



## Police use of firearms statistics

England and Wales: April 2018 to March 2019

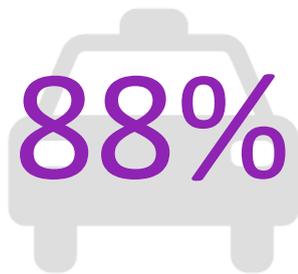
This release contains statistics on firearms operations and armed officer numbers for the 2018/19 financial year.

### Key results

There were **20,186 police firearms operations** in the financial year ending March 2019, a **7% increase** (+1,405) in the latest year and **continuing the increase since the year ending March 2016**.

**+7%**

The **Metropolitan Police Service** and **West Midlands Police** accounted for **40%** of these operations.



Of the 20,186 operations, **88% (17,742) involved an Armed Response Vehicle** (the highest proportion since year ending March 2009).

There were **13 incidents** in which police firearms were discharged, compared with 8 incidents during the previous year.

There were **6,653 armed officers** as at March 2019, a **3% increase** (+194) and continuing the recent rise in the number of armed officers.



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# 1 Introduction

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This release contains statistics on police use of firearms from the 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales, for the financial year ending March 2019. It details the total number of:

- police firearms operations, including operations involving armed response vehicles (ARVs)
- incidents in which police firearms were intentionally discharged
- armed officers

Related [data tables](#) include figures from years ending March 2009 to March 2019.

The 'Police use of firearms' release is an Official Statistics output produced to the highest professional standards and free from political interference. It has been produced by statisticians working in the Home Office Analysis and Insight Directorate in accordance with the Home Office's ['Statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics'](#) which covers our policy on revisions and other matters. The Chief Statistician, and the Head of Profession, report to the National Statistician with respect to all professional statistical matters and oversees all Home Office Official Statistics products with respect to the [Code of Practice](#), being responsible for their timing, content and methodology.

