





Part 1: Overview

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In many respects, 2020 proved to be an exceptional and extraordinarily difficult year for policing. The pandemic posed a significant risk to public health, and the measures brought in to curb the spread of the virus, particularly restrictions on liberty and economic activity, have had a profound and far-reaching effect on the public.

Many people suffered the loss of family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues; the police were no exception. At the time of writing, 30 police officers and staff in England and Wales have lost their lives to COVID-19. On behalf of all those who work at HMICFRS, I offer my most profound condolences to those who have lost loved ones.

The pandemic has taken its toll on many other people because of intensified loneliness and isolation. It has deeply affected many people's mental health, as well as their economic and educational wellbeing. Some people continue to suffer the long-term debilitating effects of the virus. They do not know when, if ever, they will get better.

Many police officers are at risk of suffering from mental ill health. Not only do they come under great stresses in the exercise of their duties, but they also face the most appalling and dreadful things.

I am talking not only about the angry and dangerous man, armed with a weapon, although that is prevalent enough, or the reckless or even murderous driver of a vehicle, determined to kill or maim, and the person who is mentally ill, endangering lives in his or her immediate vicinity. I also mean the circumstances of serious road traffic collisions, sudden deaths and suicides – sometimes of young people – people who have died in fires or by violence of all kinds, the elderly person who died alone and a long time before his or her body was found, the death of a baby, and so much else; and the strains of telling a parent of tragedy; and of the most unspeakable crimes against children; and the list goes on and on.

These things as we know have profound and lifelong effects on the police officers and police staff who have to deal with them. And yes, of course, they take those experiences home; how could it ever be otherwise?



Let us also acknowledge that these experiences have knock-on effects on officers' families and those close to them. When officers lie awake, unable to dispel what it is they have seen, and they withdraw into depression and worse, then their families suffer too, as they try to support and cope with the effects on their own loved one.

Most regrettably, in previous years my *State of Policing* reports have spoken of the deaths of officers who lost their lives while protecting the public. With three such deaths to report, this year has been the worst in recent years.

In September 2020, Metropolitan Police sergeant Matiu Ratana was fatally shot in the Croydon custody centre.¹

In April 2020, South Yorkshire Police constable Matthew Lannie lost his life as a result of a collision between his police motorcycle and a car. He was on his way to an emergency incident at the time.²



In June 2020, special constable Resham Singh Natal of West Midlands Police died at home while recovering from injuries he sustained when hit by a car in 2019. He received these injuries while dealing with another road traffic collision.³

All police officers, whether full-time, part-time, or special constables, as well as police community support officers, police staff and some other volunteers, face risk every time they come to work. For many of them, and their families, living with the risk is a way of life: an unavoidable and accepted part of the job of keeping other people safe.

In many respects, policing is a dangerous job. It is incumbent upon all of us to be mindful of that and to do what we can to help those who help us.

The culture of the police has many great strengths. It is a culture of determination, courage, hard work and achievement, of facing any challenge or danger and confronting it in full measure. There is a considerable degree of goodwill in the police, in making sacrifices – personal and otherwise – to protect the public, deter crime, disrupt criminal networks, apprehend criminals and make communities safer. Nothing should be done which might jeopardise that.

There are many rewards in policing; indeed, I believe it may be one of the occupations with the highest potential for job satisfaction of any. Not only is the variety of work in policing exciting and stimulating, but most people can only imagine the reward of securing the conviction of a person who has committed a crime of a serious nature, or someone who presents a great threat to children, or a person who has made life almost unbearable for the members of a community. And so must be the knowledge that a threat of a catastrophic nature has been averted and those who presented the greatest danger to innocent people have been taken out of society.

These are not satisfactions which are available in most other kinds of work.

Policing during the pandemic

While policing the pandemic presented some difficulties for the service, in many respects, its response was exemplary. And this is no less than what the public expected.

We reported on this in detail in our report *Policing in the pandemic*.⁴

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) quickly recognised the unprecedented problems caused by the pandemic, and by mid-March 2020 it had set up Operation Talla. The operation was designed to co-ordinate the police response to the pandemic, and managed communication and collaboration among all forces.

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While many officers reported for duty as usual, some officers and staff in support roles found that they could do their jobs almost as effectively from home.

In last year's *State of Policing*,⁵ I observed that the public's resolve to comply with the restrictions imposed on liberty and economic activity may increasingly be tested. The figures speak for themselves: between 27 March 2020 and 14 March 2021, police forces in England and Wales issued 94,368 fixed penalty notices for breaches of the lockdown regulations.⁶

For the most part, the precise reasons why the police issued each of these notices never made the news. Officers often issued these notices as a last resort, after first trying to engage with the public and encouraging them to comply with the new regulations.

