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Policing in the UK



Summary

- 1 Key concepts
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Summary

Police services in the UK are organised around two legal entities: the ‘**Office of Constable**’ and the **police force**.

Police officers (no matter their rank) each individually hold the **Office of Constable**. The Office of Constable grants them powers to detect, prevent and investigate crime.

Every police officer is a member of a **police force**. The police force organises and coordinates their crime fighting. As members of police forces, officers (and other police personnel) are under the “direction and control” of their chief officer. Chief officers are ultimately responsible for the operation of their force.

There are 48 civilian police forces in the UK: 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales, a national police force in both Scotland and Northern Ireland and three specialist police forces (the British Transport Police, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Ministry of Defence Police).

Policing is (by and large) a devolved matter in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive are responsible for deciding how most police services are organised and managed in their nations. Policing culture is very similar throughout the UK and Police Scotland and the Police Service Northern Ireland share many of the characteristics of English and Welsh forces.

The term **British model of policing** is sometimes used to describe policing culture in the UK. There is no formal definition of the British model, but it is typically understood through three interlinked concepts: **The Office of Constable**, **operational independence** and **policing by consent**.

Force performance

[Data](#) from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) suggests that around 55% of people think their police force is doing a “good” or “excellent” job. This figure is often known as the **confidence level**. The confidence level has fallen over the last two years (from around 62% in 2017/18 to 55% in 2019/20).

Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services inspects forces and scores them against three assessment pillars (effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy). Forces receive one of four ‘judgements’ for each pillar: outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate. It maintains an [online dashboard](#) displaying all force scores. HMICFRS also provide a detailed written assessment of each force which can

be found by navigating through the [online dashboard](#). There were no inspections in 2020 owing to the pandemic. Therefore HMICFRS PEEL scores are still the latest given as at 2018/19. HMICFRS has tended to judge forces better on effectiveness and legitimacy, giving slightly lower scores on efficiency. Overall, most forces are judged to be performing well by the Inspectorate across all three measures. However, there is growing divergence between the performance of forces. The Inspectorate has said this is the result of some forces rising to the twin challenges of rising demand and falling resources better than others.

The Government began measuring ‘National Crime and Policing Measures’ (data points associated with certain crime types) in the summer of 2021. It is expecting “significant” national improvements against these measures within three years. It is also committed to working with HMICFRS to publishing police force “league tables” for 101 and 999 call responsiveness. However, it is yet to announce when the first league tables will be published.

1 Key concepts

1.1 The ‘Office of Constable’

All police officers (no matter their rank) each individually hold the ‘Office of Constable’. The Office of Constable is a common law concept and as such there is no single piece of legislation which defines its duties and responsibilities.¹

The ‘Office of Constable’ grants police officers an array of powers they can use to prevent, detect and investigate crime and disorder.² Most police officers in England and Wales have jurisdiction to use their powers anywhere in both nations.³

Police officers are expected to use their powers “without fear or favour” or “improper political interference” and “faithfully according to law”.⁴

Police officers receive training and guidance on the lawful and effective use of their powers and authority, but ultimately, they have discretion to make decisions.⁵ As ‘office holders’ they are personally responsible for their decision making.⁶

Police forces are responsible for providing officers with appropriate support and resources. The police force is also responsible for challenging officers who misuse their powers or abuse their position.

1.2 Operational independence

Governance arrangements for UK police services are built on the principal of **operational independence**. Those who work in police forces are under the

¹ Halsbury’s Laws, Vol 84 (Police and Investigatory Powers), para 1 and 40; *Rice v Connolly* [1966] 2 Q.B. 414.

² See: House of Commons Library, [Police powers: an introduction](#), April 2020

³ **Note:** British Transport Police officers have limited jurisdiction outside the railways. See section 1.1 of the Library briefing [British Transport Police](#) for details.

⁴ Police Federation, [The Office of Constable: The bedrock of modern day British policing](#), undated, p3 [last accessed 7 May 2020]; [Schedule 1](#), The Policing Protocol 2011, para 12

⁵ College of Policing, [Code of Ethics](#), July 2014, para 5.5

⁶ Police Federation, [The Office of Constable: The bedrock of modern day British policing](#), undated, p2 [last accessed 7 May 2020]

“direction and control” of their **chief officer**.⁷ Chief officers are independently responsible for all operational matters concerning their force.

Operational independence is fundamental to the British model of policing but has no agreed or legal definition.⁸ In fact, the opposite is true, [paragraph 35 of The Policing Protocol Order 2011](#) states that operational independence is “not defined in statute, and... by its nature, is fluid and context-driven.”

Operational independence describes the matters that are under the “direction and control” of chief officers. Chief officers are expected to be able to make independent decisions, free from political interference, about these matters. What is under a chief officer’s direction and control is “fluid and context-driven” because politicians have statutory responsibilities to scrutinise these decisions and powers to make strategic decisions regarding police services. So, whilst chief officers are expected to be able to make some decisions free from political interference, there isn’t an expectation that they are exempt from political scrutiny or completely free from political influence.

The Policing Protocol goes some way to defining boundaries between matters subject to political scrutiny / influence and “direction and control” matters. It provides a [list of things that are definitely operational](#). The list includes “decisions concerning the configuration and organisation of policing resources...” and “total discretion to investigate or require an investigation into crimes”.⁹ However, it also says that this list is “not exhaustive and is by way of illustration only”.¹⁰ A “grey area” exists between matters subject to political scrutiny / influence and “direction and control” matters.¹¹

Some have argued that operational independence is a misleading and insufficient term. The Patten Report (a UK Government commissioned report which provided a blueprint for Northern Irish policing following the Good Friday Agreement) recommended the term be dropped in favour of “operational responsibility”. The Patten Report argued that “operational responsibility” better reflects that chief constables are “both free to exercise [their] responsibilities but also capable of being held account afterwards for the manner in which [they] exercise them”.¹²

The Government is committed to consulting on “potential changes” to the Policing Protocol to provide a “brighter-line on the boundaries of operational independence”.¹³ It made the commitment as part of its response to part one of a two part review its running on Police and Crime Commissioners. The [Library’s briefing on PCCs](#) explains more.

