



Police use of firearms statistics, England and Wales: April 2017 to March 2018

Statistical Bulletin 15/18

In the year ending March 2018, compared with the previous year, there were:

- 18,746 police firearms operations, an increase of 19% (2,937 operations); this continues the rise since the year ending March 2016
- 15,794 firearms operations involving Armed Response Vehicles; this was 84% of all police firearms operations (the same proportion as the previous year, and which has remained between 80-85% each year since March 2009)
- 12 incidents in which police firearms were discharged, up from 10 incidents
- 6,459 armed officers as at 31 March 2018, an increase of 3% (181 officers) and continuing the recent rise in the number of armed officers

Contents

[1. Introduction](#)

[2. Police firearms operations, including operations involving Armed Response Vehicles \(ARVs\)](#)

[3. Incidents in which police firearms were discharged](#)

[4. Armed officers](#)

[5. Revisions](#)

[6. Quality and methodology](#)

[7. Glossary](#)

[8. Uses of the statistics](#)

[9. Related statistics](#)

[10. Feedback & enquiries](#)

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1. Introduction

This release contains statistics on police use of firearms from the 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales, for the year ending March 2018. It details the total number of:

- Police firearms operations, including operations involving Armed Response Vehicles (ARVs)
- Incidents in which police firearms were discharged
- Armed officers

The figures in this release cover the period between the years ending March 2009 and March 2018.

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, as Head of Profession, reports to the National Statistician with respect to all professional statistical matters and oversees all Home Office National Statistics products with respect to the [Code](#), being responsible for their timing, content and methodology.

2. Police firearms operations, including operations involving Armed Response Vehicles (ARVs)

2.1 The recent rise in police firearms operations continues

In the year ending March 2018, there were 18,746 police firearms operations in England and Wales. This is an increase of 2,937 (19%) police firearms operations compared to the previous year, and is the highest number of operations since the year ending March 2011. As shown in Figure 1, despite the increase in the previous two years, there has been an overall decrease of 4,435 (-19%) in the number of police firearms operations since the year ending March 2009.

Figure 1: Police firearms operations, including operations involving ARVs, years ending March 2009 to March 2018

