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Performance Tracker 2023: Police

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Forces are starting to reverse poor performance, but severe challenges still remain.

30 OCT 2023

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Contents



The police service faces an array of challenges. Levels of public trust are at historically low levels – a consequence of a litany of scandals

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While overall levels of reported crime have declined over the last 10 years, so too have charge rates. In the period, police resources have been stretched by the combination of increasing crime complexity and growing non-crime demands.

Police spending has increased significantly in recent years, largely to support the successful recruitment of an additional 20,000 police officers. The decline in the charge rate has been halted, and the absolute number of charges increased in 2022/23 for the first time since 2013/14. Similarly, forces are increasing their focus on sexual assaults, while aiming to reduce the amount of time spent on non-crime demands such as responding to mental health incidents.

However, there is considerable uncertainty about the long-term impact of the additional officers. Forces are under financial strain to maintain officer numbers, while rapid recruitment has led to concerns over the adequacy of vetting arrangements and the burden placed on supervising officers. It will take time to assess whether these changes can lead to a sustained increase in the number of charges, and improvements in public trust.

Police: key figures

- **0.9%** – the real-terms increase in police spending in England and Wales in 2022/23.
- **8,655,504** – the number of victim-based crimes reported in 2022/23, a 15.2% decline on 2019/20.
- **8.9%** – the minimum increase in the number of charges/summonses in 2022/23, corresponding to a charge rate of 5.7%.^{*}
- **20,947** – the increase in police officer headcount between October 2019 and March 2023.
- **51%** – the proportion of people who feel that their local police are doing a good or excellent job. That equates to a 5-percentage-point decline on 2019/20 and the lowest proportion since at least 2009/10.

Police forces have seen big funding increases in recent years

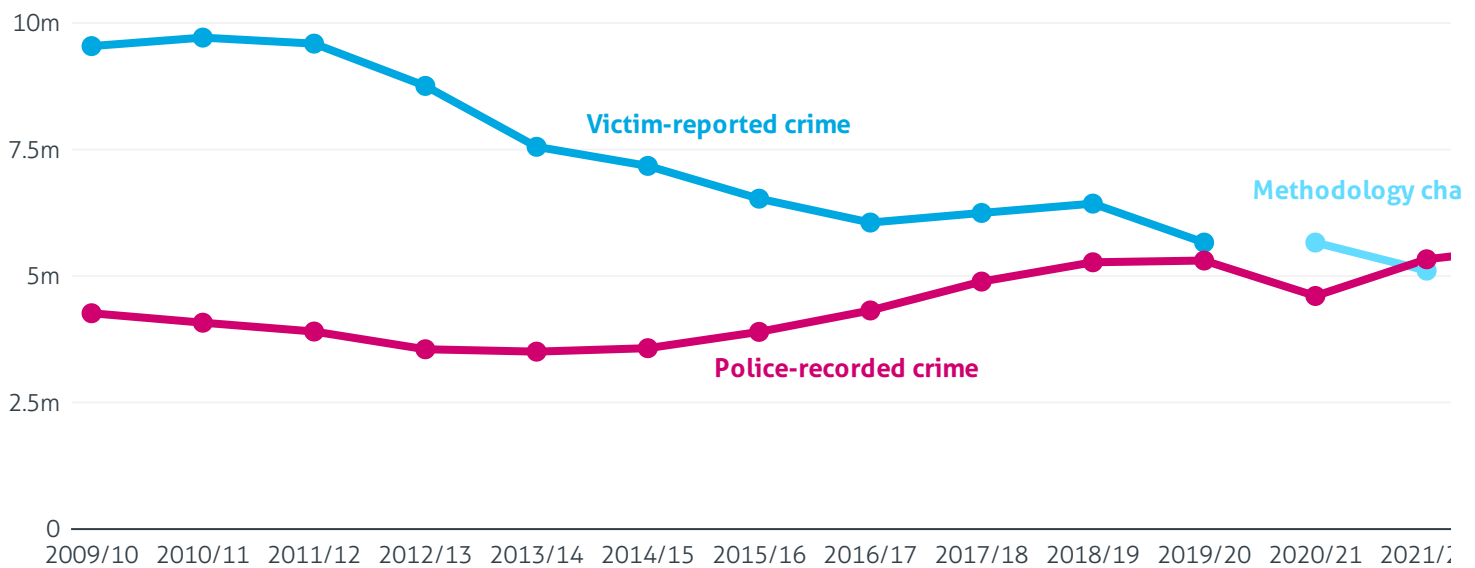
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Source: Institute for Government analysis of DLUHC, 'Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: 2022 to 2023 outturn - first release' ('Table 3a') and StatsWales, 'Police authority budget requirement by police', 2022/23, supported by CIPFA • Notes: See Methodology for details of how figures have been put into real terms. • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#) • [Download image](#)