There are, of course, highly publicised and isolated exceptions. For example, in January 2021, Derbyshire Constabulary issued fixed penalty notices to two women in open and almost deserted countryside, who had met up for a walk five miles from their homes. This case attracted substantial national media attention, and the force faced strident criticism. In the end, the force reviewed the notices and decided to rescind them.⁷

The media also criticised South Yorkshire Police after an officer told a family they weren't allowed to be in their front garden during lockdown. The force later apologised for their "well-intentioned but ill-informed" actions.⁸

The service adapted well to new ways of working

Police stations became quieter places during the working day. While many officers reported for duty as usual, some officers and staff in support roles found that they could do their jobs almost as effectively from home.

Of course, officers couldn't do everything remotely – for instance, arresting people and interviewing suspects held in custody suites. But they could do certain tasks, including talking to members of the public by telephone and answering non-emergency 101 calls.



Law and guidance

The public found it difficult to distinguish between the law and government guidance. Information from different sources was contradictory and many people were left confused about what they were allowed to do.

In its report on the use of fixed penalty notices to enforce the lockdown regulations, Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights concluded that "the public cannot be expected to know the law if the guidance does not reflect the law, and politicians' statements match neither".⁹

The frequently changing nature of the regulations made it extremely difficult for both the public and the police to keep up; the first set of regulations covered 11 pages and the last ran to 123. The chair of the committee said that the regulations were neither straightforward nor easily understood, either by those who had to comply with them, or by the police who had to enforce them.¹⁰

In the light of the above, the policing of the pandemic – in particular, the policing of restrictions on movement – has brought into sharp focus the responsibilities and obligations of the public, the police and the Government.

All parties have distinct responsibilities and obligations. Usually, Parliament is responsible for creating legislation. Considerable powers are, however, vested in individual ministers to create some forms of legislation – these include the public health regulations used to reduce the transmission of the virus.

Primarily, it is the responsibility of the police to enforce regulations. And, in theory at least, the police's discharge of their functions should be a relatively straightforward matter. But the new regulations were accompanied by a considerable volume of Government-issued guidance, which had no legal effect. Put simply, citizens were not under any obligation to do anything other than what the law said.

The Government did not always make this important distinction sufficiently clear when publishing regulations and guidance, neither to the police nor to the public.

The police enforce the law, not guidance

Emphatically, the police's role is not to enforce government guidance; their role is to enforce the law. In the United Kingdom, unlike much of the rest of the world, the police are not the obedient and coercive arm of the executive government.

Ministers do not have the authority to demand action from a podium or behind a lectern and expect that criminal offences are created instantly; Parliament must authorise these offences first.

The fact that ministers asserted that their guidance – which had no higher status than requests – were actual instructions to the general public was inevitably confusing. This was equally confusing for the police.

For example, the Government's warnings to the public to stay within their local area, and to leave home only once a day, were just guidance and not the law.

Vulnerability

Crime patterns and trends changed

With the shops being shut and people staying at home, levels of acquisitive crime, such as burglaries and shoplifting, naturally went down during periods of lockdown. They then rose again when restrictions eased.¹¹

The pandemic provided organised crime groups in particular with new opportunities to enlarge and diversify their activities in ways which caused further severe harm to the public. These included selling counterfeit, unregulated and substandard personal protective equipment and using cryptoassets, such as Bitcoin, to launder money.¹²

Some crimes, however, continued to be committed. The circumstances of the lockdown provided the perfect backdrop for many other crimes – especially those committed online.

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The Online Safety Bill

In 2015, the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, added child sexual abuse to the Strategic Policing Requirement as a new national threat.¹³ This meant that the National Crime Agency (NCA) and the police have to give special emphasis to tackling child sexual abuse.

In *State of Policing 2018*,¹⁴ I said that parents have a responsibility to teach their children how to navigate the online world safely. I said that the onus cannot rest completely on them, and I warmly welcomed the proposed reforms announced by the Government in April 2019 in its Online Harms White Paper.¹⁵

The Government's draft Online Safety Bill was published on 12 May 2021.¹⁶ It is designed to regulate access to harmful content and provide significant protections to vulnerable people, especially children. These include susceptibility to grooming and access to images of child abuse, extreme violence, hate speech and radicalising material.