⁷ [para 21](#), The Policing Protocol Order 2011

⁸ [Schedule 1](#), The Policing Protocol Order 2011, para 30

⁹ Ibid, para 33

¹⁰ Ibid, para 34

¹¹ HC Deb, [Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill](#), 27 January 2011, cc 242

¹² Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, [A new beginning: policing in Northern Ireland](#), September 1999, paras 6.19- 6.22

¹³ [HCWS849: Concluding Part One of the Police and Crime Commissioner Review](#), 16 March 2021

1.3

Policing by consent

The concept of ‘policing by consent’ is derived from the [nine ‘general instructions’](#) given to the first officers of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in 1829.¹⁴ The general instructions are better known as the **Peelian Principles of Policing**, named for Sir Robert Peel, the Home Secretary when the MPS was founded.¹⁵

According to the Peelian Principles the police’s authority is dependent on public consent.¹⁶ The police lose their authority when they lose the consent of the public. The public’s consent is maintained “not by pandering to public opinion” but by applying the law fairly, impartially and by using minimal force.¹⁷

In order to demonstrate they are applying the law fairly police forces should operate with transparency.¹⁸ They **must** provide certain information about the use of their powers to the Home Office.¹⁹ Forces **must** make arrangements for people to receive information about, and comment on, policing in their area.²⁰ Most do this by conducting beat meetings where residents can engage with local policing teams and by operating Independent Advisory Groups where local people, often those from underrepresented groups, advise on how their policing is affecting them.²¹

In England and Wales, the public can also influence policing by voting in their local Police and Crime Commissioner (PCCs) / Mayoral election. PCCs/ Deputy Mayors have two dual roles related to policing by consent. A governance role in which they set local priorities for their chief officer and an accountability role in which they monitor their force’s performance (see section 2.2 for details).

¹⁴ Home Office, [Definition of policing by consent](#), 10 December 2012

¹⁵ Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, [Peel, Sir Robert, second baronet](#) [intranet only link]

¹⁶ Home Office, [Definition of policing by consent](#), 10 December 2012, principle 2

¹⁷ Ibid, principle 5

¹⁸ College of Policing, Transparency, [last accessed 7 May 2020]; College of Policing, [Code of Ethics](#), July 2014, para 1.4.3

¹⁹ Home Office, [Annual data requirement from police forces in England and Wales](#), 11 March 2019; s44, Police Act 1996

²⁰ [s34](#), Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

²¹ College of Policing, [Engagement and communication APP: communication](#), 30 January 2020

2 Key actors

2.1 Home Office

The Home Office is responsible for policing policy for England and Wales. It is responsible for:

- **publishing a statutory document called the Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR).** The SPR sets out the most pressing national crime threats and how police force should be responding to them. The [current SPR](#) was published in March 2015.
- **managing Government legislation concerning policing.**
- **maintaining some statutory guidance documents relating to police powers.** The College of Policing (see below) is now responsible for most police guidance, but the Home Office still maintains some key statutory documents on police powers (notably the PACE and IPA codes). The Library has explained more about police guidance in the briefing [police powers: an introduction](#).
- **presenting the annual Police Grant Report to Parliament for approval.** The [Police Grant Report](#) sets out the annual grants given to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) for the day-to-day management of their police forces and the funding available for national priorities. Alongside the Police Grant Report the Home Office also announces the annual council tax policing precept limit. The Home Office also has powers to set the minimum budget a PCC can set for their force.²² The Library briefing [police funding](#) explains how forces are funded in more detail.
- **providing political leadership of national policing bodies.** The Home Office oversees the National Crime Agency (NCA), the College of Policing and the Independent Office of Police Conduct (each have a different governance relationship with the Home Office). The Home Secretary is also (either directly or indirectly) responsible for key policing appointments including the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service (the most senior police officer in the UK), the Director General of the NCA and the IOPC, the Chair of the College of Policing and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary.
- **ensuring the policing system is working effectively.** It largely uses informal powers to do this, but it does have statutory powers to issue

²² s41, Police Act 1996

directions to ineffective forces/ PCCs (see below). The Home Office convenes the [National Policing Board \(NPB\)](#) which brings together senior policing leaders and Home Office ministers and officials to “oversee the progress the Government and its partners are making against the National Crime and Policing Measures”.²³ The NPB aims to meet four times a year, meeting [agendas and minutes](#) can be found on the NPB’s website.²⁴ The Home Office also publishes **ad-hoc strategy documents** on crime fighting and convenes **ad-hoc task forces** on specific types of crime. Recent examples include the [Beating Crime Plan](#), which set out the Government’s strategy to combine prevention, deterrent and enforcement to combat crime, and the Crime and Justice Taskforce, which has met (amongst other things) to [discuss violence against women and girls](#).

Strategic Policing Requirement

[Section 77](#) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 requires the Home Office “from time to time” to publish a ‘Strategic Policing Requirement’ (SPR) document. This document must set out what the Home Secretary believes to be most pressing national threats and how police services should work to counter them. Police chiefs are required to have regard to the SPR in their duties.²⁵

So far the Government has published two SPRs The [first SPR](#) was published in 2012 (shortly after the commencement of the 2011 Act). The [latest SPR](#) was published in 2015. In January 2021 the Government said it was reviewing the SPR with the review due to conclude “ahead of PCC elections”, but no details of an upcoming SPR have since been published.²⁶

The current SPR sets out seven ‘national threats’:

- Terrorism
- Serious and organised crime
- A national cyber security incident
- Threats to public order and safety which cannot be managed by a single police force
- Civil emergencies that require an aggregated response across police force boundaries
- Child sexual abuse

²³ HM Government, [Beating Crime Plan: Fewer victims, peaceful neighbourhoods, safe country](#), July 2021, p47

²⁴ Home Office, [Prime Minister opens first meeting of National Policing Board](#), 31 July 2019

²⁵ s77(2), Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

²⁶ [PQ131177, Roads: Police](#), answered 11 January 2021

- Child exploitation that is attributed to serious and organised crime.²⁷

The SPR describes how chief officers and PCCs should work to combat these national threats (based on the ‘five Cs’). The SPR says forces should ensure:

- they have **capacity** to combat the national threats. This in turn ensures they **contribute** to national crime fighting.
- They have the **capability** to combat the national threats.
- That there is **consistency** in approach across the country.
- That they take a joined up **connected** approach.²⁸

Power to issue directions to forces

Under sections 40, 40A and 40B of the Police Act 1996 (as amended)²⁹ the Home Secretary can issue directions requiring local policing bodies take specified measures to address their own failure (or potential failure) to execute their functions efficiently and effectively or the failure (potential failure) of their force to execute its functions efficiently and effectively. These directions can be used to require PCCs submit an “action plan” to the Home Secretary detailing how they will address their force’s failings.