Around 70% of police funding comes from central government.¹ Most of that is passed directly to police and crime commissioners (PCCs), who have broad control over how much is allocated to their force as opposed to other services such as victim support.² The rest of the central funding goes to support national efforts like counter- terrorism.³ The other major funding source is the police precept on council tax.⁴ This is set by each PCC and since 2015/16 has accounted for between 25% and 30% of annual police funding.⁵

Police expenditure declined in real terms by 16.2% between 2009/10 and 2016/17. It has risen significantly in recent years – although remains below 2009/10 levels – with real-terms spending sitting at £17.3bn in 2022/23. One key driver of these recent increases has been the government's 2019 police uplift programme to increase officer numbers by 20,000, which the National Audit Office (NAO) expected would cost £3.6bn by 2023. In 2022/23, the government provided an additional £550m to PCCs in part to help forces recruit their quota of additional officers,⁶ and also allowed them to raise up to £246m through increases to the police precept.⁷



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, 'Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables' ('Worksheet A1' and 'Table A4a') 2022/23, supported by CIPFA. • Notes: Police-recorded crime figures in 2019/20 exclude those from Greater Manchester Police, which was unable to supply data for the period July 2019 to March 2020. Victim-reported crime figures for 2022/23 are comparable to those for 2019/20 and earlier (although National Statistics status for estimates were temporarily suspended in July 2022 due to data quality concerns). Details of the methodology change, affecting 2020/21 and 2021/22, are described in the Methodology chapter. • Get the data • Embed • Download image



Our understanding of crime levels comes from two sources:

- Police-recorded crime statistics: these statistics come from the crimes reported to – and recorded by – the police. They provide a relatively quick signal of emerging trends, but are influenced by changing recording practices, police activity and public willingness to report crimes.⁸
- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW): conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), this looks at crimes reported by a representative population sample. It measures a smaller number of crimes than police-recorded statistics, but captures crimes not reported to the police and is independent of police recording practices. As such, the CSEW is a better indicator of long-term trends.⁹

The CSEW has shown a relatively consistent decline in the number of crimes over the last decade. In 2022/23 this was at its lowest level at 4,384,656 crimes.* This is a 22.5% decline on 2019/20, the most recent year for which comparable data is available. The key contributors to this trend have been declines in theft and violence offences.

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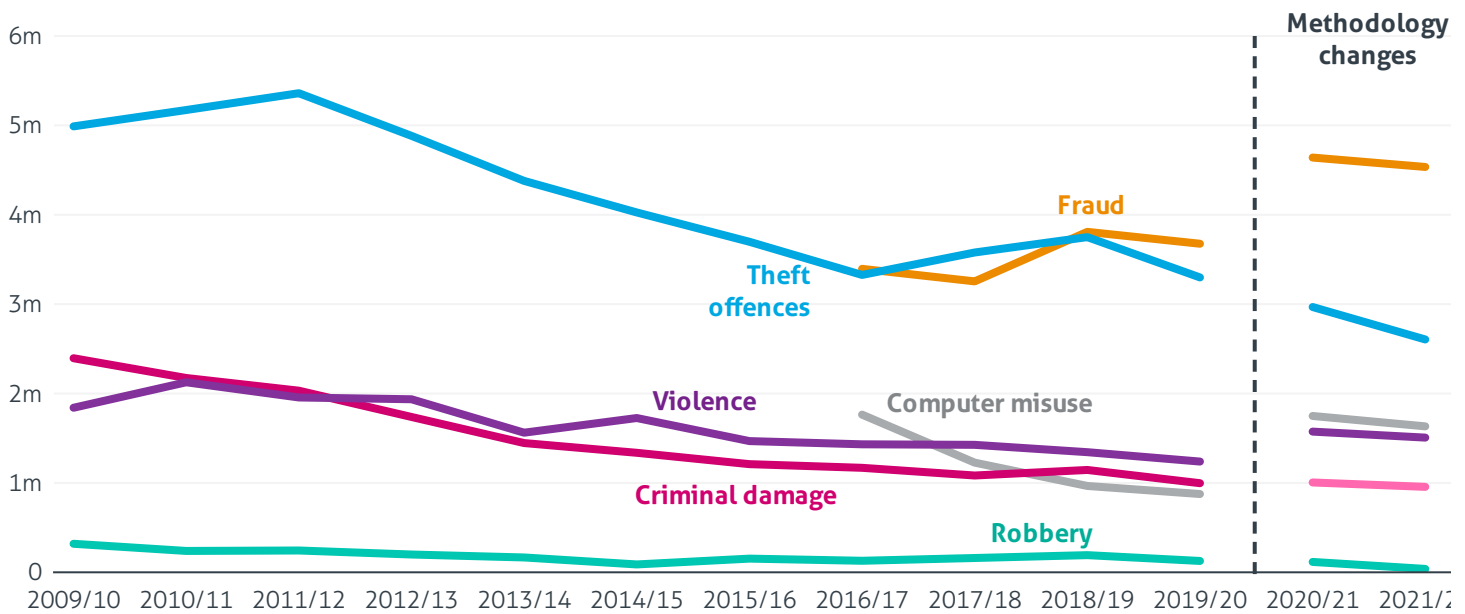
Conversely, the levels of police-recorded crime have been increasing in recent years and are now well above levels recorded by the CSEW. Overall police-recorded crime stood at 5,584,888 in 2022/23, some 30.9% above 2009/10 levels and 59.3% above 2013/14 levels.** Contributing to this increase is a growth of 204% in recorded sexual offences between 2013/14 and 2022/23, and a 233% increase in total 'violence against the person' offences over the same period.

