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HARVEY REDGRAVE
MADELINE ROLFE

Rebuilding Trust and Delivering Safer Communities: A Plan for Reforming UK Policing

TONY BLAIR
INSTITUTE FOR
GLOBAL CHANGE

Contents

Our Future of Britain initiative sets out a policy agenda for a new era of invention and innovation, based on radical-yet-practical ideas and genuine reforms that embrace the tech revolution. The solutions developed by our experts will transform public services and deliver a greener, healthier, more prosperous UK.

This report on police reform is the first of three focused on law and order – and will be followed by two further policy papers on preventing the causes of crime and reform of the criminal-justice system.

01

Foreword

Public services exist for one reason alone and that is to serve the public. The NHS exists for its patients, education for our children; and in policing it is for the communities they protect and the victims on whose behalf they bring criminals to justice.

2023 has already highlighted some of the problems facing British policing, including both the HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary's annual assessment, and my own work in the Metropolitan Police. Both of these reports showed that policing, across a whole range of areas, has lost its way.

If we needed proof of this then look no further than the finding that more than 40 per cent of people who experienced or witnessed a crime chose not to report it. The biggest single reason given for not reporting was that people did not think the police would take them seriously. This is deeply worrying and speaks to a fundamental rupture in the bond of trust between the police and the public.

The public are not fools. They have noticed the decline in visible neighbourhood policing. They have seen the drop-off in the charge rate, with only 6 per cent of offences charged. They can see that the response to cross-cutting issues like fraud and serious organised crime is not what it ought to be. They also know that the job facing police today is different to the one they faced a decade ago, including dealing with a large rise in serious violence, both in the home and on the streets.

This report from the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI) seeks to look

at what changes will be needed. The authors argue that focusing on police-officer numbers alone won't be enough to rebuild and modernise policing. I agree. We watch programmes like ***CSI*** on our televisions but in real life the wait for forensics and digital investigations is woeful. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services has said that in some forces police don't even understand what digital forensics means, with tens of thousands of devices sitting in storage waiting to be examined.

Criminals are clever, using any method – technical or otherwise – to serve their purposes, which means policing needs the best skills and modern capabilities. But at the moment, policing is far behind those it is trying to stop.

As much as the challenge is real, decline is not inevitable. There are things the government could and should be doing to turn this situation around, many of which are identified in this report.

A focus on proper neighbourhood policing – with officers who are visible and accessible to the public – is paramount. A modern, flexible workforce using civilians in specialist areas, absolute professional standards across every level of policing and smarter use of technology are long overdue. I also agree with TBI that we need to bite the bullet on structural reform – the way we deal with national and cross-border threats makes little sense and that needs to change.

But I return to the beginning: the police's relationship with the public is at breaking point. In London, the police have lost the consent of black people and women to be policed. Nationally, if we get into a place where the public are no longer bothering to report crime to the police, we are in real difficulty.

It's time for a fundamental "reset moment". TBI is right that only with wholescale and radical reform can trust and confidence in the police be rebuilt.

Louise Casey

Baroness Casey of Blackstock DBE CB

02

Executive Summary

The British system of policing is at breaking point. Perhaps more than in any other public service, public trust and confidence is essential to effective policing. Yet new polling conducted alongside this report has found that an extraordinarily high proportion of the public – 41 per cent – who had experienced crime in the last year did not bother to report it because they did not think it would be treated seriously.

The world in which the police are operating has changed dramatically from a decade ago. A growing proportion of crime is severe and therefore more complex to resolve, and much of it now occurs in the online space. Public expectations have changed and the police are being called upon to intervene in areas traditionally dealt with by other public services, such as mental health.

Yet the police are stuck with a model that was designed for a different age. As a result, they lack the skills, capabilities and technology to meet public expectations. They are neither fulfilling the "basics", such as offering a neighbourhood policing presence and responding to 999 calls, nor are they keeping pace with new crime challenges.

The traditional policy lever reached for by politicians – more money for police officers – is unlikely to be available in future. But even if it were, it would not solve the fundamental problems identified in this report, which require comprehensive and deep reform, both of the police themselves, but also the wider criminal justice system (as further papers will show).

The policy changes recommended in this report fall into five broad categories:

1. Putting prevention at the heart of policing, with a new neighbourhood-policing guarantee and greater focus on diverting prolific offenders away from crime.

2. A modern and flexible workforce, with multiple new entry routes into policing to encourage new skills.

3. A new focus on professional standards and responsiveness, with forces judged by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

(HMICFRS) to be failing to be subject to intervention from the centre, as well as new ways for the public to drive action on issues of local concern, such as anti-social behaviour.

4. An overhaul of structures, with a new national force to tackle threats that cross force boundaries and require a strategic response, encompassing counterterrorism, serious organised crime (SOC) and cyber-crime.

5. Smarter use of technology to prevent criminality, including digital identity to tackle online fraud and an expansion of facial-recognition technology.

Some of those steps will be contentious and involve painful choices. But doing nothing now will only increase the pain later on. Now is the time for government to take the necessary steps to enable the police to meet the challenges of the 21st century and restore the founding principle of consent.

