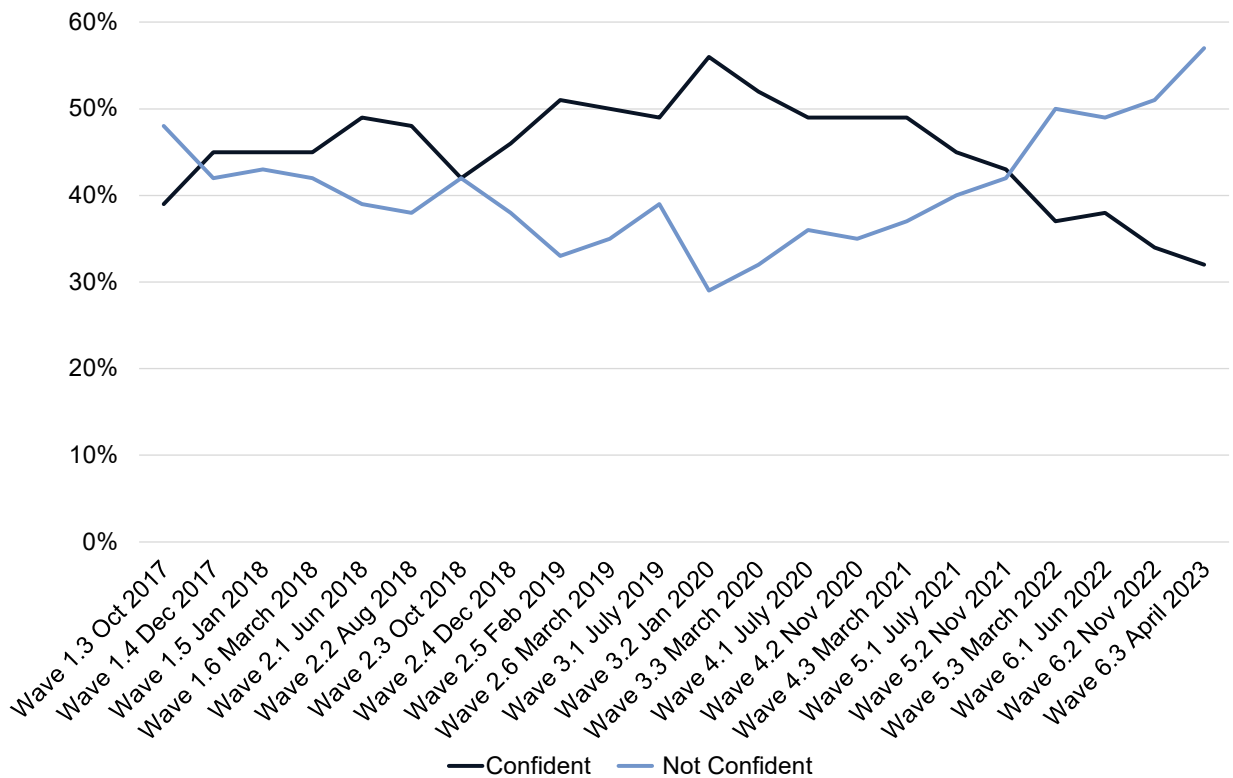
However, the police are given significant powers, and just one police officer or staff member who shouldn't be serving has the potential to cause severe harm to the public. For this reason, police officers, staff and volunteers must be held to a higher standard than the vast majority of other public servants. Therefore, this type of screening must become routine, rather than an exceptional and challenging project. The police have recognised this and are working to implement an ICT solution that will allow them to screen their workforce on a regular basis.

### **The public need to be more confident that the police deal with public complaints fairly and effectively**

Each year, thousands of people complain about the police. The [Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\)](#) has statutory responsibility for overseeing the police complaints system in England and Wales. It collects data on the number of complaints made to police forces. It reported that, between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, police forces and PCCs logged 81,142 complaint cases. The number of people who make a complaint each year is a very small proportion of the millions of people who interact with the police. But the public must have confidence that if they made a complaint, it would be dealt with fairly.

The IOPC commissions regular research to track the public's perception about itself and the police. On 26 July 2023, it published an update to its [Public Perception Tracker](#). As shown in Figure 2, the research found that public confidence in the police dealing fairly with complaints was at its lowest point since sampling began in 2017. Of the 4,154 people who responded to the survey in April 2023, almost 6 out of 10 people (57 percent) said they weren't confident that the police dealt fairly with complaints.

**Figure 2: Public confidence in the police to deal fairly with complaints made against the police, in England and Wales between October 2017 and April 2023**



**Source:** [Public Perceptions Tracker summary report](#), waves 6.1–6.3, Independent Office for Police Conduct

Some of this worsening public perception may be due to ongoing negative media coverage, including regular reporting of police misconduct cases or criminal trials of serving or former officers. Because of the actions the police are taking to root out people who shouldn't be in the service, more of this news coverage is likely to come. This means that public confidence in the police to deal fairly with complaints may be somewhat beyond the control of forces, the IOPC or Government in the short term. But they should still do all they can to improve public confidence in the police complaints system.

Some work is being done to improve how well complaints are dealt with. On 21 March 2024, [the Government published an independent review of the IOPC](#). This report made 93 recommendations, 73 of which are aimed at the IOPC. These should help the IOPC to effectively fulfil its role and build trust and confidence in the police complaints system.

The inspectorate also has a role to play in promoting improvements and providing the public with information about how well forces are dealing with complaints. As such, we have recently designed and piloted a comprehensive new integrity inspection programme. In addition to inspecting forces' vetting and counter-corruption arrangements, we will inspect the efficiency and effectiveness of all forces' professional standards departments, which are the departments that investigate

public complaints. We will award a graded judgment in all three areas. The current focus on upholding and improving police integrity must not be lost. We will do everything within our power to make sure it is not.

## **Forces are investing more in neighbourhood policing**

### **Effective neighbourhood policing is the best way to restore public confidence**

The evidence about what will work to restore public confidence is clear: neighbourhood policing. Effective neighbourhood policing is vital for preventing crime and disorder. Investigating and detecting crime will always be essential, both as a deterrent and to bring justice for victims. But policing in England and Wales is built on the need to prevent crime.

On 14 March 2024, the College of Policing published [evidence-based guidelines](#) to support forces in their attempts to provide high-quality neighbourhood policing. These guidelines were based on a review of academic research.

The specific activities that have been shown to have a causal effect on public confidence when implemented in combination are:

- engaging with communities to identify crime and disorder problems that matter to the public, and prioritising those that matter most;
- problem-solving to tackle the underlying causes of crime and disorder that matter most to the public; and
- patrolling in certain areas to reassure and engage with the public and reduce crime.

### **The number of neighbourhood police officers is increasing**

Between 31 March 2010 and 31 March 2017 – through the years of austerity – police officer numbers had been in decline. Forces had to make difficult choices at a time when budgets were being reduced and the nature of demand was changing.

In the face of those difficult choices, neighbourhood policing was seen as something that was nice to do rather than essential. As a result, the approach to neighbourhood policing increasingly diverged between forces, although generally it diminished. The service now accepts that neighbourhood policing isn't something that is nice to do. It is clear that it is fundamental to the police's relationship with the public and to preventing crime.

Between 31 October 2019 and 31 March 2023, police officer numbers increased by almost 21,000. This was a result of the [Police Uplift Programme \(PUP\)](#). Many chief constables who wrote to me told me their forces were using a large proportion of the increased numbers of police officers to invest in community policing, and many had designed new neighbourhood policing-focused operating models.

The NPCC has published its '[National Policing Prevention Strategy](#)', which is intended to make sure these extra officers are used to best effect. The strategy identifies the aims of preventative policing as being fewer victims, fewer offences and less demand on policing. It sets out a range of desired outcomes and what the service must be good at to achieve them. Having this clear strategy to guide police action will help forces to become more efficient and effective.

Through our PEEL inspections, we are seeing the investments forces are making in neighbourhood policing. Of the 13 forces we have inspected and published reports on up to 31 March 2024 in the current round of PEEL inspections, we found that the best performing aspect of policing was 'prevention and deterrence'. This includes approaches to neighbourhood policing. We have given no grades of 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'. We awarded those 13 forces the following grades:

- 8 good; and
- 5 adequate.

It is positive to see this investment in neighbourhood policing. It should contribute not only to improving public confidence in the short term, but also to making communities safer in the long term.

### **But there is still much more to do to improve neighbourhood policing**

Our positive PEEL grades don't mean, however, that there isn't more work to do. For neighbourhood officers and staff to be fully effective, they need to be properly trained, led and managed – like any other police function. Between 2021 and 2023, in our PEEL inspections we routinely found evidence of:

- neighbourhood officers and staff frequently being diverted from their primary role of tackling local issues;
- a wide variation in neighbourhood policing training provision and quality; and
- a lack of data, analysis and evaluation about neighbourhood policing.

Unfortunately, on too many occasions, neighbourhood policing officers and staff are the first to be diverted away from their normal roles to respond to periods of peak demand in other aspects of policing. This negatively affects their ability to perform the core functions of neighbourhood policing, such as community engagement and problem-solving.

Forces still need to develop a better understanding of the demands they face and the circumstances in which it is appropriate to divert their neighbourhood police officers and staff to other work. Without robust management to minimise such diversions, neighbourhood policing cannot be effective. It is reassuring that the new NPCC neighbourhood policing framework, which is currently being piloted, explains that forces need to have an explicit policy in place for when neighbourhood officers can be diverted to other duties.

Training is a critically important part of developing officers and staff. But we often find a wide variation in the training that neighbourhood officers and staff receive. In their response to my call for evidence, many chief constables mentioned the levels of inexperience in their [neighbourhood policing teams](#), which were partly a result of recruitment throughout the PUP. Many chief constables also consider that a national training programme is critical to making sure officers have the skills they need to do a good job.

It is therefore pleasing to report that the College of Policing has recently published a [new neighbourhood policing programme](#). This has been designed to pilot new training sessions that have the potential to lead to considerable improvements in neighbourhood policing. The programme is intended to support a new [neighbourhood policing career pathway](#). The pathway is designed to provide accredited training to equip all neighbourhood officers with the skills they need to work effectively with local communities to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. It will use a similar framework to the long-established [Professionalising Investigations Programme](#) that is used to develop investigators' skills. In June 2024, the College intends to pilot and then evaluate this programme in 11 forces, and has plans for it to be introduced more widely in 2025.

Many forces should do more to understand what results they are achieving through their neighbourhood policing teams and other prevention work. Although academic evidence supports a prevention-focused approach, measuring the exact value of the prevention work forces are undertaking can be difficult. But many forces are either not collecting enough data or not analysing the data they hold well enough, meaning they don't understand the outcomes of their work as well as they should. Without a thorough understanding of the costs and benefits of their work, forces may not make the best decisions about how to allocate resources.

The evaluation and sharing of problem-solving plans both within and between forces is another area that many forces also need to improve. The targeted problem-solving of local issues, such as [antisocial behaviour](#), is a fundamental element of neighbourhood policing. But forces often don't evaluate or share problem-solving plans between teams or with other forces. This is preventing positive practice and learning from being shared, and it means forces may not be doing the best possible job at addressing problems that are affecting communities.

## **Most types of crime are on a long-term downward trend**

### **England and Wales are safer than ever before**

It should always be recognised that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it. That is the ninth and final Peelian principle that was developed following the establishment of the Metropolitan Police Service. This principle is as relevant today as it was when it was developed nearly 200 years ago.

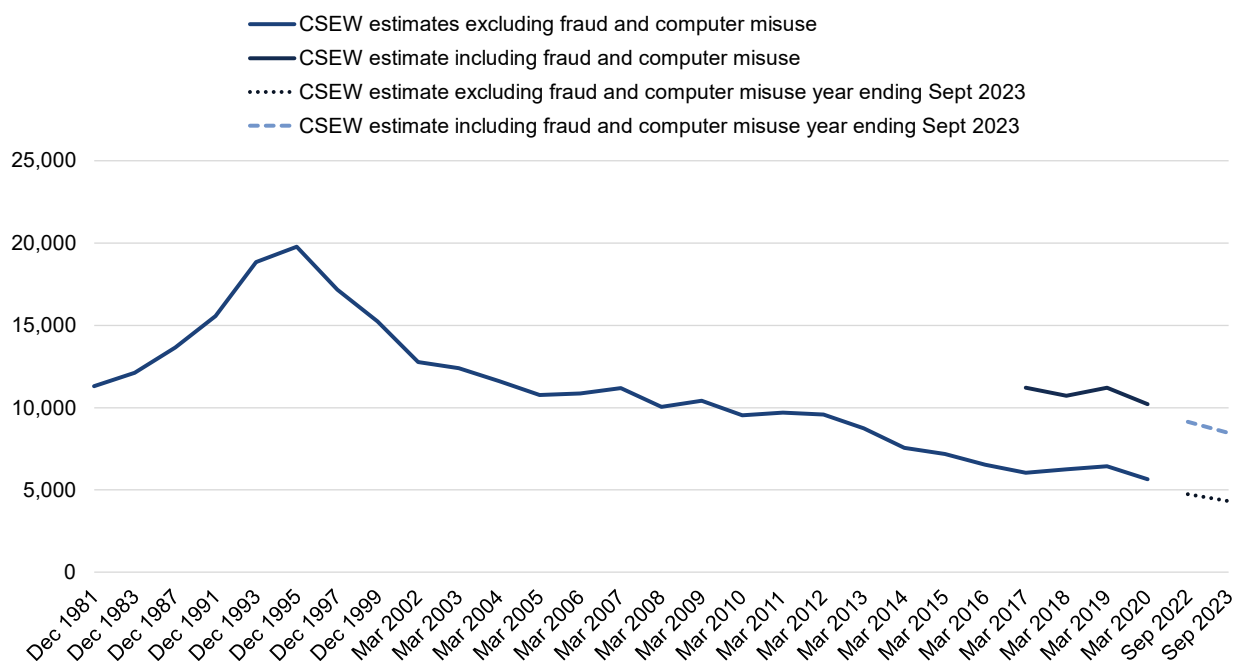


Levels of crime and the fear of crime felt by the public don't always correlate to one another. In an age of 24-hour news, the public are more aware of crimes such as homicide and violent crime than they have ever been. For some, this has created a perception that crime has increased dramatically, but the opposite is true.

The [Crime Survey for England and Wales \(CSEW\)](#) reflects people's experiences of crime and isn't affected by changes to reporting or recording practices that can affect police recorded crime. It therefore remains the best estimate of long-term trends in most crime types. The latest figures showed that there were an estimated 8.5 million offences (including fraud) in the year ending 30 September 2023. While the latest figures don't show a statistically significant change in total crime compared with the previous year, they do follow the long-term downward trend in crime since the mid-1990s and the more recent falls since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Compared with the year ending 31 March 2020, the statistics show a 17 percent reduction in total crime. The number of crimes being committed understandably dropped during the pandemic, when there were lengthy periods of lockdown restrictions that stopped people from going outside. Many predicted that after the lockdown periods ended, crime would revert to its former levels – but it hasn't.

**Figure 3: Annual crime estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, for the years ending 31 December 1981 to 30 September 2023 (number of incidents in thousands)**



Source: [Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2023](#), Office for National Statistics

## **Homicide is relatively low and has reduced over the past 12 months**

Some especially serious crimes, such as homicide, have reduced. The homicide rate gradually increased from the mid-1970s to a peak in the early 2000s. But over the past two decades, the risk of being a victim of homicide has substantially reduced. The homicide rate in England and Wales is lower than in many other countries. According to the 2023 [‘Global study on homicide’ by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#), the global average homicide rate was approximately five times higher than it was in England and Wales. And data for the year ending 30 September 2023 showed that the number of homicides in England and Wales decreased by 9 percent compared to 30 September 2022, from 651 to 591 offences.