It is likely that overall crime has declined, while changes in reporting and recording practices largely explain the growth in police-recorded crime.* However, both the police-recorded statistics and CSEW measures agree on the trends for some crimes. For example, aside from a pandemic-led uptick in 2020/21, police-recorded incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) have declined consistently every year since at least 2007/08.¹⁰ The 1,006,197 incidents recorded in 2022/23 stands 25.4% below pre-pandemic levels, and 71.5% below 2009/10 levels.**,¹¹ This seems to correspond with the CSEW, which has recorded a relatively consistent decline in perceptions of high levels of anti-social behaviour since 2006/07.¹²

* Excluding fraud and computer misuse.

** Excluding fraud and computer misuse.

Fraud and computer misuse now account for half of all crime



Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, 'Crime in England and Wales: Appendix tables' ('Worksheet A1'), 2009/10–2022/23, supported by CIPFA. • Notes: Fraud figures have only been recorded since October 2015. Figures for 2022/23 are comparable to those for 2019/20 and earlier (although National Statistics status for estimates were temporarily suspended in July 2022 due to data quality concerns). Details of the methodology change, affecting 2020/21 and 2021/22, are described in the Methodology chapter. • Get the data • Embed • Download image



In recent years, digital technology has provided new opportunities for criminals to engage in cyber-crime. According to the CSEW, there were 4.27m fraud and computer misuse offences in 2022/23. The total number of fraud and computer misuse cases has actually fallen by 17.2% since 2016/17, when they were first recorded. However, as a result of a decline in other case types, fraud and computer misuse now account for half of all victim-reported crime (49.3%).

Despite the scale of fraud, the Police Foundation (a policing think tank) has been critical of forces' response to it.¹³ The absolute number of charges or summonses for fraud has declined by 39% since 2016/17 and in 2022/23 only 0.35% of all reported fraud (which itself is a small proportion of the CSEW figure) resulted in a charge or summons.¹⁴ This partly reflects that a large proportion of fraud incidents either originate abroad or have an international element.

Non-crime demand takes up a significant amount of police time

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safeguarding and missing persons activity.

Forces do not measure non-crime demand consistently but it certainly takes up a large amount of police time. For example, in 2015, the vast majority of calls to the police did not result in a crime being recorded (83%),*¹⁵ while one study estimated that around 20% of front-line police resource is allocated to incidents requiring mental health engagement.¹⁶

There is also some evidence that non-crime demand is growing. For example, 21 of the 48 forces which responded to a recent Freedom of Information (FOI) request reported a rise in mental health incidents since 2017, with one force reporting a 313% rise.¹⁷ Cases of detention under the Mental Health Act increased by 36% between 2016/17 and 2021/22.¹⁸ This has been linked to reductions in funding for mental health services.**¹⁹ Similarly, the number of missing persons incidents, which increased by 65% between 2013/14 and 2019/20, has been estimated to cost the police around 3m investigation hours each year.²⁰

Noting that the police often stray into doing the work of other services, the police inspectorate (HMIC) recently argued that “there needs to be greater clarity over what the police’s role in society is”.²¹ The recent ‘Right Care, Right Person’ initiative – which partly seeks to reduce the amount of time police spend on mental health callouts – is one such effort, but its success will take time to evaluate.²²