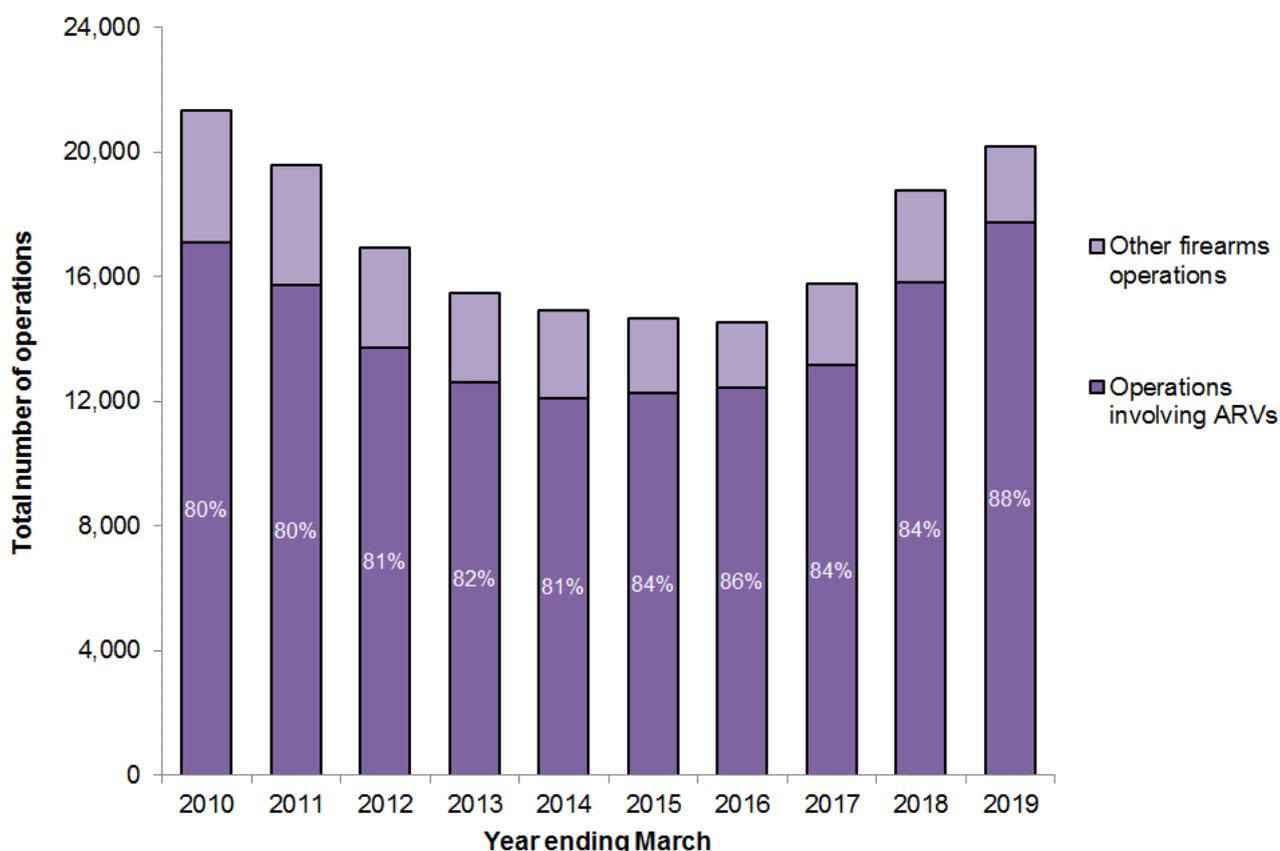
## 2 Police firearms operations

### Key results

In the year ending March 2019, there were **20,186 police firearms operations** in England and Wales, which is a **7% increase** of 1,405 from the previous year.

Of these incidents, **88% (17,742) involved an ARV** as the first or sole response.

**Figure 1: Police firearms operations, including operations where an ARV was the first or sole response, years ending March 2010 to March 2019, England and Wales**



### Chart notes:

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Tables 1 and 2.

Percentage figures indicate the proportion of total police firearms operations where an ARV was the sole or initial response for each year.

Despite the increase in operations in the latest year, the number of operations is similar to the number in year ending March 2011 (as shown in Figure 1).

For the years ending March 2010 to 2014, ARV operations accounted for around 80% of total police firearms operations. In the following years there has been a slight increase in the

proportion of operations involving ARVs. In the year ending March 2019, 88% (17,742) of all firearms operations involved ARVs, which is the largest proportion of operations involving ARVs since the time series began in 2009.

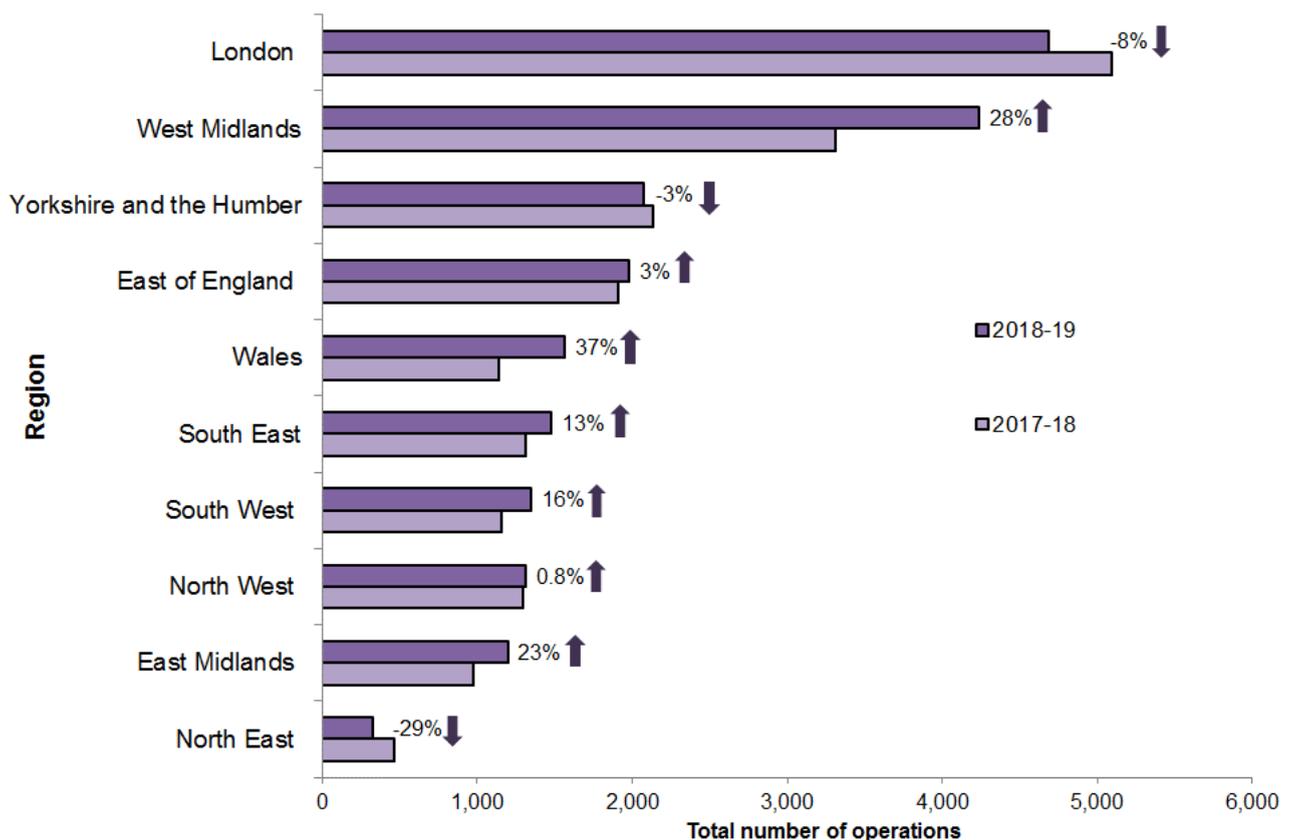
ARVs are vehicles adapted to accommodate specialist equipment and enable firearms officers to be transported swiftly to deal with incidents.