03

The Context: Drivers of Reform

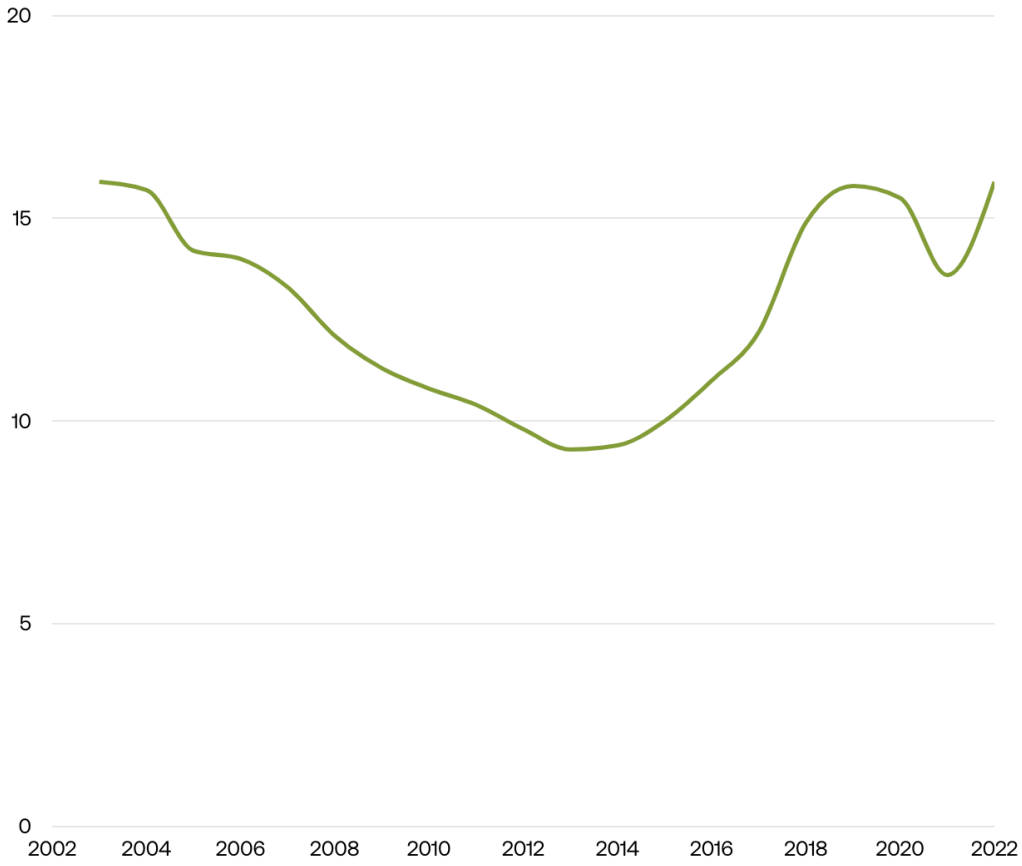
The environment in which the police are operating has radically changed from even a decade ago. This chapter summarises the key drivers of reform.

THE CHANGING CHALLENGE FROM CRIME

According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales, the total volume of crime has more than halved since 1995. However, this aggregate trend masks underlying changes in the composition of crime, with large falls in acquisitive crimes, such as burglary and car theft, being displaced by new forms of crime and harm. In particular, there has been a substantial rise in serious violence since 2014, such as knife-enabled crime, domestic abuse and homicide.[1] These types of crimes are generally more complex and take longer to investigate. A helpful way to illustrate this is through a measure called the Crime Severity Score[2] produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which measures the relative harm of crimes (as opposed to their volume). Since 2013 the score has increased by 70 per cent, demonstrating that the severity of recorded crime has increased sharply.

FIGURE 1

Crime Severity Score across all forces (2003–2022)



Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)

In addition, the growing reach of the internet has created new opportunities for criminality. In 2022, 39 per cent of all crime affecting people in England and Wales was fraud – the majority of which was cyber-enabled (61 per cent).[3] The internet has also allowed the growth of more serious crimes, such as child sexual abuse (CSA). A shocking 8.3 million CSA images were added to the Child Abuse Image Database from 2016–2019, and the problem continues to grow.[4] The rise in these types of crimes is requiring the police to develop new skills and capabilities.

