


CoPaCC



How might Thames Valley's residents and communities be affected by the UK Government's Police Reform White Paper proposals?

Report for Thames Valley OPCC

Contents

- Contents..... 1
- 1. Introduction..... 2
- 2. Force Mergers..... 3
 - 2.1 The main proposals..... 3
 - 2.2 History of force mergers and collaboration..... 5
 - 2.3 Possible merger scenarios for Thames Valley..... 25
 - 2.4 Assessment of restructuring forces.....36
 - 2.5 The White Paper argument for fewer forces.....39
 - 2.6 Efficiency and Effectiveness..... 42
 - 2.7 Thames Valley’s current performance..... 43
 - 2.8 Is bigger better?..... 48
 - 2.9 England’s regional force: Restructuring the Metropolitan Police Service..... 51
- 3. Policing Governance and Accountability..... 55
 - 3.1 The main proposals..... 55
 - 3.2 Background..... 55
 - 3.3 Policing Boards..... 60
 - 3.4 Other factors affecting governance..... 63
- 4. The potential impact on Thames Valley’s communities..... 70
 - 4.1 Operational Policing..... 70
 - 4.2 Financial implications..... 71
 - 4.3 Workforce..... 72
 - 4.4 Governance..... 72
 - 4.5 National Police Service (NPS)..... 73
 - 4.6 Wider Risks..... 75
- 5. Concluding Remarks: “Viewing the White Paper through a local lens”..... 76
- APPENDIX I: List of Abbreviations and Acronyms..... 79
- APPENDIX II: The Police Reform White Paper..... 81
- APPENDIX III: ToR for the independent review of police force structures..... 86
- APPENDIX IV: About CoPaCC Advisory..... 91

1. Introduction

In February 2026, CoPaCC Advisory was commissioned by the Thames Valley OPCC to provide a preliminary examination of the potential implications of the Police Reform White Paper on Thames Valley's communities. Our brief was to focus primarily on the White Paper's proposals for force mergers, and on changes to policing governance.

Put another way, our brief was to examine how Thames Valley's residents and communities might be affected by the UK Government's Police Reform White Paper proposals.

This document is CoPaCC Advisory's report to the Thames Valley OPCC and has been commissioned by them in good faith. The content has not been separately verified, and responsibility for the analysis and accuracy rests entirely with CoPaCC. Copyright in this material remains with CoPaCC and must be acknowledged in any reproduction. A List of Abbreviations and Acronyms is available at Appendix I of this report.

2. Force Mergers

2.1 The main proposals

The following are the main proposals in the White Paper, drawn from Chapter 2: “A Stronger Policing System”, and numbered as in Appendix II of this CoPaCC Advisory report.

- Proposal 15. “An independent review of force structures...”
- Proposal 16. “Reduce fragmentation and inefficiency by significantly reducing the number of police forces by the end of next parliament” [ie, July 2034]
- Proposal 17. “Simplify the Home Secretary’s powers to alter force boundaries, smoothing the path towards new force geographies”
- Proposal 18. “Identify opportunities to deliver a pathfinder merger this parliament, to make progress towards our ultimate ambition for fewer, larger forces”

2.1.1 Rationale

The White Paper argues that:

- The 43 force structure has been unchanged since the 1960s and is now inefficient and increasingly ineffective.
- The structure is fragmented, and coordination relies on voluntary agreement.
- Standards and processes are too variable, leading to a ‘postcode lottery’ of service quality and confusion for the public.
- Smaller forces lack specialist capabilities and are not resilient.
- A “radical” redesign is required.

In addition:

- “Local policing” should be delivered through Local Police Areas (LPAs) at level of “towns, boroughs or cities”
- Current forces will be merged into larger more strategic forces (frequently described as ‘regional’ forces)
 - “Pathfinder” merger by 2028
 - “Significant reduction” in the number of forces by 2034
 - Home Secretary to have stronger powers to change force boundaries and merge forces

The White Paper points to areas where forces have struggled to provide effective responses:

- The increase in fraud
- Technological developments and opportunities

- Capability for digital investigations and digital forensics. Note that Thames Valley has recently invested some £50 million in its forensics capability
- Failure to adopt learning and respond to HMICFRS recommendations, particularly around issues such as violence against women and girls (VAWG), rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO), vetting and standards

The challenges around fraud and technology apply to policing globally, and are arguably more reflective of gaps in the overall policing budget, the speed of technological change, and outdated powers and procedures across criminal justice. As Sir Brian Leveson has reported, *'The causes are straightforward to identify... The most significant is chronic underfunding at every step.'*¹

The alleged failure to adopt learning and respond to HMICFRS recommendations applies to forces of all sizes, including the largest, namely the Metropolitan Police. The White Paper does not acknowledge that some of the smaller forces achieve better performance in these areas, and have often been responsible for developing best practice.

The White Paper² argues that:

- The 43 force structure is inefficient, and results in 'a wide variation in service quality'
- Specialist functions are too dispersed
- Larger forces are better at dealing with major incidents
- Coordination and collaboration is difficult with '86 decision makers'

It further argues that moving to fewer forces will:

- Save money through reduced duplication and management costs
- Improve service in specialist functions
- Provide greater operational resilience
- Improve national coordination and collaboration

The White Paper provides no evidence to support these assertions. The Home Office has not yet produced a business case to support mergers, nor an estimate of how much the associated restructuring would cost.

¹ [Overview - INDEPENDENT REVIEW of the Criminal Courts - GOV.UK](#)

² White Paper, paras 143-148: The Case for Fewer Police Forces

2.2 History of force mergers and collaboration

Summary:

- 133 forces in 1946
- History of corruption and poor governance when under local council control
- Concerns small forces were ineffective and inefficient
- Royal Commission 1962 recommended minimum force size of 500 and 'tripartite' governance
 - Chief constables, Home Office, and Police Authorities (Councillors and Justice)
 - Independent members introduced 1996
- 43 forces after local government reorganisation 1974
- Concerns about lack of visibility and accountability led to introduction of directly elected PCCs in 2010.
- PCCs to be abolished from 2028³
 - Government highlighted low public awareness, cost, variable local standards
 - New model to support stronger central direction as well as local devolution and accountability

The long process of reducing force numbers in England and Wales

Policing in England and Wales was founded historically on boroughs ('police' overseen by the borough council), and counties ('constabularies' overseen by local justices). The Metropolitan Police was established under a separate arrangement, overseen by the Home Office.

The 1946 Police Act reduced the number of forces to 133. The 1962 Royal Commission rejected a national force and recommended a minimum force size of 500 with a new governance arrangement to balance national and local interests.

Larger forces were seen as necessary for efficiency and effectiveness in the face of rising crime and social and technological change. The updated governance model attempted to prevent perceived corruption and poor governance associated with forces run by local councils.

The 1964 Police Act reduced the number of forces to 49 and introduced the tripartite governance arrangement of Home Office, Chief Constables and police authorities - comprising local councillors and justices (with independent members added in 1996). The current 43 force model was established following local government reorganisation in 1974.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/police-and-crime-commissioners-to-be-scraped>

Thames Valley Police

Thames Valley Constabulary was formed in 1968 with the amalgamation of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Oxford City, and Reading forces, and became Thames Valley Police in 1971. The force's boundaries have not changed since formation, although local government boundaries within the force area have changed.

2005-6 Force Merger Proposals

Summary:

- 2005 HMIC 'Closing the Gap' recommended minimum force size of 4,000 officers/2,000 staff in order to tackle organised crime and terrorism effectively
- HMIC's methodology was challenged at the time
- Home Secretary required forces to produce merger 'business cases' to meet this minimum size requirements
- Little support within the region for change
- Fears of higher costs and more remote policing
- Police authorities estimated mergers would cost £500m, the Home Office allocated £120 million for the programme
- Plans scrapped after change of Home Secretary in mid-2006
- Home Office paid forces £25 million in compensation for the costs of merger planning
- Home Office accepted their costs had been £11m

The following options were, at that time, proposed for the South East region:

- 2 forces
 - Kent, Surrey and Sussex;
 - Thames Valley and Hampshire
- 3 forces
 - Approach 1
 - Kent;
 - Thames Valley;
 - Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire.
 - Approach 2
 - Kent, Surrey and Sussex;
 - Thames Valley;
 - Hampshire
 - Approach 3
 - Kent and Sussex;
 - Thames Valley;
 - Hampshire and Surrey
- 4 forces
 - Kent;
 - Thames Valley;

- Surrey and Sussex;
- Hampshire

In September 2005 the HMIC report, 'Closing the Gap'⁴, found that the 43 force structure was 'unfit for purpose'. The report found that forces below 4,000 officers and 2,000 staff did not have adequate capacity and capability to tackle organised crime and terrorism (although two forces above this size were also judged inadequate). It suggested that amalgamating forces to a minimum size of 6,000 could save £2.3bn over 10 years.

The HMIC report was controversial and the findings were challenged by chief constables and police authorities⁵. The report itself acknowledged: "Being bigger is not enough to guarantee strong protective services. The environment (situation) also matters...Able leadership can also be influential in allowing smaller forces to punch above their weight on these issues... There are outliers: some smaller forces were almost as successful as the majority of larger forces, whilst two relatively larger forces (5000+ staff) received surprisingly low scores"

Nevertheless, Home Secretary Charles Clarke announced a review of force structures in November 2005, with the terms of reference for mergers somewhat more restrictive than set out in 2026. Forces and police authorities were required to submit business cases to merge. Existing forces were not to be split up, and mergers had to fit within the local government regional boundaries.

In March 2006, the Home Secretary announced that the number of forces would be cut to 24, with the 4 force option chosen for the South East:

- Thames Valley;
- Kent;
- Surrey and Sussex to merge
- Hampshire

As at 31 March 2006, Thames Valley had 4,165 officers FTE, above the minimum recommended level.

The Association of Police Authorities said 13 forces had expressed a desire to merge, 14 wanted to 'stand alone', and the remaining 16 had no preference or were undecided. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO, the predecessor of the National Police Chiefs' Council) welcomed the proposals, but warned change would be 'complex and expensive'. The Police Superintendents' Association of England and Wales said the proposals did not go

⁴ <https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/publications/closing-the-gap/>

⁵ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/03/size-isnt-everything-mar-06-2.pdf>

far enough, and a national force should be created. After initial concerns, the Police Federation of England and Wales broadly supported the proposal.

In May 2006, Charles Clarke was sacked as Home Secretary. In July 2006, his successor, John Reid, stopped the plan to impose mergers and instead sought to 'encourage' forces to pursue collaboration and to continue exploring voluntary mergers. Only Lancashire and Cumbria authorities had agreed to merge voluntarily, but that agreement collapsed when the Home Office refused to provide financial support for the merger.

Following this, ACPO said it was difficult to understand how more complex and costly mergers would still be viable. The Association of Police Authorities had in 2006 estimated the cost of imposed mergers to be around £500 million⁶ - which would represent nearly £1 billion today⁷. Forces had already incurred costs in preparing for mergers, and in 2007, the Home Office agreed to provide £25 million in compensation.

In the South East, Surrey and Sussex decided against a merger on grounds of cost. Surrey Police Authority subsequently submitted a claim for £650k in costs arising from work on the merger proposal, and ultimately received £100k from the Home Office⁸.

Planning for the 2005 Merger Proposal within forces

Summary:

- Project teams established in forces and in the Home Office
- Key decisions made quickly with limited analysis and evidence
- Much depended on local relationships and personalities
- Applying a single operating model would be problematic, both for larger and smaller forces
- Addressing gaps in capability would have affected existing operating models
- Many complex issues to be addressed, likely delaying implementation
- West Midlands region four-force merger costs estimated at £57 million over four years, with possible savings coming after

The proposal was driven by the Home Office, with a requirement for forces to present business cases - through seeking merger partners, responding to suggested options, or making alternative arguments. The requirement to remain within regional boundaries limited the options.

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/dec/04/ukcrime.immigrationpolicy>

⁷ <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>

⁸

<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/Data/Council/20061128/Agenda/item%2008%20-%20Report%20from%20Surrey%20Police%20Authority.pdf>

Key decisions about amalgamations were made quickly, with limited opportunity for analysis or deeper gathering of information. Working relationships between forces and authorities depended considerably on the personalities involved and the relative sizes of each force.

There was a widespread sense of larger forces 'taking over' smaller forces. Combinations created various dynamics, with potential for change of political control or where one or more chief constables were considering retirement, making it less clear who would lead the merger.

Extending one force operating model into another force was not straightforward, especially where there were important differences in force profiles (specifically, applying an urban/metropolitan model to a mixed/rural force). At that time forces had much less experience of collaboration, and rarely worked together. Interoperability was much less developed and force operating practices and policies could vary considerably.

Larger forces found that rather than acquiring 'extra' resources and income, they would instead have to redistribute their resources (in particular the more specialist ones) across the smaller forces. That meant their own operating models would come under strain too. These issues were also found following the creation of Police Scotland.

Where smaller forces were being merged, there would still need to be investment in specialist capabilities, also placing strain on existing operating models. Merging forces may release some operational capacity through reductions in command and management, but managing larger units and departments across a larger area can also bring additional challenges, especially during a period of change.

In addition, there were numerous problems apparent around different ICT, operating procedures, estate capacity and provision, HR policies, employment terms and conditions, contracts with suppliers, reserves and investment plans that would have required extensive work to develop and implement resolutions. Many of these involved additional costs and would have delayed the realisation of anticipated efficiency benefits.

In the West Midlands region alone, it was assessed that amalgamating four forces would cost £57 million over the first four years (around £100 million in today's prices⁹).¹⁰ We understand the Home Office has allocated £100 million nationally for implementing these latest police reform proposals, which leaves a considerable gap in merger costs to be met by forces.

⁹ <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>

¹⁰ Home Office letter to forces in the West Midlands region, 3 March 2006

The failure of the Lancashire and Cumbria agreement to merge

Summary:

- These were the only forces (and authorities) that had agreed to merge
- Precept levels differed (Cumbria was 44% higher than Lancashire)
- Home Office refused financial support to mitigate precept equalisation
- Home Office refused additional financial support for the costs of merger
- Lancashire authority then withdrew support, although the Lancashire chief constable wanted to proceed

This failure highlights the difficulty of securing local support for mergers without a political mandate or financial support. Precept levels differed - Lancashire at £113 and Cumbria at £163. The merged force budget required an equalised precept charge of £126.

The 'offer' to Lancashire residents was therefore to pay more for a merged force that would likely see Lancashire resources (particularly more specialist functions) being shared with the smaller Cumbria force. The offer to Cumbria residents was to pay less, but see 'local' control being diminished with the fear that priorities and resources would be diverted to the more urban areas of Lancashire.

If the same logic were applied to any future Thames Valley merger, it could mean that Thames Valley residents:

- Paid more for a merged force where TVP resources were more thinly spread;
- Found resources diverted from rural Thames Valley areas to those urban areas brought in to a merged force
- Saw a diminution of local influence over policing in those local areas

For Lancashire residents, the £13 increase (11.5%) would have breached the then cap. The police authority would only proceed with government financial support, which the Home Office declined. It is not clear whether the Home Office would have agreed for the cap to be breached. The Home Office also declined to provide financial support for the costs of implementation. The Lancashire authority was evidently less convinced by the merger argument and was unwilling to explore options to allow it to proceed.

2.2.1 Developments after 2006

Collaboration

Summary:

- Collaboration 'encouraged' after 2006 to address national gaps
- 2011 legal requirement to collaborate if this provided the best outcome
- Interoperability has improved considerably
 - mutual aid and cross-border operations have increased demonstrating forces can work together to provide resilience
- Gaps have been addressed through establishing CT Policing, ROCUs
 - Other national functions such as NPAS, NPoCC etc

- 'Alliance' and collaboration units (between forces) have also addressed gaps and achieved savings
- Continued questions over value/benefit of some collaborations - motorway units, back office support, procurements - the business cases do not always work out
- A later full merger attempt (Dorset, Devon & Cornwall) also failed, business cases not convincing
- There is no estimate or business case for the improvements in efficiency and effectiveness that are expected now from regionalisation
- Home Office stipulates that the restructure should not place new pressures on the policing budget
 - This appears unrealistic. Unclear where savings might be realised

Following the collapse of the merger proposals, the Home Office encouraged forces to work together through regional collaboration and the establishment of joint units. This was reinforced through the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, which required chief constables and policing bodies to collaborate where this provided the best outcome - even if they did not expect their own force to benefit. The Home Secretary gained the power to mandate collaboration.

Policing made significant changes in response to the weaknesses identified in the HMIC report Closing the Gap:

- Counter Terrorism Units were established in each region, with stronger central direction and coordination through the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command. That has continued to evolve, absorbing force special branch functions, and effectively forming a national body - but still managed through lead force and host force agreements.
- Regional Organised Crime Units were developed, incorporating other agencies and carrying out a range of specialist functions on behalf of forces. A few regions have established other specialist regional functions, such as major crime investigation and firearms training, and there are numerous regional and national procurement agreements.
- However, some regional agreements (eg regional motorway units) ceased after forces found that collaboration represented an abstraction with little perceived benefit for the forces.
- Numerous forces established alliance and collaboration units with neighbouring forces, and/or more formalised agreements for mutual support. These mainly involved specialist units and functions and business support. Some of these are now struggling to show continuing value
- The National Police Air Service was formed after extensive negotiation, providing a national capability that many forces lacked.
 - Forces without air support argued they didn't need it. (Several of these relied on paying other forces for air support when needed, but were not willing to pay towards the full cost)

- Forces with air support were reluctant to 'lose' or 'share' their aircraft. However, the aircraft had been bought with Home Office funding, and few forces were in a position to afford replacements or ongoing costs.
- Similar arguments applied to marine and underwater units. These are functions that all forces need/ought to have access to, but few can justify establishing on their own - while creating a shared national business case is often unattractive.
- However, NPAS has shown that such gaps can be filled where there is a clear mandate and appropriate financial support
- Other national functions were developed, including the National Police Coordination Centre to manage national mobilisation and the response to major incidents, and other initiatives agreed through the NPCC and/or College of Policing
- Interoperability has improved significantly, with common standards being developed and applied through codes of practice for areas such as armed policing, public order, intelligence management, covert operations, and major crime investigation. This has been a key development that makes coordination and collaboration much easier. Numerous major events and incidents since 2006 have shown that policing can mobilise nationally and effectively.
- The use of mutual aid has expanded considerably, showing that forces can 'flex and surge' in response to large events (such as the Olympics), major incidents, or large investigations. However, this comes at some cost, both financially and in terms of officers abstracted from core duties.