On 11 August 2023, [we published an inspection report on homicide prevention](#). We conducted this as a smarter systems inspection, which means that we worked closely with the College of Policing, the NPCC and the IOPC. In October 2022, ahead of our inspection, the College of Policing introduced the homicide prevention framework, and the NPCC made the framework part of its national homicide prevention strategy.

During our inspection, we found several examples of positive practice, including clear and effective leadership in some forces, which helped to co-ordinate activity and make sure all causes of homicide were tackled. But we were concerned by some inconsistencies between forces’ approaches to homicide prevention. The recommendations from our inspection have helped forces to improve how they approach homicide prevention. This should lead to fewer lives being lost.

## **Theft offences have increased over the past 12 months**

Police recorded crime figures showed an increase of 32 percent in shoplifting offences between 30 September 2022 and 30 September 2023. And a [survey of British Retail Consortium members in 2023](#) found that levels of shoplifting in ten major cities had risen by an average of 27 percent.

It isn’t possible to say how much of the rise in recorded crime is attributable to increased reporting and/or recording, or increased offending. This is because shoplifting isn’t recorded in the CSEW; instead, the figures are based on police recorded crime. Police recorded crime doesn’t tend to be a good indicator of general trends in crime because it is susceptible to changes in reporting or recording practices.

But forces have listened to calls from businesses and the Government about the rise in shoplifting and the need to take these crimes of shoplifting more seriously. The NPCC has introduced [the ‘Retail Crime Action Plan’](#), which sets out how policing will provide a better and increasingly consistent response. This should help forces tackle these crimes more effectively and build the trust and confidence businesses have in the police. There is still a lot more that forces need to do to build confidence

among the retail community. Investigating and addressing retail crime should form part of their neighbourhood policing strategies.

## **The police are renewing their focus on addressing violence against women and girls**

### **Violence against women and girls is still highly prevalent in society**

Violence against women and girls offences are violent and high-harm crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. These crimes include [domestic abuse](#), sexual violence, [stalking](#) and [female genital mutilation](#).

On 24 November 2023, the [Office for National Statistics published its overview report on domestic abuse in England and Wales](#). It stated that in the year ending 31 March 2023, the CSEW estimated that 2.1 million people aged 16 years and over (1.4 million women and 751,000 men) experienced domestic abuse.

For many years, these have often been hidden crimes that have gone under-reported, under-recorded or insufficiently addressed by the police. This is still a problem today. And the same is true for other types of less visible offending involving often-vulnerable victims, such as [child](#) exploitation and modern slavery.

But society has changed and rightly will no longer accept a substandard response to these crimes. The expectation on the police and other agencies is clear: they must prevent crimes against the most vulnerable, and bring more offenders to justice.

We have been inspecting, and trying to improve, the police response to these crimes for many years. In 2021, we reported in both [our interim report](#) and [final report on the police response to violence against women and girls](#) that we considered there to be an epidemic of offending against women and girls. We made five overarching recommendations that led to a step change in how the police, Government, criminal justice system and other public sector partnerships prioritise these crimes.

On 21 July 2021, the Government published its '[Tackling violence against women and girls strategy](#)'. And in September 2021, in response to one of our recommendations, the NPCC appointed a full-time deputy chief constable to co-ordinate police action across England and Wales.

### **Forces are increasingly trying to prioritise tackling violence against women and girls**

Since the release of the Government's violence against women and girls strategy and our national thematic reports, the police have been prioritising these crimes. The need to prioritise these crimes was re-emphasised in February 2023, when the then Home Secretary included violence against women and girls in '[The Strategic Policing Requirement](#)'. By including it in this requirement, forces must consider these crimes as a national threat alongside other serious problems, such as terrorism and serious and organised crime.

All forces produce a [force management statement](#) each year that provides us with evidence of what they are doing to achieve national priorities, among other things. All forces have said that violence against women and girls is a priority for them. I welcome this.

[Operation Soteria Bluestone](#) is a collaborative programme that has been in place for more than three years. It has brought leading academics together with senior police officers to address the shortcomings and improve justice outcomes in rape and other serious sexual offence cases. They have carried out an array of research and produced briefing reports that examine a range of systemic problems. For example, one of its reports examined the complex reasons why the police and the CPS close rape investigations cases.

Operation Soteria Bluestone has also produced a '[National operating model for the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences](#)' to give these investigations the best chance of success. Establishing a common national approach across such a wide range of policies, processes and activities has rarely been done throughout all 43 forces. In November 2023, we began an inspection of how well this new investigative model had been implemented by forces, with the report scheduled for publication later in 2024.

The scale of violence against women and girls offending is such that it cannot be addressed through law enforcement alone. A more rounded approach is essential. And this approach needs to define the roles and responsibilities of policing, the Government, other departments including education and health, and the wider criminal justice system.

### **There are still many more improvements that forces need to make to protect all vulnerable people**

In the period to 31 March 2024, during our 2023–25 PEEL inspections, we inspected 13 forces for how well they protected all vulnerable people. We found many areas where forces need to improve and some examples of worsening performance.

In many forces, we have found there is a lack of performance management and insufficient oversight and scrutiny of [public protection units](#). In part, this is due to forces not having effective governance arrangements in place. Another theme we have found is that senior leaders don't always understand enough about the [safeguarding](#) activities they oversee. This leads to forces not performing as well as they could, or decisions being made with the intention of managing demand rather than aiming to make the public safer. Some forces need to improve their governance structures and the training and development opportunities they provide to senior officers.

We have also found many aspects in which the police need to improve how they share information through the [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme \(DVDS\)](#), often referred to as 'Clare's Law'. This has been an area of increasing demand for forces, with the 'right to ask' applications made by the public, including victims of domestic abuse, rising by 301 percent in 5 years. In our inspections, we have highlighted several areas that forces need to improve to manage this increased demand.

The main problem we have found is that many forces take far too long to respond to DVDS requests: 5 of 13 forces we inspected to 31 March 2024 had backlogs in processing requests. And these forces fell outside the statutory disclosure timeframe of 28 days. Other forces perform very well: these have usually invested in the right resources and training and have well-established processes.

## 2. Providing a service to victims and the most vulnerable

### **More often than not, victims aren't satisfied with the service they receive from the police and criminal justice system**

In any given year, only a small portion of the population have direct contact with the police. This is a good thing and represents the increasingly safe society we live in. But that is little consolation for the millions who are [victims](#) each year. When they are subject to a crime, victims should receive a good service from the police and wider criminal justice system.

The actions police forces are taking are still not having the desired effect on victim satisfaction levels. Too many victims are still being let down because they are being given a substandard service. Many victims choose not to report their crime to the police in the first place. Of those who do, some data seems to indicate that contact with the police is more likely to decrease their confidence in the service than increase it. This is extremely disappointing.

The reasons why victims are disappointed are clear. How victims are treated is often as important to them as any criminal justice outcome that police achieve. Victims want to be treated with respect and dignity: they want the police to take proportionate action, and they want to be kept informed of the progress of the case. These aren't unreasonable expectations; but too often, they aren't being met. The response isn't always sufficiently quick, thorough and caring.

On 8 November 2023, the [Victims' Commissioner's '2022 Victim Survey'](#) was published. It was carried out to understand victims' priorities and gain an insight into their experience of the criminal justice system over the past three years. While some of the survey questions and results have changed over time, the 2022 survey results in relation to victims' experience with the police paint a worrying picture. For example:

- 71 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the police response to their crime;
- 59 percent of respondents felt the police didn't take their claims seriously;
- 82 percent of respondents weren't confident that the police thoroughly investigated the crimes reported to them;

- 34 percent of respondents said they wouldn't report a crime to the police again; and
- 29 percent of respondents were aware of the [Victims' Code](#).

These survey responses are very concerning and must not be ignored. If victims lose confidence in the police, they are less likely to report crime. What is as, if not more, concerning is victims' experiences and attitudes towards the criminal justice system as a whole.

The survey paints a very poor picture of the experiences of victims of crime within the criminal justice system. Only 10 percent of respondents said that they were confident that the criminal justice system was effective. Only 17 percent felt that the criminal justice system was fair. And alarmingly, only 8 percent said they were confident that they could receive justice by reporting a crime. I echo the Victims' Commissioner's comment that "these statistics should serve as a wake-up call for all those involved in the justice system". Victims should be, but are not, at the heart of the criminal justice system.

On 19 December 2023, alongside HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate and HM Inspectorate of Probation, [we published a joint inspection report, 'Meeting the needs of victims in the criminal justice system'](#). We assessed whether, from when a victim reports an offence to after the offender has been convicted, the police, the CPS and the Probation Service:

- understand what victims need;
- meet victims' needs; and
- provide a good service to victims.

We found that all those organisations recognised the importance of supporting victims and were committed to improving the service they provide. But we also found that a combination of competing demands, high workloads, poor communication and lack of experience were the main factors contributing to victims not always receiving the best service.

We said that, rather than trying to meet the individual needs of victims, those organisations were focusing more on whether they were complying with the 12 rights set out in the Victims' Code. In some cases, this resulted in a 'box-ticking' approach, with no evidence of the quality of interactions with or support provided to victims.

We were told about initiatives both in England and Wales and elsewhere in the world, including victims' hubs that provided tailored support to victims, and online portals to access information about cases. These initiatives had the potential to improve the experience of all victims, but often they were developed in isolation at a local level.

We also found that there were national arrangements in place in England and Wales that were designed to measure how well criminal justice bodies provide support to victims. These had been established through the Criminal Justice Board in England

and the Criminal Justice Board for Wales. But we found that both boards had limited data on victims and didn't have full oversight of the quality of work with victims.

The [Victims and Prisoners Act 2024](#) is intended to improve the support and guidance offered by criminal justice bodies, such as the police, to victims of crime. It includes changes to the Victims' Code and creates new advocacy functions to support the victims of major incidents. Many bodies working in the criminal justice system, including the police, will now be required to collect and review more information about compliance with the Victims' Code, as set out in the Act. The law also requires the police and others to make arrangements to collect feedback from victims of crime about their experiences. This should help to amplify the voice of victims and improve the services they receive. The Government, [police and crime commissioners \(PCCs\)](#), police chiefs and other criminal justice leaders must listen carefully to what they have to say.

## The police still aren't getting many of the basics right

Last year I said that the police were failing to get the basics right. I describe them as the basics not necessarily because they are easy services to provide, but because they are the fundamental expectations of the public. These include:

- promptly answering the phone;
- attending incidents within a reasonable timeframe;
- investigating the crime;
- keeping victims informed; and
- bringing offenders to justice.

Responding to the public and investigating crime were the worst-performing areas of our last round of PEEL inspections. [In our inspection report 'Police performance: Getting a grip'](#), we said that the public were often being failed at the first point of contact. There were often unacceptable delays in the phone being answered, particularly for non-emergency [101](#) calls. In too many cases, forces didn't identify vulnerability and repeat victims. We found too many examples of investigations with inadequate supervisory oversight, and forces were closing investigations where there were still reasonable lines of enquiry that should have been pursued.

The Government and the police service listened to our concerns. On 28 August 2023, [the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire published a letter to all chief constables, PCCs and the College of Policing](#) detailing how all police chiefs had made a national commitment to follow all reasonable lines of enquiry for all crime types. Part of this commitment was that no criminal investigation should be filed solely on the basis that it is perceived as 'minor'.

The [College of Policing](#) is helping forces to improve their investigations. It has published [evidence-based guidelines on conducting effective investigations](#) and updated the [authorised professional practice on investigation](#). These provide practical



advice to support officers and staff on the frontline to make effective decisions. We are currently in the process of carrying out a smarter systems inspection about how well forces conduct investigations.

Despite the increasing focus of chief constables on responding to the public and investigations, it isn't yet translating into better performance. In our current round of PEEL inspections to 31 March 2024, we have published reports for 13 forces. We have seen some improvements in 999 call handling times. But we have also continued to see widespread poor performance in both areas. Of those 13 forces we have inspected, no force was graded as either good or outstanding at responding to the public or investigating crime.

The [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#) also hasn't completed any of the four recommendations we made within our spotlight report, which is slowing the required improvements being made. One of our recommendations was about attendance times at calls for service. We recommended that, by January 2024, the NPCC should establish a national standard for attendance times.

Timely attendance at calls for service is essential for [safeguarding](#) victims and securing evidence for investigations. This is commonly referred to as the [golden hour](#). But our inspections found wide-ranging issues with the recording of data on attendance times at incidents.

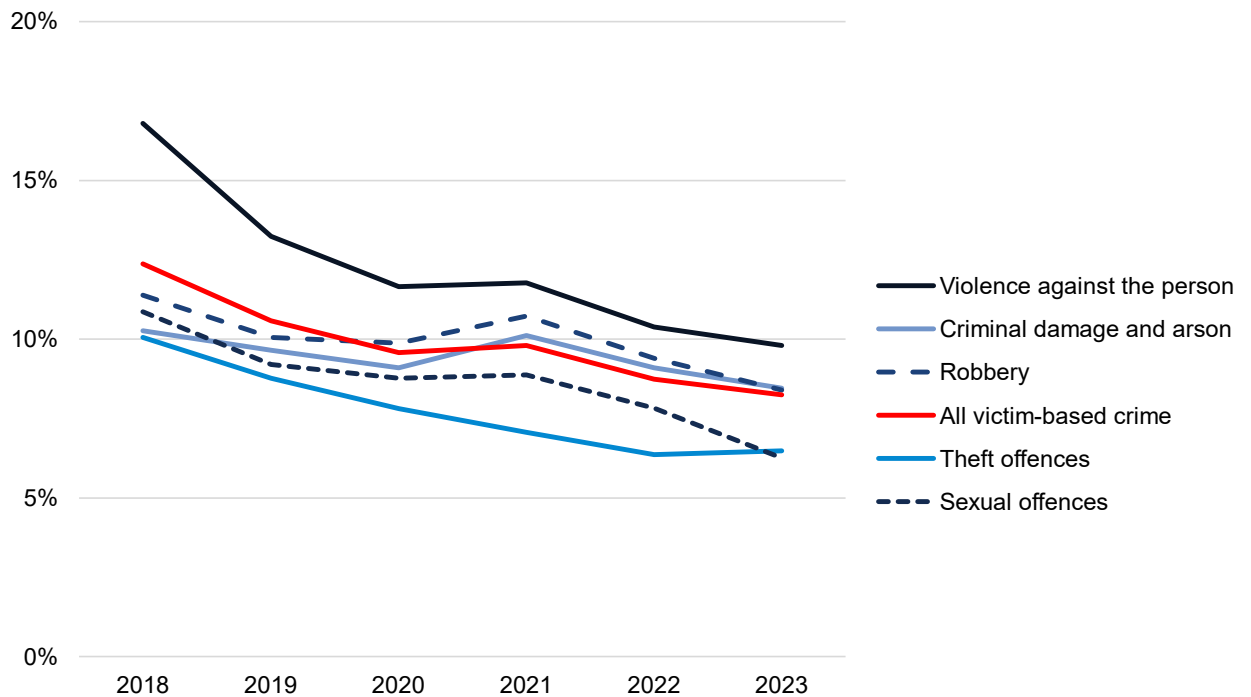
Some forces didn't have published attendance targets at all. The effect of poor and varied data means that forces can't compare attendance times against a national standard to improve their performance. Differing targets, or the absence of them, also mean that the public don't know what service they should expect. The NPCC should complete this recommendation and the other three recommendations from that report at the earliest opportunity.

## **Too few criminal investigations are leading to justice for victims**

Justice must fit the circumstances of the crime. It may be an [out-of-court disposal](#) issued by the police that involves the offender apologising, or it might be a whole-life sentence given by a court. When a crime is committed, the police play an important role in determining whether justice will be done. This is by collecting evidence and, in certain circumstances, making the final decision on the outcome type assigned to the crime.

Since 2015, the proportion of victim-based offences that are brought to justice has substantially declined. Included in this trend are some of the most serious offences, including sexual offences, robbery and violence against the person.