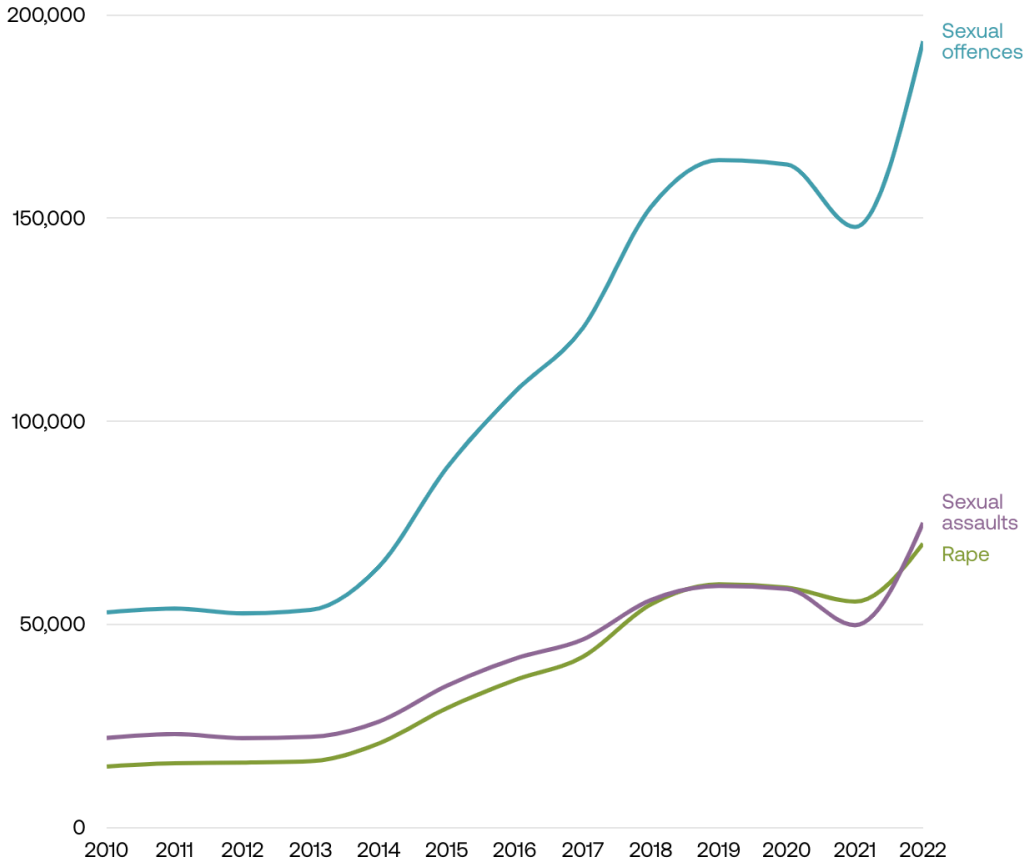
CHANGING EXPECTATIONS

Societal changes have placed new expectations and burdens on the police, stretching their role beyond simply crime-fighting. So-called "non-crime demand" has grown significantly over the last decade, with the police picking up the pieces from other public services having withdrawn. In particular, the police are spending a growing proportion of their time responding to mental-health incidents and incidents involving missing persons.[5] It is estimated that the police dealt with 600,000 mental-health incidents in 2022 and are spending 3 million investigation hours per year responding to missing-persons incidents.[6]

At the same time, the police have (rightly) come under pressure to respond to previously marginalised – and often hidden – forms of violence, such as domestic abuse, rape and other sexual offences.

FIGURE 2

Police-recorded rape and sexual offences (2010–2022)



Source: ONS

Violence against women represents a growing proportion of police demand. Domestic abuse alone accounts for nearly a fifth (17 per cent) of total recorded crime. This requires a different type of policing response: most of the violence that is perpetrated against women happens inside the home rather than in public, with the offender an intimate partner in half (49 per cent) of all cases.[7]

ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS ARE EXPLOITING THESE CHANGES

Organised gangs have become adept at exploiting the internet to further their interests. The dark web has facilitated an increasingly lucrative online cocaine trade, which is enabling "just-in-time delivery". In 2020, nearly half (44 per cent) of drug users reported that it was easy or fairly easy to obtain drugs within 24 hours,[8] up from 35 per cent in 2016. End-to-end encryption is also allowing organised criminal groups to communicate while evading detection from law enforcement.

The growing availability of class A drugs has fuelled competition between gangs, which in turn has driven an increase in street violence. Knife crime has grown steadily since 2014 (aside from a temporary dip during the pandemic) with increases in assaults with injury, robbery and threats to kill.[9] At the same time, the number and proportion of drug-related homicides has grown over the past decade, up from 43 per cent in the year ending March 2012 to 52 per cent in the year ending March 2022.[10]

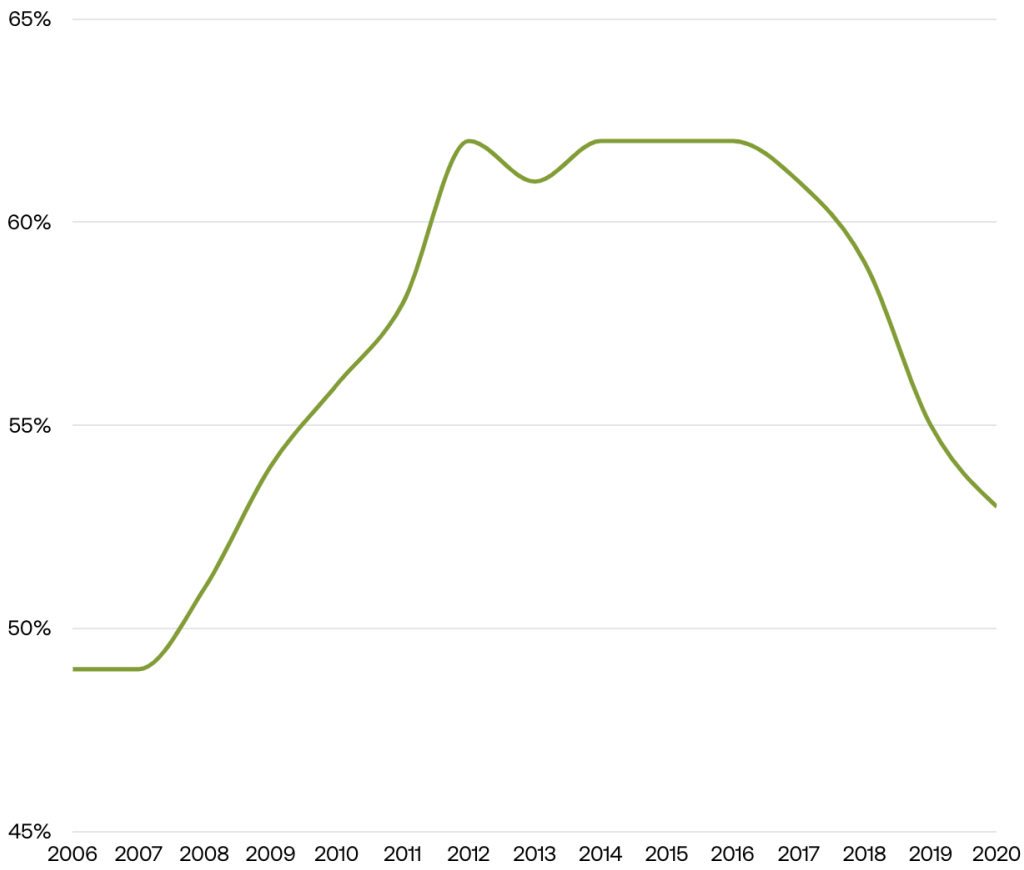
LESS CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL POLICING RESPONSIVENESS

An important test of police effectiveness is how responsive they are to local issues of concern, such as anti-social behaviour (ASB), which can hugely impact people's quality of life. The trends are not encouraging.