The 'Lose-Lose' conundrum

Summary:

- Examples of collaborations being pushed through without any business cases, or despite questions around purpose and value
- Numerous collaborations, including some that were highlighted as successful and innovative, have since ended - primarily due to concerns around cost, benefit and value
 - Examples include regional motorway units, West Mercia-Warwickshire Alliance
- Despite initial claims, forces concluded the collaboration no longer provided good value
- Difficulty of identifying what additional benefit or unmet need the collaboration provided

Collaboration was, ultimately, the main way the service responded to Closing the Gap. National standards were developed and extended to allow for interoperability. Even larger metropolitan forces found they had gaps and that there were efficiencies to be gained from working in collaboration.

However, there were some areas where the collaboration ‘calculation’ did not prove cost-effective, leading to a view that all parties were losing out. One example was motorway policing. Forces typically had roads policing units that could police motorways as well as respond to other incidents in force. Creating regional motorway units left resource gaps within forces, while forces struggled to identify benefits from the new regional capability. In theory a regional motorway resource might have allowed cross-border and travelling criminality to be addressed, but this also failed because other important supporting capabilities were not in place. Most collaborations were ended within a few years.

West Mercia and Warwickshire entered into a strategic alliance in 2012 in response to budget cuts. Most business support and specialist operational functions were merged to provide a single service across two forces, representing a £300 million collaboration.

By 2018, neither force felt the alliance was working for their best interests. West Mercia considered they were subsidising Warwickshire while being constrained from acting in their best interests. Warwickshire acknowledged the challenge of losing capability provided by the alliance, but felt resources had been diverted to West Mercia and they were not receiving a fair share. After negotiations to revise the agreement failed, West Mercia withdrew.

West Mercia PCC: *“The ‘50:50’ governance structure has created situations where one Chief Constable has been able to countermand the operational needs of another and actively prevent them from acting in the best interests of their communities. It has created situations where West Mercia has been blocked from achieving major benefits in efficiencies to reinvest in frontline services. It has left West Mercia picking up the significant costs associated with hosting 80% of all Alliance functions. It has left West Mercia locked into a 69:31 cost-sharing model, which does not accurately reflect the higher level of services that Warwickshire actually consumes.”*¹¹

West Mercia agreed to pay £10.5 million compensation to Warwickshire, a figure that was lower than the amount the Home Office recommended.¹²

¹¹ [West Mercia Police and Warwickshire Police Strategic Alliance](#)

¹²

https://www.warwickshire.police.uk/news/warwickshire/news/2020/march/warwickshire-police-agrees-alliance-exit-settlement-to-the-value-of-10.77-million/#:~:text=West%20Mercia%20Police%20and%20Warwickshire%20Police%20reached,storage%20facilities**%20*%20**Writing%20off%20of%20%C2%A3270%2C000**

The failure of the Dorset and Devon & Cornwall agreement to merge

Summary:

- Strategic Alliance agreed in 2015
- 2017 agreement to merge - “the only way forward when faced with significant funding challenges”
- Considerable local opposition - Home Office wanted a ‘robust business case’
- 2018 Devon & Cornwall PCC withdrew support, due to ‘insufficient benefits’ and lack of local support
- Precept equalisation was an issue
 - Devon & Cornwall would see a higher precept increase while ‘its’ grant funding would be shared to benefit Dorset
 - Concerns in Dorset communities also that resources would move to Devon & Cornwall
- Home Office was not willing to provide additional financial support

In March 2015, both forces agreed a ‘strategic alliance’ covering over 30 areas of work. Both forces continued to work within the wider South West regional collaboration. The main aims were to improve effectiveness and resilience, and to realise efficiency savings. The strategic alliance was due to deliver £12 million savings by 2018.

In 2017, the forces formally agreed to merge, with both chief constables seeing it as ‘the only way forward when faced with significant funding challenges’. The merger would be completed by 2020. Against a backdrop of local political opposition in both force areas to the plan, the Home Office said it would require a ‘robust business case’.

In October 2018 the merger plan was stopped when the Devon and Cornwall PCC declined to support the business case, stating insufficient benefits to justify the precept increase, and the lack of local support. The Dorset PCC claimed there were benefits for both forces, and considered the decision had been made for political reasons.¹³

The Dorset precept for 2018 was £207, while Devon and Cornwall’s was £188. There was a further concern in relation to the share of the budget raised locally (Dorset 47%, Devon & Cornwall 39%).

¹³ [Devon, Cornwall and Dorset Police force merger 'off' - BBC News](#)

A reduction in the Dorset precept was ruled out because the force was so dependent on local income. Conversely, Devon & Cornwall's central grant allocation would have been shared across the merged force, alongside a 9.5% precept increase. That would raise extra income, but as a merged force, there were no assurances where or how that extra funding would be allocated. The Home Office was again unwilling to provide finance to mitigate costs and ease the transition. Further options were being considered to achieve precept equalisation, but the decision had been made not to proceed.

HMICFRS Inspection of Collaboration, 2020

The HMICFRS report *The Hard Yards* (2020) found that the quality of business cases underpinning some collaborations was weak. It emphasised that collaborations should have a clear objective and demonstrably deliver benefits to the public. However, the report noted that most collaborations were primarily implemented to achieve cost savings, with limited clarity on whether they delivered wider public value. It also highlighted that there was insufficient tracking of the benefits arising from collaboration.

2.2.2 Mergers outside England & Wales

The creation of Police Scotland

Summary:

- Controversial reform, still divided opinions of its success and necessity
- Acknowledged as an “extended, complex and disruptive process”
- Changes ‘rushed’ through, leaving problems that have persisted
- Insufficient funding allowed for essential capital costs
- Insufficient attention to local identity and staff morale
- Insufficient attention at outset to relationships with local government and local stakeholders
- Insufficient attention to local needs and priorities
- Savings have been made, but over 1,000 officers lost and 100 stations closed
- Claimed improvements in resilience and consistency of specialist capabilities
- No formal evaluation has been conducted
- Intended improvements were not clearly defined, and have not been consistently measured and reported
- Greater emphasis on national policing rather than community policing
- Crime has fallen in Scotland, although levels have been static in recent years
- Crime fell less in deprived areas and disadvantaged groups
- Trust in policing nationally remains high, but trust in local police has fallen significantly
- Current budget shortfalls

Police Scotland was established on 1 April 2013, merging eight forces and two national agencies into one force with around 17,500 officers. There is no local precept in Scotland, with the cost of policing funded directly from the Scottish Government.

Local policing was restructured into 32 districts aligned to local government authorities, with specialist departments covering the whole of Scotland. The Scottish Government claims that the merger has achieved significant savings with improved capability extended across the whole of Scotland. However, the force reports continued funding pressures with a predicted budget shortfall of £107 million next year.¹⁴

The merger remains politically controversial and perspectives on the success of the reform remain divided. The introduction was marked by critical incidents, difficulties around amalgamating IT and objections to the imposition of standardised processes and operating models. The force had four chief constables in its first ten years.

Maintaining officer numbers was a political priority. This left insufficient capital investment to support implementation. Although officer numbers did not decline during the 2010s (as they did in England and Wales), they have now dropped to 16,400, and over 100 police stations have been closed. The loss of local identity was felt widely.

There has been no formal evaluation of the reform - probably for political reasons, as the creation was a government policy. In 2022, the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) which oversees Police Scotland assessed the reform¹⁵. The claimed benefits included:

- £200 million per year saved through efficiencies
- 2.5 million hours a year of increased police officer capacity delivered through transformation and operational and technological efficiencies
- Overall recorded crime down by 8.8%
 - Of over 500 murders homicides committed in Scotland since April 2013, only 2 murders currently unsolved
 - Clear-up rates for crime up by 4.8%
- Public trust in policing remains high
- Large policing events delivered safely

The SPA is responsible for the £1.4bn annual budget for policing and forensic services, appoints all senior police officers, and holds the Chief Constable to account for the delivery of policing.

Local scrutiny panels across the 32 local authority areas are responsible for scrutiny of an agreed Local Police Plan.

¹⁴ <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25598855.police-scotland-budget-cuts-will-see-officer-numbers-slashed/>

¹⁵ [police reform](#)

The SPA has itself faced criticism for ‘poor governance and a lack of transparency’ (Audit Scotland)¹⁶. In the review, the SPA acknowledged the change was ‘highly disruptive and widely contested’. They highlighted the following learning:

- The challenge of making extensive organisational change while maintaining day-to-day service delivery cannot be overstated
- Maintaining strong relationships with local government and key local stakeholders is critical.
- Fitting local delivery and priorities within national standards requires a clear and strategic focus with respectful listening and dialogue.
- expenditure savings (if any) and the policing improvements must be clearly defined, consistently measured and publicly reported.

The SPA concluded:

- The merger was an “extended, complex and disruptive process”, but has ultimately delivered “significant benefits” to the communities of Scotland
- A single national police service is a “national asset”.
- The savings issue dominated the debate in the early years as the policing benefits took time to be fully realised and measured.
- The “stability now reached after initial and serious disruption” is a “stable platform” for continuous improvement and that significant further change that is required.

An external study of Police Scotland concluded:

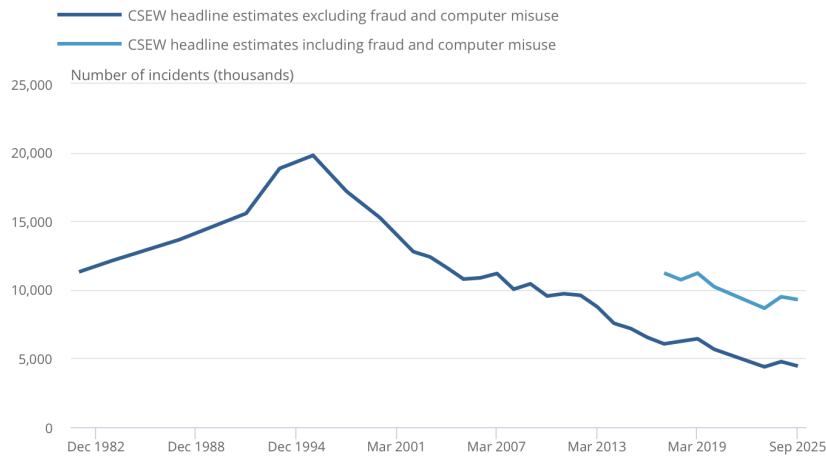
‘The restructure in Scotland was rushed through to such an extent that there were still problems of aligning systems 10 years later. In addition, there were eight police force ‘identities’ that needed time to adapt, and this was not handled with the care that was needed to ensure that officers and staff felt that they were part of the decision-making process. This had a significant impact on the morale of officers and staff.’¹⁷

¹⁶ [‘Unacceptable’ failings at Scottish Police Authority - BBC News](#)

¹⁷ [Police Scotland a cautionary tale for merging of forces south of the border | Scottish Legal News](#)

While the Crime Survey shows continued falls in crime in England and Wales, police recorded crime increased during the past decade, before falling back in recent years. Much of this is attributed to changes in recording practice.

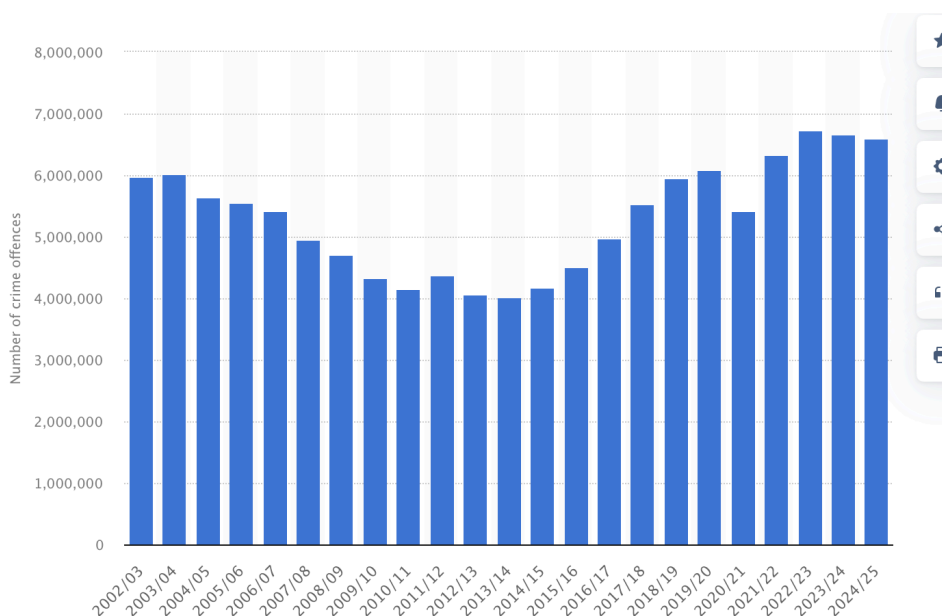
Annual estimates, England and Wales



Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) from the Office for National Statistics

19

Police recorded crime in England & Wales increased after 2014 to a peak in 2022, but has since fallen back.²⁰



© Statista 2026

¹⁹ [Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2025](#)

²⁰ [England number of crimes 2025 | Statista](#)

HMICS and Audit Scotland have recently reported that Police Scotland has been slow to modernise²¹. The joint report acknowledged much has been achieved since formation, including more equal access to specialist resources, better use of technology and an increased focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion. However, the force ‘cannot show’ if it is achieving its strategic goals.

The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2023/24²² shows that public trust in the police remains high, confidence in local policing has declined (45% of adults said police in their local area were doing an ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ job – a decrease from 61% in 2012/13, the year before Police Scotland was formed).

Those living in areas of deprivation had lower confidence in the police, with research finding that police visibility and connectedness, and wider responses to anti-social behaviour, were key drivers of local confidence – more so than policing major events or international issues.

The report stated that since Police Scotland was formed, ‘greater emphasis has been placed on the development of a national force with specialist capabilities, rather than community policing’.

A study of crime victimisation in Scotland has found that while victimisation rates have fallen overall, the reduction has been much less for disadvantaged groups. Increased victimisation inequality was most strongly associated with ethnicity, disability and financial hardship.²³

²¹ https://www.hmics.scot/media/yxvmaju4/nr_260122_best_value_policing.pdf

²²

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-crime-and-justice-survey-2023-24-main-findings/pages/public-perceptions-of-policing/>

²³ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14773708261427682>

Summary:

- Netherlands merger of 25 forces into 1 national force (2013), for a national population of 18 million
- Official review: complexity of the merger was ‘seriously underestimated’
- Concerns about loss of local identity and weaker relationships with communities
- ‘Cumbersome’ imposition of standardised operating model
- Workforce morale adversely affected
- Secured improvements in resilience and interoperability
- Savings not achieved as expected, current budget shortfall (overspend)
- Sweden merger of 21 forces into 1 national force (2015), for a national population of 10 million
- Change not received well by the frontline
- Evaluation findings have been mixed. Main concerns are reduced accountability and local priorities squeezed out by national priorities
- Denmark restructure into a centralised model (2007), for a population of 6 million
- Local stations closed, local confidence and satisfaction fell, performance declined
- Confidence has since recovered

On 1 January 2013, 25 provincial police forces in the Netherlands (population: 18 million) were merged into one force, with 51,000 officers and 14,000 staff reorganised into ten new districts. A government evaluation found that the complexity of merger had been ‘seriously underestimated’.²⁴ The force is now on its fourth chief since that time. Concerns have been raised about a loss of local identity and weaker relationships with municipal leaders. Priorities and parameters changed during the formation process, while the imposition of standardised operating models was described as ‘cumbersome’, and were not welcomed by the frontline workforce²⁵.

The evaluation considered that resilience and interoperability has improved (although the experience in England and Wales shows this can be achieved without a restructure). The economic environment has differed in the Netherlands. Savings were not a priority, and have not been achieved to the level expected. The force is now reporting a €350 million budget shortfall.²⁶

A comparative study of the reforms in the Netherlands and Scotland identified that both reforms were ‘over-ambitious, requiring large-scale structural changes within a far too short time frame’. The changes were ‘complex and difficult’, with implementation affected by political pressure, and insufficient resources, time, experience and skills to manage complex transformation.²⁷

²⁴ Commissie Evaluatie Politiewet 2012. The Hague, November 2017.

²⁵ <https://www.politieonderwijsraad.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Running-on-empty-CPS-48.pdf>

²⁶ [Dutch police warn €350 million a year needed to "avoid losing fight against crime" | NL Times](#)

²⁷ [Great expectations? Assessing the creation of national police organisations in Scotland and the Netherlands - Jan Terpstra, Nick R. Fyfe, 2019](#)

Sweden (population: 10 million) merged 21 forces into a single national force in 2015, in order to improve local responsiveness and capability against organised crime. The force was reorganised into 7 regions. The change was not received well by the frontline. Subsequent evaluations have been mixed, with the main concerns being reduced local accountability and a focus on national priorities rather than local problems.

In 2007, Denmark restructured its police under a centralised command, with an objective of improving national capabilities. A number of studies have found that this damaged local policing²⁸. Police stations were closed, with resources organised into larger units. Local confidence, satisfaction and performance fell, although confidence has since recovered.

‘The general perception of the police reform is that it is a failure. During 2008, the reform has been subject to much public debate, which has linked many unfortunate cases of police neglect with the police reform. Furthermore, the public debate has created a picture of a police not in control and with the reform to blame.’²⁹

Some have considered the RCMP in Canada as a model for the NPS. However the policing model there is different, and the role of the RCMP is not comparable. It is worth noting a recent trend for provinces and municipalities to terminate contracts with the RCMP to supply local policing and establish their own forces, mainly because of dissatisfaction with the cost and level of service.