**Figure 4: Proportion of victim-based offences that were brought to justice, by crime type, between the years ending 31 March 2018 and 31 March 2023**



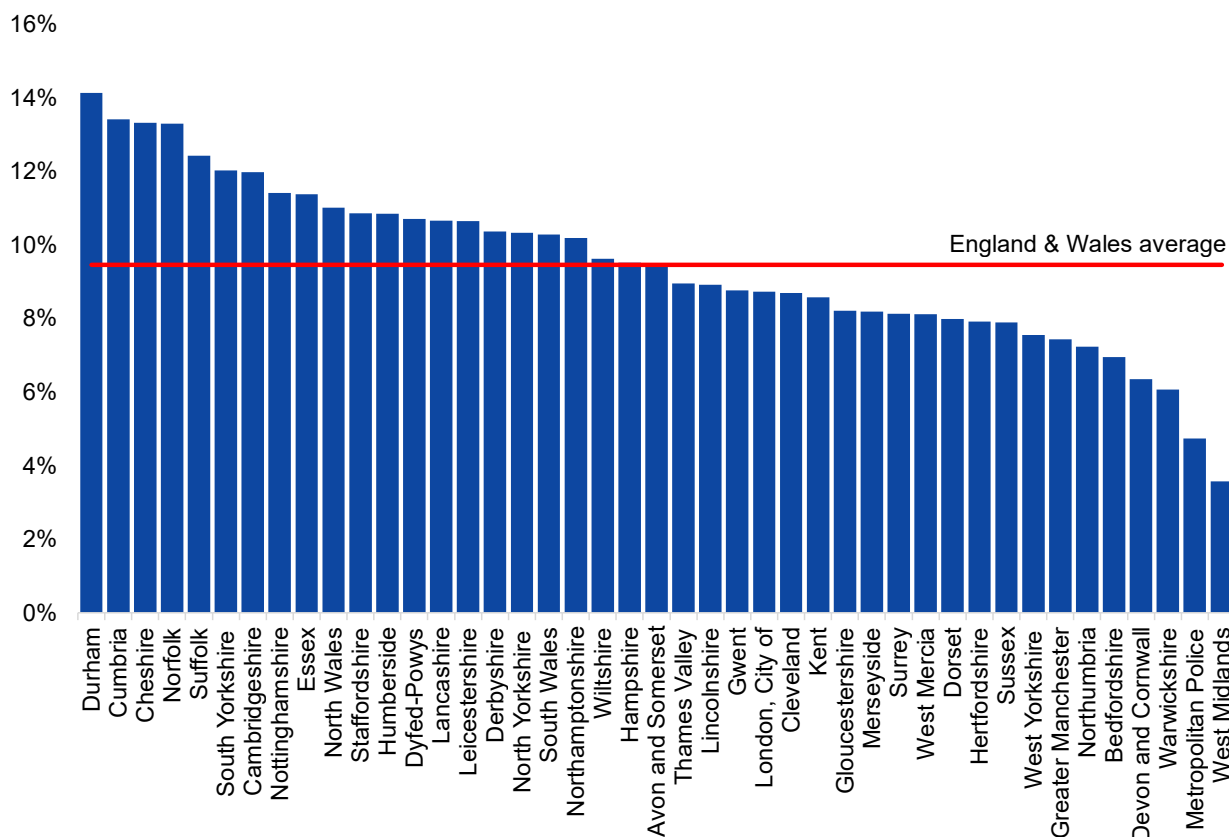
Source: [Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables](#), Home Office

Systemic factors have negatively affected the police service’s ability to detect crime, including:

- public requests for service or attendance at incidents that aren’t for the police to deal with, for example those involving people with complex mental health problems;
- an increase in police recorded crime;
- an increasing complexity of crime;
- a shortage of resources, followed by a rise in inexperienced staff; and
- an increase in the complexity of completing case files for court.

This means that positive crime outcomes, where the outcome of a police investigation meets the victim’s expectations, are lower than they could otherwise be in all police forces. But there is a significant variation in positive crime outcomes for victim-based crime depending on police force area. In the year ending 31 March 2023, Durham Constabulary had an offence brought to justice outcome rate of 14.1 percent. At the opposite end of the scale, the rate in West Midlands Police was 3.6 percent, closely followed by the Metropolitan Police Service at 4.7 percent. The message is clear: some police forces should be doing a better job at solving crime.

Figure 5: Proportion of victim-based crimes brought to justice across forces in England and Wales, in the year ending 31 March 2023



Source: [Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables](#), Home Office

Notes: ‘Offence brought to justice’ includes Charged/Summonsed; Caution (youths); Caution (adults); Taken into consideration; Offender died; Penalty notices for disorder; Cannabis/khat warning; Community resolutions; Not in public interest (CPS); and Diversionary, educational or intervention activity.

Victim-based crimes are those with a specific identifiable victim and comprise the following offence groups: violence against the person, sexual offences, robbery, theft offences, and criminal damage and arson.

## The police aren’t keeping up with the challenges presented by fraud and cybercrime

### Fraud and cybercrime pose a significant threat

Crime has always evolved with opportunity. Given the increasing extent that the public use technology and spend their lives online, the rise in fraud and cybercrime isn’t a surprise. Taken together, fraud and cybercrime now make up nearly 50 percent of all crime.

Fraud is now the crime type with the highest level of victimisation. According to the [Crime Survey for England and Wales \(CSEW\)](#), in the year ending 30 September 2023, 1 in 17 adults were a victim of fraud. There were 3.2 million fraud offences, constituting 38 percent of all crime.

Fraud and cybercrime pose a significant economic and security threat to the UK. Estimates on the cost of fraud to the economy vary widely. According to estimates from the '[Annual Fraud Indicator 2023](#)', fraud costs the UK £219 billion each year. Most of this estimated cost falls on private businesses and the public sector, with fraud crimes committed directly against individuals estimated to have a cost of approximately £8.3 billion.

The impact of fraud is more than just financial. Fraud is a concern for the public, and victims of fraud are frequently traumatised by what they have suffered. On 28 September 2023, Crest Advisory, a criminal justice think-tank and consulting practice, published its report '[Online fraud: what does the public think?](#)' The research was based on a nationally representative sample of over 3,313 adults throughout England and Wales. The data showed that people were worried about fraud, and more so than many other crimes. Most respondents (92 percent) thought online fraud was a significant problem in the UK. When asked what crimes they were most worried about, the top three crimes that people said they were most worried about were online fraud, knife crime and burglary – in that order. Many of those surveyed had been a victim of fraud and they said the crimes had an emotional and psychological impact on them.

Cybercrime has also been rising in recent years. Estimates from the CSEW for the year ending 30 September 2023 showed that there were approximately 898,000 offences of computer misuse. This was a 30 percent increase from around 690,000 cybercrime offences the previous year ending 30 September 2022, and represents a return to pre-pandemic levels.

Although fraud is already the most prevalent crime in the UK, and cybercrime is a growing threat, there is the potential for these crimes to rise further. This is primarily due to the recent advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), which have the potential to create an increase in the number of offences and make fraudsters seem more convincing.

### **Victims of fraud often receive an insufficient police response**

In 2019, we carried out our first national [thematic inspection](#) into the effectiveness and efficiency of the police response to fraud, including online fraud. [In our report, 'Fraud: Time to choose'](#), we said that the law enforcement response to fraud was disjointed and ineffective, with no national strategy or performance measures for tackling fraud.

We found that the principle of locally owned investigations supported by national functions was sound, but its application was not. There were unacceptably wide variations in the quality of case handling and prioritisation, unnecessary delays in the system, and fraudsters were rarely proactively targeted.

Since then, there have been some improvements and forces have implemented many of our recommendations. But victims of fraud still don't get a sufficient police response. Action Fraud, the public-facing national fraud and cybercrime reporting centre, was cited in [a March 2023 House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report](#) as being "seen as a black hole by many victims". When less than 1 percent of crimes reported to it result in a positive crime outcome for the victim, it is understandable why this may be the perception.

The City of London Police leads on fraud for the police service. It is in the process of overhauling Action Fraud and developing a new system that should make it easier for victims to report fraud, get support and information about their case, and provide police forces with better information to conduct investigations and target prevention activity. The new system is due to go live in 2024. If it achieves what it intends to, it should improve the service victims of fraud receive.

However, a new system will not make it easier for forces to adequately prioritise the investigation of fraud crimes. Given the varying community needs that forces must address with limited resources, it isn't surprising that many chief constables have highlighted to me that they struggle to prioritise the investigation of fraud. Some chief constables have said it might be time to consider a radically different approach to investigating fraud. I agree it is time for change.

### **A focus on prevention will be the key to reducing fraud**

Given the volume and nature of fraud, it will always be difficult for the police to provide an adequate investigation for those crimes, which means the focus must be on prevention. Fraud isn't a problem the police can solve alone. The Government, wider public sector, businesses and the public all have a role to play in effective prevention.

The Government has recognised the need for prevention in [its national 'Fraud Strategy'](#), which it published in May 2023. The strategy set out a plan to reduce fraud by 10 percent on 2019 levels by December 2024. There are three pillars: pursue fraudsters, block fraud and empower people. All three of these have an element of focus on preventing future crimes. In support of its strategy, in February 2024 the Government introduced the ['Stop! Think Fraud'](#) campaign to help people avoid becoming a victim of fraud. This provides knowledge and tools about fraud for the public and should help to prevent offences.

In 2025, we will be introducing a new inspection programme and framework. Given the importance of tackling fraud, other forms of economic crime and cybercrime, we are considering how we can increase our inspection of these areas in coming years.

## The police need other agencies to play their part in preventing offending and reducing the number of victims

### Crime levels are affected by other factors than the police

Crime always has and always will be both too important and too complex for the police to deal with on their own; other agencies need to play their part. Although the police have a large part to play in preventing crime, many of the factors that lead to offending are beyond their control. The reasons behind offending are varied, complex and not fully understood. But factors often associated with criminality include:

- lack of education and employment opportunities;
- adverse childhood experiences; and
- mental health problems and substance misuse.

The criminal justice system has a role to play in preventing reoffending through deterrence and offender management. But it is cheaper and more effective to intervene early before people begin a pattern of offending.

It is usually the case that by the time someone has reached a point of committing a criminal offence, other statutory agencies could have intervened to prevent their behaviour from escalating. This is particularly the case for [children](#), who may begin offending if they don't receive a suitable education, appropriate care from their parents or guardians, or access to treatment for mental health problems or substance misuse.

Agencies need to provide the right help at the right time for children, young people and their families. Not all their needs will require a multi-agency response; nor will statutory social care services always be necessary. Instead, there should be a continuum of support in the local services available to families.

### Other public sector agencies are missing opportunities to provide early help that will prevent offending

Unfortunately, it appears that an increasing number of early intervention opportunities are being missed by other public services which are under pressure. Some of those who don't get the early help they need will go on to commit criminal offences.

We regularly conduct [joint targeted area inspections \(JTAs\)](#) with Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and HM Inspectorate of Probation to assess how well local authorities, the police, health, probation and youth offending services work together in an area to identify, support and protect vulnerable children and young people.

In November 2023, [we published our findings from five JTAs on the theme of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help](#). We inspected how well agencies work together to help and protect children – the primary focus being on targeted early help.

We had a wide variation in findings throughout the five areas we inspected. But there were some common themes:

- Resource pressures were making it harder to prioritise early help. This was getting harder as more families needed help for a variety of reasons.
- Local resources weren't consistently well understood or used between services, meaning some families weren't getting the help they needed.
- Some approaches in early help were too adult-focused, rather than taking a [child-centred](#) approach.
- Information-sharing between partner organisations varied across the different areas and needed to improve.

Early help isn't provided on a statutory basis, and I am concerned that the quality of service provided to those who need it may decline further in future because of resource pressures. Less severe needs may go unmet in favour of dealing with the most severe that carry a statutory obligation. But that approach will only create more problems for the future. It could lead to preventable crimes being committed and the unnecessary criminalisation of many children and young people.

Children's social care is an area of particular concern. [In her 2022/23 annual report, the Chief Inspector of Ofsted](#) said that "problems of increasing demand and limited supply are a chronic challenge in the provision of social care – where we continue to see struggles with sufficiency".

This position will potentially worsen due to the financial challenges faced by local authorities, which are responsible for providing children and adults' social care. [In its 'Autumn Statement 2023', the Local Government Association](#) identified funding gaps of £2.4 billion in 2023/24 and £1.6 billion in 2024/25. It said that "children's social care is increasingly cited by councils as their key source of financial pressure and overspend. ... This is a continuation of a trend of spiralling costs in this service area driven partly by continuous growth in the number of children in care since 2009." The Government must recognise the importance of early help for preventing crime and make sure this area receives sufficient investment.

## **Too often, the criminal justice system isn't providing access to justice**

### **Despite repeated calls for reform, little has changed**

Last year, I described the criminal justice system as dysfunctional and defective, and said its woeful state contributed to police inefficiency. That is still the case.

Despite a decreasing number of prosecutions, our prisons are fuller than ever. The courts and legal systems are in disarray, with unacceptable court backlogs, overly bureaucratic processes and a legal aid system that is no longer fit for purpose. This all

has a considerable adverse impact on achieving justice for victims of crime and those awaiting trial.

In its 2019 Conservative Party manifesto, the Government pledged that it would establish a Royal Commission into the criminal justice system. It still hasn't been established, but it should be. The case for reform is clear: access to justice for all is the hallmark of a civilised society. But until elements of the criminal justice system are fundamentally reformed, victims will continue to struggle to get the access to justice they deserve.

### **Barriers to police and CPS joint working are hindering high-quality prosecutions**

Together with HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, we are carrying out a thematic inspection into the building of prosecution cases by the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) at the early stages of criminal cases. On 25 January 2024, [we published our interim report](#) and we intend to publish our full report later this year.

In our interim report, we found strong professional relationships, a common sense of purpose between the police and CPS, and a strong desire to achieve a high standard of casework. There was also a shared understanding that delays in bringing offenders to justice undermine confidence in the criminal justice system and contribute to victims and witnesses becoming disengaged.

However, we found a range of cultural and communication barriers between the police and CPS that were hindering high-quality prosecutions and leading to victims of crime being failed. Differing priorities and a lack of shared performance measures were undermining effectiveness and efficiency in the criminal justice system.

We also found that the range of criminal justice system performance data created a confusing picture, with different agencies using and reporting on different data measures and standards. Without common performance measures and standards, especially in respect of outcomes for victims, there can never be a truly collaborative approach across all criminal justice agencies.

We said there were significant challenges presented by the ICT systems used by both police forces and the CPS. While the CPS use one case management system, the 43 police forces use many different systems. Forces and the CPS were frequently using systems to perform tasks they weren't originally designed for. The lack of consistent ICT throughout England and Wales and the use of outdated systems mean that communicating information can be difficult and case material can be hard to locate.

There is considerable joint effort being invested to streamline the way case papers are transferred to the CPS, using a new system called the Digital Case File. But progress to implement this system is still too slow. I urge decision-makers in both the CPS and police to review their commitment to the programme and do all that they can to expedite its implementation.



There are also tensions over the requirement to prepare most of a case file and redact material before sending it to the CPS for a charging decision. These requirements were introduced because of changes to guidance.

At the end of December 2020, the '[Director's Guidance on Charging \(6th edition\)](#)', the [revised 'Attorney General's Guidelines on Disclosure'](#) and the [revised Code of Practice to the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996](#) came into force. These changes significantly increased the work the police must do before sending a file to the CPS for a charging decision. It requires the police to redact all [rebuttable presumption material](#) and to complete schedules of unused material. And in all Crown Court cases or cases with a large amount of digital material, the police must complete a lengthy investigation management document.

There is a balance to strike between making sure all information is made available to the CPS so it can make a sound charging decision, and the amount of police resources that are needed to reach that decision. The Government has been exploring how changes to this guidance could offer significant efficiency savings in England and Wales.