The Home Secretary must follow statutory rules when issuing directions. These rules give local policing bodies the opportunity to present their own proposals for remedial measures to mitigate the Home Secretary’s concerns.

2.2 Local policing bodies (Police and Crime Commissioners)

Local policing bodies (sometimes known as just “policing bodies”) is a legal term used to collectively describe Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and their equivalents for the four territorial police forces that do not have PCCs (Metropolitan Police Service, Greater Manchester Police, West Yorkshire Police and City of London Police). Local policing bodies are responsible for securing an “effective and efficient” police force for their area.³⁰ In most areas the local policing body is a directly elected politician (either a PCC or a Combined Authority Mayor). The local policing body for the City of London Police is the City of London Police Authority,

There are 39 PCCs in England and Wales. Four of them, the PCCs for Essex, Staffordshire, West Mercia and Northamptonshire, also hold responsibilities

²⁷ Home Office, [The Strategic Policing Requirement](#), March 2015, Part A, p7 and 8

²⁸ Ibid, Part B, p9-14

²⁹ **Note:** The version of the 1996 Act on www.legislation.gov.uk is not up to date with latest amendments and therefore weblinks to the 1996 Act have been omitted throughout this briefing. MPs and their staff can access an updated version of the 1996 Act via [Library resources](#).

³⁰ [s1\(6\)](#), Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

relating to their local Fire & Rescue Service.³¹ These PCCs are technically known as Police, Fire & Crime Commissioners (PFCCs). The Library uses the term PCC inclusively of PFCCs.

The Library has discussed the role and function of local policing bodies in more detail in its briefing [Police and Crime Commissioners](#). This briefing also discusses the Government's on-going [two-part review of the PCC model](#).

Functions

Local policing bodies have three core functions:

- **Police governance:** They set an annual budget and a five-year police and crime plan for their force.³² As part of their budgetary responsibilities they set the council tax precept for their police force area. Most are also responsible for appointing a chief officer to lead their force (The Mayor of London is not responsible for appointing the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, although they are consulted on the appointment).³³
- **Police oversight:** They are responsible for scrutinising their force's performance and holding their chief officer accountable for the delivery of their police and crime plan.³⁴ They also play a role delivering the local police complaints system.³⁵
- **Commissioning criminal justice services:** They are responsible for commissioning victims' services and some crime prevention programmes in their police force area.³⁶

Holding PCCs to account

PCCs are held accountable in three ways:

- **via the ballot box.** PCCs are directly elected politicians. The electorate has the power to vote them out if they are dissatisfied with their performance. PCC elections take place every four years. The last PCC elections took place 6 May 2021. The election was due to take place in May 2020 but was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.³⁷ The election results are set out in the Library's briefing [PCC elections 2021](#).

³¹ Choose My PCC, [About police and crime commissioners and police, fire and crime commissioners](#), undated

³² s41, Police Act 1996 & s5, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

³³ s38, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

³⁴ s1(7-8), Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

³⁵ See: House of Commons Library, [Police complaints and discipline](#), 4 September 2020

³⁶ s143, *Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014*

³⁷ Cabinet Office, [Postponement of May 2020 elections](#), 13 March 2020

- by local councillors sitting on **Police and Crime Panels** (PCPs). PCPs provide formal scrutiny of their PCC between elections. They are supposed to provide a similar function to parliamentary select committees which scrutinise the work of government between General Elections.
- by the **Home Secretary** through their power to issue directions to “ineffective” PCCs described above.

Like all politicians PCCs are also held accountable by public opinion. PCCs can voluntarily resign, and some have done so.

2.3

The NPCC

The **National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC)** is the co-ordinating body for all police forces in the UK. The NPCC co-ordinates national police operations and the implementation of College of Policing guidance.

The chief officer of each UK police force, the Director General of the National Crime Agency and Chief Executive of the College of Policing are all represented at the NPCC. They make decisions collectively via the Chief Constables’ Council.

The NPCC sets a ten-year plan for policing in a ‘policing vision’. The latest vision is the [Policing Vision 2025](#). This was published jointly with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. The vision has five core strands:

- **Local policing:** local policing will be aligned, and where appropriate integrated, with other local public services to improve outcomes for citizens and protect the vulnerable.
- **Workforce:** Policing will be a profession with a more representative workforce that will align the right skills, powers and experience to meet challenging requirements.
- **Specialist capabilities:** To better protect the public, police will enhance our response to new and complex threats, develop their network and the way they deliver specialist capabilities by reinforcing and connecting policing locally, nationally and beyond.
- **Digital policing:** Digital policing will make it easier and more consistent for the public to make digital contact, improve our use of digital intelligence and evidence and ensure we can transfer all material in a digital format to the criminal justice system.

- **Enabling business delivery:** Police business support functions will be delivered in a more consistent manner to deliver efficiency and enhance interoperability across the police service.³⁸

The NPCC convenes two sets of [committees](#). Twelve ‘reform and transformation’ committees, where senior leaders in policing agree changes to service delivery (including how to implement the policing vision), and eleven ‘coordination committees’, where forces agree standards for operational duties and business management.

In addition to their day jobs leading individual police forces some police chiefs take on responsibility for being a policing lead on specific crimes and issues for the NPCC. These officers help shape a national approach to these issues.