²⁸ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15614263.2013.795745>

²⁹ <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/208742/1/cbs-phd2010-07.pdf>

2.2.3 The Independent Review of Force Structures

Summary:

- Independent review, to be chaired by Lord Bernard Hogan-Howe QPM
- Recommendations for a ‘radical redesign of police structures’, to be completed by end of August 2026, interim report June 2026
- Lord Hogan-Howe has previously called for the creation of 9 ‘super-forces’ in England & Wales
- Home Office has referred to this several times as ‘regionalisation’
- No specific requirement to remain within regional boundaries, but must consider current structures and working links to ‘minimise disruption’
- Also to set out the standardised operating model for Local Policing Areas, and for force level functions
- No additional cost pressures to be caused for the overall policing budget
- Some funding has been allocated for planning (£100m?)
 - In 2006, police authorities estimated the cost would be £500 million to merge forces
 - the Home Office had earmarked £100 million, costs will now be significantly higher

The Home Office has repeatedly described the merged forces as ‘regional forces’ and the merger process as ‘regionalisation’. Writing in 2015 as the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Lord Hogan-Howe called for the creation of 9 ‘super-forces’ in England & Wales alongside the Metropolitan Police (so 10 super-forces in total):

“We do not need the boundaries that currently mark out the territory of chief constables or police and crime commissioners... How many forces do we need? No more than nine, certainly, based on regions.

In Scotland they have survived such a radical transition, and their furthest police post is as distant from their HQ as London is from Berwick or Cornwall. Holland has done it too. It can be done without diminishing local accountability.”³⁰

The evidence from Scotland and the Netherlands suggests that local policing has been diminished, however.

Given the short timescale and limited opportunity for analysis and assessment, recommendations will take some time to be converted into practicable plans. Planning and implementing a restructure, particularly one on such a scale as proposed, will inevitably consume resources and funding. We understand (not confirmed) that just under £100 million has been set aside nationally for this process. We do not know how it will be allocated.

³⁰

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/14/reform-cuts-public-risk-police-emergency-services-austerity>
Note the article references nine new super-forces, plus the Metropolitan Police Service, so ten in total

In 2006, the Association of Police Authorities estimated it would cost £500 million to implement the merger proposals. The Home Office had earmarked £100 million.³¹ At current prices, the Home Office would need to allocate at least £200 million just for force mergers - and that does not take account of costs for establishing the NPS. The White Paper expects the restructure will produce efficiency savings, but there is no indication so far that there will be developed business cases outlining exactly how the costs of restructure will be recovered through future savings. With forces increasingly relying on reserves and precept increases³², there is little flexibility in force budgets to meet these additional (and likely significant) costs.

Funding will also be needed to establish the National Police Service, which will be taken from the Home Office budget for policing as a 'top-slice'. With no overall growth, this will leave less funding for allocation to forces (although functions and responsibilities will also be transferred from forces).

The team supporting the review chair comprises officers and staff drawn from forces and the Home Office. Various numbers of forces have been suggested:

- 10 regional forces based on the government regions
- 20-22 forces as suggested by the 2006 merger plan. This appears too many to meet the Home Secretary's expectation
- 10-22 forces - somewhere between full regionalisation and the 2006 position
- Alignment with strategic authorities - despite the English devolution argument put forward to support the abolition of PCCs, it is unlikely that forces will be brought under mayoral control. There will be over 30 of these strategic authorities in England, and some larger geographic forces would have to be split up (Including potentially Thames Valley). Wales does not have the mayoral system, and the Home Office remains reluctant to devolve policing to the Welsh Government

There is no specific requirement for mergers to remain within regional boundaries, however the review must consider existing collaboration structures, boundaries of other agencies and local resilience, and minimising disruption during the formation of the NPS. It is therefore unlikely that the review will recommend mergers across regional boundaries without a strong supporting argument.

Recommendations to split up existing forces are unlikely due to the disruption. However this may be unavoidable where new strategic authorities do not match current force areas. Several of these cross regional boundaries and will affect Thames Valley.

³¹ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/03/size-isnt-everything-mar-06-2.pdf>

³²

<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/performance-tracker-2025/criminal-justice/police#:~:text=While%20the%20central%20government%20grant,funding%20has%20grown%20by%2036%25.&text=5-.Home%20Office%2C%20'Police%20funding%20for%20England%20and%20Wales,2015%20to%202026'%2C%202025.>

2.3 Possible merger scenarios for Thames Valley

The instructions for the Independent Review are set out in Appendix III.

2.3.1 Thames Valley progress since 2005

Policing of Thames Valley has changed in many respects since the Closing the Gap report. New national units and the collaboration with Hampshire have delivered important improvements in capability against the gaps highlighted in Closing the Gap, as well as further improvements in performance and efficiency. The force has continued to deliver efficiency savings, while investing in neighbourhoods and in specialist capabilities and capacity.

The force has also grown in size, from 4,160 officers in 2005³³ to 5,000 in 2025. It is now the fifth largest force in England and Wales in terms of officer numbers.

	March 2005	March 2025	Change
Officers	4,189	5,000	+883 (21%)
Staff	2,611	3,615	+914 (34%)
PCSOs	98	258	+158 (44%)
Total	6,928	8,873	+1,945 (28%)

This latest position provides an argument in support of Thames Valley continuing to ‘stand alone’, as determined in 2006. However, there is a stronger government direction this time for fewer, larger forces. Even if there is a strong argument for Thames Valley not to merge, smaller neighbouring forces may be judged in need of merging. Thames Valley could be identified as the most suitable partner for one or more of these other forces.

2.3.2 Regionalisation

Summary:

- South East force: 17,370 officers, 11,950 staff, 860 PCSOs - 30,200 paid workforce in total
 - South East population = 9.0m
 - Large disconnected geography
- Regional forces would range from 7,700 officers to 32,700.
 - North East regional force would be smaller than GMP and West Midlands currently
- Poor geography and cohesion of several regions - arguably not a good basis for restructures

³³ <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20110218145352/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/hosb2005.html>

- May be difficult to rationalise operational functions over such a large area
- Regional police governance through a board of 15-32, possibly reducing to 6 in due course
 - Thames Valley influence over policing in Thames Valley would be diluted
- New LPA model may not be a good fit with current force operating models and local needs
- LPAs may require restructuring within Thames Valley, risking current savings programme
- Standardised systems may lead to same problems of poor fit and loss of local confidence as in Scotland and elsewhere

Merging existing forces into regional forces would create organisations of different sizes (table below). The figures do not take account of potential boundary changes or transfers into the NPS, which are still unknown. An initial estimate based on roles designated as national functions³⁴ suggests the NPS might eventually take on around 7,000 officers from current forces.

Some boundary changes are also likely under local government reorganisation, although the differences would be marginal compared to the overall size of the new forces.

FTE, 31 March 2025	Officers	Staff	PCSOs	TOTAL
North East	6,449	3,858	303	10,610
North West	18,680	10,659	816	30,155
Yorkshire and the Humber	12,513	8,554	861	21,928
East Midlands	8,981	6,423	570	15,974
West Midlands	13,195	7,684	729	21,608
Eastern	12,123	7,817	320	20,260
London	32,717	12,218	1,458	46,393
South East	17,367	11,946	860	30,173
South West	10,432	7,772	620	18,824
Wales	7,679	5,065	778	13,522
England and Wales	140,137	81,996	7,315	229,448

Regional forces could range from 7,700 officers to 32,700 (FTE, March 2025). A South East force would be the third largest in the UK after London and the North West, and would be larger than Police Scotland.

ROCs, CTUs and other police collaborations are organised by region, but outside London there is no regional local government structure for forces to tie into. London would be the

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2025>

only region with a directly elected mayor having police oversight. On current planning assumptions, every other regional force would require a policing board.

Regionalisation would therefore create new ‘bands’ of forces of different sizes (in officer strength):

- ‘Very Large’ (over 32,000): London
- ‘Large’ (17,000-19,000): North West, South East
- ‘Medium’ (10,000 -13,000): West Midlands, Yorkshire, Eastern, South West
- ‘Small’ (6,000-9,000): East Midlands, Wales, North East

The smallest regional force would be smaller than the West Midlands Police and Greater Manchester Police currently. If geography and regional ‘cohesion’ are judged the more important factors, there should be consideration of whether the 10 region structure is suitable. This is particularly relevant for the South East Region, which covers a large area and population with poor regional connectivity or common identity.

The South East Region covers the following forces:

	Hampshire and Isle of Wight	Kent	Surrey	Sussex	Thames Valley	South East Region
Population	2.0m	1.8m	1.2m	1.7m	2.3m	9.0m
Area (sq miles)	1,600	900	642	1,460	2,200	6,802
Budget 2025-6 (£m)	489.8	456.6	326.2	419	622.4	2314
Precept Band D 2025-6	£275	£270	£337	£266	£283	
% total budget from precept 2025-6	40.7	40	54.3	41.9	44.5	43.6
Police officers	3,364	4,167	2,344	3,230	4,993	18,098
Police staff	2,199	2,146	1,699	2,244	3,613	11,901
PCSOs	167	83	91	254	242	837
Total paid workforce	5,729	6,395	4,134	5,728	8,848	30,834
Officers per 100k population	166	220	190	185	189	191

Workforce data 30 Sept 2025

- Kent has some joint working arrangements with Essex and does not participate in all SE regional units.
- There are collaboration units between Thames Valley and Hampshire³⁵, and between Surrey and Sussex.

The 2006 rationale that decided against a single regional force was:

- the large geography
- the disconnect and distances across the region
- three of the five forces were above the 4,000 officer minimum.

This time there is a stronger direction to merge into larger (and potentially regional) forces, while resources will in due course also be moved from forces into the NPS. Although Thames Valley has grown in terms of officer numbers since 2005, it might not be recommended as a stand alone force. Note that Thames Valley reorganised from Local Policing Areas (LPAs) to Local Command Units (LCUs), saving some £10million. Reinstating LPAs would presumably incur a cost similar (or greater than) those savings.

The Independent Review will invite submissions from forces on this. Their recommendations will also be informed by the position of surrounding forces.

The collaboration with Hampshire has shown savings and improvements in capability and resilience can be realised over a larger area, and is integral to Thames Valley's continued improvement plans. Amalgamating into a single regional force would bring numerous additional challenges and likely costs, however. The experience of Police Scotland and the Netherlands has shown it can be difficult and risky to public safety to merge control rooms and IT systems (or to do this at pace). The feasibility of deploying to and managing serious crime or firearms incidents would also require specialist officers to be retrained across the region - which limits the potential for rationalisation.

Although operating models vary and are not directly comparable, there are perhaps 20 police 'divisions' across the South East region currently. LPAs are being described as smaller units at the 'town, city or borough' level. If they are to be based around the former lower tier districts, there may need to be at least 50-60 LPAs in the regional force. Even then, they may not be considered 'local' by the communities they police.

Reorganising current operating models into standardised LPA and force models is likely to expose gaps in resourcing. Officers and staff will need to change locations and working arrangements. Estate, fleet and other support may not match the new requirement. There are likely to be gaps in skills and supervision/management. The command and

³⁵ Summary at Appendix IV

management of a large force over a large area during a period of major change will be challenging.

Governance of a South East regional force

A regional force would be governed by a policing board, which by 2028, would include:

- Kent: currently 1 Unitary + 1 Upper tier, 12 lower tier authorities (no decision yet on options to change to 1, 3, 4 or 5 unitaries)
- Sussex: 1 directly elected mayor
- Surrey: 2 unitaries
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight: 1 directly elected mayor
- Thames Valley: no decision yet on options to change to 1, 2 or 3 unitaries

The White Paper is not clear on board membership, but suggests it would comprise directly elected mayors of strategic authorities, leaders of unitary councils and upper or lower tier councils. There may also be independent members. Depending on the timing of force mergers and local government changes, a South East Policing Board could comprise between 15 and 32 members of the policing board on current structures, possibly changing to between 17 and 21 members by 2028.

The changing local government structures and consequent changes in board membership bring further uncertainty, particularly in relation to difficult budget decisions or managing issues arising from force restructures.

2.3.3 Alternatives to a regional force

Police force boundaries will need to align with those of local government, and any recommendations for force mergers will ultimately require approval from the Home Secretary and Parliament. While the independent review is expected to take local government reorganisation into account, there is currently little evidence of coordination between the Home Office, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Welsh Government. Local government reorganisation itself is being driven by agreements between local authorities, which have largely not considered policing arrangements. Compounding this, the restructuring is operating on a different timetable, and the future shape of local government across much of England remains uncertain. This creates a risk that the assumptions underpinning force merger recommendations could shift after the independent review has concluded.

Strong existing links with Hampshire present a credible case for a merger between neighbouring forces as an alternative to forming a single large regional force. However, Hampshire may ultimately be judged too small to stand alone, making a merger with a larger force such as Thames Valley a more likely outcome. While cross-regional mergers are generally considered unlikely, they are not impossible and would require compelling strategic justification. Given the relatively small size of some forces, any proposed mergers would likely need to form part of a wider combination to achieve a scale acceptable to the review. For example, the alignment of Milton Keynes with Bedfordshire could point toward a merger with Bedfordshire Police, though this would probably need to extend to include Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire to create a viable structure. Such an arrangement may prove more attractive to those forces than being absorbed into a single Eastern region force, although much will depend on the final decisions taken for that region.

Elsewhere, Gloucestershire has yet to propose a strategic authority but is likely to align either with the South West or the West Midlands, with policing merger options expected to follow that direction. Warwickshire is in a similar position and may seek an alternative to integration with the West Midlands, though the timing of this decision may come too late to influence the review's recommendations. A potential combination with Thames Valley could be considered, depending on how the West Midlands configuration develops, but this would require strong justification to offset the disruption to existing partnerships.

In the South West, Swindon's alignment with Thames Valley could support a merger with Wiltshire, particularly given that Swindon accounts for around a quarter of Wiltshire's current policing resources. However, the remainder of Wiltshire is expected to align with a Wessex authority, raising the strong possibility that Wiltshire Police could be split, with Swindon joining the South East and the rest of the county aligning with the South West.

A merger with Hampshire, rather than just continued collaboration?

The existing relationship with Hampshire would secure a combined force size of over 8,300 officers covering a population of 4.4 million.

A merger of Surrey, Sussex and Kent would create a force of over 9,700 officers covering a population of 4.7 million. This 'two force' option for the South East region may present a less disruptive and risky option that satisfies the expectation of a 'radical' reduction in the number of forces.

Precept levels in the two forces are fairly close (Hampshire's is 2.8% lower). The precept requirement for a merged force would depend on the financial position at the time, and further understanding of the tax base. However, equalisation is unlikely to involve bridging a wide difference. The bigger challenge is likely to involve past decisions in each force around investment choices, capital spending, and savings plans, which could either help ease budget gaps in coming years - or add to the challenges.

Hampshire's workforce profile was more civilianised before 2010. While the Uplift has seen officer numbers grow, the total workforce is still 12% below the 2010 level and Hampshire has significantly fewer officers per capita. This has affected performance, including difficulties in call handling and response. HMICFRS have reported that 'key operational areas of the constabulary, including response, neighbourhood and investigative policing, have at times been severely stretched'.³⁶

Collaboration working has already delivered efficiency savings and improvements and forms a key part of both forces' plans for the medium term future. Regionalisation could disrupt these plans. A full merger between the two forces could allow more opportunities to be progressed - although given the maturity of the relationship, there is a question as to what further opportunities there are.

Hampshire officers receive a lower cost of living allowance than Thames Valley officers. Harmonisation would potentially lead to a significant increase in the pay budget.

³⁶ [Hampshire and Isle of Wight PEEL Assessment 2023–2025 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

Surrounding forces

	Northamptonshire EAST MIDLANDS	Warwickshire WEST MIDLANDS	Bedfordshire EASTERN	Hertfordshire EASTERN	Metropolitan LONDON	Gloucestershire SOUTH WEST	Wiltshire SOUTH WEST	Thames Valley SOUTH EAST
Population	0.8m	0.6m	0.55m	1.18m	9.08m	0.64m	0.72m	2.34
Area sq miles	910	760	480	635	620	1,025	1,350	2,200
Budget 2025-6 £m	192.3	147.7	166.9	298.6	3771.9	167.4	171	622.4
Precept Band D 2025-6	320	303	279	265	490	322	269	283
% from precept 2025-6	43.4	46.2	39.4	41.8	26.9	46.9	45.6	44.5
Police officers	1,463	1,131	1,454	2,380	32,332	1,349	1,215	4,993
Police staff	1,088	838	1,151	1,468	11,761	861	1,038	3,613
PCSOs	77	81	45	136	1,440	72	72	242
Total paid workforce	2,628	2,050	2,650	3,984	45,533	2,282	2,325	8,848
Officers per 100k population	180	179	194	193	356	202	158	189

Workforce data 30 Sept 2025

Forces that might be considered for mergers outside their region could include:

- Warwickshire - the collaboration with West Mercia did not last, and mergers within the West Midlands region may not appeal. However, their integration into the West Midlands region is well developed. Warwickshire council has yet to propose a strategic authority - which means there is no argument based on local government change to support a merger outside the West Midlands region.
- Gloucestershire - the councils have yet to propose a strategic authority. Their most obvious options are mergers into the South West region, or possibly with Herefordshire and Worcestershire (who are also yet to agree a strategic authority). Without a strong argument or clear indication from local government

reorganisation, it is unlikely that recommendations would be made for a merger with Thames Valley

- Wiltshire - merger options in the South West present little choice other than a single regional force. Swindon aims to join the Thames Valley strategic authority, while Wiltshire (County) aims to be part of the Wessex strategic authority with Somerset and Dorset. The most likely scenario is that Wiltshire is merged into the South West and Swindon is transferred to the force that assumes responsibility for Thames Valley
- Collaboration between Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire was well developed, but there may be some questions about continued value. A merger of those forces is likely, but may be judged too small, while a single force across the Eastern region may be considered too big.
 - With a new strategic authority for Milton Keynes and Bedfordshire, and no option yet developed for Buckinghamshire, there are potential options to
 - Create a Buckinghamshire/Bedfordshire/Cambridgeshire/Hertfordshire force.
 - Merge those three forces with Thames Valley (and potentially also Hampshire)
 - Any of these would need strong support during the review submission phase to be taken forward.
 - It would, however, avoid disruption arising from the boundary changes that would otherwise be required
 - A merger of four or five forces would add to the complexity of change and create different challenges around geography
- Northamptonshire would most likely be included in an East Midlands or Eastern region combination.
- The Metropolitan Police is highly unlikely to merge with any other force, other than possibly the City of London Police.

Regional boundaries for other agencies in the TVP force area

The review will consider existing boundaries of other agencies. There are no strong arguments to support mergers outside of the South East region.

- Crown Prosecution Service (CPS): Thames and Chiltern Area covers Thames Valley and Hertfordshire
- Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB): Thames Valley
- South Central Ambulance Service: Thames Valley and Hampshire
- Fire and Rescue: Berkshire; Buckinghamshire; Oxfordshire.