In the meantime, while potential changes are being explored, some forces have already innovated to adopt automated redaction technology. These forces have made substantial efficiency savings, for which I congratulate them. Bedfordshire Police conducted an evaluation and found its automated solution reduced redaction time by 80 percent. All forces should accelerate their adoption of these technologies and use the solutions already available where possible, rather than developing their own.

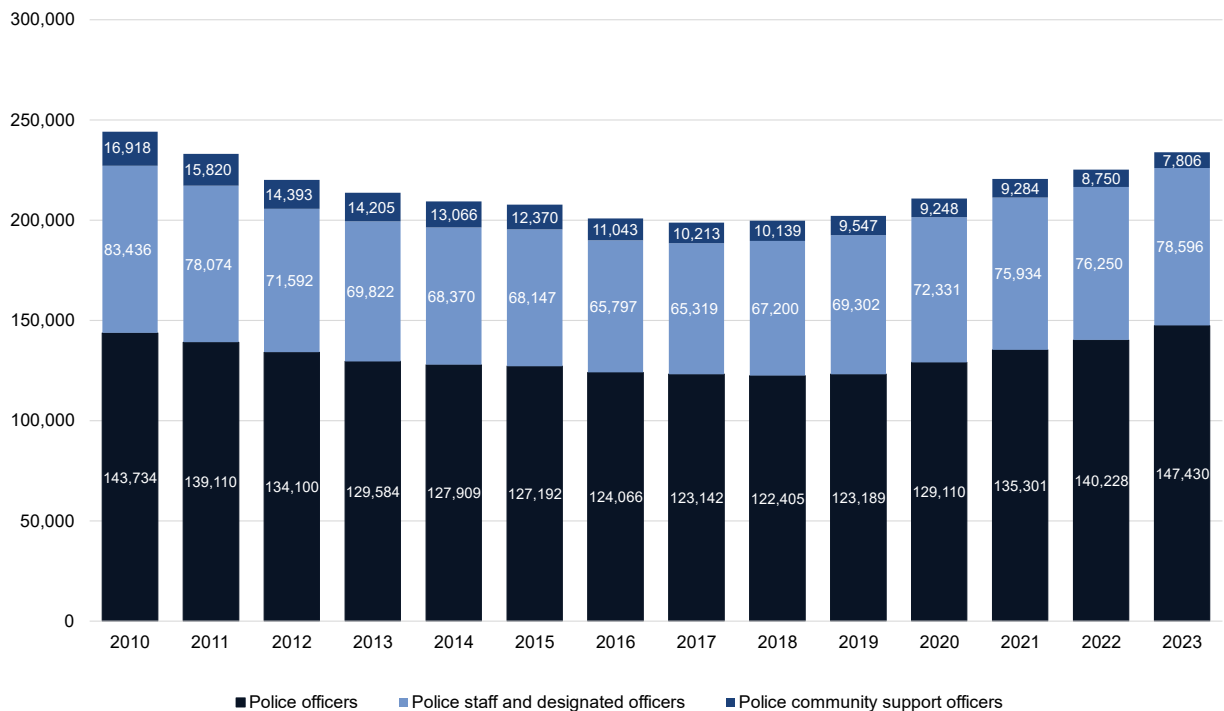
### 3. Setting up the workforce for success

#### There are more police officers than ever, but there is a lack of experience

In 2019, the Government introduced the [Police Uplift Programme \(PUP\)](#) to recruit an additional 20,000 [police officers](#) by the end of March 2023. The service met this target by recruiting an additional 20,951 officers.

The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) police officers in England and Wales reached 147,430 on 31 March 2023 – the highest number since comparable records began. By 30 September 2023, the figure dropped slightly to 147,098, which represents 332 officers fewer than the peak.

**Figure 6: Full-time equivalent size of police workforce in England and Wales, by role, between the years ending 31 March 2010 and 31 March 2023**



Source: Compiled from [Police workforce open data tables](#), Home Office

The PUP was a significant reinvestment in policing that we and the service welcomed. The Home Office expected to spend £3.6 billion on the programme up to March 2023, and it has estimated that the programme will require a further £18.5 billion over the following ten years.

Having more police officers should help to reduce crime in the long term. And increased numbers should help to make sure that the public, particularly victims, receive the standard of service they rightfully expect, and build confidence in the service. The [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#) shows that confidence in the police to do a good job has been in decline since 2016/17. The decline coincides with forces withdrawing from neighbourhood policing as their officer numbers reduced and they had to focus on the most immediate threat, harm and risk. The Government must learn this lesson and think very carefully before allowing the size of the police workforce to substantially reduce in future.

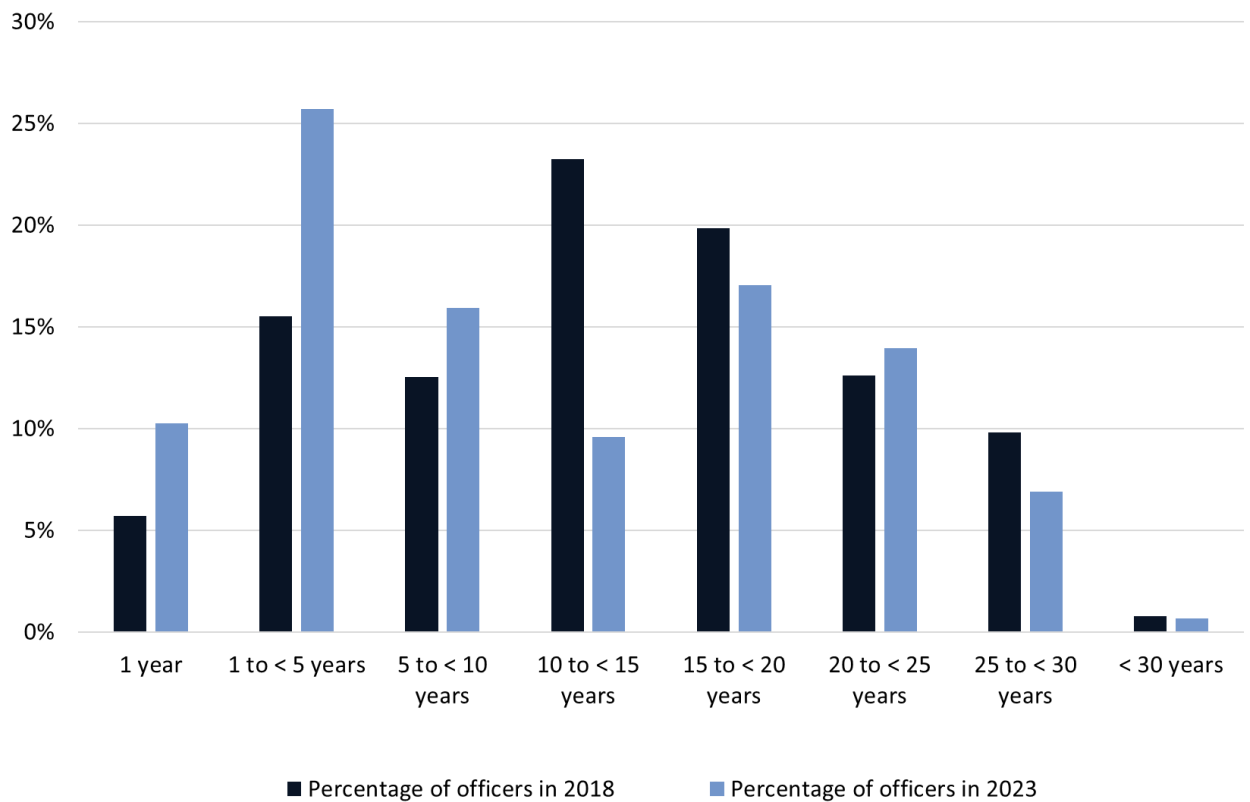
While the service was recruiting the extra 20,000 officers, the police had an opportunity to become more representative of their communities. For a long time, forces haven't been sufficiently representative of the communities they serve. This negatively affects their ability to understand the needs of communities and be seen as a legitimate service that can operate with consent. To meet the 20,000-officer target, forces had to recruit slightly more than 46,000 officers – this was a once in a generation opportunity to increase the diversity of the service.

While the police have made some progress in this respect, for which I praise them, they haven't managed to diversify their workforce as much as we or they would have hoped for. This was undoubtedly influenced by the short timeframe to recruit so many officers. For example, [according to Home Office police workforce, England and Wales statistics](#), as at 31 March 2023 only 34.7 percent of officers were female, compared to 51 percent of the population of England and Wales according the 2021 Census. Additionally, as at 31 March 2023 only 8.4 percent of officers were from ethnic minority backgrounds, compared to 18.3 percent of the population according to the 2021 Census. Despite the progress the service has made, it must continue to do all it can to become more representative of the communities it serves. The '[Police Race Action Plan](#)' is intended to help forces make progress in this area.

### **A lack of experience means the full benefit of increased officer numbers isn't yet felt in communities**

Most of the chief constables who wrote to me said that the high number of inexperienced officers, brought about by the PUP, was one of the greatest challenges their forces faced during 2023. Police workforce statistics show that as at 31 March 2023, 36 percent of police officers had less than five years' service. This is compared to 21 percent of officers as at 31 March 2018.

**Figure 7: Comparison of proportion of police officers in England and Wales by length of service, as at 31 March 2018 and 31 March 2023**



**Source:** [Police workforce open data tables](#), Home Office

This lack of experience shouldn't be underestimated, as it means it will take time to feel the full benefits of the investment. It will take some time for officers to gain experience and become fully effective on the frontline, even after they have received training. And it will take longer before they can fill critical vacancies in more specialist roles, such as being a detective. Not to mention the fact that it will take even longer for officers to become fully proficient in the most specialised roles.

Initial training through the Policing Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF) – the [College of Policing](#) accredited training framework for all police officers – will go a long way to equipping these officers with the knowledge and skills they need. Entry routes under the PEQF are more rigorous and lengthier than the previous programme. The public rightly expects police officers to be able to do a good a job and to use their powers fairly, so enhanced training is a worthy investment. But the expansion of the training curriculum has increased the financial burden on forces.

All new officers under the PEQF need to receive training, tutoring and supervision from experienced officers in the force. This takes these officers away from the frontline. Officers who enter through the Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship, which is one route within the PEQF, study for a degree over three years while they are working as an officer. In addition to needing the support of experienced officers, these

new officers need time away from the frontline to study, which considerably reduces the resources forces have available.

For some time, forces have had high numbers of vacancies in detective roles. This is partly a result of chief constables assessing that they need more detective posts, particularly in public protection. And it is partly a result of the fact that there is an inexperienced workforce that isn't yet ready to fill those posts. Given that the number of inexperienced officers has reached its peak and will now slowly decline, the number of vacant detective posts or insufficiently qualified people in detective posts is reducing.

This level of inexperience is a serious problem that won't be resolved within the next year; it will take time. The next few years will be a crucial time for forces as they manage the challenges posed by an inexperienced workforce while trying to meet the needs of communities.

## **The police need a balanced workforce to be efficient and effective**

### **Police staff are vital to reducing and detecting crime**

[Police staff](#) are an essential part of the police workforce and they carry out many important roles. Some of these are public-facing, such as police community support officers (PCSOs), call centre staff and crime scene investigators. Some are less visible, but perform equally vital roles, such as [digital forensics](#) experts, financial experts and analytics. These are just a few examples; there are many more.

Given much of their work isn't visible to the public, the importance of their work isn't widely understood. Their dedication to public service is no different to that of police officers, and they contribute to preventing and detecting crime and keeping communities safe. Police staff lead and run critical services and help to develop new technologies, gather evidence and work with communities.

Over recent years, the number of police staff (excluding PCSOs) has fluctuated broadly in line with the number of police officers. As at 31 March 2010, staff numbers were 83,426 FTE. But they then declined during the years of austerity, and as at 31 March 2017, they were at their lowest at 65,319 FTE. Staff numbers then increased again through additional Government investment in policing, and as at 30 September 2023, there were 78,596 FTE police staff.

The [Police Reform Act 2002](#) introduced PCSOs to work in local neighbourhoods to help prevent crime and [antisocial behaviour](#) and engage with communities. Many chief constables say they perform an essential role that contributes to gathering [intelligence](#), solving problems and interacting with the public.

But PCSO numbers have been in decline for many years due to a lack of funding. As at 31 March 2010, there were 16,918 FTE PCSOs in England and Wales. As at 31 March 2023, this number was 7,806, which represents a reduction of over 50 percent since 2010 and a decrease of 944 from the previous year.

Recruiting the right people into police staff roles is just as important as the number of funded posts. In August 2022, the Home Office commissioned an independent review of productivity in policing. And on 20 November 2023, it published '[The Policing Productivity Review](#)'. The review highlighted that the service experienced gaps in technological specialists in fraud, digital forensics, network architects and data scientists. It highlighted that:

“Police forces need to be able to keep pace with a changing technological and economic environment – digital forensics, data science, robotics, artificial intelligence, cyber skills, access to research and development.

Whilst data exploitation presents an opportunity, it can only be seized if forces compete in an employment market for technical skills that are much in-demand”.

The review also pointed out that “most of these roles are filled by staff so increased officer capacity will not bridge the gap”.

Many chief constables echoed these views but also highlighted a range of other police staff vacancies they were struggling to fill. Some believe they cannot always get the staff they need because the police can't match the pay and conditions being offered by private sector employers.

Forces must do all they can to recruit and retain the specialist staff they need. Some chief constables told me about a range of measures their forces had introduced to do this. These included recruitment campaigns, special payments, additional training and development, secondment arrangements and better exit interview processes. When they introduce measures, they should evaluate them to establish whether they are effective. And when forces find effective ways of recruiting and retaining police staff, they should share this knowledge with other forces so the service as a whole is able to better tackle this common problem. In our reports, we will continue to highlight positive practice we find on our inspections.

### **Chief constables should be able to hire a workforce mix that meets local need**

Chief constables are operationally independent, and in principle they can hire the number of police staff that they have determined they need. However, in practice, control over how chief constables spend their available budget is constrained by a range of policies and financial incentives from the Home Office. I believe this to have been the case since constabularies began to receive an exchequer grant in 1856. There is nothing wrong with this approach, provided the incentives lead to better outcomes for the public.

Following the conclusion of the PUP, the Home Office told forces to maintain the increased number of police officers. Forces are allocated with a certain portion of their funding that can only be used to recruit police officers. Chief constables cannot use it to recruit police staff and, if it isn't used, the Home Office withholds it. A process that incentivises the recruitment and maintenance of police officer numbers may seem an attractive proposition. But it restricts the ability of chief constables to decide on the best workforce mix to police their local communities.

The reality of modern policing means that forces need a range of skills in their workforce to be efficient and effective. Warranted powers aren't essential, or indeed required, for many important roles within modern police forces. The [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#) has told us it estimated that 6,000 police officers were working in roles that could be filled by police staff. These police officers are therefore working in roles they don't have the specialist skills for. It also doesn't represent value for money, as police officers are usually paid more than police staff, so forces are paying more to fill a role than they otherwise should be.

Police contact centres in particular seem to be staffed by too high a proportion of police officers. The Policing Productivity Review calculated, using [our 2022 value for money profiles](#), that 28 percent (2,930 out of 10,304) of the workforce in police contact centres were police officers. Contact centres in five forces had less than 5 percent of police officers, while contact centres in three forces had over 40 percent.

Some officers will always need to be trained to work in contact centres and control rooms in case they need to cover sickness or in case police staff go on strike. And there are other advantages, such as the experience they bring in dealing with crimes that can help to resolve issues at first contact. But such a large proportion isn't justifiable.