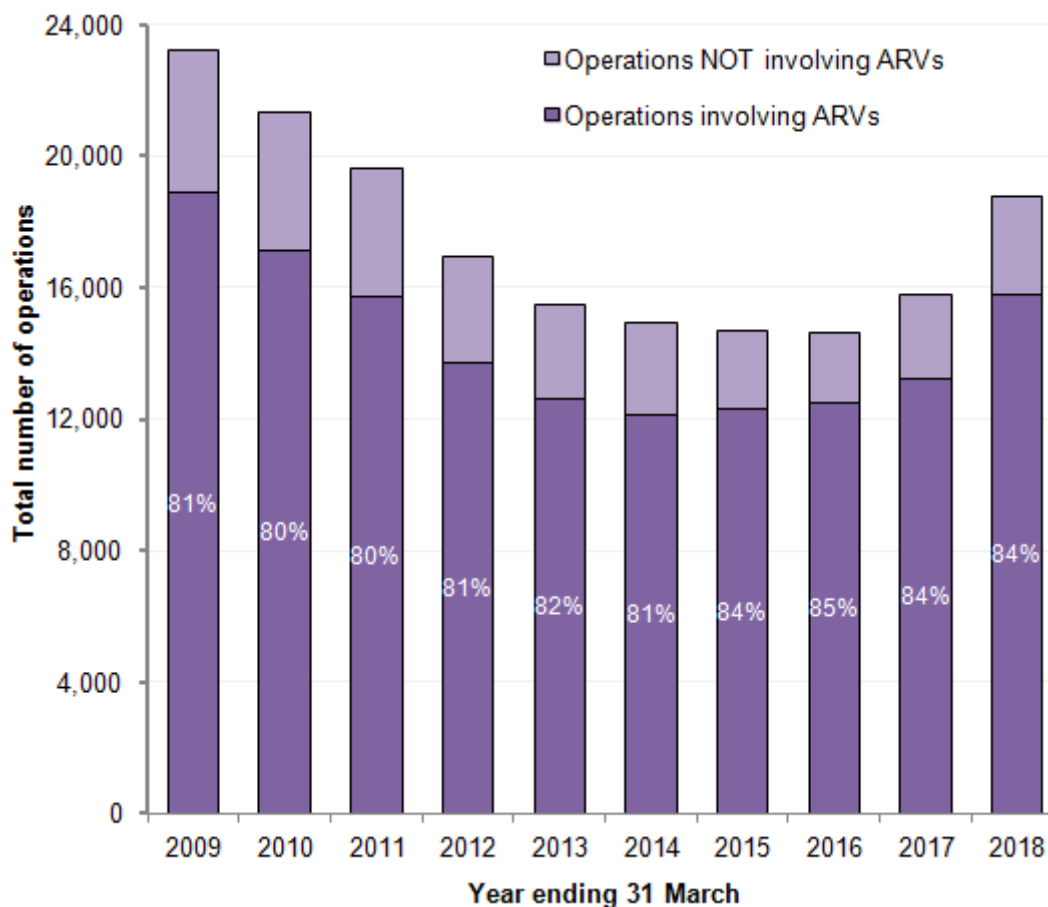


Chart notes

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms, England and Wales: April 2017 to March 2018 data tables](#), Tables 1 and 2.

Percentage figure indicates the proportion of total police firearms operations involving ARVs for each year.

In the year ending 31 March 2018, 84% (15,794) of all firearms operations involved ARVs. ARVs are adapted to accommodate specialist equipment and enable firearms officers to be transported swiftly to deal with ongoing incidents. The trends seen in the number of operations involving ARVs are in line with those seen in the total firearms operations figures. The proportion of operations involving ARVs remained stable between the years ending March 2009 and March 2014, accounting for between 80% and 82% of all firearms operations. There has been a slight increase in the proportion of operations involving ARVs in the previous four years (with operations involving ARVs accounting for 84-85% of total firearms operations in these years).

2.2 Regional trends in police firearms operations remain similar to the previous year

In the year ending March 2018, London accounted for the largest proportion of all police firearms operations with 5,142 (27%) operations, followed by the West Midlands with 3,312 (18%) and Yorkshire and the Humber with 2,130 (11%). These three regions also accounted for the highest three regions for number of operations in the previous year.

The North East accounted for the smallest proportion of all police firearms operations, with 461 (2%) operations, followed by the East Midlands with 973 (5%) and Wales with 1,137 (6%). These three regions also accounted for the three regions with the lowest number of operations in the previous year.

Figure 2: Total police firearms operations by region, years ending March 2017 and March 2018

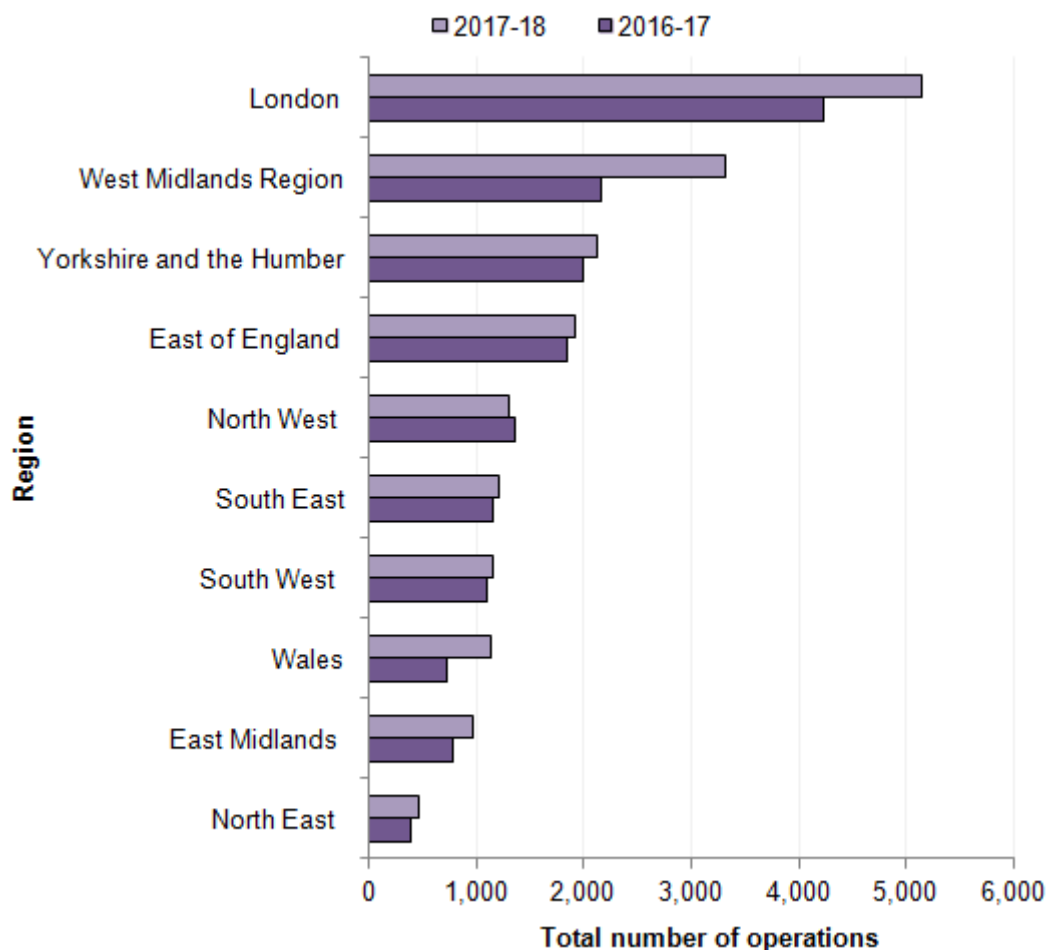


Chart notes

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms, England and Wales: April 2017 to March 2018 data tables](#), Table 1.