Central Grant and Precept considerations

The government intends to review the police funding formula (also known as the Police Allocation Formula, or PAF) for the grant to forces. No date has been set for this, and there

is no indication on how it might change. The formation of the NPS and its promised investment in additional capability will mean that more of the policing grant will be retained centrally (a larger 'top-slice'). We can anticipate that proportionately less funding will be available for local forces.

It is not known how funding for the NPS will be determined. Both the National Crime Agency and College of Policing have reported budget challenges. There is a risk that if the NPS is not scoped or resourced adequately, work will fall back to forces and/or a larger top slice will be needed. Forces will at some point lose most/all the current funding for national functions, which will have a wider effect on financial planning.

The formula allocation for a merged force may not be the same as the sum of original force allocations. The 'averaged' profiles that inform the calculation will change, as might the need for damping (floor and ceiling). Other central grant funding may cease or be diverted to the NPS.

The precept calculation is fairly straightforward in principle. However, the resulting precept charge would present much the same equalisation complaints of unfairness as with Lancashire/Cumbria and Dorset/Devon & Cornwall.

A major challenge for forces from now on is how to plan ahead with so many unknowns, and when there are already budget gaps.

Summary of scenarios

- Thames Valley has a strong argument to stand alone, but this may not be accepted
 - Home Secretary expects a radical restructure
 - TVP has grown since 2005, but will also become smaller after national functions are transferred into NPS
 - Areas of the current force may be transferred to other forces, although a new area may be acquired
 - This could be a 'less worse' alternative to a single regional force
- South East regional force remains a strong possibility, but there are arguments that this may not be effective or efficient
 - Geographical challenges of the region, long distances, disconnect
 - Would be very large force, complexity of merging
 - Disruptive to current financial plans
- Merger with Hampshire could be favoured due to established links
- Merged/Regional force priorities may be outside the Thames Valley area
- No business case for regionalisation - Unclear what extra capacity and capability would be gained through a regional force that is not already available through collaboration

The White Paper calls for larger, regional forces, but there is no supporting rationale to suggest what a minimum or optimum force size should be, or how savings would be realised. The costs of restructure would likely fall to forces and require the new forces to develop new efficiency plans. Thames Valley has addressed the Level 2 'gap' issues raised in 2006 through collaboration working. If there are gaps that remain, they are either at the national level, or in overall funding.

A single South East regional force is a challenging prospect. The large size and geography are likely to present considerable operational difficulties and risk before any savings or improvements could be realised.

For local residents, the concerns are about the disruption, risk and suitability of standardised models under a new force structure. Forces in the region are already facing financial and operational challenges, which are likely to require resources being 'rebalanced' to address performance priorities. That may lead to higher cost for less service.

The intended benefits for Thames Valley residents relate to improved national capabilities, improved local resilience (financial and operational) and clearer, common standards (which may not represent an improvement against current service in Thames Valley). However, many of these matters have already been addressed by the force, while the potential benefits have not been calculated or assessed against the costs of change.

2.4 Assessment of restructuring forces

Any assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of a merger must consider the intended aims and rationale for creating larger forces.

The Home Secretary's argument is that:

- Fewer forces bring less duplication of functions and lower management cost overheads
- Larger forces are more cost efficient because they can generate greater economy of scale
- Larger forces have greater capacity to provide more specialist capabilities, so are able to address a broader range of threats and risks
- Larger forces are more resilient, both financially and operationally
- Fewer forces will allow for more standardisation, thus providing higher quality services overall

However, the evidence from elsewhere shows that police force restructures are:

- More difficult than anticipated
- Take longer to complete than anticipated
- Cost more than anticipated
- Save less than anticipated
- Damage relationships with communities
- Create the perception that policing is more distant and less responsive
- Are not received well by the workforce

Particular concerns:

- Limited mechanism for local communities to influence local priorities and policing
- Standardised operating model may not work for all communities
- LPA model may require restructure within TVP, and risks reversing current efficiency plan
- Protecting flexibility and responsiveness of local policing
- Imposition of national priorities to the detriment of local needs
- Limited time to assess costs, benefits, and to plan for change
- Policing becomes more remote

The White Paper seeks to mitigate these risks through Local and Neighbourhood Policing. In Scotland, local plans and local scrutiny panels were introduced to provide local influence and accountability. The independent review has been asked to make recommendations around local community representation at the LPA level.

The imposition of standardised operating models in Scotland proved highly disruptive and was associated with critical failures during the earlier phases. An operating model designed for densely populated urban areas did not work well in rural and mixed urban-rural areas, and similar issues are likely to arise in England and Wales.

Alongside this, Thames Valley introduced a new operating model in 2025, which has secured efficiency savings of £11 million so far, and will support further savings over the next two years. That model may have to change, bringing additional costs.

Neighbourhood policing is rooted in the concept of local police and local communities working together to solve local problems, whatever they may be, including contributing to tackling regional, national and sometimes international threats and problems. The eyes, ears, and support of local community members are key to effective policing in many ways. Operational policing challenges and needs vary from community to community. Standardised models designed around national priorities will inevitably lead to resources being prioritised into those activities that are subject to most scrutiny.

Despite the investment in neighbourhood policing, there is a risk that resources will be focused on meeting national priorities. Other functions will also be affected. Call handling, response, the work arising from attending an incident, and the capacity to problem solve are interconnected. We know that failing to answer 101 calls promptly leads to an increase in 999 calls. Failing to respond to lower grade incidents promptly can lead to more calls and more incidents. Failing to deal with incidents thoroughly and promptly can lead to more problems and more serious problems.

Force mergers will be further complicated by the creation of the NPS, which in due course will absorb ROCUs and CTP resources, as well as others. Work that the NPS cannot take on will fall back on forces. As those resource transfers are introduced, the 'residual' forces, although nominally larger, will become proportionately smaller. This was the experience of the Metropolitan Police (and could therefore be the experience of a future Thames Valley Police), where BCU resources were nominally increased, but they acquired more responsibilities and were given more work - meaning their capacity was reduced.³⁷

A study of police force reorganisations concluded:

'It is clear that there is not compelling and unambiguous evidence of any simple cause and effect relationships between increasing force size and specific outcomes: whether these relate to greater efficiency, local policing, the provision of protective services, or police governance.' There were few formal evaluations, and no evidence that any single force structure was most efficient or effective. The study did find strong evidence that police restructures bring particular risks relating to the loss of skills and competence, disruption to

³⁷ Discussed below. [BARONESS CASEY REVIEW Final Report](#)

*employer-employee relationships; and underestimating costs - with problems exacerbated by inadequate planning and management.*³⁸

The 2006 mergers failed in the face of cross-party and local opposition, as well as the lack of central government funding to cover costs. There is an expectation now that these changes should not add cost to the policing budget. The merger recommendations will not be known until late August 2026. There will be little time, if any, to assess the potential cost of the recommendations and how savings will be realised. There is a risk that some mergers may not 'work' (a belated lesson from local government reorganisation in 1974, which is still being worked through).

Local identity appears important to the public, in terms of a local police presence that they recognise as their local service. The prospect of their police being based further away or controlled from a more distant headquarters is a difficult proposition, even if it is argued that it provides additional capability or resilience.

³⁸ [Full article: Does police size matter? A review of the evidence regarding restructuring police organisations](#)

2.5 The White Paper argument for fewer forces

The Case for Fewer Police Forces White Paper, paras 143-148	Observations
<p>The current structure is highly inefficient, with each of the 43 forces having its own headquarters, management teams, operational and business support functions and many specialist capabilities. These costs are particularly high in smaller forces, some of whom are struggling to maintain financial resilience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No indication that larger forces have lower overheads ● Alliance and Collaboration arrangements have helped achieve efficiencies ● Some smaller forces are struggling financially - Lincolnshire and Gloucestershire, for example. However, some larger ones are also reporting financial difficulties, eg Metropolitan Police, West Midlands. ● The impact of those financial pressures in larger forces appears to be felt most in their local policing and public protection ● Funding for policing in England & Wales remains below 2010 levels in real terms ● Rationalising command, management and support across merged forces could potentially achieve savings in due course, but savings may only be marginal as larger forces will require appropriately sized command, management and support functions
<p>It is ineffective to disperse specialist policing functions across a large number of police forces. The evidence suggests that concentrating functions such as cybercrime, firearms, major crime and roads policing in fewer 'centres of excellence' will improve learning and development by bringing together expertise and will enable better targeting of resource, with specialist units being deployed across a wider area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Forces have progressed much of this already through collaboration and alliance agreements ● Roads Policing collaborations have largely failed due to poor value ● 'Clustering' specialisms may allow for improvements in expertise and resilience, but operational practicalities are likely to require specialist resources to be spread across the geography of larger forces

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Could be progressed further without full mergers
<p>The current model results in wide variation in service quality, with victims' experiences and investigative outcomes differing markedly depending on geographic location. Fewer forces will enable higher-quality investigations and more consistent support for victims, helping to bring offenders to justice and rebuild public trust.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The evidence for these claims is not set out in the White Paper ● Reducing the number of forces may not address variations standards and quality ● Could be progressed without merging forces
<p>Larger forces are better equipped to respond to major incidents and mass-deployment events. Currently, smaller forces routinely struggle to handle major crime investigations or respond to critical incidents, often relying on mutual aid from others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Smaller forces may lack a particular expertise/experience and are not resourced to deal with exceptional or protracted incidents (eg Wiltshire Novichok attack) ● However, similar arguments can apply to larger forces too (eg MPS and protests), while best practice has often emerged from smaller forces ● Forces have improved interoperability ● Mutual aid and special grant are the means through which policing meets these exceptional demands now, and it is likely to continue despite mergers
<p>It is harder to achieve national coordination and collaboration in a system with 86 decision-makers (Chief Constables and PCCs).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NPCC has majority voting ● PCCs are being replaced by boards ● How will this change if there are fewer chief constables and force boards?
<p>Moving to a system of fewer police forces will therefore improve policing for the public by:</p>	
<p>Saving money through reduced duplication and management costs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There is no estimate of how much the Home Office expects restructure will save compared to how much it will cost
<p>Providing a more effective service in areas such as major crime, roads policing and firearms, helping to ensure more</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National standards are already in place - and applied rigorously in

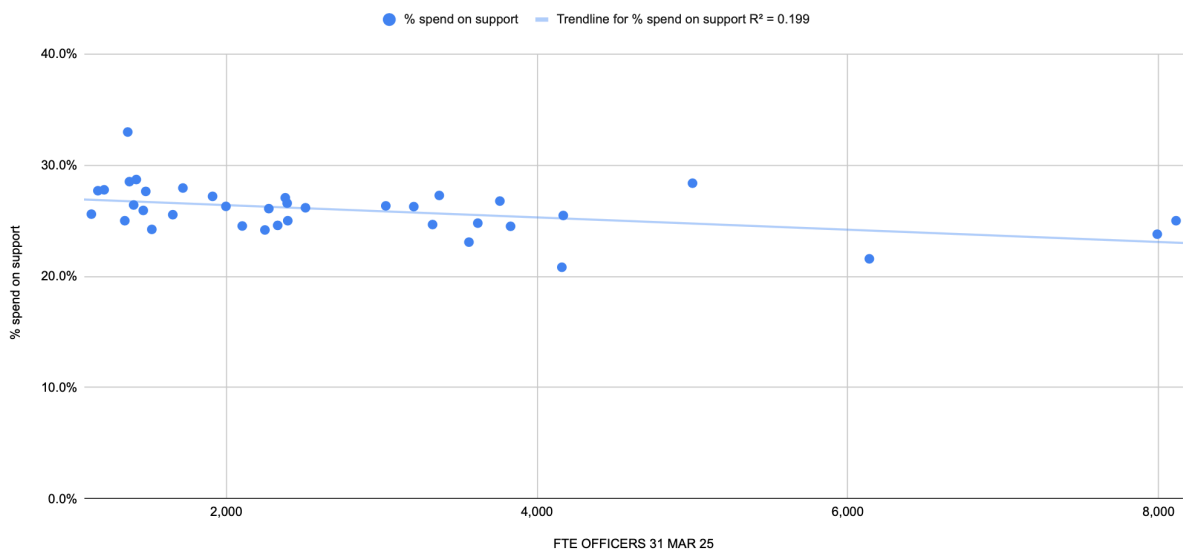
<p>consistency in the service the public receive from the police</p>	<p>matters such as firearms and major crime</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No evidence provided of what these variations are ● Forces/PCCs do make choices about operating models and priorities - however these are presumably informed by local needs and circumstances ● Note that the White Paper is silent on areas such as police dogs and horses
<p>Equipping local policing with a greater ability to surge resource and respond to major events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● This is available already
<p>Making it easier to coordinate and collaborate across forces nationally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaboration is already a legal requirement ● Collaborations have failed where the business cases are poor, not every collaboration achieves better value ● Force responses can be coordinated already ● Could be progressed without mergers

2.6 Efficiency and Effectiveness

Forces have been making efficiency savings for many years. As budgets have become tighter, forces have drawn down reserves and increased the precept while also making cash savings and investments to improve - often through collaboration. In 2018, the Public Accounts Committee examined the financial sustainability of police forces in England and Wales. They found that total police force funding had fallen by over £2 billion compared to 2010 to 2011.³⁹ Since then, the Home Office has funded forces to increase officer numbers, while at the same time failing to provide adequate funding for other budget requirements.⁴⁰

The latest HMICFRS Value for Money tables show the percentage of force resources employed in support functions. There are numerous reasons that influence the data, such as a force's operating model, temporary/transitional factors, and the way the data is gathered. There is a slight indication that larger forces may spend proportionally less on support functions, but there are exceptions. The smallest force (Warwickshire) spends 25.6% on support, while the largest (MPS) spends 28.5%. The lowest level is in Merseyside (4160 officers) at 20.8%. (Thames Valley = 28.4%).⁴¹

% spend on support vs. FTE OFFICERS 31 MAR 25



In October 2025, the National Audit Office reviewed police productivity⁴². It found that the Home Office's previous attempts to improve efficiency and productivity had not led to sustainable long-term change. The NAO found forces in 2024-25 reduced reserves by £276 million while borrowing £632 million, running high levels of staff vacancies, using more officers in civilian roles and 'reprioritising' services.

³⁹ [Financial sustainability of police forces in England and Wales inquiry - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

⁴⁰ [Proposed Thames Valley Police funding 'terrible' for force - PCC - BBC News](#)

⁴¹ [Value for money profiles - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

⁴² [Police productivity](#)

The NAO found the Home Office:

- lacked a national view of the impact of funding pressures
- distributes core funding using the outdated police allocation formula
- While seeking to improve, it is working from a low base and has gaps in its data and understanding.
- has not yet established consistent data on police costs and has limited understanding of why some forces are under greater financial stress.

The NAO considered that fully funding the government's policing commitments while managing existing pressures will require police forces to make significant savings. At the same time, demands on policing have increased and wider criminal justice reforms are predicted to further increase demand. The Home Office and policing do not have a shared understanding of the resource implications of changing demands.

- Limited evidence as to the effectiveness of Home Office initiatives to achieve efficiency improvements.
 - The 2015 transformation programme cost £373m, but by 2019-20 had only led to savings of £112 million.
 - The Home Office reported it had achieved efficiency savings of £220 million between 2020-21 and 2024-25 but could only provide details to support £25 million in 2020-21 and did not know whether these had been sustained.
- There is a savings target of up to £354 million by 2028-29 through the Police Efficiency and Collaboration Programme. As at September 2025, the Home Office had not yet decided how to do this. Over half of the savings are assessed as 'high' or 'medium' risk and funding to deliver the savings had not been identified
- Previous efforts to improve productivity have not been sustained.

The Home Office also has a poor track record of delivering major change programmes, while the Home Secretary has accepted the department is 'not yet fit for purpose', after an internal report found it 'dysfunctional', with 'chronic problems' around data and IT.⁴³

2.7 Thames Valley's current performance

There are continued financial pressures and considerable uncertainties for Thames Valley Police over the medium term. The funding settlement for 2026/27 was £9 million lower than expected, while the Home Office has indicated that they will not provide additional funding for pay awards. Funding for the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee is unknown. While the establishment grew by 68 for neighbourhood policing, there are 78 net staff vacancies. There is little clarity on funding from 2027/28 onwards.⁴⁴

⁴³ [Shabana Mahmood says Home Office 'not yet fit for purpose' - BBC News](#)

⁴⁴ <https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/PAM-Agenda-and-Papers-22.01.26.pdf>

The force achieved savings of £15 million during 2025/26, and is committed to further savings of £15 million over the next four years, while allocating £8 million of reserves for digital and process improvements. Borrowing is expected to reach £80 million by 2028/29, growing to £150 million over the longer term. There is a risk that the revenue impact is not affordable in the long term.

Further risks arise from changes to the demands on policing, such as monitoring of offenders in the community, or new service standards and priorities.

This comes on top of making £34 million of savings over the previous four years.

Savings Delivered	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 forecast	Total
Planned (cashable) £m	3.5	2.2	4.2	7.5	15.4	32.8
Achieved £m	3.1	2.2	5.2	8.1	15.7	34.2
% of savings achieved	87%	98%	124%	108%	102%	104%

The financial pressures are unlikely to be eased as a result of restructuring, however. Thames Valley may be merged with forces that have greater financial challenges or that have adopted other approaches and strategies to make savings - which may not be compatible with the new structure.

With no overall budget growth, forces will have to absorb the costs of the programme. Some of these may be considerable, for example if the current operating model is judged to be non-compliant, or where the formation of the NPS leaves gaps in capacity and capability that forces will have to fill.

The argument in favour of restructure is that larger forces and the NPS will provide greater operational and financial resilience. However, there is an absence of business plans and estimates of the costs involved in restructuring to support this. There is a high risk that forces may not be able to afford to operate effectively within the new model. Without additional central funding, the funding gap can only be met through precept increases for local residents.

The White Paper states that service standards and performance in forces are too variable and not good enough. There will be a requirement for forces to answer 90% of 999 calls within 10 seconds, and attend 90% of 'serious' incidents within 15 minutes (urban) and 20 minutes (rural).

Currently, Thames Valley Police:

- Answers 95% of 999 calls within 10 seconds
- Answers 101 calls within 2 minutes on average
- Attends 69% of Grade 1 incidents in under 20mins
- Attends 92% home burglaries (another government requirement)

The most recent HMICFRS PEEL inspections expressed broad satisfaction with the force's performance, acknowledging progress but also setting out a number of areas for improvement. The force received 1 Good grade, 2 Adequates, 4 'Requires Improvement', and 1 Inadequate.