Police officers are paid for the powers they hold and the risks they take. They should primarily be working in roles that make best use of their warranted powers and unique skills. In 2022, I said no arbitrary target should prevent chief constables from having the right people in their forces, but I didn't go as far as making a recommendation. However, there is increasing evidence of the adverse effect this policy is having on the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

One chief constable said to me:

“policing should be able to take a balanced approach, where data scientists, police digital investigators, automation developers and other essential staff are treated as equally essential as police officers. If the current approach continues, I will find myself not only unable to develop the right skills in specialist areas, but will be replacing civilians with police officers, a significantly regressive step”.

Chief constables weren't alone in their frustrations. Many [police and crime commissioners \(PCCs\)](#) highlighted their disappointment and frustration that the police officer target was too inflexible and didn't allow them to invest in a blended workforce that included PCSOs.

### Recommendation 1

By 1 April 2025, the Government should abolish the fixed police officer numbers target in favour of a more balanced performance framework.

## An effective workforce needs strong leadership

### Many in the service don't feel valued by their force, the Government or the public

The [Police Federation of England and Wales \(PEFW\)](#) carries out an annual pay and morale survey of its members. Findings over recent years have been increasingly negative. On 20 March 2024, [it published the 2023 survey results](#), which reveal continued low levels of morale in the service. Some of the main findings were:

- 87 percent said that morale within their police force is currently “low” or “very low”;
- 71 percent said they didn't feel valued within the police;
- 51 percent agreed that they “feel proud to be in the police”; and
- 22 percent said they had an intention to resign from the police service either “within the next two years” or “as soon as they can”.

The factors that were seen as having the most significant effect on low morale were how the police were treated by the Government and the public. Most other factors were focused on the way they were supported by their force, such as workload and responsibilities, work–life balance and opportunities for training and development.

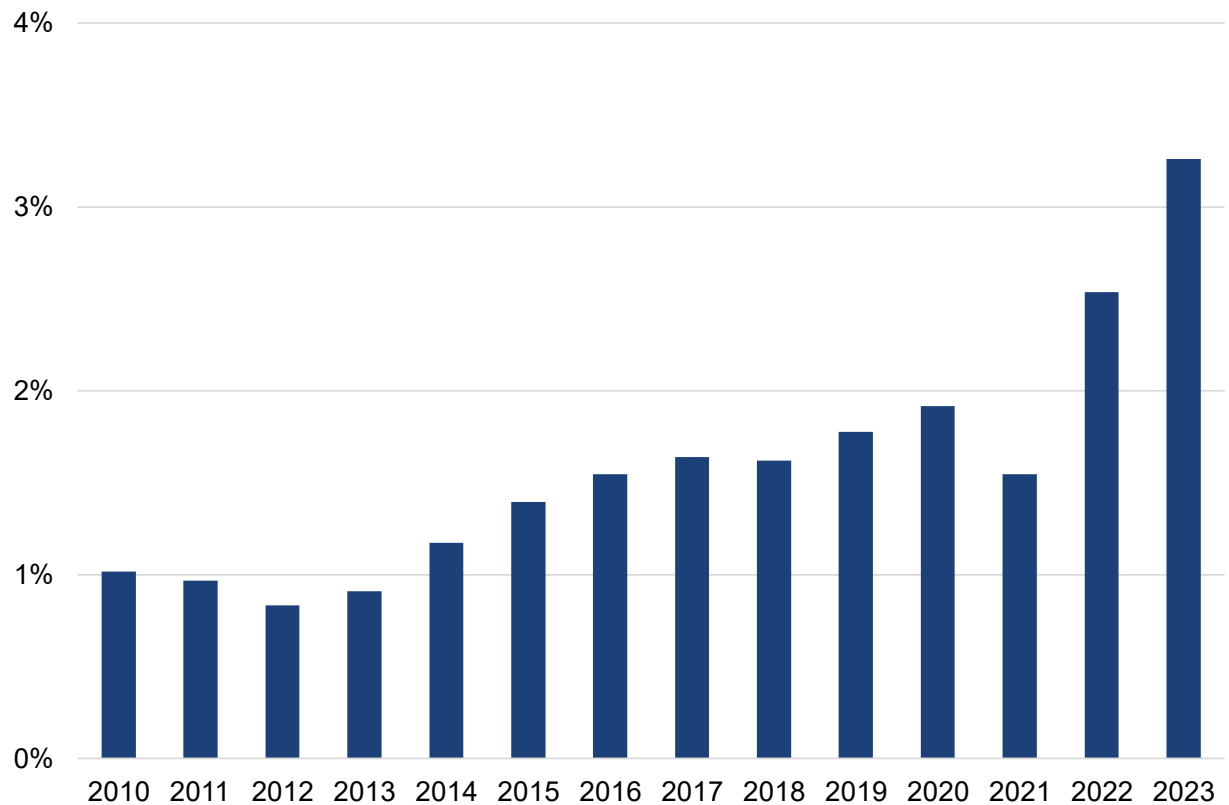
In 2019, the [National Police Wellbeing Service](#) was introduced. It is intended to provide support and guidance for police forces across England and Wales to improve and build organisational well-being. Each year, it runs a national policing well-being survey in co-ordination with Durham University. On 12 December 2023, [it published its 2023 survey results](#). There were over 42,000 responses received from police officers, police staff and volunteers.

Many of its findings were similar to the PFEW Pay and Morale Survey. Police officers and staff reported lower levels of feeling valued by their force or by the public than in the previous year's survey. These were the lowest levels recorded since [its first survey in 2019](#). It also found police officers had a moderate intention to quit the service – the highest level since the survey began.



A finding of an increased intention to leave the service by both surveys is an area of increasing concern. Many who provide that response to the surveys will not go on to leave their police force, but some will. Police officer voluntary resignations have generally continued to rise. In the year ending 31 March 2023, the rate of police officer voluntary resignation was 3.3 percent, which represented the highest rate on record and a 0.7 percent increase on the previous year.

**Figure 8: Police officer voluntary resignation rates (excluding transfers), for forces across England and Wales between the years ending 31 March 2010 and 31 March 2023**



**Source:** Compiled from [Police workforce open data tables](#), Home Office

These changes may be partly due to the changing nature of how some groups view their careers. Police officers used to join for 30 years and would rarely leave. But for some demographics, particularly those most recently entering the labour market, there is an increasingly prevalent idea of doing a role for a few years and then changing careers. Policing is also a job like no other, so of the 46,000 additional officers recruited, some will find it isn't the right job for them.

However, there may be some more negative factors affecting attrition. Low morale and the sense of being undervalued by the force, the public and the Government could play a leading role in officers deciding to stay or leave. The PFEW survey also found that pay and conditions comparative to the demands of the role were relevant factors in their decision-making. The NPCC has recognised this. And in its 2024 submissions to the [Police Remuneration Review Body](#) and the [Senior Salaries Review Body](#), it

called for an above-inflation pay increase across all ranks and higher starting salaries for constables.

There has been limited academic research on why the number of voluntary resignations has been rising in England and Wales. In August 2023, [research from the University of Portsmouth](#) indicated that people voluntarily resigning from the service experienced a lack of voice, a lack of recognition of skills and experience, and barriers to career development and progression. To counter these problems, forces must have internal processes and outcomes that are deemed to be fair.

Compared to many other public services, the rate of police voluntary resignations is still low. But it is a problem that is getting worse. If people keep leaving at this rate, it could lead to a loss of skills and experience that would be detrimental to the service. Forces will have to dedicate more resources to recruitment and training. It could also negatively affect the diversity of the service because, to date, voluntary resignations have been higher among groups who are underrepresented.

Forces need to understand and act to mitigate factors within their control that are leading to people deciding to leave policing. During our last round of PEEL inspections, we found that most forces didn't understand enough about the reasons why people were leaving. In recent years, too few people have received an exit interview after they have decided to leave the service. This isn't acceptable: not only is it common courtesy to the staff leaving, but it is essential to understanding the reasons why people are leaving the service and finding ways to make improvements.

There has, however, been positive practice in some forces. Greater Manchester Police has developed a 'stay team', whose aim is to retain both new recruits and experienced members of the workforce. The stay team meets officers and staff who have said they intend to leave, to identify barriers to them remaining with the force. The force told us that, between September 2022 and March 2023, the team successfully retained 71 percent of people it interviewed, retaining a total of 1,305 years of experience and achieving a saving of £31.8 million.

From our 2023–25 PEEL findings so far, we have seen that most forces have improved their processes for conducting exit interviews. But many forces are still not effective at collating and analysing data from these interviews to identify themes and concerns. This means people are still leaving for reasons that could be prevented. More forces are also exploring or have already introduced [stay interviews](#). This should help forces to intervene early, before officers and staff have made a final decision to leave, which should lead to them retaining experience and saving money.

### **High workloads and ineffective performance management are preventing the workforce from being as effective as it can be**

The greatest asset of the police service is its workforce. Forces rely on police officers, staff and volunteers turning up at work and giving their best efforts to provide a high-quality service to communities.

There are very few police officers, staff, special constables and volunteers who don't come to work with the intention of doing a good job. Most people join policing with the intention of positively contributing to society. Most work tirelessly throughout their careers to help the public. They therefore need to have the right conditions in place to be able to do their job properly.

As described in [Chapter 2](#), the service to the public, especially victims, isn't always what it should be. On some occasions, this is because officers and staff are falling short of the standard expected of them. But on most occasions, it is a result of the wider system that they operate in.

In our PEEL inspections, we examine various aspects that contribute to the success of the force's workforce. For example, we examine how good forces are at building, developing and looking after their workforces and encouraging ethical, lawful and inclusive behaviours in the workplace.

During our PEEL inspections to 31 March 2024, we have awarded the following grades for how well forces build, develop and look after their workforces for the 13 force reports we have published:

- 3 good;
- 7 adequate; and
- 3 requires improvement.

We have found several areas of practice that are positive. For example, there has been greater investment in understanding the causes of stress and poor well-being. Some forces have introduced surveys to better understand the demands and challenges facing student officers. And we also frequently found there was a positive relationship and good communication with staff associations, unions and networks.

But there are some areas that require improvement in a number of forces. Some forces have ineffective professional development review (PDR) processes in place. Meanwhile supervisors in other forces don't hold regular reviews at all. This stops officers and staff from reaching their full potential in their current role and developing their aspirations for the future. Forces need to make sure that their PDR processes are effective, valued by officers and staff, and applied consistently throughout the workforce.

We are also finding some members of the workforce are reporting extremely high workloads, which often seriously affects their well-being. In addition, overtime is being used too regularly in some forces, which can also affect well-being as officers and staff need to have enough time away from work to rest. The PFEW 2023 survey reinforces our findings, with 64 percent of respondents rating their workload as being too high. And 39 percent stating that their workload being too high has impacted their mental health and well-being.

For too long, in response to rising community needs, the police service has struggled to provide a high-quality service to members of the public. This has manifested in them not getting the basics right, such as slow response times to incidents and poor investigations. But giving staff an unmanageable amount of work to do is not the answer to these problems. Senior leaders need to be aware of the challenges their staff face and have plans in place to mitigate them, even at times of peak demand.

### **Strong leadership at all levels has never been so important**

Strong leadership is fundamental to the efficient and effective functioning of a force. Leaders play a crucial role in setting standards, culture and managing performance.

Leaders at all levels need to be supported by the service and receive appropriate leadership development. For that reason, it has been reassuring to see the continued progress the College of Policing is making in developing the [National Centre for Police Leadership \(NCPL\)](#). The NCPL aims to provide leadership programmes that span the full policing career cycle, from new joiners through to executive leaders. The importance of ethical and inclusive leadership sits at its core. This is an investment in policing worth making.

Considering there is such an inexperienced police workforce, frontline supervisors have an essential role to play in supporting staff. [In our 2023 PEEL spotlight report, 'Police performance: Getting a grip'](#), we identified that inexperienced first-line supervisors were often being expected to manage inexperienced teams. This combination led to several problems, including poor service to victims of crime and, in some cases, a failure to protect [vulnerable people](#).

Since then, we have seen a good level of investment in first-line managers. Many forces have introduced, or are planning to introduce, training to make sure that first-line leaders are better able to support staff and lead effectively. The content of training courses varies between forces, but we have found that many forces have made sure their training is in line with the NCPL programme.

Since [my last 'State of Policing' report](#), the College of Policing has also introduced stages 4 and 5 of the leadership development programme, which is aimed at senior leaders and executive leaders respectively. Stage 4 of the leadership programme is intended to develop senior leaders at chief inspector, superintendent and chief superintendent level, who already have broad experience of leadership and supervision.

Stage 5 of the leadership programme replaces its former Strategic Command Course. The course is designed to equip future [chief officers](#) to “lead policing operations and organisations locally, regionally, and nationally”. The first cohort began on 19 June 2023, with the second now underway and a third soon to follow. The College is evaluating these programmes to understand whether it is achieving its aims and what further changes it may need to make. These courses should help to give the most senior police officers and staff the leadership skills they need.

In our 2023–25 PEEL inspections, we have included an ungraded assessment of force leadership at all levels using the [College of Policing leadership standards](#) as a framework. We have found so far that while each force faced unique challenges, there were some common themes.

Forces have acknowledged that communication and engagement with officers and staff are essential to fostering a supportive and inclusive organisational culture. They usually had clear priorities and plans to guide their operational activities and resource allocation. And they increasingly recognised the value of working with other forces and partner agencies to share positive practice, learn from one another and tackle common challenges.

Chief constables must do everything they can to make sure that all officers and staff of all ranks and grades follow the College of Policing leadership standards.

## 4. Funding the police

### **Forces can still do more to provide a better service with their existing funding**

In 2014, we began our PEEL inspections of forces. We designed these inspections to provide accessible information to the public on how well their force is performing, and how well it is spending taxpayers' money. We assess forces against [our characteristics of good performance](#). A force's ability to meet those characteristics of good performance can be influenced by the funding it has available and how well it is led and managed.

In our PEEL 2021/22 inspections, we provided a graded judgment for all forces on strategic planning, organisational management and value for money. Our findings showed performance varied widely. We gave five forces a grade of outstanding, while we gave four forces a grade of inadequate. The main reasons behind this variability related to how well forces were managed rather than funded.

We found that too many forces were failing to properly understand and manage their own performance. Two of the biggest reasons for this were that forces weren't using data properly to inform their decision-making and they didn't have effective governance processes in place. This prevented many forces from being as efficient, effective and legitimate as they could have been. Often, forces were giving a poor service when they had sufficient funding to provide a better one.

During our PEEL 2023–25 inspections, we assess forces for how good they are at leading and managing their services to make sure they are efficient, effective and sustainable. We have found some improvements since our last round of inspections. In response to one of our national recommendations, many forces have reviewed their performance frameworks and governance processes and introduced changes. Sometimes, we have seen how these changes have improved the direction and control of the force.

But we are also still finding many of the same problems. In their responses to my call for evidence, many chief constables said that the needs of their communities overwhelm the resources they have available. Yet in our inspections, we often find that many forces still don't have a sufficient understanding of the demands they face. This can lead to forces operating as if they are in crisis mode because they cannot meet the normal day-to-day needs of communities. Efforts to get the amount of work back to manageable levels often lead to a substandard service for victims. They also

often come at the expense of longer-term problem-solving to reduce crime and future demands on forces.

### **Forces could improve the productivity of their workforce**

Forces must strive to continuously improve the quality of service they can provide with the funding they have available. We find many forces are trying to do this, but there is often a patchwork approach.

Better forces are examining productivity throughout a wide range of their processes and are finding ways to remove inefficiencies. They follow what the evidence has shown to work to prevent and detect crime or run an organisation well. In doing so, they avoid wasting their efforts or offering services that should be provided by other organisations. And they innovate to find even better ways of doing things in future.

The Policing Productivity Review made several recommendations. It estimated that, taken together, those recommendations had the potential to free-up about 38 million hours of police time over the coming five years. The review was expansive, but the areas covered by its recommendations included:

- addressing barriers to productivity, such as reducing unnecessary police attendance at incidents involving people with mental health problems;
- using technology to improve productivity; and
- better measuring policing productivity and improving consistency of approach between forces.