### London and West Midlands continue to have the most police firearms operations

In the year ending March 2019, London had the largest proportion of all police firearms operations accounting for around 1-in-4 (23%; 4,688) of the total operations. West Midlands had the second highest number of police firearms operations, with this region accounting for around 1-in-5 (21%; 4,233) of the total. These two regions also accounted for the highest number of operations in the year ending March 2018.

London showed the largest numerical decrease of 404 operations (down 8%), while West Midlands experienced the largest numerical increase of all regions, with 921 more firearms operations (up 28%) in the year ending March 2019 than in the previous year.

**Figure 2: Total police firearms operations by region, years ending March 2018 and March 2019, England and Wales**



**Chart notes:**

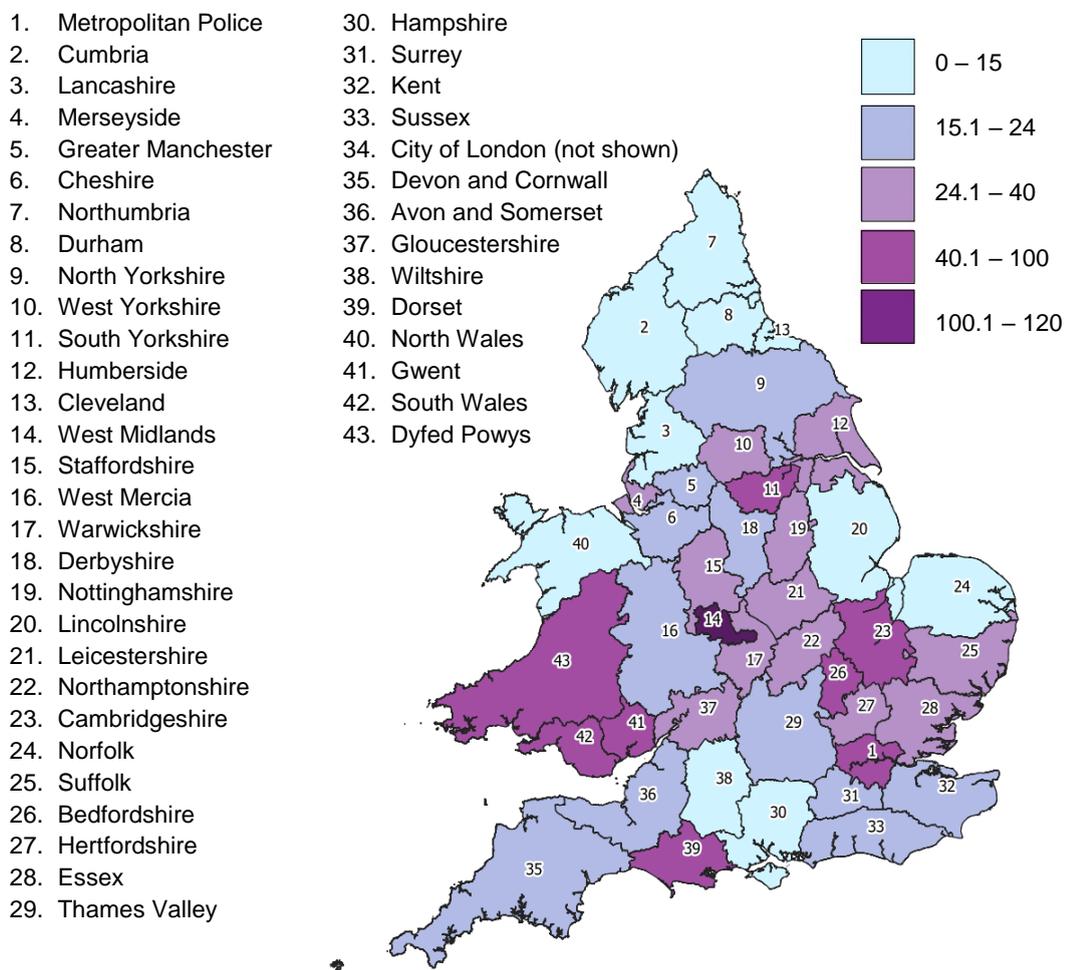
Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Table 1.