- Inadequate - Protecting Vulnerable People: concerns mainly relate to staffing levels, workloads and backlogs

The force has also addressed all the causes for concern and recommendations made by HMICFRS in the most recent inspections, with 7 areas for improvement still open. Issues regarding staffing levels and workloads depend mainly on overall resource and skill levels.

The force is already exceeding the call answering standard, but not meeting the response time standard. Setting a national performance target for incident response will present operational and resource challenges. Further study of this will be needed, but potentially the force will need to consider:

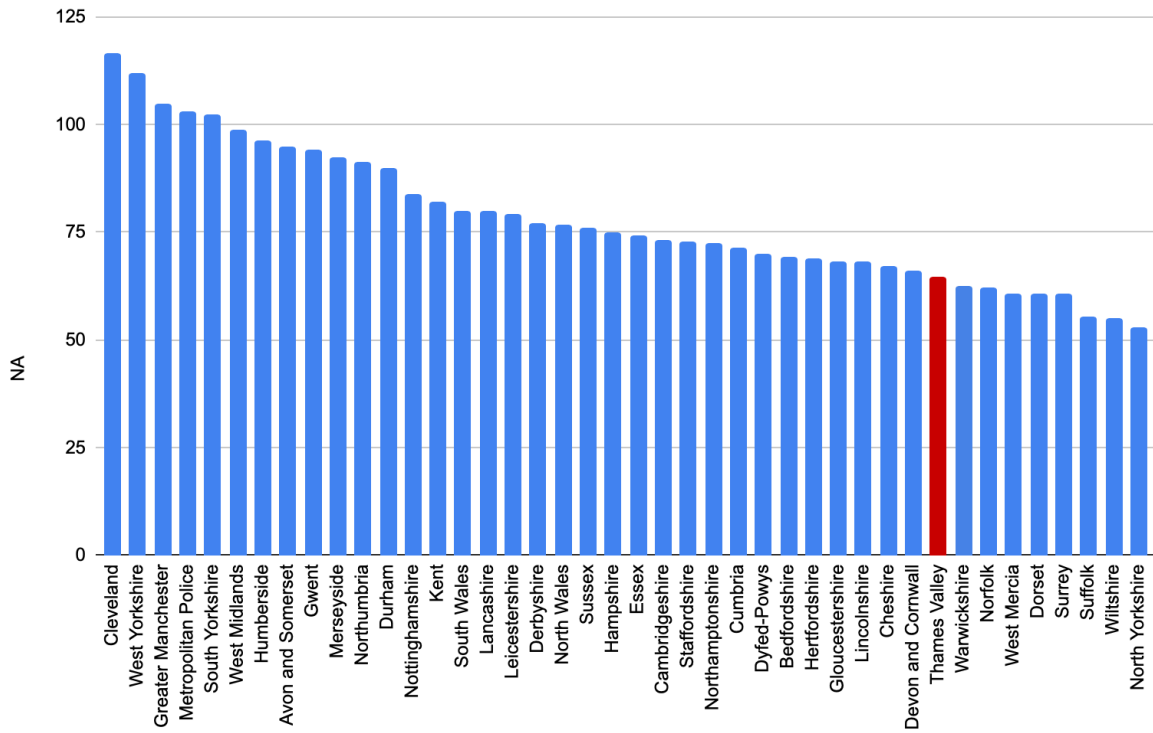
- Faster response time for 'urban' incidents (the White Paper does not define rural/urban)
- Additional resources in response
- Changes to shift patterns or operating bases
- Crewing policy
- Incident grading policy (urban/rural, regrading)
- performance analysis capability

These again are issues relating mainly to resources, rather than police force structures. Response times can be improved by moving resources, but this will likely cause difficulties in other areas of policing. With neighbourhood resources ring-fenced, forces (whatever their size) have limited options.

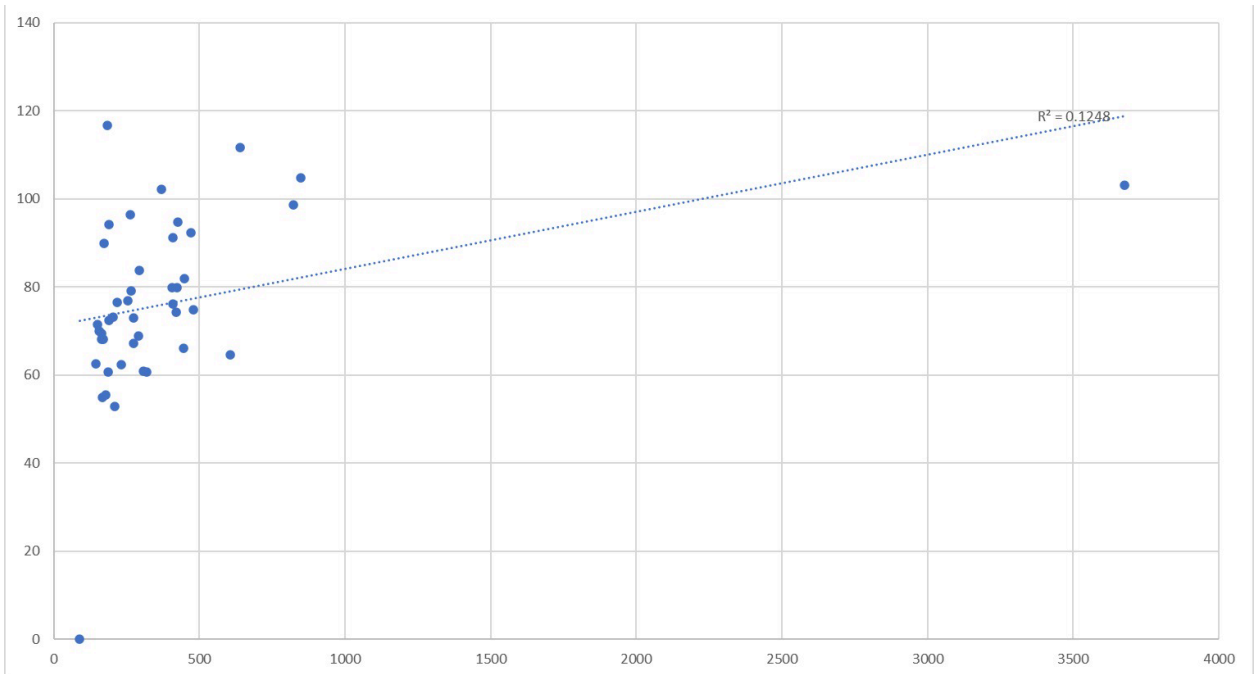
Crime levels in Thames Valley are below the national average (64.6 compared to 85.3 crimes per 1000 residents)⁴⁵. Across the region, crime is lower in Surrey, but higher in Hampshire, Sussex and Kent. This might suggest that a regional force's priorities would be outside the Thames Valley area.

⁴⁵ [Dataset Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables](#)

Total recorded crime per 1,000 residents



Real terms funding to crime rate



Total recorded crime, excluding fraud, per 1,000 population (year ending Sept 2025), compared to force funding 2025-26 (£m).^{46 47}

There is little correlation between force budgets (which effectively determine the force size) and levels of crime. Crime is higher in more urban areas, which are typically policed by larger forces.

A 2023 survey⁴⁸ conducted for Thames Valley showed 72% of residents trusted the force, while 62% thought the force was doing an 'excellent or good job'. Levels of trust were considerably higher in Thames Valley than nationally.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ [Dataset Crime in England and Wales: Police Force Area data tables](#)

⁴⁷ [Police funding for England and Wales 2015 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

⁴⁸

https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/TVP-Trust-and-Confidence-Survey_Overall-weighted-Mar25.pdf

⁴⁹

https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/TVP-Trust-and-Confidence-Survey_Overall-weighted-Mar25.pdf

2.8 Is bigger better?

Summary:

- No correlation between size and performance
- Bigger forces, including the current regional force (MPS) do not perform better and also have budget gaps and challenges in providing specialist services
- Savings achieved in Scotland have been achieved through reduced headcount and closure of stations, damaging public confidence
- Ongoing financial challenges for forces, no budget growth within this restructure
- Main challenges remains financial rather than structural

Those arguing for larger forces will point to inadequacies and gaps in specialist capabilities. Smaller forces may be performing ‘well’, but gaps in capability mean they may not be truly efficient or effective. Police Scotland has addressed capability and resilience gaps, but while there has been reduced duplication from the former structure, the majority of the cash savings realised has come from estate disposal and headcount reduction. Over 100 stations have been closed and the force has 1,000 officers fewer than when formed.

Whether their reform can be considered an improvement in efficiency and effectiveness depends on subjective judgement of what is most important. There is often an assumption across government that larger units are more efficient and effective. However, judged against the HMICFRS inspection gradings, there is no strong correlation between size and performance. The four ‘worst’ performing forces in England and Wales include the two largest (MPS, WMP) and one of the smallest (Lincolnshire). The six ‘best’ performing forces each have under 4,000 officers, and include two of the smallest forces.

Force	Officer strength FTE March 2025	Combined PEEL ‘score’ 2023-25 Programme	Outstanding grades	Inadequate grades
Humberside	2,273	33	3	
Cheshire	2,395	32	2	
Cumbria	1,365	32	1	
Lancashire	3,561	29	1	
North Yorkshire	1,655	28		
Durham	1,376	27		
Kent	4,168	27		
City of London	992	26		
Cleveland	1,520	26		
Leicestershire	2,248	26		
Greater Manchester	8,112	25		

Merseyside	4,159	25		
Northumbria	3,829	25		
South Wales	3,511	25		
Essex	3,760	24		
Surrey	2,330	24		
Sussex	3,206	24		
Bedfordshire	1,481	23		
Cambridgeshire	1,720	23	1	2
Northamptonshire	1,465	23		
South Yorkshire	3,026	23		
West Yorkshire	6,138	23		
Dorset	1,420	22		
Dyfed-Powys	1,291	22		
Norfolk	1,911	22		
Suffolk	1,403	22		1
Wiltshire	1,213	22		
Avon and Somerset	3,327	21		
Gwent	1,549	21		
Hertfordshire	2,379	21		
North Wales	1,736	20		
Warwickshire	1,131	20		1
West Mercia	2,509	20		
Derbyshire	2,102	19		
Gloucestershire	1,346	19		1
Thames Valley	5,000	19		1
Staffordshire	1,997	18		
Nottinghamshire	2,391	17		3
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	3,370	16		
West Midlands	7,991	15		3
Metropolitan	33,293	15		2
Devon and Cornwall	3,618	14		2
Lincolnshire	1,173	12		4

The combined score: outstanding = 5, Inadequate = 1

Crime recording grade excluded as 20 forces are yet to be inspected.

The Metropolitan Police is judged inadequate at investigating crime and managing suspects), while West Midlands Police is judged inadequate at investigating crime, protecting vulnerable people, and managing offenders. These are areas where the rationale would expect larger forces to be better. The largest force with an 'outstanding' grade is Lancashire. None of the large metropolitan forces received an outstanding grade.

There are many reasons why forces receive poor gradings, and there are other ways of assessing performance or defining efficiency and effectiveness. Underlying socio-demographic factors are arguably the most reliable indicators of demand, need and difficulty, while expectations vary between communities creating pressures that may not be comparable or visible other than through confidence and satisfaction measures.

Leadership, and the legacy of past policy decisions are very relevant too, while resources are always raised as a factor. Some forces have been struggling to overcome long-standing funding difficulties - but these challenges are affecting both the smallest and the largest forces. There is a risk that combining forces with significant structural difficulties with forces that are in a (somewhat) better position may simply spread the problems to the merged force, as has been the experience with local authorities in financial difficulties⁵⁰. HMICFRS has made the following comments:

"Lincolnshire Police has a growing gap between income and expenditure, and the deficit is expected to grow. The resource gap puts pressure on the force's ability to effectively manage its demand and provide a level of service which the public would expect."⁵¹

Metropolitan Police: significant challenges, made even more challenging due to the size and scale of the changes. "Given the size and scale of the changes being carried out, the transformation of the force is still very much a work in progress."⁵²

West Midlands: serious concerns about investigation, protecting vulnerable people and managing offenders and suspects. Improvements are needed, but 'acute environmental factors' also influence its ability to meet demand. Between 2010 and 2023, the total officers in the force reduced from 8,660 to 7,950, despite the Police Uplift Programme. Funding reduced by 13% per capita between 2014 and 2020. West Midlands Police needs to have enough resources to prevent crime and protect the public effectively."⁵³

PCCs from across the political spectrum have been highlighting current and expected financial challenges. Roger Hirst, the PCC for Essex and the APCC Lead on Funding Formula, CSR and Grants, has stated: 'Police budgets have been under strain for an uncomfortably

⁵⁰ [More local authority financial failure is likely without further funding | Institute for Government](#)

⁵¹ [Lincolnshire PEEL Assessment 2023–2025 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

⁵² [Metropolitan PEEL Assessment 2023–2025 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

⁵³ [West Midlands PEEL Assessment 2023–2025 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

long time now, even as demands on policing are growing. It has left police – and fire, in my case – and crime commissioners and deputy mayors facing difficult and often deeply unpalatable decisions.’⁵⁴

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) considers that raising precepts is ‘not a solution to the breakdown’ of the PAF. They find that funding levels have fallen faster in more-deprived and more-dense areas, and moved further away from assessed spending needs.⁵⁵

All of this suggests that funding will be ‘rebalanced’ as a result of the restructure, which is likely to see resources being moved to areas of higher priority (which may not be in Thames Valley) alongside continued pressure for precept increases to meet the costs of the restructure and new budget gaps.

2.9 England’s regional force: Restructuring the Metropolitan Police Service

Summary:

Merger of 32 divisions into 12 BCUs (2019)

- Significant budget challenges, force has closed over 120 stations and reduced headcount
- New functional model based on merging divisions to deliver most local services
- Similarities with outline of LPAs/forces in the White Paper
- Savings achieved (through cutting numbers and closing stations)
- Similar impact as in Scotland
 - Stretched frontline, reduced supervision
 - Weaker relationships with communities and partners
 - Neighbourhood resources abstracted, poorer service
 - Worse impact on deprived/disadvantaged areas and communities
 - Force placed in HMICFRS ‘Engage’ with inadequate grades in several areas
 - Unpopular with workforce
 - Specialist functions relatively protected

The MPS is by far the largest force in the UK, and will remain so even if it loses resources and responsibilities to the NPS. London is a region itself, with the only potential merger being with the City of London.

The MPS has had to make large financial savings for over a decade, during which time it has closed around 120 stations and cut back significantly on support staff. A major element of the cost saving process was the introduction of a new operating model in 2019. This merged 32 borough commands into 12 BCUs, to deliver the majority of local policing services in London. The restructure was developed under the then Commissioner, Bernard

⁵⁴ [APCC Joint Finance Lead: We need fair funding for policing](#)

⁵⁵ <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/does-funding-follow-need-analysis-geographic-distribution-publicQ-spending-england>

Hogan-Howe, and implemented by his successor. It established a 'functional-based' local policing model, led by a strategic HQ function - similar to the model outlined in the White Paper.

HMICFRS inspections suggest that the restructure failed in its objectives and arguably produced worse outcomes. The force has been in HMICFRS 'Engage' since 2022, and is judged inadequate at investigating crime, protecting vulnerable people, and managing offenders. The force 'requires improvement' in five other strands, and is 'adequate' in the remaining strand. A new change programme has been introduced to address a number of critical failings.

In her review of standards and culture in the MPS, Baroness Casey was highly critical of the 2019 restructure. While the restructure had maintained numbers in local command units (BCUs), the number of people working in local policing fell significantly. This was because of cuts to police staff and extra work being passed to the BCUs. Spans of command and geographic responsibilities were increased, while local leaders felt 'disempowered'.⁵⁶

Baroness Casey found the restructure 'had resulted in a collection of dedicated but over-stretched and under-supported frontline teams, less visible to, and less connected with, Londoners'. Some of her findings included:

- Neighbourhood Policing teams have been 'decimated'. Response teams, CID and Public Protection are 'totally overstretched'.
- 'Striking' contrast between BCUs and specialist units, which were comparatively well-resourced, well-trained and well-supported, with good facilities, experienced officers and staff.
- An absence of basic management and supervision created cultures where poor practice is tolerated.
- Neighbourhood Policing teams were ring-fenced but are constantly abstracted
- Loss of neighbourhood policing resources, increased distance between police and communities
- Partnership working has become more difficult, including where there are shared statutory responsibilities such as safeguarding or community safety.
- Response times worse as a result of covering larger areas and closing sites
- Reduced local accountability, local Commanders have little influence over force level units.

The Met's model of delivering policing operations is 'centrally controlled, locally delivered'. Baroness Casey found this meant BCUs are required to deliver initiatives that do not appreciate local practicalities or local needs.

⁵⁶ [BARONESS CASEY REVIEW Final Report](#)

A London School of Economics study⁵⁷ of incident and resourcing data covering five years around the MPS restructure found that the effects have been ‘modest and uneven’. They concluded that ‘simply redrawing organisational boundaries without altering the underlying resource base, accountability structures, or service delivery mechanisms is unlikely to yield substantial improvements in policing outcomes’.

The MPS was able to achieve savings, but the judgement of whether it was an efficiency improvement depends on how ‘performance’ is defined and the weight attached to various policing outcomes. The study found ‘robust evidence’ of:

- Moderate but meaningful reductions in overall police demand, particularly for internal and routine tasks, and concentrated in more deprived communities. As such, the results may reflect a behavioural response by the public, rather than a decline in underlying incidents. Alternatively, it is possible that resource reallocation shifted priorities away from lower-severity or harder-to-investigate crimes.
- While overall perceptions of police may have improved, this was not the case in more disadvantaged areas. In those communities, public attitudes either remained unchanged or deteriorated modestly in response to the reform. The results echo earlier findings on police demand, where the observed reductions in calls were concentrated in more deprived areas.
- Taken together, these patterns point to a potential disengagement between disadvantaged communities and the police following the consolidation.
- While the reform may have improved internal efficiency or responsiveness in aggregate, it may also have contributed to a weakening of public trust in areas where that trust was already fragile.