Realising the potential savings from this review will require the continued commitment of the Government, police forces and other criminal justice agencies.

Forces are all trying to reduce the number of incidents they respond to that involve people with mental health problems and have signed the [National Partnership Agreement to implement the Right Care, Right Person approach](#). Forces have been criticised by some groups for the speed at which they are introducing this scheme because of fears that it will put [vulnerable people](#) at risk of harm. There will always be a legitimate role for the police to respond to incidents involving people with mental health problems. But this is only where there is an immediate risk of serious harm or where police powers are required. In all other circumstances, the police aren't the appropriate agency to respond. The introduction of 'Right Care, Right Person' remains in the public interest.

Technology offers great promise to improve the productivity of the police. This includes recent advancements in areas such as automation and artificial intelligence. For these advancements in technology to be effective, forces need to have good-quality data and a workforce that is increasingly data literate.

Forces will also need to co-ordinate their work nationally and make significant monetary investments. Yet the service's approach to technology is often fragmented as a result of the 43-force structure: what works in one force isn't often replicated quickly enough elsewhere. A co-ordinated approach will be increasingly important, which is something the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#) is trying to achieve through its co-ordination committees. The Policing Productivity Review reported that "the Chief Scientific Adviser to Policing estimates that 97 percent of today's science and technology investment in policing is spent on maintaining existing technologies", rather than investing in improving them or developing new ones.

In the [Spring Budget 2024](#), the Chancellor announced £230 million over four years for new policing technologies to improve productivity. The stated aim of this spending is to reduce the amount of time frontline workers spend on unnecessary administrative tasks. This includes introducing police pilot schemes using technology, such as facial recognition, automating the triage of [101](#) calls and deploying drones as first responders.

This is a welcome investment that should help forces to speed up the adoption of new technologies. During pilot schemes, forces will need to carefully evaluate any efficiency improvements that these technologies may bring. Given this is a relatively small investment, the Government will need realistic expectations about how much of this spending can be recovered in the medium term.

Measuring productivity in policing isn't straightforward. The main goal of policing is prevention, and it can be very difficult to understand the exact value added by prevention work. As a result, the data available that shows what works and is most cost effective to tackle certain problems in policing isn't as extensive as the service would wish.

The Policing Productivity Review worked with a small number of forces to develop a model process tool. This tool is designed to help forces understand their productivity. It breaks down the cost and performance of different processes and helps forces to establish what provides value for money. The [College of Policing](#) is building on this work by developing a Centre for Police Productivity. This is intended to help forces better use data to improve their services. This work is very encouraging; we will follow it with great interest and support it where we can.

## **The way police funding is distributed between forces isn't fit for purpose and needs to be revised**

The system of police funding is outdated and unfair. Funding should be distributed so it goes to where it is needed most. But currently, this isn't the case.

The main source of funding for most police forces in England and Wales is government grants. Since 2013, the Government has allocated funding to forces using the police allocation formula. [Police and crime commissioners \(PCCs\)](#) can also raise



money through council tax bills, and forces can raise income by charging for some of their services, such as policing football matches and music concerts.

But this formula hasn't been updated since 2013. This means that, every year since then, each force's percentage share of the government grant hasn't changed. The formula hasn't been revised to account for changes in local need or changes in population. So, some forces aren't getting their fair share of the funding, while others are getting too much.

The proportion of overall police funding that is raised by local council tax has been rising. The Government gives PCCs in England some discretion about how much they can raise council tax in their local areas each year without requiring a referendum. In recent years, many PCCs have taken the option to raise council tax by the maximum allowed. Overall, council tax has risen from 28 percent of all police funding in 2015/16 to 34 percent in 2023/24. But areas with a higher proportion of B and D council tax properties, which are usually the wealthier areas, can raise more money through these increases. This puts police force areas with fewer band D properties at a disadvantage, as they are usually more deprived, have higher population densities and higher crime rates.

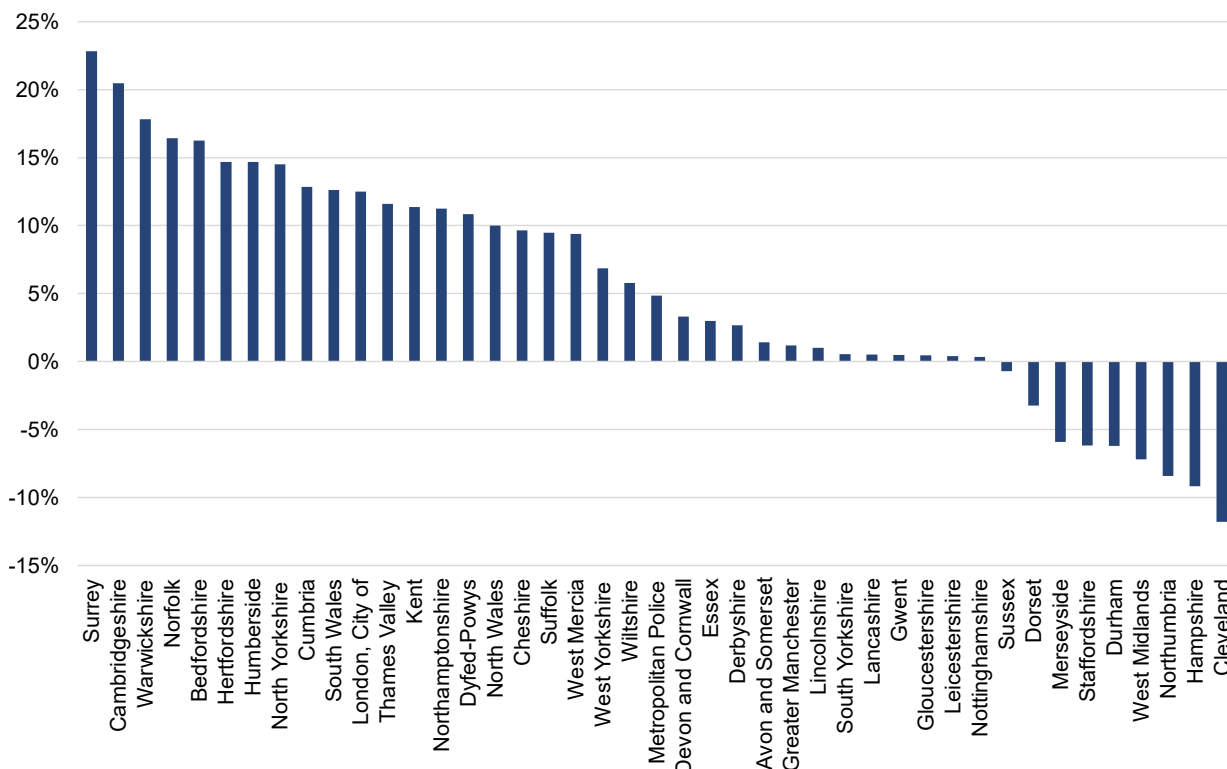
The result of both the police allocation formula and council tax system means that the more grant-dependent, deprived and urban parts of England and Wales are more likely to be underfunded compared to their needs.

The Government has long recognised that the way funding is allocated needs to be updated. In 2015, only two years after the most recent police allocation formula was introduced, [the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee said the formula was ineffective](#). The Home Office agreed and said it would revise the formula. Nearly ten years on, and despite several calls for change, it still hasn't introduced any changes.

The unfair way that police funding is distributed had a disproportionate impact on some forces during the years of austerity, with some forces facing much larger declines in funding than others. Since then, the funding to support the increase in police officer numbers through the [Police Uplift Programme \(PUP\)](#) has also been distributed unfairly.

A proportional split of the total funding to support the PUP was allocated to forces on the basis of the outdated police allocation formula, which has amplified the unfairness. The Home Office also didn't account for PCCs who have been able to increase their proportion of funding through council tax. The way that the PUP funding was distributed means that new officers haven't been appointed where they are needed most. And although officer numbers overall are slightly higher than they were in 2010, as at 30 September 2023 nine police forces still had fewer officers than they did at 31 March 2010.

**Figure 9: Percentage change in the full-time equivalent volume of police officers across forces in England and Wales, between the years ending 30 September 2010 and 30 September 2023, by force**



**Source:** [Police workforce, England and Wales 30 September 2023](#) and [Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2010 data tables](#), Home Office

Cleveland is the force with the lowest number of officers compared to its number in March 2010. It has experienced a reduction of 12 percent. This is worrying, considering its policing area contains some of the most deprived communities in England and Wales. In the year to September 2023, it also had the highest rate of police recorded crime per 1,000 population at 141.7 offences.

Fixing the funding formula is one of the most obvious and worthwhile changes the Government could make to policing. In its [2022 White Paper 'Levelling Up the United Kingdom'](#), the then Government recognised that urban areas and coastal towns experience high levels of crime. It also recognised that places with particularly high levels of deprivation have the highest levels of community need, and poor opportunities for the people who grow up there.

In my report last year, I said the Government had committed to having a new funding formula in place by the end of that Parliament. That didn't happen. Some delay is understandable: devising a fair formula is a difficult proposition that requires careful consideration and consultation. For example, forces must not be financially rewarded for ineffective policing that leads to higher crime levels. But the most likely factor impeding progress is that fixing the police funding formula, in the absence of increasing the overall spend on the police, will mean taking money away from some to

give it to others. This may be politically unpopular, but it is the right thing to do to make poorer communities safer.

## **The Government should give police forces a multi-year funding settlement**

In addition to receiving a fair share of the total funding, forces should ideally have a reasonable degree of certainty about how much money they will receive over a period of a few years. This allows them to plan their spending and the services they will provide to meet community needs. It gives them the best chance of being both financially resilient and effective at preventing and detecting crime.

But for many years, forces haven't always had the medium-term financial certainty they need. This is because funding has been provided on an annual basis, and there has often been little or no certainty about what amount of funding they would receive in the following years. Depending on the state of public finances, inflationary pressures and changes in Government priorities for public spending, some degree of uncertainty is inevitable. However, the more uncertainty that forces face, the less effectively they can plan. A lack of certainty means they sometimes need to make unexpected changes that result in worse services being provided for the public.

Between 2010 and 2023, there was a high variability in overall police funding. According to the [National Audit Office](#), in real terms after adjusting for inflation, the funding for forces fell by 19 percent between 2010/11 and 2018/19 – almost a fifth. [Statistics on police funding for England and Wales 2015 to 2024](#) show that total force-level funding has been on a real-terms upward trend since 2018/19. This is in large part due to the PUP. The total funding for forces in the 2023/24 financial year was £15.1 billion, 12 percent higher in real terms than it was in 2018/19. The large and rapid decrease in funding followed by a large and rapid increase has had a widespread and long-lasting impact on policing in England and Wales.

As funding declined between 2010/11 and 2018/19, forces had to take a range of measures to reduce spending. Most of the funding given to forces is used to pay police officer and staff salaries. Despite efforts by forces to save money on non-pay related costs, such as buildings, vehicles or ICT, the size of the police workforce substantially decreased. The workforce reached its smallest size as at 31 March 2017, when it comprised 198,675 full-time equivalent personnel, which was 19 percent smaller than at 31 March 2010.

To cope with the reduction, most forces had to substantially reorganise and change the way they operated. Because forces didn't know what funding they would receive in future, many of the changes they made were primarily focused on providing a balanced budget for a single financial year. This approach often came at the expense of considering how to provide value-for-money and sustainable services for the public.

With the additional funding since 2018/19, forces have been able to increase the size of their workforces, and many have once again made changes to their structure. The impact of this increase in funding has been mostly positive. But forces have still been uncertain about how much money they could expect to receive each year, leading to too much short-term decision-making in some forces. One of the biggest reasons for this is that a large proportion of the real-terms increase in funding has come through increases in council tax precept. This is set annually, so although forces make financial assumptions about whether and how much it will rise, they still have little certainty.

Despite the highly variable real-terms funding they have received over the past 13 years, forces have done an excellent job of maintaining balanced budgets. No force has experienced the severe financial difficulties that many other public organisations have, such as those seen in local councils. This is due, in no small part, to forces managing their finances carefully. While the amount of funding for the police will always be a matter for the Government to decide, both forces and the public would benefit from an extended period of financial certainty.

The amount of funding the Government provides to policing is set at spending reviews, where the Government decides how it will fund public services over several years. At the next spending review, the Government should do everything it can to provide forces with medium-term financial certainty and this should include a multi-year funding settlement that sets out how much forces can expect to receive. Given the highest cost for police forces is paying police officers, a multi-year pay award (as has been provided in the past) would also help to increase the financial stability of forces.

### **The police need additional financial support for capital investments**

The police must invest in long-life assets that help them to carry out their work, such as buildings, technology and equipment. These investments, called capital spending, typically incur large but infrequent costs. Forces then benefit from using these assets for many years. Having a sound plan for capital spending is an essential part of being an efficient and effective police force.

Police forces fund their capital spending in several different ways. The main ways include saving up some of the regular revenue funding they receive into a capital reserve, selling existing assets such as land and buildings, and borrowing money.

In addition to their normal revenue funding, lots of public services receive some government support to make these large investments, referred to as capital funding. The NHS, schools and many government departments (including the Home Office) all receive capital funding.

The Home Office provides capital funding for the police. In the financial year 2023/24, this was £105 million. But all this money was allocated to national functions and programmes, such as the National Police Air Service and police technology programmes. Forces weren't given any capital funding at all during 2022/23 or 2023/24.

Before 2022/23, forces did receive some capital funding, but this was a very small amount compared to overall police funding. Over the past nine years, the capital funding given to forces was highest during 2015/16 at £90 million. But this still represented only a small proportion of what forces needed to spend.

Forces are predicting that they will reduce overall capital spending between 2023/24 and 2026/27. Many chief constables have told me this isn't because they don't need to make investments, but because they cannot afford to make them. Spending on both police forces' estates and ICT is expected to substantially reduce.

In April 2023, the Home Office, the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#) and the [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners \(APCC\)](#) carried out a joint finance survey of all police forces. The survey covered forces' budgets for 2023/24 and 2024/25, along with some elements of their financial forecasts up to 2026/27. This showed overall capital spending was expected to decline from £1.095 billion in 2023/24 to £756 million by 2026/27.

**Figure 10: Estimated capital expenditure by all Home Office police forces from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2027**

<b>Capital</b>	<b>2023/24 (£m)</b>	<b>2024/25 (£m)</b>	<b>2025/26 (£m)</b>	<b>2026/27 (£m)</b>
Estates	479	668	449	345
ICT (excludes Greater Manchester Police)	364	274	229	235
Fleet	154	138	144	132
Other	98	82	55	44
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,095</b>	<b>1,162</b>	<b>877</b>	<b>756</b>

**Source: 2023 finance survey of 43 Home Office forces, NPCC**

Because forces don't have the multi-year financial certainty they need, it is possible they may have been overly cautious in their estimates. Nevertheless, it is concerning to see these predicted reductions, and I question the long-term sustainability of these plans. Much of the police estate is dated. Forces need to invest in it because police officers and staff need adequate facilities so they can do their jobs well.

Police forces need good ICT systems that allow them to operate efficiently and effectively. They also need to keep up with advancements in technology so they can continue to prevent and detect crime. Given recent advancements in technology, one might expect that the police should be increasing their spending on technology, not decreasing it. Yet through our inspections we frequently highlight problems, such as the lack of integration between various ICT systems, which hinders information-sharing and makes forces less efficient.

Despite the predicted reductions in capital spending over the coming years, forces still don't believe they have enough money to sustainably fund the capital purchases they need to make. A 2023 joint survey on finance showed that forces estimated their total reserve balance would fall from £1.74 billion in 2023/24 to £1.06 billion in 2025/26, which represents a 40 percent reduction. Forces use their reserves for several reasons, so not all this spending would go on capital investments – but some of it would.