According to new polling conducted for the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI), 45 per cent of people say that crime is a problem in their local area, with ASB the most commonly experienced problem. Despite this, 41 per cent said that they did not report crime they witnessed or experienced to the police, with the most common reason given being that people did not think the police would take it seriously. This is backed up by data from the Crime Survey, which show the proportion of people who have confidence that local police will take robust action on ASB has fallen since 2014–2015, after several years of steady rises.

FIGURE 3

Percentage of people who agree that the police and local council deal with the issues that matter in their local area



Source: ONS

A major contributor to declining confidence is the fall in visible policing, which has been evident over the past decade. Between 2010 and 2020, the proportion of people saying they saw foot patrols on the streets once a week or more fell from 39 per cent to 15 per cent – a decline of more than half.[11] It is notable that these trends coincided with a period in which neighbourhood policing was eroded, evidenced by a sharp reduction in police community-

support officers (PCSOs) and the proportion of officers dedicated to neighbourhood roles.

It is important to say that declining trust and confidence is a population-wide trend but clearly there are particular communities, such as the black Caribbean community, where levels of trust have historically been much lower than the general population's. Indeed, one interpretation of current trends is that we are witnessing a "levelling down" of public perceptions.

CHALLENGES POSED BY THE EXISTING POLICE STRUCTURE

The existing 43-force structure poses a number of challenges to the police's ability to respond to threats which cross force boundaries and/or which require a national-level response.

Cross-Border Crime

Traditionally, the jurisdiction of a police force is geographical. However, forces are finding that an increasing number of threats, such as illegal "county lines"[12] drug transportation, online fraud and human trafficking, extend beyond geographical boundaries and are consequently effectively beyond their reach.

Specialist Capabilities

The changing nature of crime increasingly requires the police to be able to access certain specialist capabilities, such as surveillance, digital forensics and firearms, even if the extent to which these capabilities are needed differs across individual forces. However, such capabilities require significant investment and training and are therefore more likely to be effective if they are developed at scale, rather than 43 times.

Resilience

The existing system of "mutual-aid" agreements (whereby forces lend assistance to each other in anticipation of a major incident or event) has generally served policing well but, in recent years, has been subject to pressure, for example during the 2011 riots and following an upsurge in protests. Given the expected rise in demand for public-order policing, there are legitimate concerns as to whether the existing model will be sufficiently

resilient.

Economies of Scale

There are potential financial benefits from nationalising the procurement of police equipment, such as cars, uniforms, helicopters, body-worn video and so on, rather than requiring 43 forces to retain separate arrangements.

Use of Technology

A major problem with the current structure is the lack of a coherent approach to investment in and use of police technology, denying forces the ability to benefit from systems that are joined up and interoperable, rather than siloed and fragmented. Nothing symbolises the current dysfunction better than the police national computer (PNC) – a vital piece of policing infrastructure upon which we rely for information about criminal records – which is 49 years old.

TRADITIONAL POLICY LEVERS WON'T BE AVAILABLE

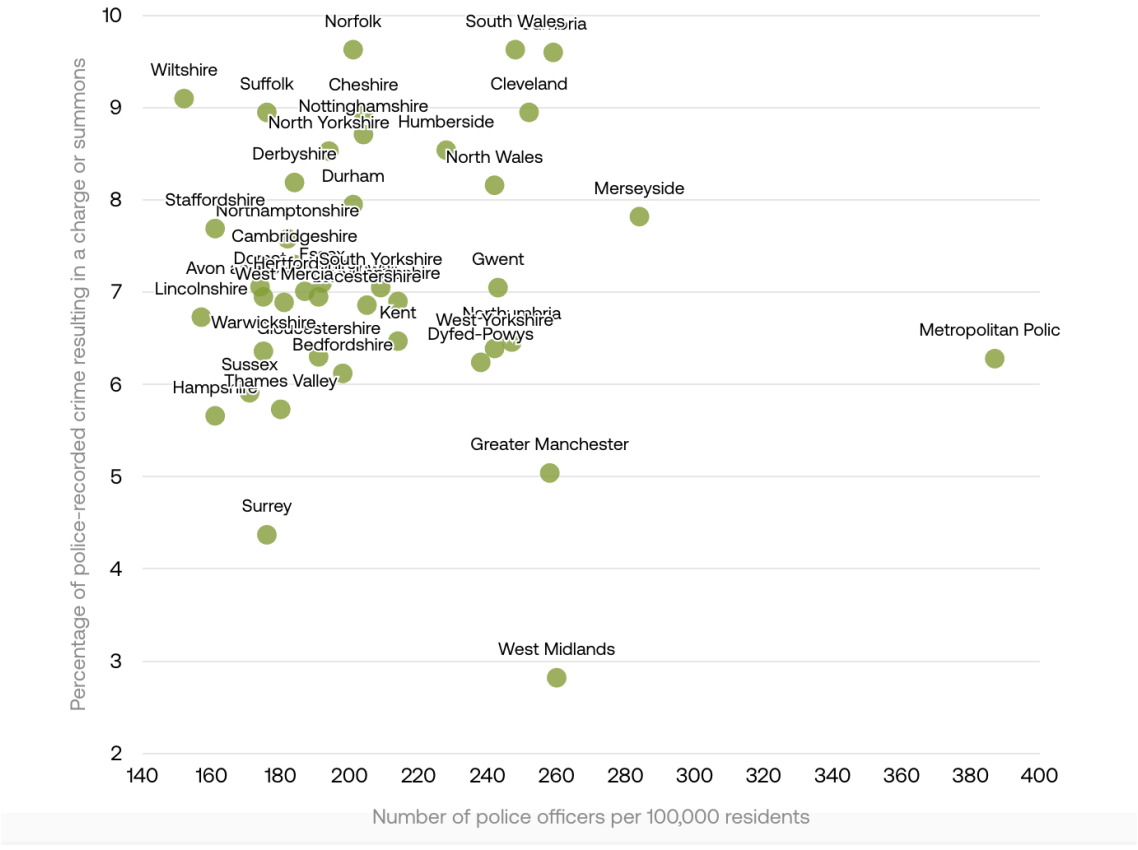
The traditional policy lever for improving police outcomes – increased officer numbers – is unlikely to be available in the future.