Wales showed the largest percentage increase of 37% (up 424) and is now the region with the fifth largest number of operations (ranking eighth last year). The largest percentage decrease occurred in the North East, which had 135 fewer (down 29%) operations. The North East also had the lowest number of operations in the year ending March 2018.

### Highest number of operations reported by the Metropolitan Police

Reflecting the regional trends above, the police forces with the highest number of police firearms operations in the year ending March 2019 were the Metropolitan Police Service (4,652) and West Midlands Police (3,367). Together these forces accounted for 40% of all operations in England and Wales. However, when comparing operations per 100,000 population, West Midlands Police have the largest number of operations.

**Figure 3: Total police firearms operations per 100,000 population by police force area, year ending March 2019, England and Wales**



**Chart notes:**

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Table 1. Population figures source: [Office for National Statistics](#). Shape file source: [ONS Geo-portal](#).

Notes: City of London is not included as its mid-2017 population estimate is less than 100,000.

### 3 Incidents in which police firearms were discharged at person(s)

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These figures refer to incidents in which police firearms were intentionally discharged at person(s). The number of incidents does not reflect the number of firearms that were fired, or the number of shots fired. The use of firearms by police is expected to be a last resort, considered only where there is a serious risk to public or police safety.

In the year ending March 2019, there were 13 incidents in which police discharged firearms. Table 1 shows that this is the highest number of incidents since the current time series began (year ending March 2010). This represents 0.06% of total operations.

**Table 1: Number of incidents in which police firearms were discharged, England and Wales, years ending March 2010 to March 2019**

	March 2010	March 2011	March 2012	March 2013	March 2014	March 2015	March 2016	March 2017	March 2018	March 2019
Number of incidents	6	4	4	3	4	6	7	6	8	13

**Table notes:**

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Table 4.

Figures cover number of incidents where conventional firearms were discharged. The figures exclude less-lethal weapons such as C.E.D. (Taser®).

Excludes accidental discharges, discharges for animal destruction, the use of firearms during police training and tyre deflations.

Figures for years ending March 2017 and March 2018 have been revised in line with the standard revisions policy as set out in the [Home Office Statement of compliance with Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#). For more information see [Revisions](#).