This legislation cannot come quickly enough. Some tech giants now own and operate what, to many people, have become significant pieces of public infrastructure, and they need to be held to account. Their supervision of these networks and systems should now be subject to appropriately stringent public interest regulation.

The act of simply fining some of the world's richest companies for tolerating the presence of harmful material on their websites will not bring about meaningful change. While the sanctions available in the Online Safety Bill will undoubtedly be subject to close Parliamentary scrutiny, there is a case for these sanctions to be even greater.

As I said in *State of Policing 2018*,¹⁷ in the United States we have seen that what really weighs on the minds of the directors at the very top of large companies is the prospect of losing both their fortunes and their liberty. Were measures to that effect introduced in the United Kingdom, this would make tangible change and protect vulnerable children online.

Many people experienced intensified vulnerability

The lockdown intensified and increased the vulnerability of people who were already vulnerable.

During the first lockdown period, the National Domestic Abuse Helpline logged 65 percent more contacts and calls compared to the previous three months. There was also a noticeable increase in domestic abuse-related demand for Victim Support services in the weeks following the easing of lockdown measures.¹⁸

This figure may not reveal the true extent of what was happening behind closed doors. Some people may have experienced difficulties in getting support while confined to their homes. Others may not have been aware of the fact that, under the lockdown regulations, if you were fleeing the threat of violence, or violence itself, you were entitled to leave your home.

Many forces worked with other organisations to identify vulnerable people at heightened risk. They were also aware of the fact that, in some households, adults couldn't escape their abusive partners, nor children their abusive carers.

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Headteachers and their staff worked hard to keep schools open for some children, including those who were vulnerable. For some children, the only decent meal they had was the one provided in school canteens. However, with most children not being in school, bruises may not have been seen, malnutrition not noticed and children with no shoes may not have been spotted by teachers.

Children living with domestic abuse in some form or another will bear scars for life. Even if they were not physically harmed, it's highly likely that they would have been psychologically harmed, just by being there. Many children will be profoundly affected by the fact that they witnessed and heard domestic abuse at home, or hid from it and knew that it was going on.

And this feeds into crime. It must never be overlooked that children who grow up in poverty and suffer severe neglect have a much higher chance of becoming offenders in the future.

A very high proportion of people in prison were, in one way or another, victims of domestic abuse when they were children. A lot of them grew up in an atmosphere of violence and fear, and many people who were victims of domestic abuse as children go on to be domestic abusers themselves later in life.

The prison system makes vulnerable people even more vulnerable

Many of the people who end up in prison or who are drawn into the criminal justice system are people who are ill and not bad. They have done bad things; they may have harmed, alarmed, or threatened other people. But in a high proportion of cases, what these people have been through in their lives, very often as either victims or witnesses to domestic abuse, has made a material contribution to how they have turned out.

If you brutalise somebody, they will become brutal, and this is exactly what is happening in our prisons.

In the first lockdown, many people in the criminal justice system with mental health, drug or alcohol problems had reduced access to support. Many prisoners were kept locked in their cells for longer. Of prisoners surveyed between July 2020 and September 2020, 78 percent said they were allowed out of their cells for under two hours each day, of whom 42 percent reported being allowed out of their cells for under an hour each day.¹⁹ This length of time spent in such confinement is inevitably detrimental to a person's mental health and wellbeing.

The former Chief Inspector of Prisons, Peter Clarke, has said that the practice of keeping prisoners locked in their cells for 23 hours a day to reduce the risk of infection from the virus was dangerous. He has also said that when that is happening "there is not much hope and I think hope is a key component for prisoners".²⁰



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If we are to break the cycle of offending, we need to have a sound rehabilitation system in place. In many cases, people commit offences because they have no money, no job, no stable accommodation, no food, and are often dependent on alcohol or drugs. If, once they leave prison, their circumstances haven't changed, and they still have no job and no home, they may very well return to previous offending habits, and the cycle starts again.²¹

The aim of rehabilitation is to prevent reoffending by providing a person with education and support. This can include vocational courses, assistance with finding employment and housing, as well as medical and psychiatric help.

In too many respects, the promises of rehabilitation are not kept; many people walk out of prison with £46 in their pocket,²² a bag containing their possessions, nowhere to live,²³ and no adequate preparation for life outside. Very often, they simply go back to the environment and associations, and incentives, which sent them to prison in the first place. Although we have seen a decrease in the levels of reoffending in recent years, the level is still far higher than it should be. Of those prisoners sentenced to under 12 months in custody who were released between October 2018 and December 2018, 61 percent reoffended within one year.²⁴ This crisis in criminal justice has gone on for far too long.