A notable trend over the past 50 years has been the steady increase in the share of government spending devoted to health. Given the United Kingdom's demographic profile (an ageing population with worsening health outcomes), it seems reasonable to project that police funding will more likely be squeezed than expanded.

In any case, there may be diminishing returns from simply increasing the number of police officers. Analysis of police productivity and officer numbers indicates that there is no direct relationship between the number of police officers and detection rates.

FIGURE 4

Percentage of police-recorded crime resulting in a charge or summons (2022)



Sources: Home Office (Crime Outcomes) and Home Office (Police Workforce)

Despite an increase in officer numbers, in the past year only 6 per cent of all crime recorded by the police resulted in a charge, compared with 17 per cent in 2014.[13] Reversing the collapse in police productivity is perhaps the biggest challenge facing policymakers in the Home Office today.

04

Approach to Reform: A Police Service Fit for the Future

The drivers of reform set out in the previous chapter point to the need for policy changes in a number of interrelated areas.

FIGURE 5

Drivers of reform and policy implications for the future of policing

Drivers of reform	Policy implications
Rising demand and a broadening of the police's role, leading to a capacity crunch	Policing focused on prevention, not just dealing with consequences
Technological change: new crimes and threats, demanding new skills and innovation	A modernised and flexible workforce making efficient use of available resources
Declining confidence in the ability of the police to uphold standards and respond to issues of local concern	Beefed-up standards regime and new ways for citizens to hold policing to account and drive action on anti-social behaviour
Concern about the effectiveness of existing police structures and an underpowered and disjointed approach to national threats, such as serious organised crime (SOC)	New powers for police to seize the assets of SOC nominals and an organisational framework which strengthens specialist capabilities
The traditional policy lever of more money to fund officer numbers will not be available	Using technology to design out crime at source and deter would-be offenders

Source: TBI

These reform areas, in turn, point to a multifaceted reform agenda for government. These are explored in greater depth in this section.

PREVENTION AT THE HEART OF POLICING

One of the features of policing over the past decade has been a slow but steady shift away from a proactive, preventative model, towards a more reactive service, dealing with the consequences rather than the causes of

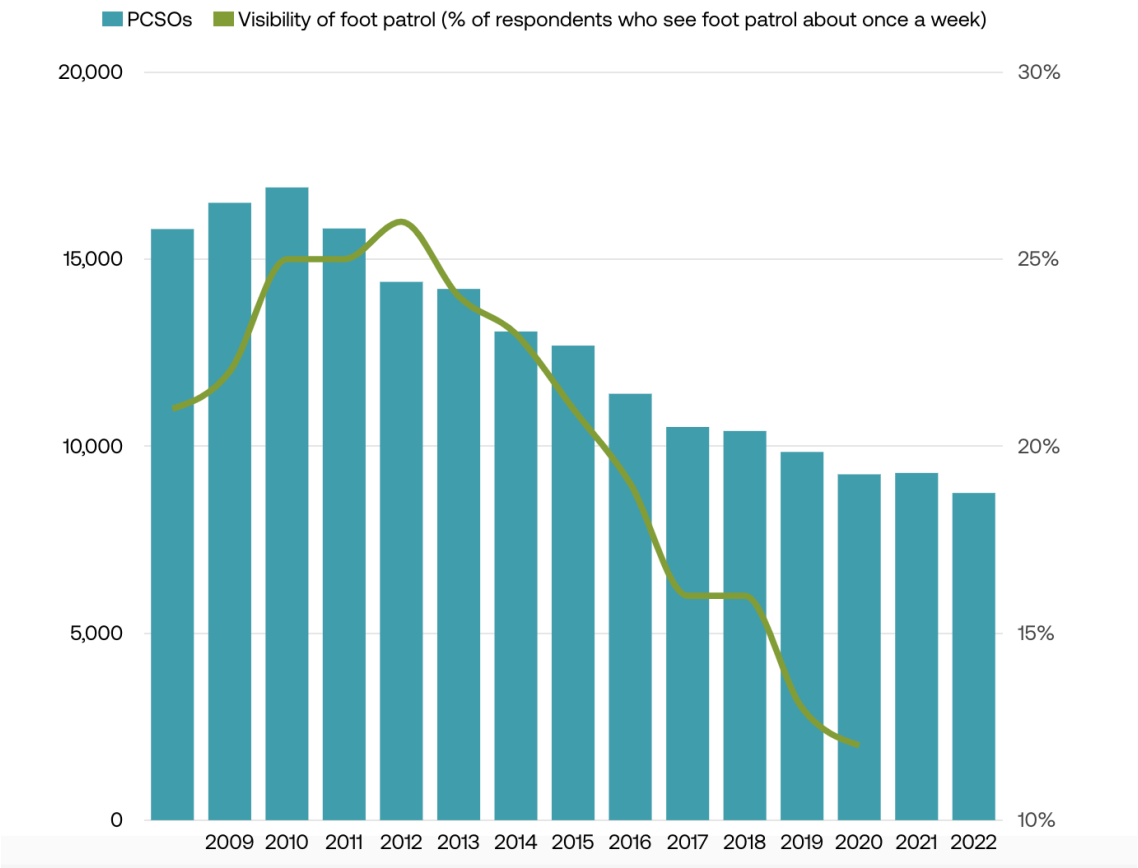
crime. There are a number of contributory factors to this, but by far the biggest has been the erosion of neighbourhood policing. Established by the last Labour government in 2005, neighbourhood policing was built around three core principles:

- a visible and accessible policing presence
- involving communities in identifying priority issues
- tackling these issues in collaboration with other agencies and the community through a problem-solving approach

However, in recent years, the model of neighbourhood policing envisaged in 2005 has been diluted and hollowed out: while forces still allocate some resources to neighbourhood teams, there is now considerable variation in what "neighbourhood policing" has come to mean in practice.[14] For example, in many forces, neighbourhood policing is effectively abstracted into general local response policing, eliding the distinction between proactive and reactive work. This shift has been accelerated by a significant reduction in PCSOs.