These findings have similarities to the research on crime levels after the creation of Police Scotland, in that the effects were not felt evenly, with more deprived communities receiving less benefit or worse outcomes.

International perspectives

The policing governance structure that is being proposed in this White Paper appears unique internationally, and as such is an untested new model. Countries typically have:

- Separate forces with clear geographic or thematic responsibilities (eg England and Wales currently)
- A single national force (eg Scotland, Ireland)
- Multiple national forces that are responsible for defined geographies (eg France)
- Tiers of national, provincial/state and local forces that have clear and separate responsibilities (eg Germany, Spain)

⁵⁷ <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp2148.pdf>

- The above plus other law enforcement agencies with specific responsibilities (eg Italy, USA)

In these models, there are clear and distinct policing responsibilities and jurisdictions, with accompanying oversight and accountability structures. The proposed model here differs, in that forces will remain nominally 'independent', but will operate under the direction (and if necessary, the command) of the NPS and must follow a standard operating model with common policies and procedures set by the NPS. It might be described as a 'Franchise' model.

Under the 'franchise' model, it will not be clear who is responsible or accountable for how policing is provided locally, and who has the responsibility and capability for responding to an issue. Similar issues were experienced to a lesser extent when forces were subject to intervention under the performance regime of the 2000s.

There are further questions about how improvement can be developed and change approved if decision making is transferred to the national level and local flexibility to innovate is removed.

3. Policing Governance and Accountability

3.1 The main proposals

The following are the main proposals in the White Paper, which are argued as reducing the cost of corporate governance and bringing greater consistency “as Offices of Police and Crime Commissioners have grown based on PCC wishes”. Others would of course argue that OPCC vary in function and nature to reflect the democratic mandate of PCCs and the needs of communities.

The main proposals set out here are drawn from Chapter 3 “A new system of local police governance”, and numbered as in Appendix II of this CoPaCC Advisory report.

- Proposal 10. “Abolish Police and Crime Commissioners, transferring police governance in 2028 to Strategic Authority Mayors or local council leaders through Policing and Crime Boards. Over time, these Boards will then be adapted to provide the governance of future fewer larger forces”
- Proposal 11. “Require every Policing and Crime Board to appoint a Policing and Crime Lead”
- Proposal 12. “Improve the process of appointing, suspending and dismissing Chief Constables...”
- Proposal 13. “Engage with the Welsh Government and relevant partners to ensure [the Welsh policing governance approach] reflects Welsh national circumstances”
- Proposal 14. “Set out what functions Policing and Crime Boards and their supporting secretariats should have. This will reduce the cost of corporate governance and bring greater consistency as Offices of Police and Crime Commissioners have grown based on PCC wishes”

3.2 Background

Police and Crime Commissioner role and responsibilities

PCCs were established under the 2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act. The core functions of PCCs are:

- appoint the chief constable (and remove them, if necessary)
- set the budget
- set local policing priorities.

PCCs have to swear an oath of impartiality when they are elected. The Policing Protocol sets out the operational independence of chief constables.

Under the terms of the 2011 Act, PCCs must:

- secure an efficient and effective police for their area
- appoint the Chief Constable, hold them to account, and if necessary dismiss them
- set the police and crime objectives for their area through a police and crime plan
- set the force budget and determine the precept
- contribute to the Strategic Policing Requirement set out by the Home Secretary
- bring together community safety and criminal justice partners

The PCC remit was later expanded to include responsibility for commissioning the majority of victims' services, and specific responsibilities in relation to complaints and misconduct.

PCCs are held to account through elections, and scrutinised by Police and Crime Panels (PCPs), also to be abolished. In England, PCPs are made up of a minimum of 10 representatives from the local authorities in the force area. With some limitations, the PCC must gain PCP approval for the budget and the appointment of a chief constable.

The addition of the Protocol and panels was to address concerns from across the political spectrum and within policing that the introduction of elected PCCs would politicise policing and interfere with operational independence.

Under the 2011 reforms, the Home Office intentionally reduced central oversight and direction of forces. Forces had to have 'due regard' to the Strategic Policing Requirement. Funding has been directed through specific grants, while other pressure on chief constable and PCC priorities has been applied through inspections or direct legislation, for example. However, the lack of direct control has led to some frustration in central government - with the Home Secretary recently calling for the power to dismiss chief constables, for example..

Important elements of police governance are being removed or changed:

- New constitutional relationship
- New Policing Protocol
- Home Secretary power to intervene in forces and dismiss chief constables
- Home Secretary to set policing priorities nationally
- The National Police Service (NPS) Commissioner will have a new power to direct
- Abolition of Police and Crime Panels (PCPs)
- NPS, IOPC and HMICFRS roles and reach will be strengthened

Before PCCs - Police Authorities

Police authorities were created in 1964 on the recommendation of a 1962 Royal Commission, to replace the watch/standing committees that were responsible for local forces. The new authorities sought to address long standing concerns about poor

governance, perceived corruption and weak oversight by local councils, as well as reforming constitutional relationships between the home secretary, chief constables, and elected representatives of the local communities. This became known as the 'tripartite model'.

The aim was to balance chief constables' independence with political direction and oversight, to balance the priorities of central government with local communities, while reducing the potential for abuse. These 'constitutional relationship' matters were central to the debates at the time.

After 1994, authorities typically had 17 members - 9 were local councillors, while 8 were independent members (of whom at least 3 were magistrates). Councillors were appointed according to the party representation and population shares in the upper tier authorities in the force area. Only the elected members could vote on budget matters.

Authorities had similar responsibilities to PCCs - setting budgets, appointing chief officers, and scrutiny of performance. Operational independence was defined by statute and case law. Over time, authorities gained other responsibilities, such as setting a plan and engaging with communities.

The authorities were described as 'invisible' to the public, and criticised for lack of transparency and accountability.⁵⁸ Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced to address those failings.

Abolition of PCCs

The rationale for this was set out by the Home Secretary in November 2025:

- Reduction in unnecessary bureaucracy
- Achieve efficiencies in police governance, releasing at least £20m annually
- Low election turnouts
- Low public understanding and engagement

Most of these functions and responsibilities will be transferred to policing boards (or directly elected mayors), to be performed on a day-to-day basis by an appointed crime and policing lead (or deputy mayor). A crime and policing lead will likely be paid a similar salary to a deputy mayor.

The government claims there will be savings of £80-100 million, mainly through ending PCC elections, not appointing Deputy PCCs, abolishing PCPs, and possibly through absorbing some OPCC functions into local authorities. However, most functions will have to be carried

⁵⁸ [The abolition of police and crime commissioners | Institute for Government](#)

over, and the Home Office has assessed that just £20 million will be released for investment in policing.⁵⁹

With stronger central direction provided by the Home Office and the NPS, the nature of the role will change to focus on scrutiny and performance. There may be an overall reduction in the governance work performed currently. However, with larger forces and the complexity of structures, a regional board (and its support functions) will require an appropriate level of resourcing. (MOPAC in London has over 150 staff.)

This time, senior chief constables have expressed their support for proposals that will bring stronger central government political control with possibly fewer checks and balances, and possibly less protection for operational independence.

Likely phases of change from PCCs to Boards

Summary:

- May 2028, PCCs abolished at end of current term in office
- Policing Board assumes responsibility (duties to be defined by the Police Reform Act that follows the White Paper)
 - Board to comprise leaders of the local authorities in the force area (membership to be confirmed by the Act)
 - Crime and Policing Lead appointed
 - OPCC functions transferred to new Policing Board office team
- When forces are merged, new Board formed, CPL appointed, and office team established
- Board membership (and CPL appointment) may be affected by force boundary changes
- Board membership (and CPL appointment) may be affected by local government reorganisation
- Local government reorganisation and police force restructures are running to separate timelines with no apparent co-ordination.
- Already several areas where force, regional and new strategic authority boundaries do not align
- Risk that recommended force mergers will have to change as decisions are made in local government

⁵⁹ [Police and crime commissioners to be scrapped - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/police-and-crime-commissioners-to-be-scrapped)

Local government in the Thames Valley force area

Unitary	Upper	Lower	Population	% share of total population	Political leadership
	Oxfordshire		763,200	23%	Liberal Democrat
		Cherwell	170,400	5%	Liberal Democrat
		Oxford City	165,200	5%	Labour
		South Oxfordshire	156,500	5%	Liberal Democrat
		Vale of White Horse	149,300	4%	Liberal Democrat
		West Oxfordshire	120,900	4%	Liberal Democrat
Buckinghamshire			560,400	17%	Conservative
City of Milton Keynes			305,900	9%	Labour
Bracknell Forest			130,800	4%	Labour
Reading			182,900	5%	Labour
Slough			160,700	5%	Conservative
West Berkshire			165,100	5%	Liberal Democrat
Windsor and Maidenhead			158,900	5%	Liberal Democrat
Wokingham			177,500	5%	Liberal Democrat
TOTAL			3,367,700	100%	
Swindon			238,400		Labour

Oxfordshire councils have submitted three different proposals to change from a two-tier structure. Either a single unitary, two unitaries, or three unitaries.

All the Oxfordshire and Berkshire authorities, plus Swindon, intend to form a Thames Valley mayoral strategic authority.

City of Milton Keynes intends to join a strategic authority with authorities in Bedfordshire. Buckinghamshire has not yet identified a proposed strategic authority. They have declined to join the Thames Valley group, but will need to combine with at least one other unitary authority. Their options are now limited, but there is a possibility that they will combine with areas not currently policed by Thames Valley. That would further complicate merger options and membership of the policing board.

The White Paper provides the Home Secretary with stronger powers to merge forces and change boundaries where required. Similar powers are proposed for the Local Government Minister in the English Devolution Bill. There is a desire for police (and other services) to align with these new strategic authorities. However, there appears to be little communication between local government and the Home Office (and forces) on these restructure programmes, which are running to separate timetables and guidelines. Force boundaries will have to follow the new local government boundaries, and there are several areas across England where police force boundaries will need to change. There are also large parts of England where decisions on future strategic authorities have not been made. The independent review is making recommendations on mergers, but there is a risk that the basis for some of their assessments will change.

3.3 Policing Boards

Summary:

- Policing Boards appear similar to the discredited pre-1964 model
- Thames Valley Police will require a policing board after 2028
 - Likely 9 members or more in 2028
- No indication on decision making procedures for the board, with risks of unfairness, lack of representation, or impasse
- Appointment of a “day to day lead for policing and crime”
- Board membership will change as local government is reorganised and forces are merged
- A merged force board will have reduced representation from the Thames Valley force area - potentially only through one mayor in due course
 - South East regional board could comprise 17-21 members, possibly reducing to 6-7
- Scrutiny only through local government structures (local councillors, audit committees, etc)
 - no direct scrutiny mechanism for the board itself
- Possible establishment of local boards risks duplication and confusion over responsibilities and planning
- No provision for checks and balances, or requirements to consult and engage

As it currently stands, the PCC functional responsibilities for Thames Valley will be transferred to a Policing Board in May 2028. The Board will comprise leaders of the local councils in the force area. The original announcement suggested these would just be the

unitary and upper tier councils, but the White Paper has now included the potential for lower tier councils to be included. The board must appoint a Crime and Policing Lead to manage the responsibilities of the board - a recognition that the role requires more 'hands on' commitment. It is likely to be a similar employed role to the Deputy Mayors for Policing and Crime in strategic authorities - which are broadly similar to the PCC position.

There is no indication yet about decision making procedures and voting. There is a suggestion that the board may include independent members. Council leaders are subject to a lower level of vetting checks, and a different oath of office. This could present potential difficulties in providing effective oversight and governance.

On current force boundaries, the board would comprise the leaders of the 8 unitary authority councils and the leader of Oxfordshire County Council (total = 9 members). There is a suggestion that the 5 lower tier councils in Oxfordshire might be included as well (total = 14 members), although the restructure of Oxfordshire may have been decided by 2028.

With either 9 or 14 members of different parties on the board, there needs to be effective and 'fair' rules on voting and decision making. Giving every member an equal vote will disadvantage areas with higher populations. Weighting votes according to population size could disadvantage areas with smaller populations. Including both upper and lower tier councils would create double representation. For example, Berkshire as a county will have far more representation because it has smaller unitary councils so if there are wider Berkshire issues in relation to policing, those issues could potentially be heard 6x compared to just once in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

These are important issues of democracy, representation and governance, yet it appears little thought has been given to how they will be assured in the new model.

Local politics can be volatile, and there is a possibility that political leaders may change between elections, and/or the appointed crime and policing lead may lose political support. Basing board membership on council leaders excludes representatives of other parties. That situation applies to PCCs, but mechanisms such as Police and Crime Panels and requirements for consultation were introduced to balance that risk. These balancing mechanisms are being removed or changed, and boards will be subject only to normal scrutiny processes in local authorities.

As forces are merged, and local government restructures come into being, board membership will change at various times during the period between 2028 and 2034. This will potentially disrupt decision making and planning.

Local community influence in the new structure

The Independent Review will also consider how local interests can be represented at LPA level. We may see something similar to the local scrutiny panels in Scotland, which also set local plans for LPAs. This was incorporated into the legal duty of Police Scotland and the SPA. The White Paper did not include a similar provision, however. Note that Thames Valley already has local scrutiny panels, which have membership from each of the local geographies.

We do not know what will be recommended, but a local panel brings the potential for additional/conflicting priorities and oversight, with forces being set national priorities overseen by a policing board, and LPAs being set local priorities scrutinised by a local panel. Depending on how an LPA is defined, there may not be a clear local government structure to link in with.

Regional force board

Although mergers in the South East are unlikely before 2028, a regional force once created would be governed by a policing board of 15-21 members. Current local government in the South East:

- Kent: currently 1 Unitary + 1 Upper tier, 12 lower tier authorities (no decision yet on options to change to 1, 3, 4 or 5 unitaries)
- Sussex: 1 directly elected mayor
- Surrey: 2 unitaries
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight: 1 directly elected mayor
- Thames Valley: 8 unitaries + 1 Upper and 5 lower tier authorities (no decision yet on options to change to 1, 2 or 3 unitaries)

Proposals for restructuring some local authorities are at various stages of progress.

However a future South East Policing Board could potentially comprise 6 mayors/leaders:

- Thames Valley (including Swindon)
- Buckinghamshire unitary (subject to proposal for a strategic authority)
- Surrey
- Sussex
- Hampshire and the Solent
- Kent and Medway

This will inevitably dilute the voice of Thames Valley residents within a much larger force. Precept equalisation will also be controversial, with 2025/6 charges ranging from £266 to £337.

3.4 Other factors affecting governance

New constitutional position

The White Paper sets a new structure of policing which will alter the constitutional position of a chief constable. The NPS Commissioner will effectively assume a senior command function, with the power to direct policing responses, standards and policies across the whole of the UK if required. The Home Secretary will also acquire stronger powers to direct priorities and mandate responses across policing. This will be set out in a new Policing Protocol that will provide a new definition of operational independence.

Police Authorities were designed to balance local and national interests, while protecting operational independence. PCCs were introduced to strengthen local democracy and provide more effective and accountable oversight. Checks and balances were added to protect against possible abuses and political interference. After fourteen years, that system is to be abolished but there is very little clarity on the checks and balances in the new structure.

Specifically, there are important unanswered questions about:

- Changed constitutional relationships
- Protection of operational independence
- Allowing space for the local voice
- Extent of powers being assumed by central government
- who specifically is responsible for a policing issue within a structure where policies, process and standards are set centrally

Changed oversight role

The role of a policing board will adjust to focus on scrutiny and performance against the national priorities. Boards will still set the budget and precept, and appoint the chief constable. Structures, standards and priorities will be set centrally through the NPS .

Other roles, such as complaints receipt and oversight, responsibility for victims services, chairing local justice boards, and the requirement to engage and consult may change - although much is yet to be clarified. It is not clear whether the board will be required to set a plan for the force, and what this may cover. The Policing Protocol will change to reflect stronger central direction over local policing.

Providing effective scrutiny of a larger force will be more challenging alongside an objective of reducing 'unnecessary' bureaucracy arising from local oversight. Important OPCC functions (responsible legal and finance officers, corporations sole, etc) are likely to be carried over to a corporate legal body, as there will still need to be a 'police authority' to set and raise the precept and provide for public liability.

The Crime and Policing Lead (CPL) role is an acknowledgement that the work of overseeing a force requires a full-time appointment. This is likely to be a salaried appointment similar to that of a Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime. There is a suggestion that the Home Office will determine the funding level for the office support for a CPL, which is likely to be smaller than a combination of the existing OPCCs resources. This may limit the ability to scrutinise forces.

PCCs have a legal duty to consult and engage with communities, and make considerable effort to build links across the communities they represent. The Office of the CPL will cover a larger geography. Engagement will be more difficult. Transferring policing to mayors/council leaders is designed to bring policing within a wider local government responsibility, where policing will be just one of many responsibilities. That may dilute the ability to provide effective oversight or responses to concerns raised by the public.

In due course, the interests of most Thames Valley residents could be represented at a regional force level by the mayor of Thames Valley (subject to decisions for Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes). Although supportive of the “metro mayor” model, the IfG reported in 2022: “In some places the [mayoral] model has struggled... The performance of the mayors themselves has also been variable over time and across different regions. Local scrutiny mechanisms necessary to hold metro mayors to account do not work well and need bolstering.”⁶⁰

Standardised tiers of policing

The standardised structure will also affect governance arrangements, with responsibilities and resources redistributed in a new way, and with some important functions removed from local control.

- Neighbourhoods: ring-fenced resources focused on the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee
- Local Policing Areas (LPAs): based on towns, cities or boroughs, providing the main policing services
- Forces: fewer in number and larger after implementing merger recommendations, presumably hosting the more specialist and support functions
- National Police Service: specific functional units and service-wide responsibilities, with a Commissioner who may have overall command of policing if required

Neighbourhood policing will be defined through guarantees, with ring-fenced resources. LPAs and forces will be responsible for ensuring these guarantees are being met. While the aim is to provide consistency and clarity for the public, problems and responses do not

⁶⁰ [How metro mayors can help level up England](#)

always fit into neat tiers. There is a risk of gaps opening between these tiers, with forces becoming larger and more remote, and elements being moved into the national organisation. Currently, the public knows that their policing is delivered by their local force. In the new model, it may be less clear who is responsible for doing what.