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Some public services keep on failing

Not only is it highly regrettable that the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the lockdown restrictions made certain members of the public more vulnerable, but it also limited access to support services. For example, Schedule 12 of the Act²⁵ temporarily released local authorities from some of their obligations in relation to vulnerable children and adult social care. Many local authorities were working under increased pressure and therefore had to prioritise those with the most urgent and acute needs. This meant that some who were in need, but not most in need, went without sufficient support.

In our 2018 report on policing and mental health, we said “too many aspects of the broader mental health system are broken”.²⁶ We also stressed that it was “a national crisis which should not be allowed to continue; there needs to be a fundamental rethink and urgent action”.²⁷

Not enough action has been taken to fix the mental health system, and the crisis in adult and child mental health has continued long enough.²⁸ Many people who have mental ill health as adults began that journey into ill health when they were children. To make matters worse, in an intolerably high number of cases, children and young people have difficulties gaining adequate access to NHS treatment for mental ill health.

In 2018, the Care Quality Commission carried out a review of mental health services available to children and young people. They found that too many children and young people, as well as their parents, families and carers, had found that they had to navigate a complex system that did not place them and their needs at its heart.²⁹ They also highlighted the symptoms of a system under pressure: long waiting lists, inappropriately high eligibility criteria, and gaps in service provision. In many respects, not much has changed. This will only make it harder for children and young people to get the support they need at the right times.

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In the cases of many vulnerable people, isolation and hardship made their experiences of the pandemic all the more painful. The effect of isolation intensified their loneliness and led many people to withdraw into themselves and experience feelings of helplessness. Many turned to alcohol to numb the emotional pain. Alcohol kills more people – directly and indirectly – than all other drugs combined.³⁰ Alcohol abuse often leads to addiction and long-term significant ill health. Not only does this have a material adverse effect on the individuals concerned and their families, but it also considerably increases demand on the police.

Unless the health and social care system is fixed, and people can get the support they need from it, people will continue to be vulnerable, which may lead them avoidably and unnecessarily into the criminal justice system.

Local democratic accountability

Police accountability was materially reformed by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. In replacing police authorities with police and crime commissioners (PCCs), Parliament's intention was to improve the democratic oversight of the police and give local people better means to hold chief constables to account for police performance.

The model of criminal law enforcement we have in this country has grown up since the Middle Ages. Police officers as we recognise them today arrived in 1800 in Glasgow and 1829 in London. Their antecedents were ordinary citizens, discharging responsibilities which were – and still are – incumbent on everyone to prevent crime and apprehend offenders. The police come from and are of the community. In sharp contrast to the police in very many other countries, our police forces are not modelled on and do not operate as the obedient and oppressive arm of an authoritarian political leadership. The first duty of a chief constable – and the officers and staff under his or her direction and control – is the prevention and suppression of crime and disorder. In this, the chief is operationally independent, and cannot act on unlawful orders or unduly intrusive political direction.



The operational independence of chief constables is crucial

The Policing Protocol Order 2011³¹ specifies how PCCs and chief constables should work together. It explicitly deals with the protection of the operational independence of chief constables. It states that it “does not supersede or vary the legal duties and requirements of the office of constable. Chief Constables remain operationally independent”.³² The oath of office which PCCs must take includes a promise “not [to] interfere with the operational independence of police officers”.³³

Regrettably, that unequivocal legal commitment to operational independence is not always respected. In too many respects, the boundary of operational independence has been put under undue pressure, and sometimes it has been crossed. Police and crime commissioners are not the line managers of chief constables; it is not a relationship of master and servant, and should not be understood as such. Police and crime plans are not sets of directions or orders, and cannot override the common law obligation of the chief constable to enforce the criminal law with objectivity and impartiality. If a PCC were to threaten to invoke the procedure for dismissal of a chief constable – under section 38 of the 2011 Act – simply because the chief refuses to carry out improper instructions, that would be illegal.

The principles and policy of the Policing Protocol are founded on there being a professional relationship between PCC and chief. It is of course impossible to make detailed prescription for every factual permutation in the relationship. Policing is too complex for that. The trust and confidence in the proper operation of the relationship must be high, and that includes respect for the principle of operational independence.

Police and crime commissioners have positions of immense importance in local policing and, collectively, in regional and national policing. Their powers over the setting of policing priorities, the force’s overall budget and the power to dismiss the chief for failures in efficiency and effectiveness, are considerable. Their abilities to improve criminal justice in their police areas are great and in many cases that is how they are used. But they do not amount to powers of intervention and direction, and they should not be regarded as opportunities for the application of undue pressure.