* The 83% of calls will, however, include crime-related incidents where no crime was recorded

** For comparability, Avon & Somerset, North Wales, and West Mercia have been excluded.

The number of charges increased sharply in 2022/23 for the first time since 2013/14

Charge rates – that is, the proportion of recorded crimes that resulted in a charge – have declined precipitously over the last decade. This is partly a function of the increase in the number of crimes recorded by the police and in some cases the over-recording of crimes. Recently announced changes to recording practices, which

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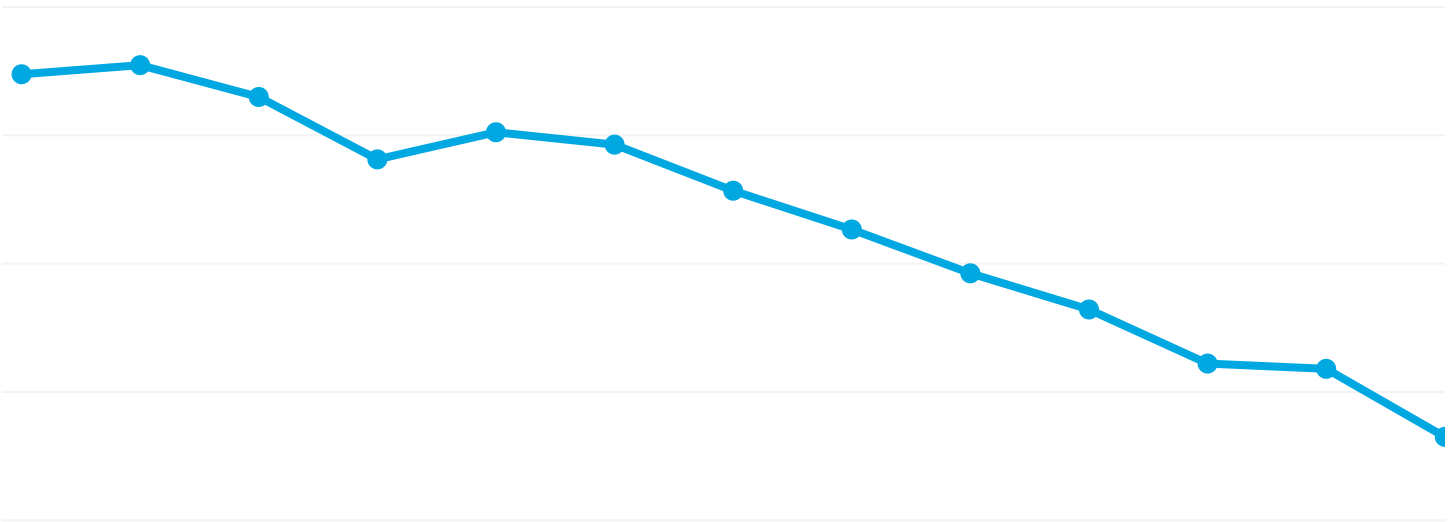
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course of a more substantial offence) will likely reduce the number of recorded crimes and increase the charge rate.²³

However, the absolute number of charges issued each year also fell by 43.6% between 2009/10 and 2021/22. This fall likely reflects problems with police performance. Last year, HMIC argued that insufficient supervision, poor digital forensic capability and inadequate capacity had contributed to low charge rates for serious acquisitive crime.²⁴ HMIC also criticised what it described as the “unacceptably low number of crimes that are solved following investigations”, and identified cases in which investigations were closed before all lines of inquiry had been pursued.²⁵ Indeed, HMIC’s PEEL inspections (which examine the effectiveness of forces) assessed no forces as outstanding when it came to investigating crime.²⁶

The police have come under particular scrutiny for their performance in charging sexual assault and rape. In 2014/15, just 11.3% of sexual assaults and 8.5% of rapes ended up being charged. In 2021/22 this had fallen to 2.9% and 1.3% respectively. The government’s end-to-end rape review highlighted forces’ poor performance against rape investigations.²⁷

Similarly, Operation Soteria (a pathfinder programme seeking to identify ways to transform investigations into sexual offences, and now being rolled out to all forces) has found that investigators lack sufficient knowledge about sexual offending, that disproportionate effort was being put into testing the credibility of a victim’s accounts, and that forces lack sufficient data systems to allow for good strategic analysis to improve investigations.²⁸



Source: Institute for Government analysis of Home Office, 'Crime outcomes in England and Wales' ('Table B2'), 2022/23, and Home Office, 'Police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables', 2018/19–2022/23. • Notes: Greater Manchester Police and Devon & Cornwall Police did not submit full data in 2019/20 and 2022/23 respectively. • Get the data • Embed • Download image



The charge rate rose marginally in 2022/23 to 5.7%, up from 5.5% the year before. The increase in 2022/23 was the result of a minimum 8.9%* increase in the absolute number of charges. This is the first increase in the absolute number of charges since 2013/14. As discussed further below, the increase in the number of charges likely reflects new officers becoming more productive. This was in part driven by a 23.9% (minimum) increase in charges for sexual offences, the largest year-on-year increase since at least 2006/07.