## 4 Armed officers

### Key results

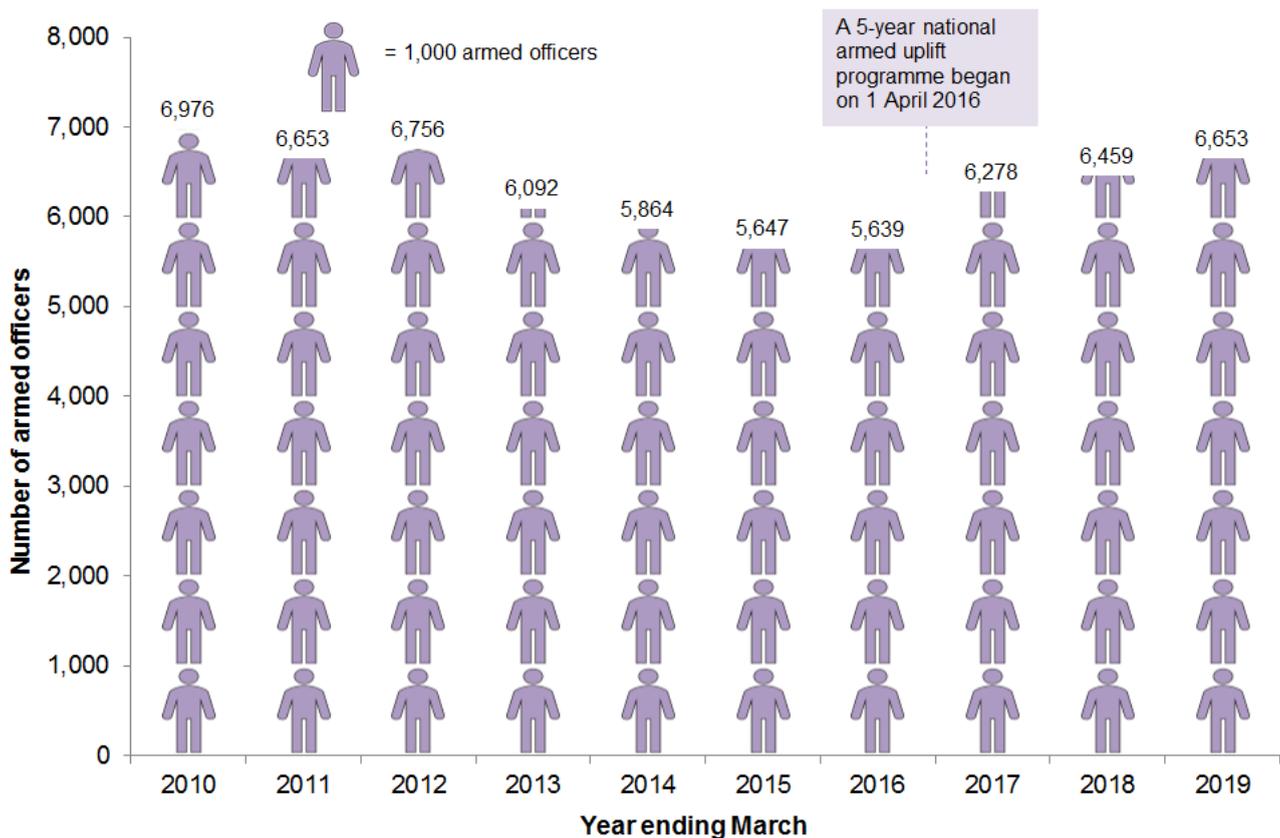
In the year ending March 2019, there were **6,653 armed police officers**, a **3% increase (+194)** compared with the previous year.

### The recent rise in number of armed officers continues

This is the third consecutive year in which the number of armed officers has increased, following a previously downward trend in armed officer numbers.

The increase in armed officers in recent years is likely to be linked to a national uplift in armed policing. On 1 April 2016, the Home Office announced provision of funding for a five-year uplift programme to increase policing capability and capacity in the use of firearms.