The criminal justice system

Still dysfunctional and defective

The perilous state of the criminal justice system has been widely criticised for many years, and the court backlog is a significant problem. In recent years, there has been a vast reduction in the number of cases brought to justice. In fact, the actual number of cases going into the criminal justice system is at the lowest level it has been for decades. Yet, for some reason, court backlogs and waiting times have become inexcusably long.

The already chronic backlog in court cases increased as a result of the pandemic. Between February 2020 and December 2020, there was an increase of 57 percent in the backlog of magistrates' court trials,³⁴ and an increase of 65 percent in the number of cases waiting to be heard at Crown Court.³⁵ While the courts did find ways to make better use of technology and operate safely, it wasn't enough for them to operate at their usual (still inadequate) capacity, and justice sharply deteriorated.

The perilous state of the criminal justice system has been widely criticised for many years, and the court backlog is a significant problem.



All communities depend upon and deserve justice.

In January 2021, I reported jointly with the chief inspectors of the other three criminal justice inspectorates on the pandemic's effect on the criminal justice system. We said:

“We have each as independent chief inspectors commented in the past on the risks of chronic and systemic under-resourcing across the CJS [criminal justice system]. As a chief inspectors' group, we now consider that Covid-19 has resulted in these risks becoming critical”.³⁶

Several police forces expect that the delay between a crime being reported and the case reaching court will mean that victims and witnesses will require support for longer. In many cases, this unacceptable delay in taking cases to court will take its toll on the physical and mental health of victims, witnesses and those accused of committing crimes. Often these people are vulnerable.

Victims may lose confidence in the criminal justice system and decide they are no longer willing to support a prosecution. People suspected of having committed offences who are on remand will have to spend longer in prison: between March 2020 and September 2020, the number of remand prisoners increased by 22 percent.³⁷ All communities depend upon and deserve justice; this is not justice.

Those accused of offences should have easy access to legal representation through all stages of the criminal justice system. However, the financing of criminal defence is in a terrible state. The situation has been described by the Law Society as a “deepening crisis in the criminal legal aid profession”.³⁸ People with greater wealth are able to afford to instruct their own lawyers, while others have to rely on legal aid. The very considerable majority in the middle have no adequate wealth and no access to public funding. As a result, they are especially vulnerable to injustice and financial ruin, made worse by the absence of financial relief for defence costs after acquittal or the dropping of the case.

The Law Society has warned that, with no adequate funding in place, criminal defence services may become unavailable in some areas.



The need to reform the criminal justice system is, therefore, more pressing than ever. In *State of Policing 2018*,³⁹ I described the criminal justice system as “dysfunctional and defective”. I spoke about the cycle of offending and the system routinely letting down children and other vulnerable people.⁴⁰ By the time of my 2019 assessment, little improvement had been made.

A year has passed since then, and there hasn't been a great deal of change. The proposed Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, which was announced in late 2019, is intended to review and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system in England. It still hasn't been established. Despite repeated questions to the Government, no indication has been given as to when the commission will start work.

Significant delays and cost overruns, and failures in specification and procurement, have put the efficiency and effectiveness of the police, and others, at risk.

Modern technology – on too slow a track

The Home Office is responsible on a national basis for three principal pillars of essential technology for the emergency services. Significant delays and cost overruns, and failures in specification and procurement, have put the efficiency and effectiveness of the police, and others, at material risk.

Airwave replacement – long overdue

The police rely very heavily on mobile communications in all aspects of their work; one such example is in the deployment of officers to incidents. The current system, Airwave, has been in use for over 20 years. The other emergency services and some 363 other organisations, including local authorities, also use Airwave as their communications network.

In 2011, the Home Office said it would replace Airwave with the Emergency Services Network (ESN). The ESN was originally scheduled to be operational in 2017, yet four years later we are still waiting. This is due, in part, to failures in planning and collaboration between contractors, to organisations working to different technical standards, and to delays in related projects.

In its report *Progress delivering the Emergency Services Network*, the National Audit Office stressed that it would be unlikely for the ESN to be in place by the 2022 target.⁴¹ To make matters worse, the ESN has been further delayed due to the completion of the switchover, which is now expected to take place by the end of 2026.