While this likely reflects the efforts inspired by Operation Soteria, the charge rate for sexual offences only increased marginally to 3.6%, significantly below the 2013/14 level. Similarly, overall charges are still at historic lows, and it will take time before forces can demonstrate consistent overall improvements.

* Devon & Cornwall Police did not submit full data in 2022/23.

The government has met its officer recruitment target

In 2019, the government announced the police uplift programme, its plan to increase officer numbers by 20,000 by March 2022. The government has now

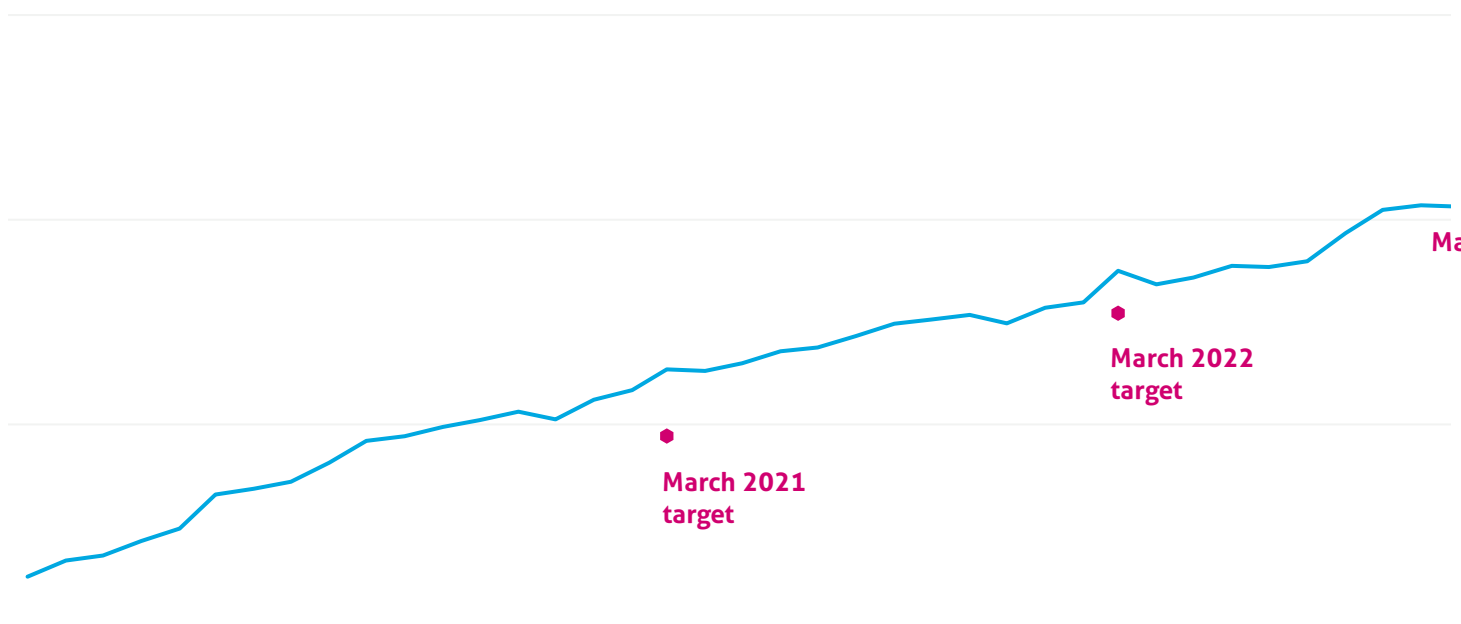
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October 2019. Accounting for attrition, this involved recruiting 46,504 new officers, approximately 31% of the total officer workforce.²⁹

