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Policing in the UK

Summary
1 Key concepts
2 Key actors
3 Police forces
4 Performance
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Contents

1 Key concepts 6
  1.1 The ‘Office of Constable’ 6
  1.2 Operational independence 6
  1.3 Policing by consent 7

2 Key actors 9
  2.1 Home Office 9
  2.2 Local policing bodies (Police and Crime Commissioners) 11
  2.3 The NPCC 13
  2.4 College of policing 14
  2.5 The IOPC 15
  2.6 HMICFRS 16
  2.7 Scotland and Northern Ireland 17

3 Police forces 18
  3.1 Territorial police forces 18
  3.2 National police forces 19
  3.3 Specialist police forces 19
  3.4 The 43-force structure 20
  3.5 Collaboration 21

4 Performance 23
  4.1 Inspections 23
  4.2 Public confidence 24
  4.3 Targets 26
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 countries. 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 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. 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. 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.

The Government is 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.
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

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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 examples 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”.\(^12\)

### 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. 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.

According to the Peelian Principles the police’s authority is dependent on public consent. 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.

In order to demonstrate they are applying the law fairly police forces should operate with transparency. They must provide certain information about the use of their powers to the Home Office. Forces must make arrangements for people to receive information about, and comment on, policing in their area. Most forces 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 forces on how their policing is affecting them.

In England and Wales, the public can also influence policing in their area by voting in their 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 constable and an accountability role in which they monitor their force’s performance.

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14 Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Peel, Sir Robert, second baronet* [intranet only link]
15 Home Office, *Definition of policing by consent*, 10 December 2012, principle 2
16 Ibid, principle 5
17 College of Policing, Transparency, [last accessed 7 May 2020]; College of Policing, *Code of Ethics*, July 2014, para 1.4.3
18 Home Office, *Annual data requirement from police forces in England and Wales*, 11 March 2019
19 *s34*, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011
20 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 paper police powers: an introduction.
- presenting the annual Police Grant Report to Parliament for approval. The Police Grant Report sets out the annual grants available to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to allocate to their police chiefs for the day-to-day management of their police forces and specific activities and the funding available for national priorities. Alongside the Police Grant Report the Home Office announces the annual council tax policing precept limit. The Home Office also has powers to set the minimum budget a PCC can set. 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.

21 s41, Police Act 1996
• **ensuring the policing system is working effectively.** It largely uses informal powers to do this, but it does have statutory powers to issue 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”. The NPB aims to meet four times a year, meeting **agendas and minutes** can be found on the NPB’s website. 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 **Serious Violence Strategy**, which set out an ambition to combine targeted enforcement with early interventions to combat serious violence, and the **Burglary taskforce**, which brought together police and industry stakeholders to explore what more could be done to combat “intrusive crime”.

### The 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.

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** document was published in 2015. In November 2020 the Government indicated it was reviewing the SPR, but no details of an upcoming SPR have since been published.

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

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25. s77(2), *Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011*
26. HCWS574: HMICFRS’s Inspection Report: An inspection of the National Crime Agency’s relationship with the Regional Organised Crime Units, 12 November 2020
• Civil emergencies that require an aggregated response across police force boundaries
• Child sexual abuse
• 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 to 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 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 which give local policing bodies the opportunity to present their own proposals for remedial measures to mitigate the Home Secretaries 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

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\(^{27}\) 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
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 relating to their local Fire & Rescue Service. 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.

**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. 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 (MOPAC is not responsible for appointing the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service).

- **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. They also play a role delivering the local police complaints system.

- **Commissioning criminal justice services**: They are responsible for commissioning victims’ services and some crime prevention programmes in their police force area.

**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. The election results are set out in the Library’s briefing PCC elections 2021.

- 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 a 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

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37 Cabinet Office, Postponement of May 2020 elections, 13 March 2020
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 constables 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.\(^{43}\)

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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
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 services.
- **Licence fees**: The College provides three-year licences of their training programmes to others.
- **Royalties**: Licences 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](https://www.independentofficeforpoliceconduct.gov.uk/about-us/director-general)) appointed by the Queen (on advice by the Home Secretary).\(^49\)

The IOPC maintains [statutory guidance on the police complaints system](https://www.independentofficeforpoliceconduct.gov.uk/about-us/statutory-guidance) which assists those working with complaints to achieve high standards and meet...
Policing in the UK

their legal obligations.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{51}