2.4 College of policing

The College of Policing (the College) is a professional body for policing in England and Wales. It is a limited company, owned entirely by the Home Secretary, operating as an arms length body of the Home Office.³⁹

The College has three complementary functions. It:

- Shares knowledge and good practice within the policing community.
- Sets service standards for policing.
- Supports the professional development of police personnel. It delivers its own training programmes and quality assures training delivered by others.⁴⁰

The College has statutory responsibilities related to its functions. It is responsible for issuing ‘Codes of Practice’ to chief officers on the exercise of their duties.⁴¹ It also has powers to instruct the Home Office to make regulations relating to police officer ranks, police recruitment and training.⁴² The Home Office has “veto powers” relating to both these responsibilities but has yet to use them.⁴³

³⁸ NPCC, [Policing Vision 2025](#), [last accessed 3/06/19]

³⁹ College of Policing, Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020, December 2020, p9

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ s39A, Police Act 1996 (as amended). See: [s123- s130](#), Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

⁴² s50A, Police Act 1996 (as amended). See: [s123- s130](#), Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

⁴³ [s123- s130](#), Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

Income

The College is part-funded by the Home Office, primarily through grant in-aid.⁴⁴ In 2019/20 it received £41m via grant in-aid and around £11.8m in other Home Office grants.⁴⁵

The College also generates its own income by selling professional services to police (and related) services throughout the world. It has six “income streams”:

- **Training delivery:** The College delivers training to UK and overseas police services.
- **Selection and assessment centres:** The College provides policing related assessment and recruitment to English and Welsh police forces.
- **Licence fees:** The College provides three-year licences of their training programmes to others.
- **Royalties:** Licence holders must pay the College royalties when they deliver their training programmes to organisations/ individuals other than Home Office police forces.
- **Events:** The College runs conferences and other vocational training events.
- **Board and accommodation:** The College’s estate can be hired by commercial clients.⁴⁶

The College generated just over £11.6m from these income streams in 2019/20.⁴⁷

2.5

The IOPC

The IOPC is the independent body responsible for maintaining public confidence in the English and Welsh police complaints system.⁴⁸ It’s run by a Director General (currently [Michael Lockwood](#)) appointed by the Queen (on advice by the Home Secretary).⁴⁹

The IOPC maintains [statutory guidance on the police complaints system](#) which assists those working with complaints to achieve high standards and meet

⁴⁴ Home Office, Protocol between the Home Office and the College of Policing Limited, July 2019, para 13.6

⁴⁵ College of Policing, Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2020, December 2020, p104 & p101

⁴⁶ Ibid, p84-85

⁴⁷ Ibid, p101

⁴⁸ s10(1)(d), *Police Reform Act 2002*

⁴⁹ [HCWS187, Appointment of the Director General of the Independent Office for Police Conduct \(IOPC\)](#), 20 October 2017

their legal obligations.⁵⁰ It publishes [statistics on police complaints](#) and monitors the performance of the system. It conducts [research designed to understand and improve the system](#).

The IOPC also plays a role in handling some complaints and conduct matters. It conducts independent investigations into some complaint, conduct and death and serious injury matters.⁵¹

The IOPC also makes recommendations for improvements in police practice based on learnings from complaint and misconduct matters.⁵² It publishes regular [learning the lessons magazines](#) and makes learning recommendations as part of the outcomes of its investigations.⁵³

The Library has discussed the role of the IOPC in more detail in its briefing [police complaints and discipline](#).

2.6

HMICFRS

HMICFRS is responsible for inspecting the police in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They issue an [annual assessment of each police force](#) which provides a score for forces for their three “pillars”:

- **Effectiveness:** how effective a force is as reducing crime and keeping people safe.
- **Efficiency:** how sustainable a force’s services are to the public.
- **Legitimacy:** how the force treats the public and its workforce.

HMICFRS identify ‘areas for improvement’ or ‘causes for concern’ in forces whose performance has fallen below expected standards. ‘Causes for concern’ are accompanied by recommendations to help the force improve.⁵⁴

PCCs/ Deputy Mayors must respond to HMICFRS inspection reports of their force. However, it’s the Home Office (not HMICFRS) that has the power to issue directions to the PCC/ Deputy Mayor requiring them to address serious failings in their force.⁵⁵

HMICFRS also undertake **thematic inspections** of the police service commissioned by the Home Office. These inspections usually respond to an area of concern with policing across the country. HMICFRS use their thematic

⁵⁰ IOPC, [Statutory guidance on the police complaints system](#), February 2020, para 1.2; s22, *Police Reform Act 2002*

⁵¹ s10(2), *Police Reform Act 2002*

⁵² s10(1)(e), *Police Reform Act 2002*

⁵³ IOPC, [Learning strategy 2018-22: Improving policing by identifying and sharing learning from our work](#), undated, p5

⁵⁴ HMICFRS, [How we inspect](#) [last accessed 11 December 2020]

⁵⁵ [s55, s40, s40A & s40B](#), *Police Act 1996*

inspection reports to identify areas for system wide improvement. In these reports they make recommendations to the Home Office and others in the policing system.

Certain charities and public bodies designated by the Home Office have the power to ask HMICFRS, the IOPC and the College to conduct an investigation into a problematic aspect of policing by making a [police super complaint](#).⁵⁶

HMICFRS use the findings from their inspections to publish an **annual report on the state of policing in England and Wales**. The [latest state of policing report](#) is based on the inspections it carried out between March 2020 and March 2021.

2.7

Scotland and Northern Ireland

Scotland

The [Scottish Police Authority](#) (SPA) provides governance and oversight of the police in Scotland. It provides a similar function to local policing bodies in England and Wales. The SPA also provides forensic services in Scotland.

[Police Investigations & Review Commissioner](#) (pirc) oversees the Scottish police complaints system and conducts independent investigations of some incidents involving Scottish police. It is a similar body to the IOPC.

[Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Scotland](#) (HMICS) inspects Scottish police and scrutinises the SPA.

Northern Ireland

The [Northern Ireland Policing Board](#) provides governance and oversight for the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI).

The [Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland](#) handles all complaints about the PSNI.

⁵⁶ s29A-s29C, Police Reform Act 2002; [The Police Super-complaints \(Designation and Procedure\) Regulations 2018](#)

3 Police forces

3.1 Territorial police forces

Under [section 2](#), Police Act 1996 there must be a single police force for each of the 41 police areas listed in its [Schedule 1](#), the “metropolitan police district” and the City of London police area.

Outside of London

Outside of London territorial police forces serve “police force areas” that largely mirror county and metropolitan district boundaries.⁵⁷ Police force areas cover varying geographies and populations. For example, West Midlands and Greater Manchester Police (the two largest forces outside of London) each serve a population of around 2 million. They police densely populated urban areas. In contrast, Cumbria Police serves just half a million people who live in a sparsely populated rural county.