Moving from the Local to the National

The NPS will be overseen through central government, with defined remits, working to priorities set by the Home Secretary. These national functions will affect local policing - whether operationally (such as their tasking against serious crime), or indirectly (through the setting of standards and policies which local policing will be obliged to follow). An NPS board will include some representation from forces.

The new structure shifts responsibility for policing direction and standards to central government. Removing the 'postcode lottery' of policing will remove local flexibility. While there may be benefits from setting priorities and service standards nationally, Thames Valley residents will have less influence over their policing.

The independent review will recommend the design of LPAs and forces, while the White Paper sets out a framework for how priorities will be set centrally and performance monitored. The role of a policing board will therefore focus on scrutiny and performance against the national priorities and standards. HMICFRS recommendations will become mandatory requirements, and there will be intervention from the NPS where forces are judged to be failing. The Home Secretary will have the power to dismiss chief constables. Combined, this will create a more complicated picture of responsibilities and accountability.

The target-driven performance regime of the 2000s has been identified as causing adverse consequences for public safety. This was highlighted by a Home Office independent review, and led to the dismantling of the central performance regime.⁶¹ A further lesson from the central performance regime of the 2000s was the difficulty of ending an intervention. Interventions often rolled on for far longer than envisaged, spreading into other areas of business. This created a permanent sense of 'limbo' within the force, hindering decision making.

⁶¹ [The use of targets in policing - Review 2015](#)

Local Policing Areas

Current LCUs in TVP

- Oxfordshire with police stations in: Abingdon, Banbury, Bicester, Cowley, Didcot, Witney.
- Buckinghamshire with police stations in: Amersham, Aylesbury, High Wycombe.
- Milton Keynes with police stations in: Milton Keynes.
- Berkshire East with police stations in: Bracknell, Maidenhead, Slough.
- Berkshire West with police stations in: Loddon Valley, Newbury, Reading.

The new Thames Valley Police operating model was introduced last year. This has helped secure efficiency savings and forms an important part of savings plans over the next two years. At the same time, the force has improved performance against priorities and addressed most of the issues identified in the last round of HMICFRS inspections.

Alongside the creation of fewer, larger forces, the White Paper sets out that LPAs will form a standardised geographical model for delivering the main policing service to the public. Neighbourhoods will be organised within these LPAs, working to the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee.

Little detail is provided for how the new LPAs will be designed, other than they are to be established at the 'city, town or borough' level. While the TVP model broadly reflects the LPA vision for local services, they may not be considered 'local' enough.

This might require the force area to be redivided into at least 9 LPAs (subject to the Oxfordshire decision) to match the unitary authority boundaries. That would likely challenge the current operating model and require resources to be redistributed within a different command structure. The current estate may not suit that model.

The ambition is for LPAs and Neighbourhoods to be the tiers where most of routine policing is provided - and to become the focal point for local 'identity'. The merged/regional force will become more of an administrative tier from which specialist and support functions can be organised more efficiently. Forces will still be responsible for providing a range of critical police functions, but over a larger area and population. Getting the balance between force (specialist) and local policing will be difficult, particularly as resources and responsibilities will be squeezed between neighbourhoods and the NPS.

Boundary changes

The White Paper provides the Home Secretary with stronger powers to merge forces and change boundaries where required. There is a desire for policing structures to align with strategic authorities.

Within the Thames Valley force area, the City of Milton Keynes may form a strategic authority with the authorities covering the Bedfordshire force area. Swindon is seeking to join the proposed Thames Valley strategic authority, alongside the Oxfordshire and Berkshire councils. Buckinghamshire could be required to combine with another unitary authority, which could be outside the current Thames Valley force area.

Changes to local government boundaries that cross police force boundaries will require areas to be transferred between forces. Without this, the electors of one area could determine the policing of another (including setting the precept), but have no representation in their own force.

There are numerous changes proposed for local government, and the sequencing of these changes will need careful planning to minimise disruption.

Apart from a few minor adjustments, there have only been two significant boundary changes since 1974. In 1996 a former district council (population 104,000) was transferred from South Wales to Gwent Police following local government reorganisation in Wales. 174 officers were transferred between the forces and the central grant allocation adjusted accordingly.

In 1999, the areas policed by the Metropolitan Police outside Greater London were transferred to their respective forces (Kent, Surrey, Essex, Hertfordshire) to coincide with the formation of the Greater London Authority. This represented significant change for the surrounding forces. Surrey grew from around 1,600 officers to over 2,000, with a major change in the force demand profile. The Metropolitan Police lost a number of important operating sites.

Boundary transfers require considerable planning, preparation and money. Police staff (and not necessarily only those employed within the affected area) will be subject to normal employment transfer rules and TUPE. It may be that their roles will not exist in the new force, or that their roles will change. This may require changes to employment contracts or a redundancy process may be needed.

A number of police officers will be invited or required to transfer forces. A process will need to be negotiated to determine how this will be managed. There is likely to be some training

requirement and exchange of uniform and equipment which would need to be facilitated. The receiving force will need to provide assets and equipment for the new area.

Policing will need to continue through the transfer, and an agreement will be needed on managing cases and liabilities after transfer. As with a merger, the transfer is likely to affect operating models within both forces.

Complaints and Misconduct responsibilities

In 2020, PCCs took on important additional responsibilities in relation to complaints and misconduct, under reforms introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017. PCCs gained a statutory duty within the police complaints system, to strengthen public confidence, accountability and independent oversight, including:

- Acting as the review body for all complaints outside the remit of the IOPC.
- Informal resolution of certain complaints (optional)
- Updating complainants on progress (optional)

PCCs may review certain complaints and issue recommendations to the force. PCCs are the appropriate authority in law for handling complaints against the Chief Constable, determining the most appropriate way to handle such cases in line with IOPC Statutory Guidance.

PCCs are responsible for ensuring misconduct panels and appeal hearings are conducted properly and in accordance with regulations, and that force complaints and conduct arrangements are efficient, fair, accessible and transparent. They must also be satisfied that learning and improvements are identified and implemented.⁶²

These responsibilities will need to be carried over into the new structure after 2028. While most of this should be straightforward, it will require changes to legislation, and there are questions about how complaints against the chief constable will be handled and overseen by a board of council leaders/mayors - for example where the relationship is under strain or if there are conflicting views on the board.⁶³ Council leaders and mayors are not subject to the same level of vetting as PCCs, which could present a difficulty in the sharing of information by the force.

Chapter 4, Part 3 of the White Paper sets out proposals for wider changes in the handling of complaints and misconduct. These focus on the IOPC. There appears to be no recognition of the current role of PCCs in the system. Presumably, the responsibilities will transfer either to the board, the mayor, or the CPL. While this may just be a technical change, designing the detail of the new process will be important within a board structure.

⁶² Report to Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel, 12 March 2026

⁶³ [Warwickshire Reform's George Finch defends criticism of police chief - BBC News](#)

Victim Services and Criminal Justice

PCCs are responsible for commissioning victims' services. Thames Valley OPCC has established 'Victims First', provided through a £1.6 million contract running from 2024 to 2027. This responsibility will presumably be carried over to the new Policing Board, although the White Paper is rather unclear on this:

*'PCCs play a vital role as the local advocate for victims, ensuring their needs are met and their voices are heard within policing and the wider criminal justice system. We will work closely with other government departments, the APCC and the Victim's Commissioner to ensure effective support for victims and witnesses... Regardless of changes to police governance, we will retain this important focus on victims.'*⁶⁴

There is also little clarity on local criminal justice board arrangements after 2028.

'PCCs play a leading role in bringing criminal justice partners together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system in their force area. Local Criminal Justice Boards (LCJBs) are a crucial forum for enabling this collaboration to tackle shared challenges across the system and improve the experience of victims and witnesses. With the Ministry of Justice, who lead on LCJB policy, we will consider how LCJBs should operate and their alignment with future policing structures.'⁶⁵

⁶⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69779267276692606c013862/260125_White_Paper.pdf Para 129

⁶⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69779267276692606c013862/260125_White_Paper.pdf Para 130

4. The potential impact on Thames Valley's communities

This chapter seeks to summarise the risks, tensions and unintended consequences of the Police Reform White Paper's proposals, with a particular focus on the potential impact on Thames Valley residents and communities.

Police Scotland was hindered by the failure to set out clear outcomes for the public which could be tracked and reported on. One key overarching risk is the absence of any clear statement or definition, within the Police Reform White Paper, of what the Home Office and UK Government see as policing's role. This may emerge, by default, from definitions of LPAs, forces, and the eventual remit of the NPS.

4.1 Operational Policing

We judge that there is a very significant risk that implementation of a number of the proposals in the White Paper could have a detrimental impact on the operational policing support available to Thames Valley residents and communities.

Risks during the change programme:

- Considerable disruption across the whole of policing structures
- Limited time to develop a new model and assess its practicality across the whole of England and Wales
- Some key areas of policing not mentioned (eg, rural crime). Thames Valley lays claim to be the "best rural crime task force in the country", and this is one area where there are risks from White Paper implementation
- Potential changes to political direction during the programme
- Risks associated with co-ordination of transfer between key bodies
- Risks associated with demotivated or demoralised officers and staff

Risks at the conclusion of the change programme

- Inability of any new, regional force to deliver improvements in performance. Note that:
 - the Metropolitan Police Service is already a "regional force", and that its overall performance does not suggest that such forces are inherently stronger
 - Some policing collaboration experience suggests that poorly designed relationships can be "Lose-Lose"
- Questions over what will happen to the policing services currently supported and funded by the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and his OPCC offices, such as:
 - Victims' services
 - Wider "& Crime" activities

- Uncertainties about the future of the Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership (VPP), formerly known as the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)
- Uncertainty over the capability and capacity of the NPS, leaving unexpected demands on forces
- Uncertainty over the skills and capabilities remaining in forces

4.2 Financial implications

In addition to the operational policing impacts on Thames Valley communities and residents, there are significant risks that the proposals in the White Paper will incur additional financial cost. With no overall growth in the policing budget nationally, these costs will require continued savings and precept increases. While mergers may provide opportunity for efficiencies, forces will also be constrained by the requirement to adopt standardised operating models.

These potential costs include:

- Restructuring (estimated at £500 million to merge forces in 2006, almost £1 billion at today's prices)
- Unforeseen impacts and contingencies
- Impact on current planning and cost saving programmes
- Impact on existing contracts and capital plans that may have to be changed
- Larger top-slice to fund NPS and investment in national services

Difficulty of financial planning when so much is now unknown:

- Funding over the short to medium term
- Possible mergers, but with who?
- Possible boundary changes
- New Police Allocation Formula - but when, and what will the implications for Thames Valley be?
- Precept equalisation could be controversial
- Resources, budget and assets being transferred to NPS
- Top-slice unknown
- Unknown/Insufficient funding for change costs
- Who will be making the decisions is unknown
- Structures within forces unknown, and probably requiring investment to change
- Priorities unknown

4.3 Workforce

Delivering excellent policing within Thames Valley's communities and to Thames Valley's residents relies fundamentally on the continuing support of Thames Valley's police officers, police staff and volunteers. Successful crime prevention also relies on those many working in and with related partners and communities. Many of these will also be Thames Valley residents.

The White Paper proposes a number of significant changes to the workforce. Introducing a licence to practise, standardising terms and conditions, and 'streamlining' training may add to costs and require investment in management systems. There is also no clarity on whether there will be costs to officers associated with obtaining the licence. There are provisions for wellbeing support, but also stricter expectations around vetting and automatic suspensions for certain misconduct and complaint matters. These have the potential to add costs and disruption. Experience from Scotland and elsewhere suggests that workforce morale is likely to be adversely affected.

4.4 Governance

The White Paper proposes major changes to constitutional relationships, with the transfer of powers to the national level. Force policing boards are a return to the model that was discredited in 1962, with little provision for checks and balances to rescue the risk of abuse. They also bring the risk of being ineffective in the way they are designed and the responsibilities they are being given.

At this stage, key governance questions include:

- How to prevent political interference in policing and preserve operational independence - whether at force or national level.
- If policing protocol is being changed, what will it cover?
- Policing Boards - membership, numbers, decision making procedures, appointment of C&PL
- LPAs - how will these be decided/designed? Are they feasible? What local scrutiny structure will there be?
- How voices of under-represented and marginalised groups can be heard?
- How will local priorities be reflected in a national performance framework?
- How will NPS be held accountable to local forces (boards, chiefs)?
- How will funding for the NPS be determined?
- How will central funding be affected for national functions not transferring into NPS?
- How will a new OPCC (or rather, its replacement) be 'sized' and funded? Will there be enough funding allowed or available under the new arrangement?

4.5 National Police Service (NPS)

The NPS will be established in phases, starting with the College of Policing and NPCC, then extending to the NCA and CTP. This new body will take over responsibilities and functions from forces. Some of those functions are currently funded directly through the top slice. Some functions are provided by forces through specific grants. Some functions are funded by forces through collaboration agreements. These arrangements will eventually change so that the NPS is funded directly.

The NPS will set standards and policy nationally, through Codes of Practice and training, assuming the responsibilities of the College of Policing and the NPCC. The NPS Commissioner will act as the most senior officer in the UK, with the power in certain cases to command major incidents and direct force responses. The NPS will also absorb CTP, NCA, NPoCC, NPAS, ROCUs and other functions and teams working nationally (eg the support for large inquiries).

In due course, the NPS will recruit transferees from forces. There will also need to be a process for determining access to or control of assets, including estate, which may need to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. These processes may create temporary imbalances. Some forces will be providing proportionately more resources to national functions than others - through secondments, host/lead force arrangements, or provision of estate and other assets and services. The 'top slice' will increase to fund the NPS directly, meaning all forces will lose a proportion of central funding. Some forces will lose specific grant income.

Similarly, some forces will stand to lose proportionately more staff to the NPS. Most of these staff will be experienced and have specialist skills, and the potential loss of these could affect the capability remaining in force. Conversely Officers who do not transfer to the NPS will need to be deployed elsewhere in the organisation.

National functions in TVP

For the 2024-25 financial year, there were 832 officer and staff posts in regional collaboration units and external secondments (almost 10% of the total workforce).⁶⁶

As at 31 March 2025, 247 officers and 271 staff from TVP were reported as employed in national functions⁶⁷.

Thames Valley Police hosts:

- CT Policing South-East (CTPSE)
- Regional Prison Intelligence
- SE Regional Organised Crime Unit (SEROUCU)
- Regional Specialist Firearms
- Chiltern Transport Consortium (CTC)

Responsibilities, funding and resources will be transferred to the NPS in phases, the timetable for which is not yet known. There will need to be further clarity on what precisely will be transferred to the NPS, and what will remain with forces. There may be particular issues to resolve such as ownership and use of shared facilities, and specialist firearms teams that are integral to force capabilities. This adds further uncertainty to financial and operational planning - and possibly additional costs.

The impact of the NPS on forces

It will be difficult to co-ordinate the implementation of these multiple structural changes. The NPS will be established in phases, and each phase will have a differing degree of impact on each of the 43 forces.

At some stage:

- Force mergers will begin, running from 2028-2034
- Force boundary changes will likely be required (and announced) from 2028 onwards
- The NPS will start to form, possibly from 2027 onwards (earlier may not be possible without legislation)
- The LPA structure should be defined and forces may start to migrate to new models, possibly before forces merge
- Merged forces will start to build new operating models for the functions and resources that are not moving to the NPS

This is likely to take several years to complete, during which we can expect continuing disruption. As with organisational restructures elsewhere and previously in policing in

⁶⁶

<https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/PCC-and-Group-statement-of-accounts-2024-25.pdf>

⁶⁷ Police Workforce Data

England and Wales, it is reasonable to expect that some models may not prove effective and require further change. Experience also suggests it will require further years before the changes settle in.

4.6 Wider Risks

There are a number of additional risks, tensions and potential unintended consequences associated with the Police Reform White Paper, and which could have an indirect impact (or potential impact) on Thames Valley's communities and residents. These include:

- The current absence of any definitive challenge process for the Police Reform White Paper proposals. There are already decisions being taken, in order to allow the legislative process to proceed in time for a Policing Bill to be presented early next year. The risks here, associated with mis-steps taken in haste now, are considerable.
- The absence of any visible Government or Home Office learning from previous relevant experience, whether from England and Wales or internationally. A specific example relates to the 2005/06 "Closing the Gap" proposals, where several of those with direct and very significant experience from that time have not yet been approached or consulted by the Home Office.
- The poor track record of the Home Office in implementing major projects. The ESN programme is now significantly delayed and over budget, while the Home Secretary has described the Home Office as 'unfit for purpose'.

5. Concluding Remarks: “Viewing the White Paper through a local lens”

One of the key omissions from the White Paper is any statement of a core mission for the UK policing system as a whole. There is no statement of how that system's 'sum of the whole' - including the proposed local, regional and national tiers - will be greater (and more effective) than its component tiers.

This gap leaves open the question of how the operational necessity of dealing with crime as the continuum it is will be addressed (all crime, including that with an exclusively digital footprint, or crime enabled by organised crime gangs operating internationally, still results in a victim within a local community), and may make it harder for each of the proposed system 'tiers' to fully understand where and how they fit into the policing system as a whole.

This compounds the challenges arising from the White Paper proposals for the local policing level where, if mission expectations and boundaries are not clearly defined, neighbourhood policing will be left in the invidious space between community expectations and realistic delivery capacity.

Whilst parts of the White Paper do indeed emphasise neighbourhood policing, they do so whilst setting out proposals that strongly imply less money, resource and focus for neighbourhoods.

The lack of a clearly defined role for neighbourhood policing, other than a proposed set of performance indicators, also risks increasing that local divergence between expectation and delivery. Without a defined mission for policing, it may be reasonable to conclude that, at least as far as local policing is concerned, the Home Office has yet to reach a settled view on what it wants to achieve and whether current trajectories will deliver it. It may also potentially lead to the Home Office missing the opportunities arising from the default mantra of public confidence in public services, namely that the public are often 'locally confident but nationally pessimistic'.

Building confidence in any new, White Paper based, policing structure would significantly benefit from a community-up perspective. It is to be hoped that the Home Office approach reflects this truism from the outset but, on the basis of a further public sector mantra that 'trust is good, but supervision is better', it may be prudent to develop a tool for proactive 'supervision'.