FIGURE 6

Police officers and PCSOs in "neighbourhood policing" roles and foot-patrol visibility



Source: Home Office

Another key contributory factor in the shift away from prevention has been the dismantling of efforts to identify and grip the most prolific offenders. For example, around 300,000 crack and heroin users are thought to be responsible for around half of acquisitive crime, yet referrals into treatment have fallen off a cliff over the past decade.[15] The last Labour government established a system of drug testing on arrest in order to divert more drug users into treatment and address the underlying causes of their offending – but the Drug Intervention Programme was cancelled in 2013.

Policy implications: There is a need to shift policing towards a more preventative model, re-establishing neighbourhood policing as a dedicated, universal service and ensuring the police are able to proactively manage the most prolific offenders, for example through drug testing.

A MODERNISED AND FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE

At present, rigid rules around entry and exit, pay, training and employment regulations restrict the ability of the police workforce to evolve and adapt to new challenges. For example, most police officers enter the service at the lowest rank (constable) and work for 30 years, meaning the police miss out on valuable skills from outside. Pay tends to be related to tenure rather than skills; performance-management is minimal and on-the-job training is infrequent. Moreover, the special nature of police employment – whereby the police are not employees but subject to a series of regulations governing their rights and responsibilities – reduces the ability of chief constables to tailor their workforce to meet local needs. As a result, underperformance is not rooted out quickly enough and pathways for career progression are often stunted. The government has introduced some limited reforms in this area, including a number of direct-entry schemes to address specific shortages (such as detectives) but these have been reactive and piecemeal rather than part of a systematic workforce strategy.

Another major problem is the lack of any kind of national strategy for the development of specialist capabilities within key areas of policing, where skills gaps are harming police productivity. One obvious example of this is digital forensics, once considered a niche capability, but increasingly becoming a core component of all police investigations. In December 2022, HM Inspectorate reached a damning conclusion.[16]

"It has become increasingly clear that the police service hasn't kept pace with the scale of the challenges they face. In some cases, we found that the police simply didn't understand what digital forensics meant. We found a national backlog of over 25,000 devices waiting to be examined."

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

DECEMBER 2022

A shortage of trained investigators, particularly in more specialist areas such as financial crime, cyber and serious sexual offences, is contributing to plunging charge rates and increasingly lengthy cases, leading to long waits for victims.

Policy implications: The government should facilitate a shift to a more modern and flexible workforce model, with new direct-entry routes, skills-related pay and the development of institutions with a remit to grow key specialist capabilities such as digital forensics.

STANDARDS AND RESPONSIVENESS

Baroness Casey's review of standards and culture within the Metropolitan Police – triggered in light of the rape, abduction and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer – revealed multiple and severe organisational failings, especially with regard to vetting, misconduct and the investigation of violence against women and girls. The review concluded that the force was institutionally homophobic, racist and misogynistic.[17]

Arguably, however, the findings of Baroness Casey's review were not exclusive to the Metropolitan Police but spoke to a broader failure to uphold and enforce standards within policing. For example, it is illogical that chief constables, including the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, do not have the power to remove and dismiss officers found guilty of gross misconduct or identified as not fit for the job. Similarly, there is a need to overhaul the system of vetting, which was not designed to root out racists and misogynists.

At a national level, there are few levers for the government to address underperformance within policing. In contrast to schools, for example, the judgements of HMICFRS are purely advisory: forces deemed to be failing are not subject to "special measures" and do not need to act on the inspectorate's recommendations. In theory, police and crime commissioners (PCCs) have powers to remove chief constables if they are dissatisfied with their performance, but in practice this rarely happens. To demonstrate the point, in 2022 HMICFRS judged six forces to be failing, yet not a single chief constable from those six has been forced to resign.

In addition to falling standards, the public has perceived a marked decline in police responsiveness. Polling carried out for TBI in 2022 found that despite 42 per cent of people saying they had personally experienced ASB where they lived, 72 per cent did not bother to report it.

Policy implications: The entire standards regime needs to be overhauled, starting with vetting and misconduct but extending into performance more broadly, with a beefed-up inspectorate and a more proactive Home Office able to intervene when forces are failing. PCC elections aside, the public needs new ways to ensure the police maintain a focus on issues of local concern, such as ASB.

AN ORGANISATIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FIT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

The current policing model – with 43 geographically bounded forces – is increasingly irrelevant to modern forms of threat and harm, whether from SOC or cyber-enabled fraud, which are largely borderless.

At various points over the past decade, different institutional reforms have been superimposed onto existing structures in order to try and strengthen the response to cross-border threats. The National Crime Agency (NCA) was

established in 2011 to lead and coordinate the UK's efforts to combat SOC, supported by a network of Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCUs). In other areas, such as counterterrorism and fraud, institutional arrangements have evolved over several decades, with a single force – the Metropolitan Police for counterterrorism and the City of London Police for fraud – assuming a national leadership role in coordinating local force activity.

These different structural reforms were developed largely in isolation from each other, rather than as part of a strategic whole-system response. There is therefore a lack of coherence in the current institutional arrangements for the policing of cross-border and national threats. In stark contrast to the policing of counterterrorism, where operational activity is nationally planned and coordinated via a network of counterterrorism units, the NCA has struggled to task local forces with the policing of SOC. Nor is it obvious why the NCA's funding is dwarfed by that for counterterrorism, given the relative scale of harm caused within communities. Policing leaders – past and present – have commented on this incoherence.