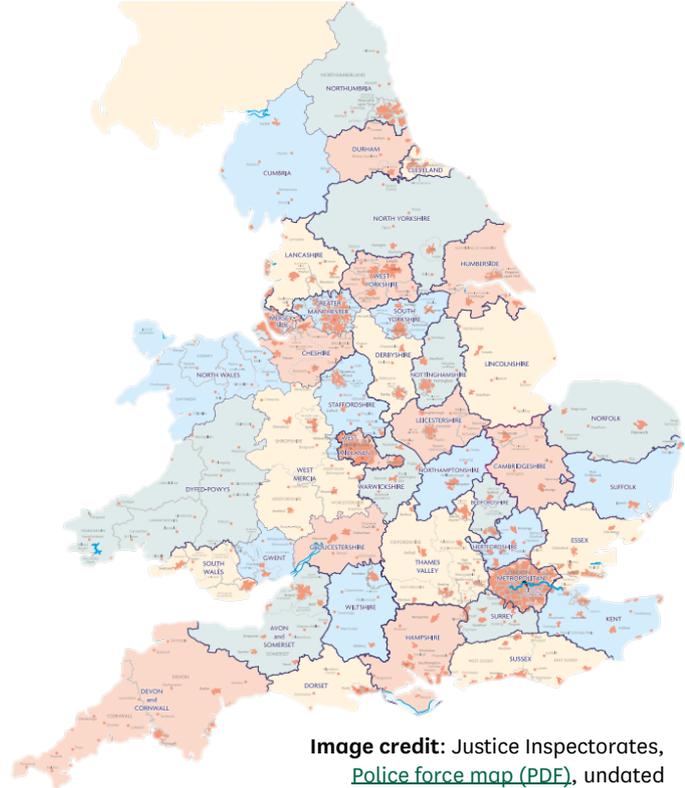


Image credit: Justice Inspectorates, [Police force map \(PDF\)](#), undated

The Metropolitan Police Service

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) serves the “metropolitan police district”, an area covering most of London.

The MPS is considered the most important and influential police force in the UK. Its job policing most of London (the political, cultural and financial centre of the UK) places it at the heart of national life in Britain. The MPS also undertakes some specific national policing functions (for example, special persons protection) that other forces do not.

⁵⁷ [Schedule 1](#), Police Act 1996

The MPS is by far the largest police force in England and Wales, serving a population of around eight million people and comprising around 33,000 officers.⁵⁸ Established in 1829, it is also one of the oldest police forces in the world.

City of London Police

The City of London Police (CoLP) serves the City of London, one of London's financial districts, known as the "square mile". The CoLP is a unique force, it has two distinct roles: it is the local police force for the square mile but it is also is a national force lead for economic crime.⁵⁹ CoLP's role as the national lead for economic crime policing is discussed in the Library briefing paper [banking fraud](#).

3.2 National police forces

There is a single national police force in both Scotland and Northern Ireland (where policing is a devolved policy area). Operationally, Police Scotland and the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) are similar to their territorial counterparts in England and Wales.

3.3 Specialist police forces

There are three specialist civilian police forces in the UK: the British Transport Police (BTP), the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (CNC) and the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP). These forces fall outside the departmental responsibility of the Home Office.

British Transport Police

The BTP polices the British railway network. The Department for Transport has departmental responsibility for the BTP. The governance and operation of the BTP is discussed a [separate Library briefing](#).

Civil Nuclear Constabulary

The CNC is an armed police force that protects civil nuclear sites and nuclear materials in Britain. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy holds departmental responsibility for the CNC.

⁵⁸ House of Commons Library, [Police Service Strength](#), September 2021, Appendix 1

⁵⁹ City of London Police, [City of London policing plan: 2020-2023](#), undated, p2

Ministry of Defence Police

The MDP protects the Ministry of Defence’s nuclear sites and other defence assets in the UK. The Ministry of Defence holds departmental responsibility for the MPD.⁶⁰

3.4 The 43-force structure

There have long been calls for the 43-force structure of English and Welsh police forces to be reformed. It is often argued that the number of territorial forces outside of London should be reduced so forces police larger areas and enjoy more commensurate resources.

The last serious attempt to change the territorial boundaries of English and Welsh police forces occurred in 2006. The then Labour Government proposed to reduce the number of forces by merging neighbouring forces outside of London. At the time the plans were strongly opposed by police leaders and Cleveland Police mounted a legal challenge to the proposals.⁶¹ In the face of this police opposition the Labour Government abandoned its plans before they were finalised. It agreed to pay almost £4 million to forces for the preparatory work they had carried out for the mergers.⁶²

More recently the idea of force mergers has gained traction. Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the Home Affairs Select Committee and even some senior police officers (like the former Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police) have supported the idea.⁶³

HMICFRS says “in some important respects” the 43-force structure is “no longer fit for purpose”.⁶⁴ It argues that modern day crimes like online banking fraud, county lines drug dealing and online child sexual exploitation cannot be effectively policed by forces with hard geographic boundaries. It says the Government and police leaders should “work out what capabilities and capacity [policing] needs... [and] reorganise accordingly, defining what should be done locally, regionally and nationally”.⁶⁵

Comprehensive reform of the 43-force structure would require primary legislation. The Home Office has the power to amend police force areas

⁶⁰ **Note:** There are three separate military police forces which provide policing services to the UK’s armed forces. They are known collectively as the Service Police. The Library’s briefing [Service Police Review](#) discusses them.

⁶¹ The Guardian, [Police mergers face legal challenge](#), May 2006

⁶² HC Deb, 30 October 2006, [c3WS](#)

⁶³ HMICFRS, [State of Policing – The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2019](#), June 2020, p37; House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, [Policing for the future, Tenth Report of Session 2017–19](#), October 2018, para 236; Manchester Evening News, [Chief Constable backs calls for merging of police forces in England and Wales](#), January 2020;

⁶⁴ HMICFRS, [State of Policing – The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2019](#), June 2020, p35

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p37

outside of London by order, but it can only exercise this power when requested by the local policing leaders concerned.⁶⁶ Using this power to enact wholesale change of police force boundaries would therefore be very difficult.

The Home Office says it welcomes local proposals for force mergers. But has shown little appetite for fundamental reform of the 43-force structure of English and Welsh policing.⁶⁷

3.5

Collaboration

Police forces in England and Wales collaborate and share resources in several ways. The Home Office has issued statutory guidance to chief constables on [police collaboration](#).⁶⁸ This guidance explains how police forces can collaborate and when it might be most appropriate to do so.