Police officers (headcount), October 2019 to March 2023

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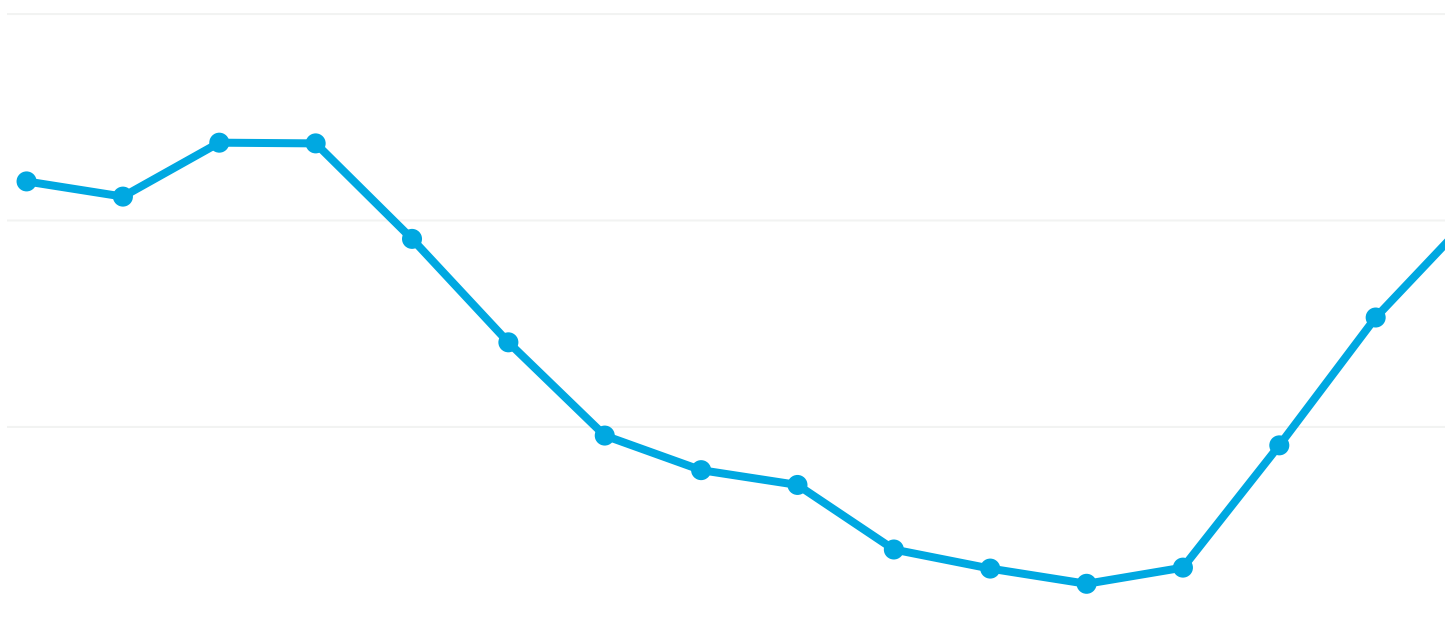


Source: Institute for Government analysis of Home Office, 'Police officer uplift, final position as at March 2023' ('Table U1'), October 2019 to March 2023, supported by CIPFA. • Notes: Figures are shown from the beginning of the police uplift programme and include both police officers recruited through the police uplift programme and those recruited through other streams. • Get the data • Embed • Download image

This has contributed to a 14% increase in full-time equivalent (FTE) officer numbers since 2019/20. This is the highest number of officers since at least 2002/03, when comparable records began.³⁰ The recruitment has also accelerated the long-term growth in the proportion of female officers since 2006/07 (women now comprise 35% of all officers compared to 30% in 2018/19 and 23% in 2006/07). It has also had an impact on overall ethnic diversity, with the proportion of non-white officers increasing from 9.3% to 11.0% between 2018/19 and 2022/23.

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Source: Institute for Government analysis of Home Office, 'Police workforce, England and Wales, 31 March 2023: workforce open data tables', supported by CIPFA. • Notes: Figures exclude the British Transport Police. • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#) • [Download image](#)



The police uplift programme may help address key shortages, but also poses several challenges

The roles that new officers are put into will make a big difference to whether the number of charges continues to increase in future years. Interviewees repeatedly stressed concern over the national shortage of detectives. In 2021, there was a shortfall of 6,851 level 2 accredited investigators (dealing with the most complex investigations), a 38% increase on the previous year.³¹ A lack of suitably qualified detectives can damage both the quantity and the quality of police investigations.³²

Similarly, concerns have been raised about the ability of forces to properly manage and investigate serious acquisitive crime (burglary, robbery and theft),³³ and mismatches between the increasing demand for digital forensic examinations and forces' capacity in this respect.³⁴ It appears that the police uplift programme has already contributed to an increase in officers undertaking these roles, with 2,376 additional officers working in investigations in 2022/23 compared to 2018/19. This may explain why the number of charges per officer increased to 2.7 in 2022/23, from 2.6 a year earlier.* This is the first increase since 2013/14, which recorded 4.7

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figure continues to grow, then this will feed through into a sustained increase in the number of charges as well.