**Figure 4: Number of armed officers, as at March 2010 to March 2019, England and Wales**



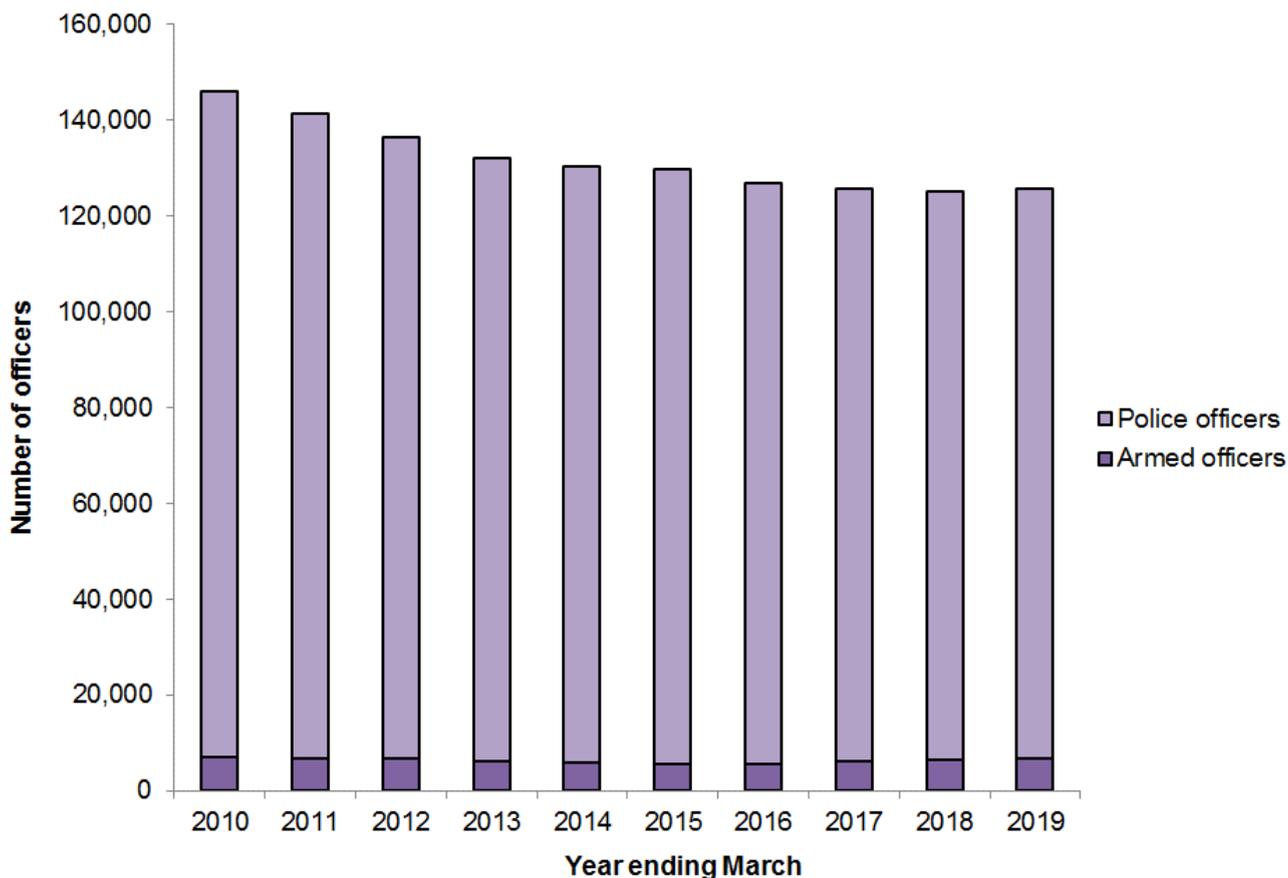
### Chart notes:

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Table 3.

### Proportion of armed officers remains stable

As at March 2019, there were 125,793 police officers in England and Wales, an increase of 0.6% (+699) compared to the previous year. Following the general downward trend to March 2015, as seen in Figure 5, police officer numbers have remained similar since year ending March 2016. Roughly 1-in-19 police officers are armed officers, the same proportion as year ending March 2018.

**Figure 5: Total number of police officers and armed officers, as at March 2010 to March 2019, England and Wales**



#### Chart notes:

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Table 3; and [Police workforce](#) open data tables, Table S2.

Notes: The number of police officers is a head count, for full time equivalents (FTE). See Home Office, [Police workforce](#) open data tables, Table S2

Chief Officers are expected to determine the number of armed officers in their areas based on a thorough assessment of threat and risk.

## 5 Revisions

During the data confirmation exercise carried out with police forces for the current release, a small number of forces submitted revisions to previously published data. These figures have been revised in the latest release in line with the revisions policy as set out in the [Home Office Statement of compliance with Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#). Table 2 and Table 3 below detail these changes.

**Table 2: Revisions to figures published in year ending March 2018 release**

Financial year	What was revised	Number of forces that made revisions	Previously published figures (in 2017-18 release)	Revised figures (in 2018-19 release)	Numerical change	% change
2017-18	Police firearms operations	3	18,746	18,781	+35	+0.2%
2016-17	Police firearms operations	1	15,809	15,783	-26	-0.2%
2015-16	Police firearms operations	1	14,631	14,552	-79	-0.5%
2013-14	Police firearms operations	1	14,939	14,937	-2	-0.01%
2017-18	Police firearms operations involving ARVs	3	15,794	15,838	+44	+0.3%
2016-17	Police firearms operations involving ARVs	1	13,214	13,188	-26	-0.2%
2015-16	Police firearms operations involving ARVs	1	12,498	12,445	-53	-0.4%

2013-14	Police firearms operations involving ARVs	1	12,135	12,110	-25	-0.2%
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### Table notes

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Table 1 and 2;

Previously published figures from Home Office, [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Table 1 and 2.