In the only other part of the UK to have actually amalgamated legacy (an “eight Force”) policing structures into a single national organisation, the Scottish Parliament attempted to address the need for a defined mission for policing in the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. The Scotland experience is addressed in earlier Chapters of this report, but it is worth considering whether the Scottish definition is directly transferable to the White Paper proposals. The broader 'improve the safety and wellbeing' function set out in statute for Police Scotland may not, of itself, be sufficiently clear to meet policing needs in England and Wales, not least with the continuing intention to roll out the 'Right Care, Right Person' approach to mental health and general welfare duties. However, in Scotland, they also included a statutory duty for policing to be 'be accessible and engage with communities'. To embed this important responsibility in statute in England & Wales, for all tiers in the proposed policing structures, may significantly add to community involvement and influence in any new structure. It would also ensure that communities - at every part of the system 'from local to national' - are treated as the valuable asset and ally that they are to effective policing.

However, despite this definitional omission in the White Paper for England & Wales, its very absence does provide local communities, and their advocates, with an opportunity to define their own local lens. Creation of such a lens (or diagnostic tool) could allow the ready assessment of the impact of any structural and policy changes to the local policing delivery model. In the forthcoming consultation phase of the independent review of police force structures, led by ex MPS Commissioner Bernard (now Lord) Hogan-Howe, having such a 'community diagnostic tool' may significantly assist in asking the key questions of this review, even if those questions may be difficult and awkward, and act as a means of 'keeping score' on behalf of local communities (in terms of positive and negative impacts).

As George Bernard Shaw said, 'the biggest danger in communication is the illusion that it has taken place'. Perhaps the same could be said of the need to ensure that community voices are front and centre of the White Paper proposals right from the outset. The challenge will be developing an impactful tool with which to defend and promote community needs into the macro discussions on structural and policy change.

Perhaps the most suitable foundation on which to build a tool to advocate for local communities on the White Paper proposals is on a combination of what matters to them, and on the levels of trust and confidence they have in the current delivery model. The Thames Valley PCC priorities reflect those issues which, based on consultation, matter most to local communities. Many of those priorities, in particular those around increasing neighbourhood number and police visibility generally, as well as tackling drugs and road safety, would be common to most communities across the UK. Other priorities, particularly those around homicides and County Lines, are likely to have a significant operational footprint at regional, and even national, level in the White Paper proposals.

Being able to delineate between those (currently defined) policing priorities which will continue to be exclusively delivered at a local policing level, those that will not, and those that will be dealt with on a 'hybrid' basis (jointly between different tiers) will also be important to assessing how community needs will be met, and how accountability feeds back to those local communities in which all these crimes are being experienced. The Scotland experience, again, was of a retrospectively acknowledged 'democratic deficit' in the design of accountability structures from the outset, where early accountability focus was on the national at the expense of the local. It took a number of years to redress that early imbalance.

A community diagnostic tool, as mentioned before, may help to ensure that this key mistake from Scotland is not repeated in England & Wales. The second potential foundation of community advocacy - local trust and confidence figures - may also help to frame diagnostic questions for the White Paper proposals. The Thames Valley PCC has, in 2024, publicly said that policing faces a 'challenge' after an internal survey suggested that only 60% of local people felt that they could trust the police. Using trust and satisfaction surveys may provide an additional means of assessing not only the efficacy of any White Paper structural changes but, importantly, local communities' perceptions of them. Feelings of safety are not only a function of policing effectiveness, they also reflect how responsive the system is expressing community concerns. Developing a community diagnostic tool could help to address key questions around a diverse range of issues from clarifying who is responsible for developing, assessing and responding to public trust and confidence measures during any national change programme, to questions around how back office system infrastructure is nationally mandated, funded and delivered.

APPENDIX I: List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

APA	Association of Police Authorities
APP	Authorised Professional Practice
APCC	Association of Police and Crime Commissioners
BCU	Basic Command Unit
CPL	Crime and Policing Lead
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CTP	Counter Terrorism Policing
CTU	Counter Terrorism Unit
CTPSE	Counter Terrorism Policing South East
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (as was)
HMICFRS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
HMICS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland
IOPC	The Independent Office for Police Conduct
LCJB	Local Criminal Justice Board
LCU	Local Command Unit
LPA	Local Policing Area
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
MOPaC	Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (London)
MPS	Metropolitan Police Service
NCA	National Crime Agency
NPAS	National Police Air Service
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
NPoCC	National Police Coordination Centre
NPS	National Police Service
OPCC	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
PAF	Police Allocation Formula
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
PCP	Police and Crime Panel
PCSO	Police Community Support Officer
PECP	Police Efficiency and Collaboration Programme
PSA	Police Superintendents' Association
RASSO	Rape and Serious Sexual Offences
RCH	Regional Crime Hubs
ROCU	Regional Organised Crime Unit
SOC	Serious and Organised Crime
SA	Strategic Authority
SEROCU	South East Regional Organised Crime Unit
SPA	Scottish Police Authority

SPR Strategic Policing Requirement
TVP Thames Valley Police
VAWG Violence Against Women and Girls

APPENDIX II: The Police Reform White Paper

In January 2026, the Home Office published a White Paper on police reform, entitled “From Local to National: A New Model for Policing”. The White Paper runs to over 100 pages, set out in five Chapters, and includes over 50 proposals, with some containing numerous elements within.

The Summary of Proposals section of the White Paper, running from pages 97 to 102 of that document, provides an overview of the Paper’s proposals, ideas and aspirations. Below, we summarise these proposals (though the list remains lengthy), with this list structured in the manner set out in the White Paper.

Whilst our commission is to focus primarily on force mergers and on governance, we judge it important to present all the elements below, as individually and collectively these proposals will all have an impact on Thames Valley’s residents and communities, as explained later in this document. We have also used quotation marks below to make clear where we are (and where we are not) using the exact wording from within the White Paper. Finally, we have numbered the Proposals (the White Paper did not provide this).

*“From Local to National: A New Model for Policing”
Home Office White Paper on police reform, January 2026*

The White Paper runs to over 100 pages, set out in five chapters, with over 50 proposals (some containing numerous elements).

We have numbered the proposals (the White Paper did not do this).

Chapter 2: “Better policing for local communities”

Part 1: Neighbourhood policing - existing Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, plus “by the end of the parliament”...

1. “13,000 additional neighbourhood policing personnel in police forces across England and Wales”
2. “New standards, so that neighbourhood officers are not routinely abstracted...”
3. New powers and funding to tackle shop theft and assaults on shopworkers
4. Enhanced additional training for “every neighbourhood police officer and PCSOs” [sic]
5. “Publish dashboard will be published [sic] to measure performance focused on the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee commitments”

Part 2: “Removing the barriers that stop the police focusing on the public’s priorities”

6. Support the roll-out of Right Care, Right Person
7. Develop a core set of Productivity Priorities
8. “Explore how we can use AI to free up officers for the front line”
9. “Work closely with sector partners to streamline training, including integrating it into everyday working where possible

Part 3: “A new system of local police governance”

10. “Abolish Police and Crime Commissioners, transferring police governance in 2028 to Strategic Authority Mayors or local council leaders through Policing and Crime Boards. Over time, these Boards will then be adapted to provide the governance of future fewer larger forces [sic]”.
11. “Require every Policing and Crime Board to appoint a Policing and Crime Lead”
12. “Improve the process of appointing, suspending and dismissing Chief Constables...”
13. Engage with the Welsh Government and relevant partners to ensure [the Welsh policing governance approach] reflects Welsh national circumstances
14. “Set out what functions Policing and Crime Boards and their supporting secretariats should have. This will reduce the cost of corporate governance and bring greater consistency as Offices of Police and Crime Commissioners have grown based on PCC wishes”

Chapter 3: “A Stronger Policing System”

Part 1: Police force structures

15. Establish “An independent review of force structures...”
16. “Reduce fragmentation and inefficiency by significantly reducing the number of police forces by the end of next parliament” [so by July 2034 at the latest]
17. “Simplify the Home Secretary’s powers to alter force boundaries, smoothing the path towards new force geographies”
18. “Identify opportunities to deliver a pathfinder merger this parliament, to make progress towards our ultimate ambition for fewer, larger forces”

Part 2: The National Police Service

Establish a new national police force, the National Police Service (NPS), to cover:

19. Strategic leadership
20. Standard setting in areas like data, technology, training
21. Bring together national enabling capabilities, such as consolidating delivery and oversight of national IT and commercial services
22. Deliver forensics as a national service

23. Expand the NPS to be the single national operational law enforcement body, including Counter-Terrorism Policing, the National Crime Agency, Regional Organised Crime Units, and the Senior National Coordinator role for public order policing

Part 3: Police Funding

24. Review the police funding formula and distribution of police funding locally
25. “Recognising this will take time, in the interim we will work in partnership with policing to explore the structure and scope of the police settlement and consider what steps can be taken in the short term to better align funding allocations with this Government’s policing priorities”

Chapter 4: “Consistently high standards”

Part 1: A more active Home Office

26. “Set clear National Strategic Policing Priorities... to provide clear strategic direction... linked to measurable outcomes and targets embedded in a new Performance Framework
27. “Fundamentally reform the Policing Protocol to articulate the roles and responsibilities of all policing leaders...”
28. “Solidify the boundaries of operational independence and clarify the appropriate use of the Home Secretary’s powers to intervene to support improvement within policing where necessary”

Part 2: “Improving police performance”

29. “Implement a new Police Performance Framework...”
30. “Introduce a new tiered performance system to identify and support improvement within under-performing forces...”
31. “Set up a new Home Office Police Performance Improvement Unit that will ensure stronger central Government oversight...”
32. “Establish new policing guarantees that set out the minimum level of service the public can expect to receive from the police wherever in England and Wales they live”

Part 3: “Raising individual standards”

33. “Take focused action to improve the culture of policing, reforming the police vetting and misconduct systems and tackling unethical and discriminatory behaviour...”
34. “Work with the Independent Office for Police Conduct to enhance accountability, scrutiny and transparency in the police complaints and misconduct system; amending the current Governance structure and ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in investigations.”

Chapter 5: “A more capable police service”

Part 1: “The future workforce”

35. “Create a modern workforce, where chief constables have greater flexibility to recruit and retain those with the skills required to tackle the threats we face and where more police officers are back on the beat in local communities”
36. “Deliver a national workforce strategy to ensure we have a police workforce with the skills to meet current and future demand...”
37. “Strengthen police leadership by mandating national leadership standards, reforming the process for appointing chief constables, and responding to the recommendations of the Police Leadership Commission...”
38. “Introduce a Licence to Practise for police officers...”
39. “Give greater flexibility around entry and exit for the workforce...”
40. “Make improvements to workforce culture through improved support, development and leadership, especially at first line management level”
41. “Use the Police Covenant to deliver a package of wellbeing support and mandate national wellbeing standards...”

Part 2: “Unleashing the Power of Our People Through Data and Technology”

42. “Invest £115m over the next 3 years to enable the rapid and responsible adoption of AI and automation technologies by the police. This will include the creation of a new National Centre for AI in Policing, known as Police.AI. “
43. “Roll out the use of Live Facial Recognition (LFR) technologies...”
44. “Create a bespoke legal framework for the use of technologies like facial recognition...”
45. “Create a public register of the AI in use by Police forces”
46. “Simplify the governance of data by creating a single decision-maker for policing to take decisions on national datasets...”
47. “Establish clearer accountability for policing data...”
48. “Work with policing to define specific national standards for police data and data quality requirements...”
49. “Work with forces to understand the barriers to technology adoption...”

Part 3: “Smarter crime prevention”

“Take a stronger lead on crime prevention by...”

50. “Delivering an integrated crime mapping system for England and Wales”
51. “Testing and learning crime prevention interventions in these areas”
52. “Establishing more effective crime prevention partnerships at the national level”
53. “Providing clearer strategic direction on crime prevention”

“Take steps to create a clearer and more effective local landscape for crime prevention, including to...”

54. “Reduce the flow of young people into crime through delivery of the Young Futures Programme”
55. “Bring together the prevention tools of policing, with those of local government and local communities in the most streamlined and effective manner possible”
56. “Strengthen the link between the centre and local areas on crime prevention”
57. “Break down silos and improve spreading of best practice”

APPENDIX III: ToR for the independent review of police force structures

Published 17 March 2026

Purpose

- “Our policing system requires radical re-design. A system designed in the 1960s, based around 43 local police forces, is no longer fit for purpose”
- The White Paper committed to an independent review of police force structures, to make recommendations on the optimum number of forces and the most effective implementation.
- The aim is to design:
 - a new model, built around fewer, larger police forces
 - which meet the needs of victims and
 - supports effective, efficient and accountable policing both at the local and national levels
 - “for now and far into the future”

Outputs

- The Chair should report recommendations to the Home Secretary by the end of the 5th month following the launch of the review [August 2026].
- Recommendations should be supported by evidence, and consider:
 - Implementation
 - cost analysis wherever applicable
 - (including but not limited to the total costs associated with precept equalisation across merged forces)
- Interim report to Home Secretary required at the mid point of the review

Scope

The review will make recommendations on:

1. The most effective number of police forces across England and Wales and their configuration
2. How local policing can be optimised through Local Policing Areas (LPAs) including:
 - which policing functions they are responsible for
 - alignment with or relationship to existing Local Authority boundaries
 - governance and oversight
 - community involvement (including the ability to set local policing priorities).
3. How new governance arrangements (Policing and Crime Boards) should operate within larger forces, including:

- how local communities can shape LPA priorities and hold them to account
 - the role of local and strategic authorities in governance structures
4. How a move to significantly fewer forces should be delivered to:
 - minimise operational disruption (specifically incident response and local investigations)
 - maintain best practice
 - ensure delivery costs can be minimised and offset through efficiencies in later years
 5. Which forces are best suited to form part of pathfinder mergers this Parliament. This should give consideration to the local support from police forces and local policing body or Mayor.
 6. The review will not make recommendations about the role or functions of:
 - Specialist national agencies and non-Home Office forces
 - Police Scotland and PSNI
 - The National Police Service
 7. Working relationships and effective operation between these forces and the territorial forces should be considered
 8. Have due regard to the implications for Fire and Rescue Services and Local Resilience
 9. The review will not make recommendations on:
 - The revised funding formula (notwithstanding considerations for new force structures to set foundations for strong financial resilience, viability, and coherence with revised funding arrangements)
 - The design and build of the National Policing Service (NPS), and the policing functions that will be exercised as already agreed (which will be taken into account in the design of local policing and regional forces)
 - Devolution arrangements (in respect of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland)

Design principles

- A. Strengthen neighbourhood policing, to improve public confidence, to build trust and consent and to improve responsiveness to local priorities.
- B. Strong accountability at the local and regional level, to ensure policing delivers against the priorities of the public.
- C. Improve the effectiveness of policing (including specialist capabilities), or the efficient use of resources, whilst supporting the wellbeing of the police workforce.
- D. Improving the victim experience through consistent and effective delivery of policing across all force areas; reducing disparities and improving consistency in service levels, based on proportionate force capacity for the needs of the area it serves.
- E. Increase alignment with local government boundaries (including existing and potential Mayoral and Foundation Strategic Authorities), and other public service boundaries, including those in health, wider criminal justice, blue light and public safety systems, to facilitate cross-sector crime prevention and early intervention strategies.
- F. Interoperability with the entirety of the policing system and the bodies within, including after the implementation of the police reform agenda, whilst capitalising on existing regional collaborations.
- G. Greater consistency in systems, processes, data and technology across the [merged] force area to ensure that police can share relevant information to best manage the risk to the public.
- H. Planning should be on the basis that costs of this merger programme in its entirety should not create an additional pressure on the cost of policing to central Government.

Leadership

The review will be conducted by Lord Bernard Hogan-Howe, QPM.

The advisory panel will be comprised of those with significant experience across issues relevant to policing, including but not limited to local policing bodies, victims' services, public sector reform, criminal justice, and operational policing.

Governance and methodology

The Independent Chair is a direct appointment by the Home Secretary. A team of Home Office officials will support the Chair but work independently of the Department for the purposes of the review. The review will have a Senior Civil Servant sponsor within the Home Office, who will provide overall oversight and monitor progress.

The Review (Secretariat) must issue regular reports to the host departmental Unit which show progress against key milestones, spend and use of budget, and highlights any expected challenges towards completion.

In conducting the review, the Chair is expected to engage extensively with stakeholders including, but not limited to:

- a range of policing system leaders, including those who have delivered police force mergers outside of England and Wales
- police officers and staff
- trade unions and staff associations
- local authority leaders, Mayors and Deputy Mayors, including the City of London Corporation
- Fire and Rescue Services and Local Resilience Fora
- other Government Departments
- Welsh Government
- MPs and other locally elected officers
- the UK Intelligence Community, CT Policing partners, regulatory and oversight bodies
- key policing partners (APCC/NPCC), including from across the blue light and criminal justice system
- victims' groups and community representatives
- leaders of wider public sector reform
- academics and those with international perspectives

Engagement will take place through meetings and workshops as well as written submissions from these parties through calls for evidence. The Chair is also expected to invite stakeholders with existing data or unpublished analysis to consider sharing these for the purposes of the review.

A Memorandum of Understanding will set out how information and data will be shared between the Chair, the Home Office and any other parties who provide evidence. A formal data sharing agreement will be signed between the Review and the Home Office, and will set out ownership of the data and the way in which information will be shared.

APPENDIX IV: About CoPaCC Advisory

CoPaCC was established in the UK in 2012, in the same year as Police and Crime Commissioners were first elected. Our focus at the outset and from that time has been on sharing good and excellent work in policing through our two media platforms, Policing Insight, and, more recently, PolicingTV. We have grown that into the provision of policing-focused consultancy services, now with clients not just in the United Kingdom, but also around the world.

Policing Insight is a policing news and analysis site covering policing policy, leadership, and reform, aimed at professionals and policing stakeholders. It publishes articles, opinion pieces, and interviews from around the world, often focusing on governance, accountability, and innovation in policing.

PolicingTV is a video-led platform focused on interviews, documentaries, and discussions with policing leaders and experts. It tends to emphasise storytelling and practitioner insight, offering a more accessible, broadcast-style way to explore policing issues compared to written analysis. Together, Policing Insight and PolicingTV complement the advisory organisations by shaping debate and sharing knowledge across policing worldwide.

CoPaCC Advisory extends that work into consultancy, offering research, reviews, and strategic advice to policing bodies - making good use of our local and international insights, as well as of our extensive network of policing experts.

World Policing Advisory operates more internationally, providing expertise, reform guidance, and leadership support to policing organisations and governments around the world.