In the year ending March 2018, most regions in England and Wales showed an increase in the number of operations from the previous year. The West Midlands region experienced the largest increase in the number of police firearms operations, with a rise of 1,145 (53%) firearms operations from the previous year. The only region to show a decrease from the previous year was the North West, with the number of firearms operations falling by 57 (-4%).

2.3 Highest number of operations reported by the Metropolitan Police

The police forces with the highest number of police firearms operations in the year ending March 2018 were the Metropolitan Police (5,045), West Midlands Police (2,721) and West Yorkshire Police (896).

The police forces with the lowest number of police firearms operations were Cumbria Police (77), Lincolnshire Police (73) and Wiltshire Police (87). Figure 3 shows the distribution of police firearms operations by police force area.

Figure 3: Total police firearms operations by police force area

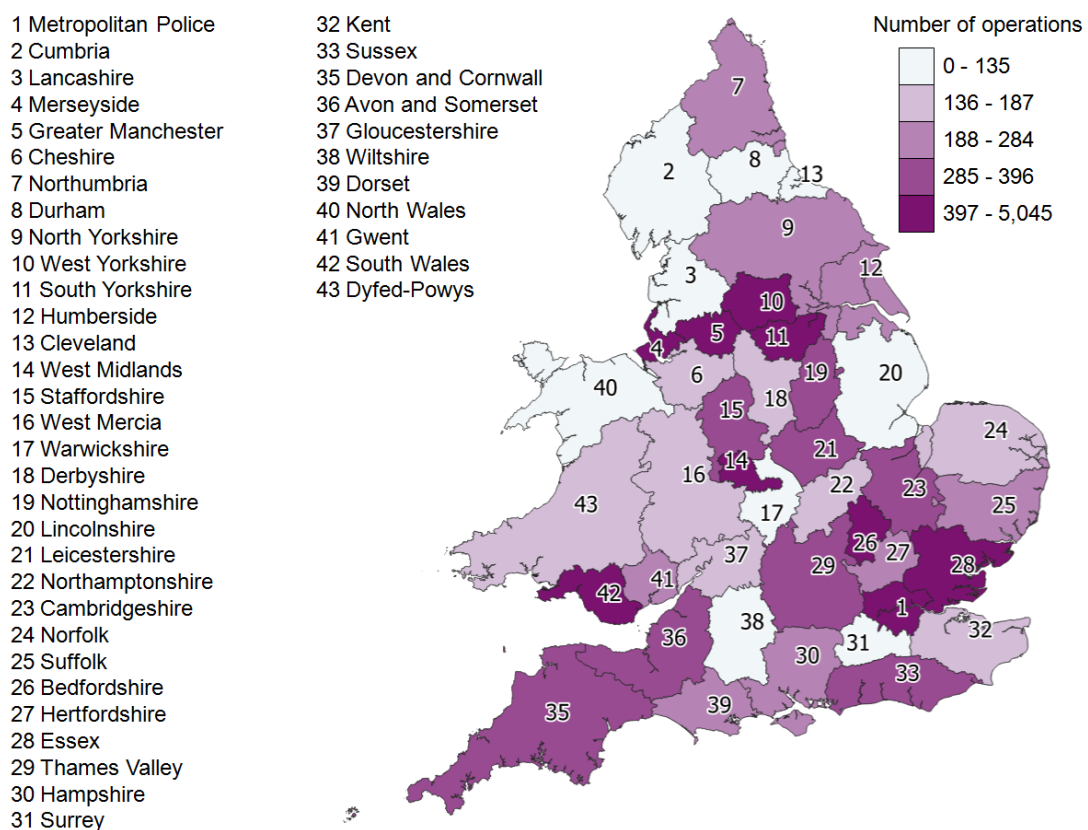


Chart notes:

Shape file source: [ONS Geo-Portal](#).

Data source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms, England and Wales: April 2017 to March 2018 data tables](#), Table 1.