Figures for percentage change are rounded to 1 decimal place see rounding.

**Table 3: Revisions to number of incidents in which firearms were discharged at person(s), published in year ending March 2018 release**

Collection year	Previously published figures in year ending March 2018 release	Revised figures in year ending March 2019 release	Numerical change
Year ending March 2018	12	8	-4
Year ending March 2017	10	6	-4

### Table notes

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Table 3; Previously published figures from [Police use of firearms statistics](#) data tables, Table 3.

Figures include number of incidents where conventional firearms were discharged. The figures exclude less-lethal weapons such as C.E.D. (TASER®).

Figures exclude accidental discharges, discharges for animal destruction, during police training, and deflating tyres.

Percentage changes are not shown due to small numbers.

The data for the latest year (and for previous years) may be revised in due course. It is standard practice across all Home Office statistical releases to incorporate revisions for previous years' data in the latest release. Corrections and revisions follow the [Home Office Statement of compliance with Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#).

## 6 Quality and methodology

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### Data collection

The statistics in this release are based on aggregated figures for the year ending March 2019 submitted by the 43 territorial police forces as part of the [Annual Data Requirement \(ADR\)](#). The ADR is a list of all mandatory data requests made to police forces in England and Wales under the Home Secretary's statutory powers.

As with previous releases, a data confirmation exercise was carried out by Home Office statisticians with the support of police forces. Validation and variance checks were carried out on the data as part of the quality assurance process. This reduces the risk of publishing incorrect figures.

The total number of operations involving the authorised deployment of armed officers excludes:

- Operations where officers were stood down before being deployed
- Armed officers deployed for VIP protection, armed prisoner escorts, airport patrols, other guarding duties and routine patrols
- Firearms operations involving accidental discharges, discharges for animal destruction, during police training, or to deflate tyres
- Operations where the reporting police force did not issue an authority but assisted another police force on an operation. The authorising police force would submit data relating to this operation, eliminating double counting.

The total numbers of police firearms operations include all operations involving ARVs. The number of operations involving ARVs is a sub-category of all police firearms operations in which the initial or sole response was by an ARV.

Figures for incidents where firearms were discharged cover the number of incidents where police discharged conventional firearms. The figures exclude discharges of less-lethal weapons (see [Glossary](#)), and incidents involving accidental discharges, discharges for animal destruction, during police training, or to deflate tyres.

The number of armed officers includes all operationally deployable armed officers, including those being utilised as trainers.

### Changes to the data

Publications prior to 'Police use of firearms statistics, England and Wales: April 2016 to March 2017' covered the number of 'authorised firearms officers' (AFOs). An AFO was defined as "a police officer who has been selected, trained, accredited, and authorised by their Chief Officer to carry and use a firearm". Following feedback from the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#), [College of Policing](#), and various police forces, the publications for the year ending March 2017 and onwards covers the number of 'armed officers'. This change was implemented to increase clarity, as the term 'AFO' can be used to refer

specifically to an armed officer trained at the basic level, as well as to any armed officer in general. The change accounted for less than 0.5% of the total number of armed offers as at 31 March 2017. As such, the figures for 31 March 2017 and onwards are regarded as comparable to figures from previous publications.

### Comparability of the data

While data from the year ending March 2002 onwards is available, the figures were not subjected to the same rigorous data validation or variance checks which have been applied to the data since. Therefore, the quality of these figures may not be of the same standard, making them incomparable with data from later years.

This is the fifth year that information relating to the number of incidents in which police firearms were discharged has been collected as part of the ADR, confirmed and published. Previously, the data on incidents involving discharges was supplied by the NPCC who collected the information from forces. This was not a mandatory requirement, and the figures were not quality assured in the same way that the discharge data collected via the ADR have been. With this in mind, [figures for the years ending March 2002 to 2008](#), which include police force level breakdowns, can be accessed online.

The '[Police use of firearms statistics, England and Wales: financial year ending March 2014](#)' release detailed some of the quality assurance work that took place for previous years, including data confirmation by Chief Officers for all data covering the period from the years ending March 2009 to 2014.