In the short term, new officers are a drain on the productivity of more senior colleagues. Before being able to work independently, new officers require supervision by more experienced 'tutor constables'. In one survey, the NAO found that these responsibilities may make tutors up to 50% less operationally effective, citing tutor 'burnout' as a problem.³⁵ This may have damaged the overall effectiveness of the workforce, as might some of the methods forces have employed to manage this pressure, including giving tutoring responsibilities to less experienced officers and increasing the number of students per tutor.³⁶ The Police Remuneration Review Body has reported that some officers became supervising sergeants after two years of service, leading to concerns that a lack of support would undermine morale and cause retention problems.³⁷

There is also evidence that the police uplift programme may have had a negative impact on the composition and thus the performance of police workforces. Officers are supported by other police staff who, as of 2022/23, made up approximately 31% of the total police workforce and include administrators, trainers and investigators. In recent years, these roles have been increasingly occupied by civilian – thus more cost-effective – specialists.³⁸ However, the requirement to maintain officer numbers has incentivised forces to replace cheaper staff – who often have specialist skills – with more expensive warranted officers.³⁹

Despite the overall increase in officer numbers in recent years, the number of police community support officers (PCSOs) declined by 15.6% from 2019/20 to 2022/23. Over this period, many were recruited into the uplift programme. The reduction in PCSOs – whose numbers had already fallen by 45.3% between 2009/10 and 2019/20 – has been cited as a key contributor to the decline in community engagement between forces and citizens.⁴⁰ While recent recruitment has boosted the number of neighbourhood officers, this has failed to translate into, for example, greater police visibility, perceptions of which reached their lowest recorded level in 2022/23.⁴¹ This has occurred over a period in which the demands on local policing have intensified, and has contributed to worse outcomes with respect to community

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new constables are performing neighbourhood policing roles, this is inefficient, since PCSOs are cheaper to employ than warranted officers.

Finally, concerns have also been raised over the adequacy of the system for vetting police recruits, which has recently led the College of Policing to strengthen its vetting Code of Practice.⁴³ Concerns that high recruitment demand would place vetting units under substantial pressure were raised at the start of the uplift programme in 2019.⁴⁴ Despite these warnings, HMIC recently found that vetting units have struggled to cope with their higher caseload.⁴⁵ Indeed, HMIC concluded that hundreds of people had likely joined the police in the last few years who should not have.⁴⁶ Similarly, recruiting difficulties and pressure to meet the target have sparked concerns that recruitment practices may have been simplified.⁴⁷ The recruitment of potentially large numbers of unsuitable officers could have a long-term impact on police performance and trust in the police.

* As above, this excludes some data from Devon & Cornwall Police. As such, the number of charges per officer is probably slightly higher

Public trust in the police is falling

The case of David Carrick, who in December 2022 pleaded guilty to 49 offences (including rape) committed over a long career as an officer in the Metropolitan Police, is one of a litany of scandals that have rocked public confidence in the police in recent years. Others – including the murder of Sarah Everard, child strip searches and the Charing Cross scandal – have similarly cast doubt on the police’s ability to appropriately vet and discipline officers (including those with histories of misconduct) and, ultimately, protect the public. This was particularly true of the aftermath of the Carrick case, when it was revealed that over 1,000 allegations of sexual misconduct implicating 800 officers had been spotted by the Met.⁴⁸ More recently, the Met has revealed large increases in the number of officers dismissed for gross misconduct, awaiting gross misconduct hearings, or who have been suspended.⁴⁹

Most of this attention is focused on the Met, which Baroness Casey – in her recent