The survey also showed that forces predicted that their debt due to long-term borrowing would increase substantially. Under the [Local Government Act 2003](#), the PCC can finance capital spending through borrowing if it remains within an affordable limit. Forces estimated that their debt due to long-term borrowing would increase from £1.79 billion in 2023/24 to £2.92 billion by 2025/26. While there is the potential for this to be somewhat overestimated, this would represent a 60 percent increase in the overall long-term debt of the police service in just two years. Forces must pay interest on the money they borrow; the more money they spend on interest repayments, the less they spend on frontline services for local communities.

The Government should provide forces with substantial additional financial support to help them make capital investments. This spending should be subject to regular oversight and scrutiny to make sure that forces are using it in a way that provides value for money for the taxpayer.

## Recommendation 2

By 1 April 2026, as part of the next spending review, the Government should provide police forces with a multi-year funding settlement that covers at least three financial years. As part of this, the Government should:

- conclude its review of the police allocation formula and make changes to ensure that funding is distributed according to the needs of communities; and
- substantially increase the amount of capital funding that it provides to forces.

## 5. The inspectorate

### HMICFRS is helping to make communities safer

#### Our inspections make a difference

The first duty of Government is to keep citizens safe and the country secure. HMICFRS, as an independent inspectorate, helps the Government to fulfil that duty.

We have a clear purpose that is shared with our inspected sectors: making communities safer. Our work leads to the public receiving a better service from the police and fire and rescue services. In response to my call for evidence for my annual assessments, many chief constables, chief fire officers and [police and crime commissioners \(PCCs\)](#) have highlighted how highly they value our work.

Through our reports on policing, we make sure there is information available to the public so they can hold their local force to account through their elected PCC. We do this by highlighting what is working well and could be replicated elsewhere, and what needs to improve.

At a force level, our PEEL reports have helped forces to make the best use of the money they have available. Our national thematic and spotlight reports have resulted in nationwide commitments and efforts to improve. For example, our reports on vetting and misconduct, violence against women and girls, serious acquisitive crime and performance management have all created a step change in how the police approach those issues.

Our reports aren't the only way in which we contribute to improvements in policing. We regularly publish a framework of what we consider to be characteristics of good performance in policing. These characteristics indicate how a force needs to perform to achieve a grade of 'good'. Many forces use our inspection framework to make changes for the better before we carry out our inspections.

We also provide forces with regular feedback during our inspections. On many occasions, they have used our suggestions to make swift improvements. This means that, on many occasions, the force's performance is better than it would have been without our inspection. And this improvement is reflected in their grades.

Policing, in almost every regard, is about balance. For example, the balance between liberty and security, prevention and detection, and quality and quantity. The inspectorate is here to help the police service get the balance right and provide efficient, effective and legitimate services for the public.

### **The inspectorate continues to provide additional support to the forces that need it**

Police forces cannot be allowed to fail. The consequences for the public would be too serious. Part of the way we make sure our inspection activity is being directed to where it is needed most is by operating a continuous monitoring approach. HM Inspectors routinely monitor the performance of all police forces in England and Wales and meet to discuss their findings.

There are two stages in the monitoring process: Scan and Engage. Scan is the default phase of monitoring, for which we use a range of data and information to identify potential areas of concern. All forces are in Scan by default.

We may place forces into Engage, our enhanced monitoring process, when we have concerns that appear to need closer scrutiny. In Engage, we ask forces to develop an improvement plan and we support them through additional inspection. They also receive support from stakeholders across the policing sector.

In last year's report, I said that I took no pleasure in being the chief inspector who had placed the most forces into Engage. Since then, we have seen further evidence of how the process helps forces to accelerate improvements. Four forces have made some substantial improvements and we have moved them back to routine monitoring:

- Cleveland Police
- Gloucestershire Constabulary
- Staffordshire Police
- Wiltshire Police.

All these forces still have more to do, but there was evidence of sufficient and sustained improvement. In their responses to my call for evidence, the chief constables or PCCs of these forces highlighted how the enhanced monitoring process had helped the forces to provide better services to the public.

Although four forces have returned to routine monitoring, a further two forces have had to be placed into Engage because of concerns about their performance. These are West Midlands Police and Nottinghamshire Police. Both chief constables have told us they intend to resolve our concerns quickly. We are hopeful they will be successful, and we will continue to provide them with support.

The Engage process can only work effectively if forces also receive the right support from other national bodies, such as the [Association of Police and Crime Commissioners \(APCC\)](#), the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#), the [College of](#)



[Policing](#) and the Home Office. Last year I raised concerns this hadn't always been the case, specifically citing the example of Cleveland Police. Since that time there have been constructive discussions with all those organisations, which have reiterated their intent to provide as much support as they can when it is requested. Accepting that resources are limited, forces that need help should always receive it.

### **The inspectorate encourages innovation**

A fundamental objective of [our strategy](#) is driving sustainable improvement. Part of this includes promoting positive practice found in our inspections that other forces can learn from. It is vital that forces do more to learn from one another, and we play a part in facilitating that so every force can make improvements. In our reports, we highlight positive findings in the same way we highlight negative ones.

We use two terms within our reports, [promising practice](#) and [innovative practice](#). Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, we published 99 examples of promising practice and 50 examples of innovative practice in our policing inspection reports.

To reinforce our findings with the sector, we are hosting a series of masterclass events where we bring forces together to learn from one another. Topics so far have included investigations, serious and organised crime, and the transformation of Greater Manchester Police.

We have also continued to work closely with the College of Policing to provide examples for the [practice bank](#). This is a public resource that contains interventions that have been used to address specific crime problems or make organisational changes. It provides a single place where forces and other organisations interested in crime reduction and criminal justice can find examples of good work in other forces.

## **The inspectors of constabulary need more powers to influence change**

### **There are limitations to the current legislation**

Despite all the inspectorate does, there are limitations on what we can achieve based on the legislation we operate within. As we are an inspectorate and not a regulator, the only power we have is soft power: the power of our voice. The main ways we influence change are through our published reports and our relationships with our inspected sectors.

We don't have the power to enforce the recommendations we make; we rely on forces and others voluntarily acting on them. Most of the time, they do so because we have developed a good reputation and an authoritative voice over many years. But there are limitations to our soft power. On too many occasions, forces have either not acted or not acted quickly enough to improve following our reports and recommendations.

In my [2022 'State of Policing' report](#), I called for more powers for the inspectorate. Many other safety-critical, monopoly, essential public services have a regulator. The police and fire and rescue services do not. The additional powers I called for would both strengthen the power of our voice as an inspectorate and give us certain regulatory powers in limited circumstances. The changes I requested included:

- a requirement for PCCs to provide an annual update on outstanding recommendations;
- a requirement for additional organisations to respond to our recommendations;
- clarification of our powers to inspect all aspects of policing, including where certain chief constable functions are commissioned by PCCs or carried out by their staff;
- a power to direct police forces in certain, limited, circumstances, where our inspections identify failings that pose a significant risk to public safety; and
- reintroducing the role of the inspectors of constabulary in the selection of chief constables.

### **There has been a broadly positive reaction to my 2023 recommendations**

Since calling for the introduction of these powers last year, I have been pleased to see that many groups in policing, or with an interest in policing, have reacted positively.

The NPCC carried out a survey of chief officers about the recommendations in last year's 'State of Policing' report. The survey received 41 responses that represented 28 forces. Chief officers were asked whether they fully supported, partially supported or didn't support the recommendations in the report. [The findings from the NPCC survey](#) showed:

- 75 percent supported or partially supported PCCs providing an annual update on recommendations;
- 88 percent supported or partially supported a requirement for additional organisations to respond to our recommendations;
- 100 percent of respondents supported or partially supported clarification of whether certain policing functions that were being carried out by others should be inspected;
- 61 percent supported or partially supported a limited power of direction in relation to police forces; and
- 61 percent supported or partially supported us having a role in the selection of chief constables.

While those results seem positive, behind the figures sit a range of queries or concerns. These broadly fit into questions about how the powers would operate in practice, the accountability arrangements to make sure they were used appropriately, and ultimately, whether they are required. There would need to be both detailed proposals and thorough consultation before any amendments to the law.

On 25 October 2023, [the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee published its report on policing priorities](#). In that report, the committee said that PCCs should play a role in driving systemic improvements in local forces. It supported our call for PCCs to be required to provide follow-up comments, at least annually, on recommendations that haven't yet been completed.

Since then, the [committee has carried out the 'Police and Crime Commissioners: 10 years on' inquiry](#). Although the inquiry was relatively brief, the committee explored several areas. Following the conclusion of the inquiry, the committee chair sent a letter to the Home Secretary. In their letter, they reiterated their support of this recommendation.

That isn't to say that all interested parties' reactions have been positive. Sometimes, new ideas may come across as radical, especially when they are substantially different to what has been done before. Some of the changes I proposed are without precedent in policing in England and Wales.

From discussions with the APCC and PCCs, it is fair to say they weren't as supportive of the need for legislative change or a stronger inspectorate as others were. Given any changes would have an impact on them, it has been important to listen to their concerns. The Home Office would also need to understand their views further and take them into account before introducing any changes to Parliament.

Granting a power of direction would be the most significant new power and it has no precedent in policing in England and Wales. However, there are similar powers in other sectors. For example, [section 29A of the Health and Social Care Act 2008](#) gives the Care Quality Commission the power to give an NHS trust or an NHS foundation trust a warning notice if the quality of healthcare provided by the trust requires significant improvement. In 2017, [a National Audit Office report](#) said there were 90 regulators operating throughout all sectors in the UK, many of whom have powers to intervene when needed.

The impact of a poor inspection report, [cause of concern](#) or force being placed in Engage shouldn't be underestimated. And under the [Police Act 1996](#), the Home Secretary already holds significant powers to give directions relating to a police force. But there is a significant gap between a negative inspection report and the Home Secretary using their powers of direction. It is right that the Home Secretary has rarely used this power because a police service that is free of political interference is an important part of the British model of policing. That doesn't mean that there is no one else who could – and should – be given power to intervene when necessary.

If such a power were granted, I expect it would be used sparingly and be reserved for exceptional circumstances. It is very likely that simply possessing the power would motivate forces to act quicker, as chief constables would know that I could use a direction if needed. As a result, more causes of concern would be closed and more recommendations would be completed sooner, which would ultimately make communities safer.

## **Some positive changes have been made through better collaborative working**

Following my recommendations for legislative change last year, the then Home Secretary wrote to me and the leaders of the APCC, the NPCC and the College of Policing to ask what we could do to strengthen governance, performance oversight and leadership of the service without additional legislation. We have subsequently strengthened how we are working together, and our collective approach to improving policing has never been so strong.

We have signed [a new memorandum of understanding with the College of Policing](#). In this new document, we have set out our commitment to work together constructively and positively.

The College of Policing has also introduced revised guidance on appointing [chief officers](#). It makes it clear that PCCs may find the involvement of the inspectors of constabulary useful at numerous points of the appointment process. Many PCCs have worked proactively to include us in their selection processes and have found our contributions to be beneficial.

PCCs are trying to increase their compliance with the statutory requirement to respond to inspection reports. Under the existing legislation, PCCs are required to respond to our inspection reports within 56 days of publication. They must publish their response and send a copy to us and to the Home Secretary. This helps to make sure that PCCs are holding the chief constable to account for our inspection findings.

We were finding that responses were sometimes being sent to us late or not at all, and that some of the responses didn't contain the required information. We ask PCCs to send a copy to us through an online tool we have developed called the monitoring portal. We carried out an audit of responses submitted through this system in the 12 months to 31 May 2023. In our audit, we found that we had received only 48 percent of the required responses and only 26 percent within the 56-day limit.

Following that audit, I wrote to PCCs encouraging them to respond regularly and follow the established process, and offered additional training to their staff. It is pleasing to see the positive response from both the APCC and PCCs to support this work and that the response rate has increased. In the 6 months between September 2023 and February 2024, we received 65 percent of required responses, with over half of those received within the 56-day timeframe. Given the importance of PCCs holding chief constables to account, I ask them to continue their focus on this area.

## **Legislative change is still needed at the earliest opportunity**

On 15 January 2024, [the then Home Secretary wrote to me with his formal response to last year's recommendations about introducing changes to legislation](#). He agreed there were areas where we could better drive improvement in policing performance, address trust and confidence issues, and make sure that policing gets the basics right. But he said that legislative change within that Parliament wouldn't be possible.

This position was understandable, as any changes to the powers of the inspectorate would require detailed consultation followed by primary legislation. However, I remain resolute that change is needed.

### **Recommendation 3**

By 1 April 2025, the Home Secretary should develop legislative proposals to grant additional powers to the inspectors of constabulary. And they should write to HM Chief Inspector to explain these plans.

## **There is a strong case for greater investment in the inspectorate**

Over the past five years, our budget has largely remained flat at approximately £25 million a year. In real terms, considering the rising costs we face over time, such as higher staff salaries and the increasing requests for us to inspect, there has been a substantial real-terms reduction. In each of the last three years, the Home Office has had to agree to additional in-year funding so the inspectorate could meet its obligations.

Despite a reduced real-terms budget, we are managing to achieve more than ever before. This is because we have focused on improving our own efficiency and effectiveness. We have improved our approach to inspection, made sure that inspection staff have the skills and tools they need to do their job, and streamlined our support functions.

But we have reached a limit; there are no other changes that we can make without damaging the quality or reducing the number of our inspections. If the trend of real-terms declining funding continues in the coming years, we will have to carry out fewer inspections or inspections that examine issues with less breadth or depth. This could be avoided. There have already been many areas of policing that we would have liked to inspect in recent years, but we haven't been able to do so. For example, our last inspection reports on fraud were published in 2019 and 2021. Without sufficient funding for the inspectorate, communities aren't as safe as they could be.

## **We can do even more to improve frontline services that keep the public safe**

Spending on HMICFRS is approximately 0.1 percent of the total spending on our inspected sectors; an incredibly small proportion when compared to the improvements inspections help to make. Of course, most resources should be allocated to the frontline of police and fire and rescue services. But having an effective inspection regime is also critical to making communities safer.

We have concerns about the overall performance of both police forces and fire and rescue services. With some additional funding, we could make an even more valuable contribution to improving performance. We believe the Government should increase our annual funding by £13 million. Even with this additional investment, we would still only account for a very small proportion of public spending on these essential services.

The three main changes we would make with this additional funding are:

- fully implementing a continuous assessment approach throughout all forces and services;
- focusing more on systemic improvements; and
- increasing the innovative use of data and creating early warning systems to identify and prevent problems before the public are put at risk.

#### A continuous assessment approach

The first area of investment would be on establishing a continuous assessment approach across all forces and services, at a cost of £6 million a year.

In 2020, we introduced a continuous assessment approach to our PEEL inspections. This means we have a better understanding of forces' performance, can spot problems earlier and can let the force know what it needs to improve. And it allows us to follow up on the completion of our recommendations to make sure forces have done what we have said they should. Forces have told us that they value the continuous assessment approach and that it is helping them to improve much quicker.

But with the current resources we have, there are limitations to how much we can achieve through our continuous assessment approach. Our force inspection leads generally have responsibility for two forces. This means only half of their time is spent in each police force, which therefore limits their ability to continually assess. Currently, it isn't possible for us to adopt a continuous assessment approach for fire and rescue services. Our inspection leads for fire and rescue services have three services each, which makes continuous assessment a practical impossibility.

For the police, we would assign an inspection lead for every force. And for the fire and rescue service, one inspection lead for every two services. This would increase the influence of our work on forces and services and make communities even safer.

#### A focus on systemic improvements

The second area of investment would be focusing on systemic improvement, at a cost of £3.5 million a year. The funding would be broken down into three areas:

- an expanded programme of national thematic inspections;
- two smarter systems inspections a year; and
- one super-complaint investigation a year.

Our national thematic inspections have led to forces making significant improvements throughout England and Wales. But they have become unaffordable to carry out. With extra funding, we would be able to continue to inspect areas of critical importance for the public, such as leadership and responding to major incidents.