> "It [the current structure] undermines police's ability to succeed in many ways, such as acquiring the best modern technology, combatting organised crime or making best use of public money."
>
> Sir Mark Rowley
>
> COMMISSIONER OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE

"We are trying to make a complex system work on what is not the design that we would start with if we were starting from scratch"

Martin Hewitt

FORMER CHAIR OF THE NATIONAL POLICE CHIEFS' COUNCIL (2019–2023)

In a similar vein, there has been a failure to ensure that the legal framework for combating SOC keeps pace with the evolution of the threat. For example, organised criminal networks are adept at using technology to rapidly move (and therefore hide) their wealth. The government has passed several laws to enable law enforcement to seize criminal assets yet, in practice, the threshold for using those powers remains prohibitively high. In the five years since the government established "Unexplained Wealth Orders", fewer than five have been obtained. This is in contrast to the rapid progress made following major geopolitical events, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine (when the government moved rapidly to seize oligarchs' assets) or following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks (when the government passed rapid legislation to tackle terrorist financing).

Policy implications: There is a need to enhance the UK's response to cross-border crime and SOC with:

- a powerful new regional tier of policing, encompassing specialist capabilities
- the creation of a powerful new national force responsible for counterterrorism, SOC and cyber-enabled crime

Government should also seek to lower the threshold for use of powers designed to seize the assets of known SOC nominals (learning lessons from the legislation passed in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine).

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

At a national level, police technology is outdated and in need of replacement. The PNC, a critical piece of technological infrastructure which holds records on more than 13 million citizens, is nearly 50 years old. Locally, the procurement of new technology is not joined up, resulting in a dangerous (and inefficient) lack of interoperability between forces, a fact that was highlighted in a recent HMICFRS report into the investigation of homicides by the Metropolitan Police.[18]

More broadly, new technologies could play a significant role in deterring crimes, particularly those in the online space. Introducing a system of digital identity verification would prevent the use of online anonymity (a major driver of fraud and other internet-based crimes). Similarly, more extensive regulation of internet platforms – to prevent hosting of criminal content – would reduce the opportunity for online criminality.

Beyond the online space, technology could be applied more ambitiously to deter and solve crime. For example, some police forces have used facial-recognition technology to locate missing persons, suspects, witnesses and victims. But its use is piecemeal; there is a need for a more systematic approach, fusing data from cameras (faces, number plates), phone masts, social media and other sources to create a single intelligence product that improves investigations. Similarly, widening DNA collection to ensure that anyone arrested and charged would have their DNA collected and retained would be likely to improve the detection of crimes such as burglary and car theft.

Policy implications: Government should examine the case for a system of digital identity verification to prevent online crime and consider more extensive regulation of internet providers to prevent the hosting of criminal content.

05

Recommendations for Change

This is a critical moment for British policing. The challenges are fundamentally different from those of a decade ago, with new patterns of crime, changing public expectations of the police's role and investigations that are, partly thanks to digital technology, increasingly complex. As things stand, the service will struggle to meet that challenge: rigid workforce rules mean officers lack specialist skills, with the organisation structured around local geographies rather than threats and the ability to deploy technology to prevent and solve crime severely curtailed. Furthermore, the traditional policy lever that has been used to improve outcomes – more money for police officers – is unlikely to be available for the foreseeable future, given the wider economic context.

We recommend a multifaceted programme of reform, consisting of five discrete pillars.

1. PREVENTION AT THE HEART OF POLICING

Neighbourhood-Policing Guarantee

Why? Neighbourhood policing is the bedrock of proactive, preventative policing, ensuring the police get in front of problems before they escalate and gather the intelligence needed to solve crimes. However, over the past decade it has been steadily eroded, with forces retreating towards a more reactive model of policing.

How? Rather than leaving the provision of neighbourhood policing to the discretion of chief constables, the government should legislate to guarantee a minimum level of neighbourhood policing in every force, ensuring that safer-neighbourhood teams would be ringfenced and protected from abstraction.

Automatic Drug Testing on Arrest for Known Prolific Offenders

Why? There is a cohort of around 300,000 problematic drug users responsible for a large proportion of acquisitive crime. Drug testing on arrest is a proven means of diverting such offenders into addiction treatment, thereby

addressing the underlying causes of their offending behaviour.

How? The government should introduce mandatory drug testing on arrest for every individual arrested for a specified list of trigger offences (where substance misuse is a known driver), such as theft, burglary, or where the offender is known to have more than five previous convictions. This would ensure that the most prolific offenders are rapidly diverted into treatment and any breach of the treatment requirements would result in cases being fast-tracked through the courts. The scheme could be piloted in the ten highest-volume crime areas in the country, before being rolled out more widely.

2. A MODERN AND FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE

Multiple Points of Entry and Skills-Related Pay

Why? The rules around entry into – and exit from – policing continue to be overly rigid, depriving the police of valuable skills from other sectors and contributing to a closed culture. In addition, police pay is related to tenure rather than the acquisition of valuable skills. The body responsible for workforce improvement – the College of Policing – lacks the resources and levers to drive meaningful workforce reform.

How? Government should create a series of new specialist entry routes and pathways into policing to attract talent from outside (such as analysts and investigators with experience of the private sector) and, in parallel, commission a review into the case for reforming police employment regulations to drive modernisation. Moreover, they should ask the College of Policing to advise on reforming the pay structure to incentivise skills and examine the case for a new "licence to practice" to drive up professionalism. The College of Policing should itself be reformed so as to enable it to play a more proactive role in monitoring and overseeing professional standards and workforce planning.