For every year that the ESN is delayed, it is costing the public purse approximately £650m per year.⁴² These costs are racking up and the programme has already been overspent by a remarkable £3.1 billion,⁴³ with an anticipated total cost of £10.3 billion.⁴⁴

It is intolerable that public money is being used so unwisely, especially at a time when many forces expect that they will have difficulties with funding in the future. They anticipate that the purse strings of public sector finances will be tightened while the country recovers from the pandemic.

Law Enforcement Data Service – also overdue

The police also rely heavily on the Police National Computer (PNC).⁴⁵ It has been upgraded many times since its introduction in 1974, but there are limits on how much an upgrade can achieve.

The PNC is due to be replaced by the new Law Enforcement Data Service (LEDS), but regrettably this has also been delayed. The full transition of PNC into LEDS has been delayed by over a year, with a current overspend of £45m.⁴⁶ The fact that LEDS is still delayed means that the ageing PNC is still being relied on as the national police computer system.

This doesn't come without its problems: it is increasingly more difficult to update the PNC because it is harder to get older components to maintain its hardware and software. Moreover, it is difficult to maintain the PNC because a limited number of people have the skills and knowledge to code the 47-year-old system. The PNC data loss of 9 January 2021 also points to the fragility of the maintenance of the system – a human error led to the (fortunately reversible) deletion of a total of 209,550 offence records.⁴⁷



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ANPR replacement – another overdue programme

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology is used to help detect, deter and disrupt criminals' activity at local, force, regional and national levels, including organised crime groups, terrorists and those engaged in county lines drug running.

For a number of years, the Home Office has been running a programme to replace the ageing national ANPR data centre with a new national ANPR service (NAS). The national ANPR service was meant to be in place in 2018. The objective was to have a single national ANPR system, which would improve policing's ANPR capability overall.

While the initial national operating capability is now live, the programme has been beset with problems. Regrettably, the introduction of further operating capability has been delayed and scaled back. This means that NAS will now not meet the level of national capability that the police need.

The Home Office is trying to put things right. In the meantime, forces need to run both NAS and their old systems.



The extra 20,000 officers

The Government's uplift programme, which was announced in 2019, continues to make good progress; it's even ahead of its target. The programme is designed to recruit an additional 20,000 police officers in England and Wales by 31 March 2023, which would broadly return police officer numbers to 2010 levels. In the year to March 2021, 8,771 officers had been recruited as part of this programme, against a target of 6,000.⁴⁸

While the programme to recruit an additional 20,000 officers is undoubtedly a good thing, there is significant pressure on forces to recruit the additional officers, as the 20,000 extra officers will be on top of recruitment to cover retirement and those leaving the service. Approximately 7,000 police officers leave the service every year.⁴⁹ This is usually through normal retirement, with smaller numbers of officers resigning, leaving the service through medical retirement or, in a few cases, being dismissed.

Such an increase will, of course, increase the proportion of relatively inexperienced and young-in-service police officers. It is also important that the numbers of specialists in forces and the NCA are maintained and, where necessary, increased to meet future demand.

Taking these factors into account, the service will need to recruit and train over 50,000 people over the three-year period.

The recruitment of 20,000 police officers may have an adverse effect on the rest of the criminal justice system. While the criminal justice system is not a single system, it needs to work like one. Without corresponding capacity increases, the prosecution, prison and probation services may not be able to cope.

Recruitment always carries risks

Police officers are vested with unique powers to detain people, to search them, to take away their property, and to take away their liberty at their own discretion. The service has a great responsibility to do all it reasonably can to ensure its new officers are fit to hold these powers.

While the criminal justice system is not a single system, it needs to work like one.

A programme of this magnitude inevitably carries risks. There is a heightened danger that people unsuited to policing may get through and be recruited. On occasion, police recruitment vetting processes identify applicants' connections with organised crime groups that try to infiltrate the police. In too many cases, the system fails. This can have catastrophic consequences.

There is also a risk of recruiting officers who hold views that are generally incompatible with the office of constable, such as extremist and racist attitudes. When unsuitable applicants lie on their application forms, conceal their social media activity, or play down their criminal connections, the quality of vetting needs to be consistently high. Moreover, when probationary constables misbehave, the police should be assiduous in tackling that conduct and removing those who are, or are likely to be, unsuitable.

As we said in our report *Shining a light on betrayal: Abuse of position for a sexual purpose*,⁵⁰ the predation of vulnerable people by police officers for sexual advantage is one of the most serious forms of police corruption, and forces must do everything necessary to root it out.

Directorates of Professional Standards should be staffed by some of the best detectives, and senior officers need to take this problem very seriously indeed.