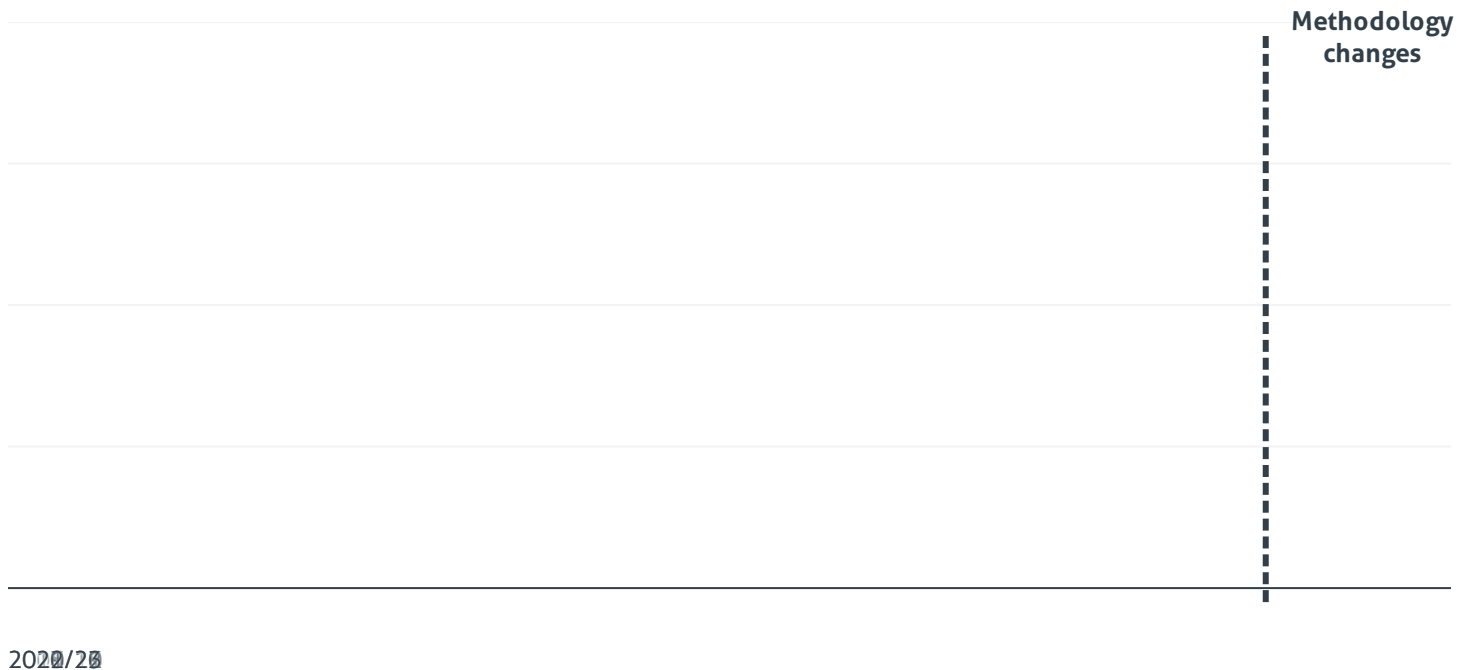
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homophobic and sexist.⁵⁰ However, along with the Met, another three forces are also in 'special measures',⁵¹ an advanced monitoring process for forces not responding to – or unable to deal with – concerns identified by HMIC.⁵² Similarly, there is evidence that claims of sexual misconduct and racism are proportionally higher in several other forces.

These reports have likely contributed to the marked decline in trust in the police among people from minority ethnic backgrounds in particular. One survey from the Mayor's Office for Police and Crime (covering London) reported that the proportion of Black respondents who believe that the police treat everyone fairly regardless of who they are fell from 64% in 2019/20 to 46% in 2021/22 (having been relatively stable since 2014/15). While such surveys in London consistently display lower rates among Black than White respondents, it is notable that the same survey also displayed a marked – though smaller – decline among White British respondents from 2019/20.⁵³

Trust in the police among the general population is also declining. The share of CSEW respondents reporting that their local police are doing a good or excellent job fell by 5 percentage points between 2019/20 and 2022/23, to 51%. This is down from 63% in 2015/16. Interestingly, the ethnic groups with the largest proportion claiming the police are doing a good or excellent job are Asian, Black and Other ethnic groups. Respectively, 59%, 56% and 63% of the respondents in these groups believed their local police were doing a good or excellent job in 2022/23, compared to 50% of White respondents.⁵⁴



2020/20

Source: Institute for Government analysis of ONS, 'Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables' ('Table S1'), March 2023; ONS, 'Crime in England and Wales: coronavirus (COVID-19) and crime tables' ('Table 5'), July 2022; supported by CIPFA. • Notes: Details of the methodology changes are explained in the Methodology chapter. • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#) • [Download image](#)



Overall, data from YouGov indicates a marked loss of confidence in recent years. Averaging figures over a 12-month period in a survey carried out between October 2022 and September 2023, more than half of respondents said they had either not very much or no confidence at all in the police to deal with crime (52%), compared to 48% in the previous 12-month period.⁵⁵ Similarly, in a different survey, averaged figures over the same period showed that half of respondents felt the police were doing a good job compared to 60% a year earlier.⁵⁶

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