The IOPC also makes recommendations for improvements in police practice based on learnings from complaint and misconduct matters.\textsuperscript{52} It publishes regular learning the lessons magazines and makes learning recommendations as part of the outcomes of its investigations.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 their force’s failings.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{50} IOPC, Statutory guidance on the police complaints system, February 2020, para 1.2; s22, Police Reform Act 2002
\textsuperscript{51} s10(2), Police Reform Act 2002
\textsuperscript{52} s10(1)(e), Police Reform Act 2002
\textsuperscript{53} IOPC, Learning strategy 2018-22: Improving policing by identifying and sharing learning from our work, undated, p5
\textsuperscript{54} HMICFRS, How we inspect [last accessed 11 December 2020]
\textsuperscript{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 to conduct a thematic inspection by making a super complaint.\(^\text{56}\)

HMICFRS use the findings from their inspections to publish an annual report on the state of policing in England and Wales.

### 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.

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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. 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.

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 130,000 officers (four times as many as the next biggest force).\(^{58}\) 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 in 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.

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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

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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.
62 HC Deb, 30 October 2006, c3WS
65 Ibid, p37
outside of London by order, but it can only exercise this power when requested by the local policing leaders concerned.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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”.\textsuperscript{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 and 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. This created a collective decision-making body and national policing units focused on specialist types of crime. 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).\textsuperscript{70} Kent and Essex police forces have a collaboration agreement which sees them share “business areas” for serious crime, IT and procurement.\textsuperscript{71}

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

\textsuperscript{66} s32, Police Act 1996
\textsuperscript{67} Home Office, The Government response to the tenth report from the Home Affairs Select Committee: Policing for the future, March 2019, paragraph 166
\textsuperscript{68} Home Office, Statutory guidance for police collaboration, October 2012
\textsuperscript{69} s1(8)(d), Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011
\textsuperscript{70} Avon and Somerset Police Force, Collaboration with other police forces, December 2016
\textsuperscript{71} Kent Police and Essex Police, Kent and Essex Police Force and Police Authority Collaboration Agreements, undated [agreement runs to 2025]
\textsuperscript{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. In July 2020 HMICFRS published a thematic inspection of collaboration agreements and found that:

- 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 2021:

- 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. 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.

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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
76 NPCC, National Policing Guidelines on Charging for Police Services: Mutual Aid Cost Recovery, 2016, paragraph 3.2
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.

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.\(^77\) 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.\(^78\)

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\(^78\) Ibid
The state of policing

The HMICFRS provides a detailed assessment of the “state of policing” in an annual report presented to Parliament. The 2019 state of policing report was published in July 2020. It provides an annual assessment of policing in England and Wales for the 2018/19 financial year. It also sets out an initial 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).

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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).\(^8\) West Midlands Police scores the lowest on this measure, at 42%, its score is around 11 percentage points below its MSG average.\(^1\)

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.\(^2\)

HMICFRS have raised concerns that the level of service the police are providing is not meeting the public’s expectation. They say a focus on tackling

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\(^8\) House of Commons Library analysis of ONS, *Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables*, 17 July 2020, table s18

\(^1\) Note: London forces (the MPS and the CoLP) are excluded from this analysis.

serious criminality (including terrorism) has left police forces stretched. They say 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.83

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.84

There have long been concerns that the police service treats those from black and minority ethnic (BME) 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.85 Since the Macpherson inquiry there has been considerable scrutiny of how the police treat BME 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”.86

In February 2020, the current Home Secretary Priti Patel reintroduced performance measures for police forces saying the Home Office is now

84 ONS, Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables, 17 July 2020, table s2.
85 Cm 4262-I, The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, February 1999
86 Home Office, Police reform: Theresa May’s speech to the National Policing Conference, 29 June 2010
expecting “improved outcomes” following investment in police officer recruitment. The Home Office now monitors “National Crime and Policing Measures”. It is expecting “significant improvements” to be made nationally against the measures within three years. However, it says the new measures are “directional” and are not “numerical targets”.

### National Crime and Policing Measures

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

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

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87 HM Government, Beating Crime Plan: Fewer victims, peaceful neighbourhoods, safe country, July 2021, p28
88 Home Office, National Crime and Policing Measures, undated
The PPAF was criticised for creating “perverse” incentives for 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.90

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.91

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.
- 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.

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

90 Public Administration Select Committee, Caught red-handed: Why we can’t count on Police Recorded Crime statistics, April 2014
91 HMIC, Responsive policing, delivering the policing pledge: Strategic Overview, October 2009
forces as “good” at meeting the pledge commitments. Most forces (35) were failing to meet “many” or “most” elements of the pledge.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{92} HMIC, \textit{Responsive policing, delivering the policing pledge: Strategic Overview}, October 2009
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