Our smarter systems inspections, such as [our inspection on homicide prevention](#), have helped the police service to make communities safer, but these aren't currently funded. We would allocate funding to two of these inspections a year to identify and promote cross-sector improvements that can make the public safer.

Super-complaints are an important feature of making sure the police service is accountable to the public and can be seen as legitimate. Our previous super-complaint investigations have covered forces' responses to [police-perpetrated domestic abuse](#), [police use of stop and search powers](#) and the police response to [stalking](#).

But we are not, and have never been, properly funded to investigate super-complaints. With increased funding, we would be able to carry out one super-complaint investigation a year.

#### [An innovative use of data](#)

Finally, we would invest in developing our analysis, automation and artificial intelligence capabilities, at a cost of £3.5 million a year.

It is often said that prevention is better than cure. That adage has stood the test of time for a reason. With advances in digital, data and technology, the inspectorate should be shifting its focus towards identifying problems early. This would help prevent forces from failing the public or needing to spend significant sums of money on making significant changes.

We want to reach a position where no force ever needs to be placed into Engage again. We want to develop analytical capabilities and early warning systems that will help us to become increasingly proactive and work with the NPCC and the College of Policing to prevent forces from developing causes of concern. Not only will this keep the public safe, but it will also save significant sums of taxpayers' money.

#### **Recommendation 4**

By 1 December 2025, as part of the next spending review, the Government should increase the funding allocated to the inspectorate to adequately reflect the scope and scale of the work of the inspectorate.

# Annex A: Our reports – 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024

## PEEL inspections

- [PEEL 2021/22 – An inspection of the City of London Police](#)
- [PEEL 2021/22 – An inspection of Gwent Police](#)
- [PEEL 2021/22 – An inspection of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary](#)
- [PEEL 2021/22 – An inspection of Sussex Police](#)
- [An inspection of the eastern regional response to serious and organised crime](#)
- [An inspection of the London regional response to serious and organised crime](#)
- [Police performance: Getting a grip](#)
- [Cleveland Police: PEEL cause of concern revisit letter](#)
- [Gloucestershire Constabulary: PEEL cause of concern revisit letter](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Merseyside Police](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Suffolk Constabulary](#)
- [The Police Service of Northern Ireland: An inspection of police effectiveness, efficiency, vetting and standards](#)
- [West Mercia Police revisit: service to victims cause of concern](#)
- [An inspection of the north-west regional response to serious and organised crime](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Durham Constabulary](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Dyfed-Powys Police](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Kent Police](#)
- [Gwent Police revisit: service to victims cause of concern](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Greater Manchester Police](#)
- [North Yorkshire Police: PEEL cause of concern letter](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Surrey Police](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Thames Valley Police](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of West Midlands Police](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Northamptonshire Police](#)
- [Inspection into British Transport Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy](#)



- [Nottinghamshire Police: PEEL accelerated causes of concern](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Cambridgeshire Constabulary](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of Gloucestershire Constabulary](#)
- [PEEL 2023–2025: An inspection of North Yorkshire Police](#)

## Child protection inspections

- [An inspection of how well the police and National Crime Agency tackle the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help in Surrey](#)
- [North Yorkshire – National child protection inspection post-inspection review](#)
- [Joint inspection of the multi-agency response to keeping children and young people safe in Denbighshire](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help in Harrow](#)
- [Cheshire Constabulary national child protection inspection post-inspection review](#)
- [Warwickshire Police national child protection inspection post-inspection review](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help in Blackburn with Darwen](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk in Gloucestershire](#)
- [Staffordshire – National child protection re-inspection](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk in Sutton](#)
- [Joint inspection of the multi agency response to abuse and neglect of children in Bridgend](#)
- [Wiltshire – National child protection inspection post-inspection review](#)
- [Metropolitan Police – accelerated causes of concern](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children and families who need help](#)
- [Thames Valley – National child protection inspection](#)
- [Suffolk – National child protection inspection post-inspection review](#)
- [Avon and Somerset – National child protection inspection](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to serious youth violence in Manchester](#)
- [An inspection of the effectiveness of the police and law enforcement bodies' response to group-based child sexual exploitation in England and Wales](#)

- [A joint inspection of youth offending services in Nottinghamshire](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk in Torbay](#)
- [Joint inspection of the multi-agency response to abuse and neglect of children in Powys](#)
- [An inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service's handling of the sexual and criminal exploitation of children](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of London Borough of Merton](#)
- [Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk in Buckinghamshire](#)

## Specialist inspections

- [An inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service's response to lessons from the Stephen Port murders](#)
- [Vetting, misconduct and misogyny in the police service: review of progress](#)
- [Report on an inspection visit to police custody suites in Dorset](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Cheshire Constabulary](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Cleveland Police](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Essex Police](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Gwent Police](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Staffordshire Police](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in the City of London Police](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting arrangements in Lancashire Constabulary](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting arrangements in North Wales Police](#)
- [Vetting and anti-corruption part 1: How effective is the National Crime Agency at dealing with corruption?](#)
- [An inspection of how effective police forces are in the deployment of firearms](#)
- [Report on an inspection visit to police custody suites in Lancashire](#)
- [Management of terrorist offenders in the wake of terrorist attacks](#)
- [Keyham shootings: recommendations made to Devon and Cornwall Police](#)
- [An inspection of the police contribution to the prevention of homicide](#)

- [Report on an inspection visit to police custody suites in West Midlands Police](#)
- [Race and Policing: A review of the police service's leadership and governance arrangements for race-related matters](#)
- [Race and policing: An inspection of race disparity in police criminal justice decision-making](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Humberside Police](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in Warwickshire Police](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting arrangements in Northumbria Police](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting arrangements in South Yorkshire Police](#)
- [Report on an inspection visit to police custody suites in South Wales Police](#)
- [Police and crime commissioner-commissioned inspection into Thames Valley Police](#)
- [Meeting the needs of victims in the criminal justice system](#)
- [Update on our activism and impartiality in policing inspection](#)
- [Joint case building by the police and Crown Prosecution Service](#)
- [Efficiency spotlight report: The impact of recruitment and retention on the criminal justice system](#)
- [Report on an inspection visit to police custody suites in West Yorkshire Police](#)
- [A report into the effectiveness of vetting and counter-corruption arrangements in British Transport Police](#)

### **Non-inspection publications**

- [Responses to the super-complaint from the Tees Valley Inclusion Project](#)
- [State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2022](#)
- [Digital crime and performance pack](#)
- [Annual review of the 2022–25 policing inspection programme and framework](#)
- [Report on the Criminal Justice Alliance's super-complaint – Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 and independent community scrutiny of stop and search](#)
- [Updated response from the National Police Chiefs' Council to the recommendations from the Tees Valley Inclusion Project super-complaint report](#)

## Annex B: About us

[Biographies for each of the Inspectors](#) and [information about who we inspect](#) are available on our website.

### His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary



**Andy Cooke QPM DL**

In April 2022, Andy Cooke was appointed HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary and HM Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services.

### His Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary



**Lee Freeman KPM**

In August 2023, Lee Freeman was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue.



**Michelle Skeer OBE QPM**

In August 2023, Michelle Skeer was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue.



**Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM**

In October 2021, Roy Wilsher was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue.

**Assistant His Majesty's Inspector**



**Nicola Faulconbridge**

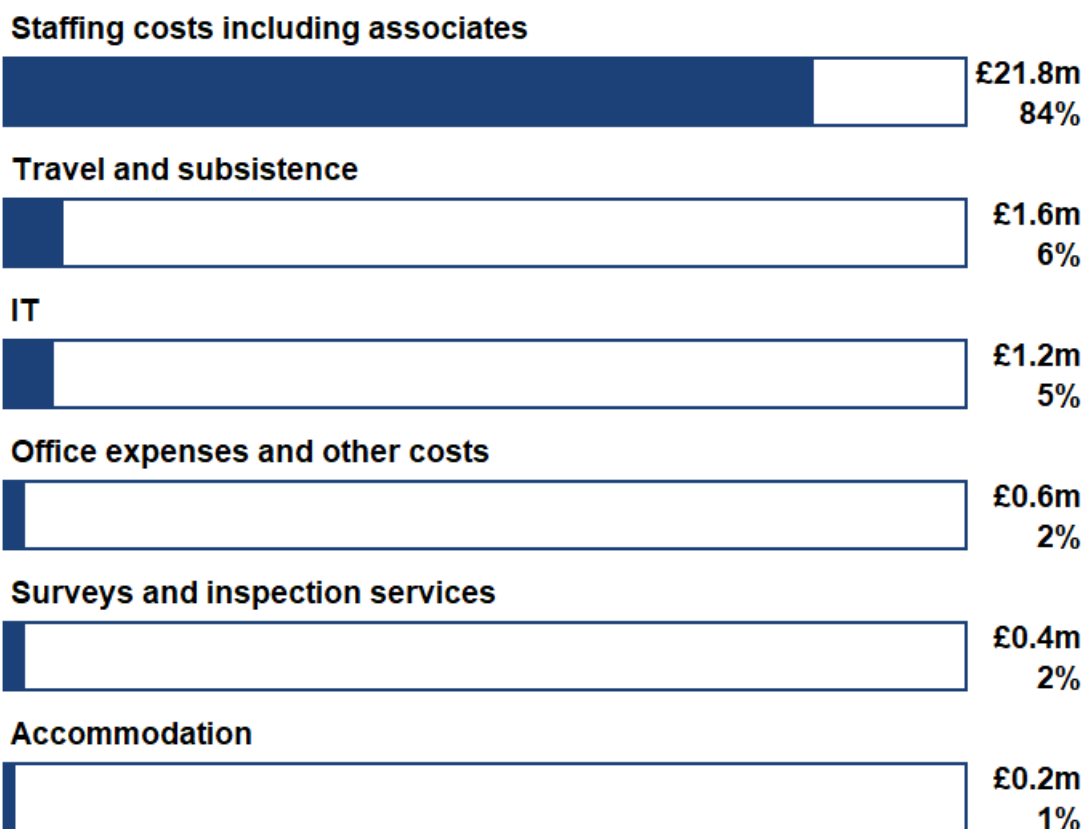
In October 2023, Nicola Faulconbridge joined HMICFRS as Assistant HMI.

## Finances and workforce

### Our finances

We are funded mainly by the Home Office. We also receive funding for inspections commissioned by others (such as the National Crime Agency). We spent 84 percent of our funding on our workforce, with the rest spent on IT, surveys and other expenses.

#### Expenditure breakdown 2022/23

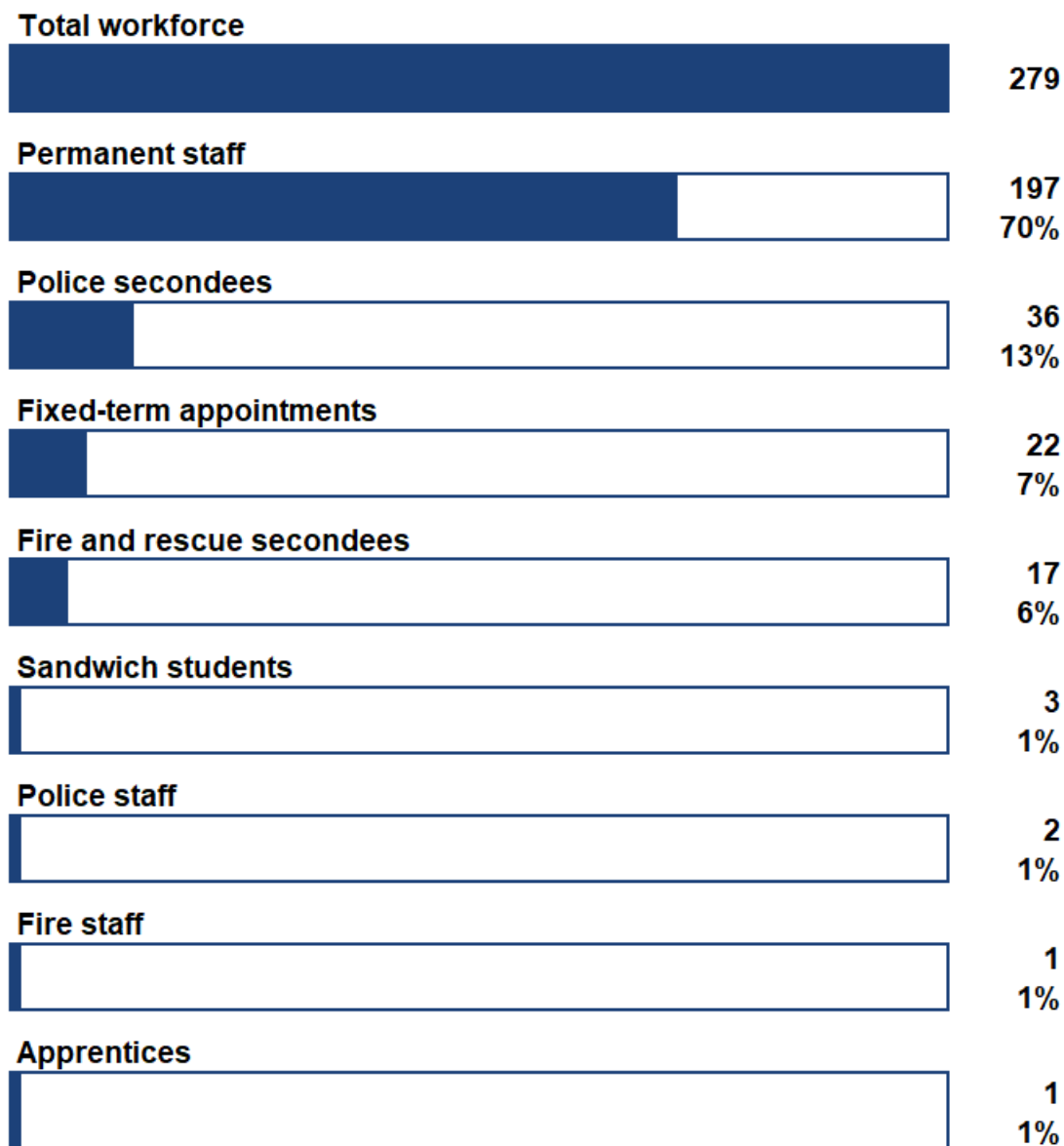


Note: numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

## Our workforce

Our workforce comprises the inspectors of constabulary and fire and rescue services, civil servants, seconded police officers and staff, and secondees from fire and rescue services. We also have a register of associates who provide specialist resource and skills.

### Staffing breakdown 2022/23



Note: numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

## Annex C: Our powers to inspect non-Home Office forces and other law enforcement agencies

The inspectorate has statutory duties to inspect other police forces and agencies whose remits aren't limited to a particular territorial area. These include inspecting the military police, the National Crime Agency and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

There is too much variation about how these inspections operate. The legislation about the inspection of these forces or agencies sets out different terms for the scope of the inspections, the powers we have when inspecting and who publishes the reports. The funding arrangements for these inspections also vary considerably.

There are good reasons for some variation, because the inspected organisations have different roles and operate in different contexts. But variations also lead to some problems.

For most of these organisations, we require an invitation to inspect them. However, on some occasions, we may not be invited to inspect them at all, or on a regular enough basis. Our inspections of these organisations are less frequent and can be narrower in scope.

There can also be concerns over the budgeting and funding of inspections. As a result, they can be limited in scope, or postponed until these concerns are resolved.

In some cases, we have no power to publish the report. This can mean the public are denied the opportunity to scrutinise the inspection findings. In other cases, these reports can be delayed – sometimes for several years.

Finally, there is no requirement for these forces and agencies to respond to our findings and recommendations, unlike our inspections of Home Office forces.

I will be writing to the Ministers responsible for these forces and agencies to ask the Government to minimise these inconsistencies in an effort to improve the inspection programmes wherever possible.



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