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Diversity

For the effectiveness of local policing, and the confidence the community has in its police force, it is important that, as far as reasonably practicable, officers are conspicuously of and part of the community. In 1829, Sir Robert Peel said, “the police are the public and the public are the police”. They are our fellow citizens, not visitors from distant and unfamiliar places. The current recruitment programme provides the police service with opportunities to improve diversity, and forces should try hard to ensure that there is a sufficient proportion of officers who are not white males. Between April 2020 and March 2021, 42 percent of recruits were female and 10.6 percent were from ethnic minorities.⁵¹ However, of those from ethnic minorities, there were three times more Asian than Black recruits. Overall, we have observed that the percentage of recruits from ethnic minorities is still not representative of the 14 percent of the general population (as established in the 2011 census).

If all ethnic minorities are not better represented in the service, this will have long-term adverse implications for public confidence in and co-operation with the police.

Police legitimacy (how the police treat the public and their workforces) is closely linked to how officers use their powers, such as the power to stop and search and their use of force. This year, we reported on the disproportionate use of force and stop and search powers and the negative effect this can have on ethnic minority communities.⁵²

I am pleased to see, however, that many forces are working with their ethnic minority communities to encourage applications and support applicants through the process. For example, in 2020, 11.3 percent of applicants in Sussex were from ethnically diverse backgrounds, compared to the previous three-year average of 5.9 percent and a local ethnic minority population of 6.3 percent.⁵³

Another such example is the Better Together team set up by Gloucestershire Constabulary, which sets out to provide support to people from underrepresented and diverse communities who are considering a career in policing.

If all ethnic minorities are not better represented in the service, this will have long-term adverse implications for public confidence in and co-operation with the police.

In many respects, the police need to invest for the longer term, particularly in technology, to become more efficient.

Spending the money wisely and well

For a considerable number of years, the inspectorate has published annual value-for-money profiles for forces, enabling forces, PCCs and others to see how each force compares with others in similar circumstances.

These instruments are explained in more detail in Part 2 of this report. They will be of especial importance to forces and those who hold them to account as they check and ensure that extra public money is being spent well.

Multi-year settlements

As I said in *State of Policing 2018*,⁵⁴ annual funding settlements are the norm for the police. But such short-term settlements are incompatible with efficient and effective long-term planning. When it comes to funding, forces and regional organised crime units need certainty, stability and predictability. So there is a clear need for multi-year statements.

This is not just about recruiting police officers and staff with the right skills. In many respects, the police need to invest for the longer term, particularly in technology, to become more efficient. It is essential that the police are given the means to do this. For example, body-worn video, fully functional handheld mobile devices, facial recognition and artificial intelligence, and the connected systems and infrastructure to support them, are all things in which police forces must invest for the long term. If they don't, they are left playing catch-up as offenders intensify and increase their abuse of modern technology to cause harm.

The integration of police systems with other parts of the criminal justice system also needs long-term investment. Lack of integration currently makes it harder for the police quickly to pass vital evidence, such as camera footage, to the Crown Prosecution Service. This, and other problems with the system, can result in delays, causing victims and witnesses to become disillusioned and withdraw from proceedings.

There is no reason why some forces should not be able to make these investment decisions with more confidence that they will have the money they need. Forces that we judge as being efficient have provided evidence that they use public money appropriately. So they should be able to benefit from multi-year settlements now.

Lessons from elsewhere

The service can, and should, adopt certain techniques and instruments used outside policing to increase effectiveness and efficiency and improve public safety.

Force management statements

Every well-managed enterprise needs a sound understanding of the demand it faces in the years to come, the state of its assets which it will use to meet that demand, and how much money it will have. In the economically regulated industries which deal with safety-critical, monopoly, essential public services, these are known as network management statements. Since policing is probably the most essential of all public services, we have introduced force management statements, which are modelled on their regulatory equivalents.

In Part 2 of this report, I explain how force management statements have been successfully introduced, and are making material contributions to the quality of policing.



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There aren't 43 best ways of doing the same thing.

A network code

I have spoken many times about the 43-force policing model in England and Wales and the problems it presents for many aspects of policing, including in the flow of information and intelligence between forces, and the establishment and efficient operation of national ICT systems. There aren't 43 best ways of doing the same thing. There is an urgent need for more effective collaboration and co-operation between police forces, and between forces and other law enforcement agencies.

Some have proposed the idea of merging forces as a way of overcoming these obstacles. Mergers would not do away with force boundaries; the boundaries would just be further apart. Mergers are also expensive and create a huge amount of work for managers.