Collaboration agreements

PCCs have a legal duty to facilitate collaboration between forces in the interests of “efficiency” or “effectiveness”.⁶⁹ Section 22A of the Police Act 1996 (inserted via [section 89](#) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011) allows police forces to enter into formal collaboration agreements.

There is no central database of police collaboration agreements so we do not have an accurate picture of police collaboration. However, collaboration agreements have been used in different ways facilitating both national and regional collaboration. Nationally a collaboration agreement was used to set up the NPCC and national policing units like the [National Ballistics Intelligence Service](#) and national policing resources the [Criminal Records Office](#). Regionally, collaboration agreements have been used to allow for both front line policing and administration to be delivered jointly by neighbouring police forces. For example, forces in the South West of England have collaboration agreements which has created multi-force policing units for organised crime, major crimes and forensics (amongst other things).⁷⁰ Kent and Essex police forces have a collaboration agreement which sees them share “business areas” for serious crime, IT and procurement.⁷¹

Collaboration agreements are time limited and must be kept under review.⁷² This means that forces can allow them to lapse and then seek either a new

⁶⁶ s32, Police Act 1996

⁶⁷ Home Office, [The Government response to the tenth report from the Home Affairs Select Committee: Session 2017-19 \(HC 5115\): Policing for the future](#), March 2019, paragraph 166

⁶⁸ Home Office, [Statutory guidance for police collaboration](#), October 2012

⁶⁹ [s1\(8\)\(d\), Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011](#)

⁷⁰ Avon and Somerset Police Force, [Collaboration with other police forces](#), December 2016

⁷¹ Kent Police and Essex Police, [Kent and Essex Police Force and Police Authority Collaboration Agreements](#), undated [agreement runs to 2025]

⁷² s22B, Police Act 1996 (as inserted by [s89 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011](#))

collaboration agreement with the same or different force or return to providing services without an agreement.

The end of the Warwickshire and West Mercia “strategic alliance” in February 2020 highlighted the risks involved in short term collaboration agreements.⁷³ In July 2020 HMICFRS published a [thematic inspection of collaboration agreements](#) and found that⁷⁴:

- too many collaborations do not have a clear purpose or objective that is understood by all involved;
- some forces are not tracking the benefits of collaboration and fail to think beyond financial savings;
- complicated and bureaucratic decision-making undermines the effectiveness of many collaborations; and
- some forces are failing to put people with the right skills in their collaborations and are not effectively sharing learning.

The Inspectorate recommended that by March 2021⁷⁵:

- the NPCC, the College of Policing and the Home Office should work together to establish a central repository for police collaborations.
- the NPCC, the College of Policing and the Home Office should identify a methodology that supports forces in tracking benefits for police collaborations and help forces implement it.

Mutual aid

[Section 24](#) of the Police Act 1996 allows police chiefs to deploy officers or offer other assistance to another force to enable them to meet ‘special demand’. This is known as mutual aid. Police forces use mutual aid in special circumstance, such as emergencies, planned events (like large-scale public gatherings) or to facilitate specialist staff deployments to other forces.⁷⁶ When police forces provide mutual aid they charge the receiving force for the cost of the police services provided. The NPCC has published [guidelines on mutual aid cost recovery](#) to assist police forces in setting the value to charge at.

⁷³ PCC for Warwickshire, [Former Alliance with West Mercia](#), [last accessed 11 December 2020]

⁷⁴ HMICFRS, [Failing police collaborations cost forces money, time and effort](#), 23 July 2020

⁷⁵ HMICFRS, [PEEL spotlight report: The Hard Yards: Police-to-police collaboration](#), July 2020, p10-11

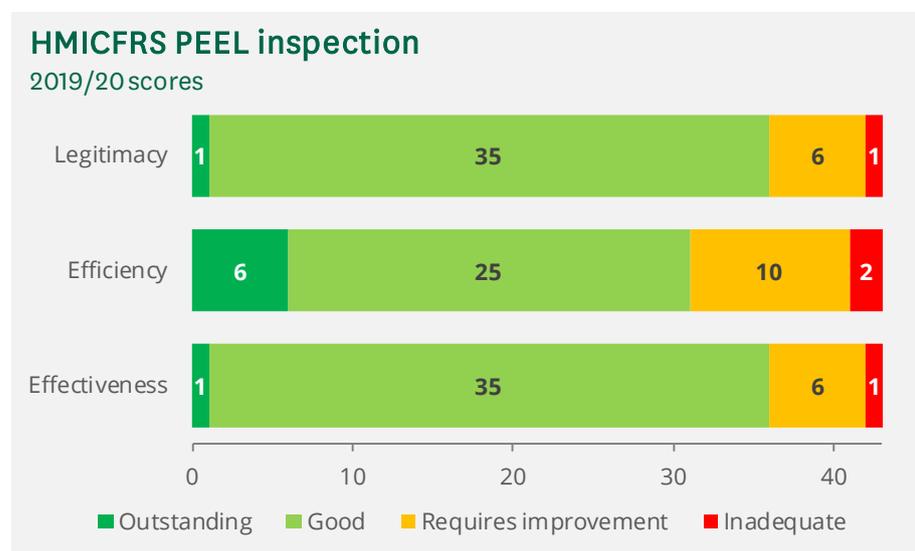
⁷⁶ NPCC, [National Policing Guidelines on Charging for Police Services: Mutual Aid Cost Recovery](#), 2016, paragraph 3.2

4 Performance

4.1 Inspections

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services maintains an [online dashboard](#) displaying each force's score against each of their three assessment pillars (effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy). Forces receive one of four 'judgements' for each pillar: outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate. HMICFRS also provide a detail written assessment of each force which can be found by navigating through HMICFRS' [online dashboard](#). There were no police force inspections in 2020/21 owing to the pandemic and so latest scores as at 2019/20 are still the most up to date.⁷⁷