### Rounding

Data are provided unrounded in the data tables accompanying the '[Police use of firearms, England and Wales](#)' publication. This is to promote transparency and allow users to exploit the data further. Unless specified within the notes for the table, percentages in the release are rounded to the nearest % using the round-half-away-from-zero method. For example, 23.5% will be rounded to 24%, and -23.5% will be rounded to -24%. Percentages under 1% are rounded to the nearest significant figure.

Where data are rounded, they may not add up to the totals shown, or, in the case of percentages, to 100%, because they have been rounded independently.

## 7 Glossary

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**Armed response vehicle (ARVs)** – ARVs are police vehicles carrying armed officers trained to the ARV standard. These vehicles are crewed by uniformed officers who have been selected and trained to respond to a range of armed operations involving subjects on foot, in moving vehicles and in buildings. ARVs are adapted to accommodate specialist equipment and enable firearms officers to be transported swiftly to deal with ongoing incidents.

**Armed officer** – This refers to officers authorised to use firearms, which should incorporate all operationally deployable armed officers, including those currently being utilised as trainers. For more information please visit the [College of Policing website](#).

**Attenuating energy projectile (AEP)** – An AEP is a soft-nosed impact projectile fired from a single shot launcher. AEP is a form of less-lethal weapon only available for use by specially trained officers to give them an additional means of dealing with threats of serious violence. It delivers an impact that is not intended to cause serious or life-threatening injury but is of sufficient force to dissuade or prevent a violent or potentially violent person from their intended course of action, thereby reducing the threat.

**Firearm** – This includes any kind of firearm routinely deployed by firearms officers that is not a less-lethal weapon. Examples of less-lethal weapons are: **AEPs** and conducted energy devices (CED) e.g. TASER®.

**Police firearms operations** – Police firearms operations involve the authorised deployment of **armed officers** where they may have to protect themselves or others from a person who: (a) is in possession of a firearm or other weapon; (b) has immediate access to a firearm or weapon; or (c) is otherwise so dangerous that the officer's use of a firearm may be necessary.

Each operation is counted as only one operation regardless of the number of personnel (or deployments) or tactics employed, or rounds fired/discharged to deal with it.

**Police firearms operations involving ARVs** – Police firearms operations in which an **ARV** was the initial or sole response are counted in this category. Police firearms operations in which ARVs were deployed as a secondary response would be counted in **police firearms operations**.

## 8 Uses of the statistics

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Uses of the statistics on police use of firearms are listed below using the standard categorisation for official statistics.

### a) Informing the general public's choices

- About the state of the economy, society and the environment – figures on police use of firearms are used by the media in articles on police use of force.
- About the performance of government and public bodies – figures on levels and trends in police use of firearms are requested via Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information Act requests to gauge performance in general or specific areas.
- When officers take the difficult decision to deploy force it is vital that they can be scrutinised by the people they serve.

### b) Government policy making and monitoring

Police use of firearms statistics are used to monitor the operational performance and effectiveness of police forces, and to inform government policy and decisions by ministers. The statistics provide a national and regional level picture of armed policing, giving some insight into how public money is spent to resource policing capabilities and the UK's capacity to deal with serious incidents.

### c) Resource allocation – typically by central and local government

Policing statistics, including statistics on police use of firearms, demonstrate the range, extent and quality of police activities, and contribute to overall cases for police funding.

## 9 Related statistics

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### Releases in this series

Forthcoming publications are pre-announced on the [GOV.UK website](#).

'[Police use of firearms, England and Wales](#)' statistical releases for the year ending March 2008 onwards are available from the Home Office pages of the GOV.UK website.

[Figures for the years ending March 2002 to 2008](#) are also available online.

### Police use of force

Statistics on [Police use of force](#) were published on 13 December 2018, and included the use of firearms as a tactic in incidents. A use of force incident differs to those collected in this release as Police use of force figures count each time an officer uses force on an individual, not specific events. The collection has other firearms data such as: location, incident outcome, reason for using force, and further subject details such as age, ethnicity, and gender. However, these two collections cannot be compared as specific firearms operations cannot be linked to use of force forms.

## 10 Feedback and enquiries

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If you would like to make an enquiry or have any general feedback about this release, please email the Fire, Licensing and Public Order Analysis Unit at:  
[PublicOrderStatistics@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:PublicOrderStatistics@homeoffice.gov.uk)

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