This year, I intend to propose a network code to enable the police service to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in these respects, dissolving the barriers to efficient cross-force operations. In other national systems, the interoperability and uniformity of standards and operation are achieved through the regulatory system and instruments similar to a network code.

The network code would be a multi-lateral contract – a legally binding collaboration agreement – entered into by all chief constables (and their London equivalents), all PCCs (and their mayoral equivalents), the NCA, the British Transport Police, the British Transport Police Authority, the Civil Nuclear Constabulary and the Civil Nuclear Police Authority, the College of Policing and the Home Secretary. Other participants in law enforcement, such as Police Scotland and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, could join later.

All parties could enter into the code voluntarily, and this would indeed be preferable. But the Home Secretary ultimately would have the power to direct chief constables and PCCs to enter into it. The code would be an enduring contract, and no party would have the right to withdraw.

My initial conception of the network code for law enforcement was that it would apply only to police ICT – its specification and procurement – to ensure, over time, the complete interoperability of ICT systems. But the code can and should go much further.

The code would allow for the creation of a process that assesses proposals for single-system operation (either regional or national, or both), which would be achieved by qualified majority voting. It would pool the individual sovereignties of the forces and PCCs in question. In a particular case, a force and its PCC could find themselves in an outvoted minority. However, the freedoms they give up will be far less valuable than what they gain through more consistent, stable, efficient and effective policing decisions.

Before getting to the stage of being put to a vote, proposals would have to be thoroughly evaluated by experts, to ensure they are sound, viable and affordable, and otherwise satisfactory. The College of Policing should have a leading role in this, since it sets standards. Other experts (for example, in ICT) may be required and engaged, according to necessity.

I have put forward the idea of a voting system that respects the relative sizes of the forces, but at the same time affords to small forces appropriate protections against always being outvoted by the largest forces.

Since the Home Secretary has overall political responsibility for law enforcement, and the Treasury controls the money, it would be necessary for the Home Secretary (on behalf of the Government) to hold a special or ‘golden’ vote. The special vote need not be cast in every case; it might never be used. It could be a reserve power, to be used only when the Home Secretary considers it necessary.

In many respects, policing is very far from simple, and the network code will offer an opportunity to cut through the complexity.

Conclusion

My annual *State of Policing* reports are, of course, about policing. But policing does not, should not, and must not sit alone or apart.

My assessment of the criminal justice system shows how essential it is that our public services work well together. The intensity of the interdependence of policing, education, housing, and health and social care must be fully recognised. We cannot, of course, separate policing from the rest of the criminal justice system.

For policing to be effective, the other public services must also be as efficient and effective as possible. If they are not, many more people may be drawn to crime, enter into cycles of offending, become victims, and lose confidence in policing.

The prevention of crime is the primary purpose of policing, and that purpose should never be forgotten or diluted. As Sir Robert Peel said, the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence



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We all need to have confidence that, when we need them, the police will come.

of police action in dealing with it. Virtually all of the costs of the criminal justice system are incurred downstream of the commission of an offence. Prevention takes place far upstream from the interventions of the police. It takes place in the home, with housing and social conditions, in health with timely treatment, and with early intervention with chaotic and troubled families. It is far cheaper than cure.

All safety-critical essential public services should never leave those vulnerable lost in bureaucracy (at best), and vulnerable to further abuse (at worst). During the pandemic, many cases of abuse may have gone unreported, and those victims – and children in particular – will live with the consequences for life; their wounds may never heal. The sufferings of children, and the risks that other children will endure them in the future, are of the highest and gravest concerns to the whole community. In many cases, children who are victims of domestic abuse go on to be violent themselves. This cycle needs to stop.

The first duty of the police is a protective duty. We all need to have confidence that, when we need them, the police will come. We need to know that they will arrive, quickly, to that 999 call for help at 3.00am, know what to do, and be able to do it with courtesy, compassion and care.

For this to happen, policing must exploit its greatest strengths, and those are the professionalism and dedication of its officers and staff. Officers are in an enhanced position in society: they have a duty of care, exceptional responsibility and the power to protect their fellow citizens. The service must therefore identify future leaders and foster their development. It must also make sure that the right people are recruited and supported in doing some of the most demanding work anyone is called upon to do.

This support needs to be reflected in the Government's next spending review, which will provide an opportunity to put right many of the problems in policing. This opportunity should, on no account, be missed.

The commitment demonstrated by police officers to public service, to protecting people and communities against some of the most violent, dangerous and corrosive forces in our society, is immense. That commitment and professionalism needs to be equalled by other public sector agencies, who must do much more.