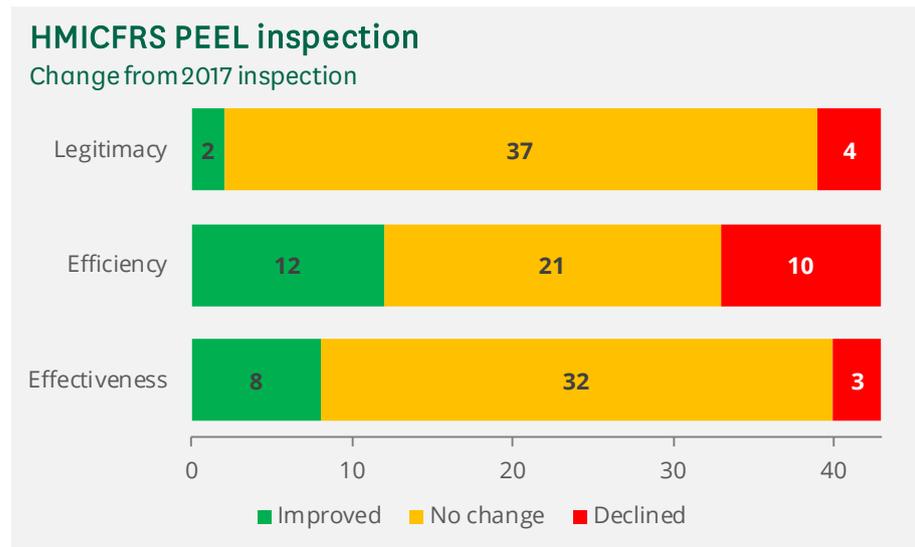
HMICFRS tends to judge forces better on effectiveness and legitimacy, giving slightly lower scores on efficiency. Overall, most forces are judged to be performing well by the inspectorate across all three measures.⁷⁸ However, there is growing divergence between the performance of forces. The inspectorate says this is the result of some forces rising to the twin challenges of rising demand and falling resources better than others.⁷⁹



⁷⁷ HMICFRS, [State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2020](#), July 2021, p48

⁷⁸ HMICFRS, [State of Policing The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary 2019](#), June 2020.

⁷⁹ Ibid



The state of policing

The HMICFRS provides a detailed assessment of the “state of policing” in an annual report presented to Parliament. The [2020 state of policing report](#) was published in July 2021. It provides an annual assessment of policing in England and Wales for the 2020/21 financial year including an assessment of the police response to the coronavirus pandemic.

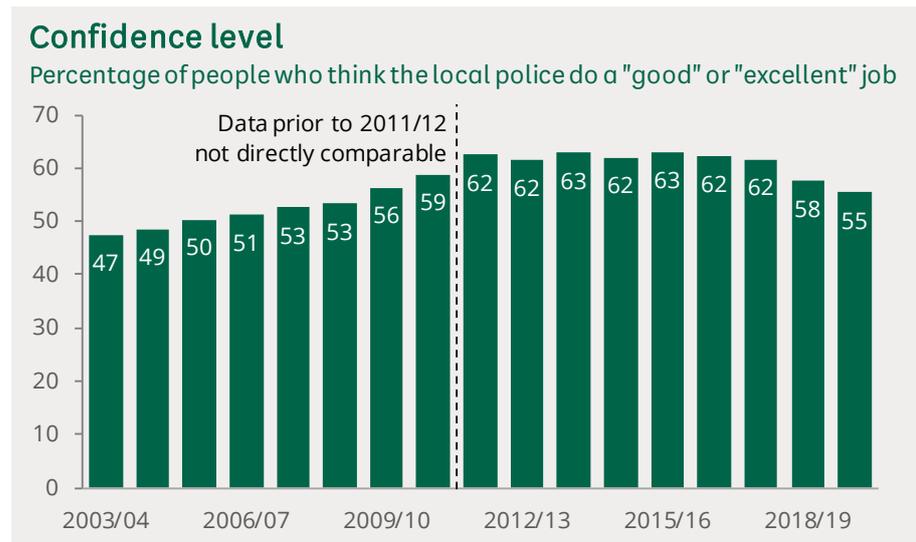
4.2

Public confidence

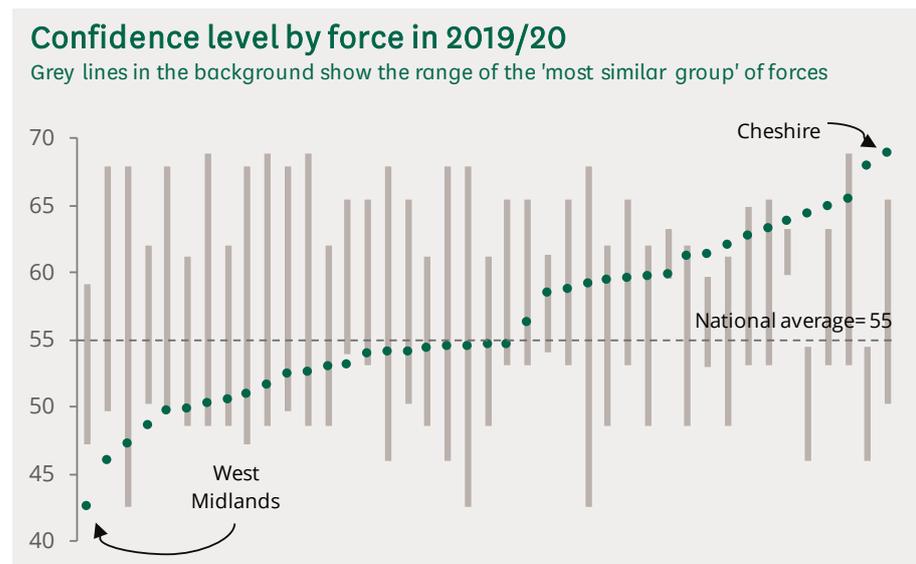
Public confidence is often used as a performance measure for police forces because forces in England and Wales police “by consent”.

Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) suggests that around 55% of people think their police force is doing a “good” or “excellent” job. This figure is often known as the **confidence level**. The confidence level has fallen over the last two years (from around 62% in 2017/18 to 55% in 2019/20).⁸⁰

⁸⁰ ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables](#), 17 July 2020, table s1



The confidence level varies between forces. Around half of forces perform in line or better than those in their “most similar group” (MSG).⁸¹ West Midlands Police scores the lowest on this measure, at 42%, its score is around 11 percentage points below its MSG average.⁸²



Victims of crime

46% of people who have experienced crime in the last 12 months said the police were doing a good or excellent job, compared to 58% of those who were not recent victims.⁸³

HMICFRS have raised concerns that the level of service the police are providing is not meeting the public’s expectation. In 2020 they raised

⁸¹ House of Commons Library analysis of ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables](#), 17 July 2020, table s18

⁸² **Note:** London forces (the MPS and the CoLP) are excluded from this analysis.