A National Digital Forensics Agency

Why? Digital forensics are increasingly key to the detection and investigation of crimes but many forces lack both the skills and technology to build this capability effectively. Investment is fragmented across the 43 forces, meaning standards of investigation vary hugely across the country.

How? Rather than all 43 forces seeking to build their own digital forensics capability in silos, the government should establish a new agency to lead on digital forensics nationally, with the remit of transforming the police's ability to investigate and solve crime and speed up the charging process.

3. STANDARDS AND RESPONSIVENESS

A New Standards Regime to Tackle Underperformance and Failure

Why? Currently, underperformance is tolerated rather than managed. HMICFRS has no power to require forces to act on its recommendations, so its judgements lack force. Similarly, since the creation of PCCs in 2012 and the dismantling of national targets, the Home Office has largely withdrawn from intervening directly with forces.

How? The government should legislate to give HM Inspectorate regulatory powers so that forces are legally required to act on its recommendations. Where forces fail to improve (over a sustained period), HMICFRS should be able to trigger a change in the leadership of those forces. At the same time, the Home Office should create a police standards unit, which would be able to work with and intervene directly in forces that require urgent improvement.

Scorecards to Drive Greater Responsiveness

Why? Currently the public has no way of comparing how responsive their local police force is in comparison with its peers, and this reduces accountability. There is a wealth of policing data but much of it is inaccessible to the public. Even PCCs, who are elected every four years to hold forces to account, often struggle to access meaningful performance data.

How? The government should ask the College of Policing to design and produce accessible performance scorecards using available policing data, enabling the public to understand how their force compares with its peers, particularly on issues of local concern, such as ASB.

4. A NEW ORGANISATIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

A New National Force to Lead on National Security Threats and a Stronger Regional Tier

Why? The existing structure of policing was designed for an age when local offenders were committing crimes against local victims in local places. It makes little sense today when nearly half of all crime is online. The structure that has been established for coordinating counterterrorism policing works well on its own terms (though it is by far the best funded part of policing) but arguably this has been at the expense of other national security threats, such as SOC, which falls between the gaps. The NCA is too small to tackle the problem and ROCUs remain voluntary associations and therefore lack operational clout.

How? The government should consult on the creation of a single UK-wide police force to lead on all crimes and threats which span force boundaries, encompassing counterterrorism, SOC and cyber-enabled crime. As a first step towards this change, the existing network of ROCUs should be put on a statutory footing, empowered to invest in specialist capabilities and, where necessary, to direct SOC operations. Local forces would remain – as now – overseen by PCCs but would be limited to the policing of geographically bounded crimes.

It is important to be upfront about the trade-offs that come with any major reorganisation. The creation of a powerful new national force would entail removing counterterrorism policing from the Metropolitan Police and the policing of fraud from the City of London Police, which would clearly create some disruption in the short term. However, by aligning police structures with the reality of modern crime challenges, such a change would be likely to unlock significant operational and economic benefits in the medium term.

A Lower Threshold for Seizure of SOC Nominals' Assets

Why? There is a range of powers available for the seizure of criminal assets but the threshold for use of those powers remains too high, so they are rarely used. Fewer than five Unexplained Wealth Orders have been successfully obtained and implemented since their introduction in 2017. The government's rapid freezing of Russian oligarchs' assets after the invasion of Ukraine in

February 2022 provides a potential template that could be applied to SOC.

How? Reverse the burden of proof to enable the police to more aggressively freeze and seize the assets of known SOC nominals.

5. SMARTER USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Digital ID to Tackle Online Crime

Why? The lack of a secure means of verifying identity creates opportunities for criminals to operate, particularly in the online space, where they are able to use anonymity to evade capture for fraud and other cyber-enabled crimes.

How? Government should introduce a national digital-identity scheme, allowing citizens to authenticate themselves and therefore reduce the opportunities for criminals to exploit anonymity online to commit crimes and evade capture.

National Strategy on Facial-Recognition Technology and Expanded Collection of DNA

Why? The growing use of cameras (for example, through smart doorbells and car dashcams) provides an opportunity to deploy facial-recognition technology in a more systemic way to aid the investigation of crimes. Similarly, the collection of DNA at crime scenes can be a valuable tool in aiding police investigations yet is currently retained only from a diminishing number of convicted offenders.

How? The government should task the College of Policing with setting out a national strategy for the use of facial-recognition technology, drawing on the UK's extensive CCTV network. It should also legislate to enable the police to retain DNA from suspects who are arrested and charged, rather than only those convicted.

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Conclusion

The British system of policing is no longer fit for the challenges it faces. Rather than seeking to muddle through – adopting the same policies and approaches as those used in the past – government needs to grasp the nettle of reform.

Endnotes

1 For these types of offences, police-recorded figures are thought to give better insight into underlying trends than the Crime Survey.

2 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeseverityscoreexperimentalstatistics

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4 https://www.policingreview.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/phase_1_report_final-1.pdf

5 https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/joint-thematic-inspection-criminal-justice-mental-health-needs/

6 https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publication-html/state-of-policing-the-annual-assessment-of-policing-in-england-and-wales-2022/

7 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2022

8 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandandwales/yearendingjune2022

9 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2022#knife-or-sharp-instrument-offences

10 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/appendixtableshomicideinenglandandwales

11 https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesannualsupplementarytables

12 https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/drug-trafficking/county-lines

13 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022

14 https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/state-of-policing-the-annual-assessment-of-policing-in-england-and-wales-2016/

15 https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/independent-review-of-drugs-by-professor-dame-carol-black

16 https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/how-well-the-police-and-other-agencies-use-digital-forensics-in-their-investigations/

17 https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/met/about-us/baroness-casey-review/update-march-2023/baroness-casey-review-march-2023a.pdf

18 https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/news/news-feed/met-polices-failure-to-stop-stephen-port-murders-could-happen-again/

TONY BLAIR
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General enquiries

info@institute.global