⁸³ ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables](#), 17 July 2020, table s2.

concerns that a focus on tackling serious criminality (including terrorism) has left police forces stretched. They said victims of “less serious crimes” are suffering poorer outcomes.

In the words of one chief constable: “victims of ‘less serious’ crimes receive a limited service, if any service at all”. Some of our inspections bear out this downbeat observation. And it applies to many forces – even those that perform comparatively well. For example, in 2018/19, Durham Constabulary, a force with an outstanding HMICFRS grade for effectiveness, assigned a positive outcome to only 13 percent of burglaries and 14 percent of vehicle crimes recorded in 2018/19, compared to 23 percent of violent crimes. While positive outcome rates were higher in Durham than in England and Wales as a whole (6 percent, 3 percent and 13 percent respectively), it still supports the suggestion that victims of ‘less serious’ crimes are unlikely to see their offenders brought to justice.⁸⁴

Black people

Black people are less likely to have confidence in the police than those from other ethnic backgrounds. 53% of Black people said the police were doing a good or excellent job. Confidence was particularly low amongst people from a Caribbean background, 39% of whom said the police were doing a good or excellent job.⁸⁵

There have long been concerns that the police service treats those from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds differently. In 1999, in his inquiry into the police investigation into the murder of Black teenager Stephen Lawrence, Sir William Macpherson concluded that the police service in England and Wales was institutionally racist.⁸⁶ Since the Macpherson inquiry there has been considerable scrutiny of how the police treat Black and Ethnic Minority people. The Library paper [race and ethnic disparities](#) discusses recent reviews of police treatment of black people.

4.3

Targets

The Home Office did not set national targets for the police between July 2010 and February 2020. In June 2010, (then) Home Secretary Theresa May scrapped all centralised targets for the police arguing that “targets don’t fight crime; targets hinder the fight against crime”.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ HMICFRS, [State of Policing The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary 2019](#), June 2020. p52

⁸⁵ ONS, [Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables](#), 17 July 2020, table s2.

⁸⁶ Cm 4262-1, [The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry](#), February 1999

⁸⁷ Home Office, [Police reform: Theresa May’s speech to the National Policing Conference](#), 29 June 2010

In February 2020, the current Home Secretary Priti Patel said she would reintroduced performance measures for police forces saying the Home Office expects “improved outcomes” following investment in police officer recruitment. The Home Office now monitors “National Crime and Policing Measures” and says it will develop league tables for answering 999 and 101 calls.⁸⁸ The Home Office is expecting “significant improvements” to be made against the new National Crime and Policing Measures within three years. However, it says the new measures are “directional” and are not “numerical targets”.⁸⁹

National Crime and Policing Measures		
Priority area	National metrics	Data sources
Reduce murder and other homicide	Homicide	Police recorded crime
Reduce serious violence	Hospital admissions of under 25s for assault with sharp object	NHS data
	Offences involving discharge of a firearm	Police recorded crime
Disrupt drugs supply and county lines	Drug-related homicides	Police recorded crime
	Police referrals into drug treatment	Public Health England
Reduce neighbourhood crime	Burglary, robbery, theft of and from a vehicle, theft from a person	Crime Survey for England and Wales
Improve satisfaction among victims, with a particular focus on victims of domestic abuse	Satisfaction with the police among victims of domestic abuse	Crime Survey for England and Wales
	Victim satisfaction with the police	Crime Survey for England and Wales
Tackle cyber crime	Confidence in the law enforcement response to cyber crime	Cyber Aware Tracker
	Percentage of businesses experiencing a cyber breach or attack	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport survey

Source: Home Office, [National Crime and Policing Measures](#), undated

How have targets been used in the past?

The PPAF

Between 2004 and 2008 police forces were assessed using the Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF). The PPAF measured forces

⁸⁸ HM Government, [Beating Crime Plan: Fewer victims, peaceful neighbourhoods, safe country](#), July 2021, p28 & p18

⁸⁹ Home Office, [National Crime and Policing Measures](#), undated

against several “performance indicators” including specific recorded crime rates.⁹⁰

The PPAF was criticised for creating “perverse” incentives for the police. There were concerns that officers were “gaming” the system by focusing their efforts on offences that were easy to resolve in order to improve their PPAF scores.⁹¹

The PPAF was scrapped in 2008 in favour of targets based on public confidence. This was supposed to incentivise the police to focus on activity which had the greatest impact on the public and victims of crime.

Confidence target and the policing pledge

Between 2008 and 2010 the police performance was monitored against the “policing pledge” and the “confidence target”

The **confidence target** was the only target centrally monitored by the Home Office. It was for the confidence level to be at 60% or higher.

The **policing pledge** set out ten policing commitments. All forces were expected to implement the pledge by the end of 2008 and monitor their performance against it locally.⁹² Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary published a strategic assessment of the police’s delivery of the pledge in October 2009. It rated only eight forces as “good” at meeting the pledge commitments. Most forces (35) were failing to meet “many” or “most” elements of the pledge.⁹³

Policing pledge

- Respect the public, ensuring fair access to all.
- Give name and contact details for neighbourhood teams.
- Make sure the teams are ‘visible’, in neighbourhoods, at least 80% of their time.
- Neighbourhood teams to respond meaningfully to messages within 24 hours.
- Answer 999 calls in 10 seconds and get there safely within 15 minutes in urban areas and 20 minutes in rural areas.
- Answer non-999 calls promptly. Get to ‘vulnerable’ and ‘upset’ callers, or those complaining about agreed local crime priorities, in an hour – or make appointments, which you keep, with other callers.

⁹⁰ HMIC & Home Office, [Police performance assessments 2006/07](#), 2007, Annex A: National Performance Indicator Data

⁹¹ Public Administration Select Committee, [Caught red-handed: Why we can’t count on Police Recorded Crime statistics](#), April 2014

⁹² HMIC, [Responsive policing, delivering the policing pledge: Strategic Overview](#), October 2009

⁹³ HMIC, [Responsive policing, delivering the policing pledge: Strategic Overview](#), October 2009

- Arrange some form of public meeting at least once a month, to agree local priorities.
- Provide monthly local updates on what police and other agencies are doing on crime and disorder.
- Ask victims how they want to be updated and do it at least once a month.
- Deal with dissatisfaction effectively, acknowledging within 24 hours.

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