3. Incidents in which police firearms were discharged

These figures refer to incidents in which police firearms were discharged, and include the terror attack on London Bridge in June 2017. The number of incidents does not reflect the number of firearms that were fired, nor the number of shots fired. The use of firearms by the 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 2018, there were 12 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 2009).

Table 1: Number of incidents in which police firearms were discharged, England and Wales, years ending March 2009 to March 2018

	March 2009	March 2010	March 2011	March 2012	March 2013	March 2014	March 2015	March 2016	March 2017	March 2018
Number of incidents	6	6	4	4	3	4	6	7	10	12

Table notes

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms, England and Wales: April 2017 to March 2018 data tables](#), Table 4.

Figures cover number of incidents where conventional firearms were discharged. The figures exclude less-lethal weapons.

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

4. Armed officers

4.1 Recent rise in number of armed officers continues

There were 6,459 armed officers as at 31 March 2018, an increase of 181 (3%) armed officers compared with the previous year. This is the second consecutive year in which the number of armed officers has increased, following a previously downward trend in armed officer numbers (an overall decrease of 1,267 (-18%) armed officers between March 2009 and March 2016; see Figure 4).

The increase in armed officers in recent years is likely to be linked to a national uplift in armed policing capability. As announced on 1 April 2016, the Home Office is currently providing funding for a five year uplift programme, in order to increase policing capability in the use of firearms.

Figure 4: Number of armed officers, as at 31 March 2009 to 31 March 2018

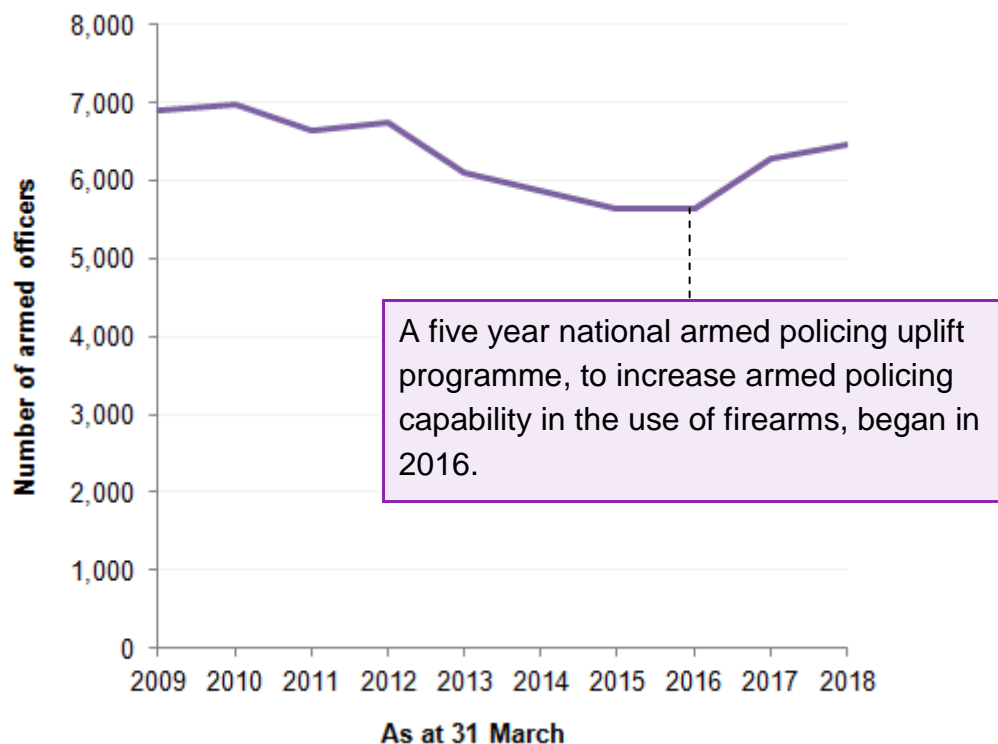


Chart notes

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms, England and Wales: April 2017 to March 2018 data tables](#), Table 3.

4.2 Number of armed officers rises while total number of police officers falls

As at 31 March 2018, there were 125,093 police officers¹ in England and Wales, representing a decrease of 0.6% compared to the previous year. The most recent fall in the number of police officers continues the general downward trend seen in the last decade (a fall of 14% from 145,948 officers as at 31 March 2009).

Over the same period (31 March 2009 to 31 March 2018), the number of armed officers also declined (by 6%). However, as shown in Figure 4, since 31 March 2016 the number of armed officers has risen by 820 (15%). In contrast, over the past two years the number of police officers has shown a 1,673 (1%) decrease.

¹ The total number of police officers provided in this release is a headcount figure. For the number of FTE police officers see Table H3 of the [Police Workforce](#) tables.

Figure 5. Total number of police officers and armed officers, as at 31 March 2009 to 31 March 2018

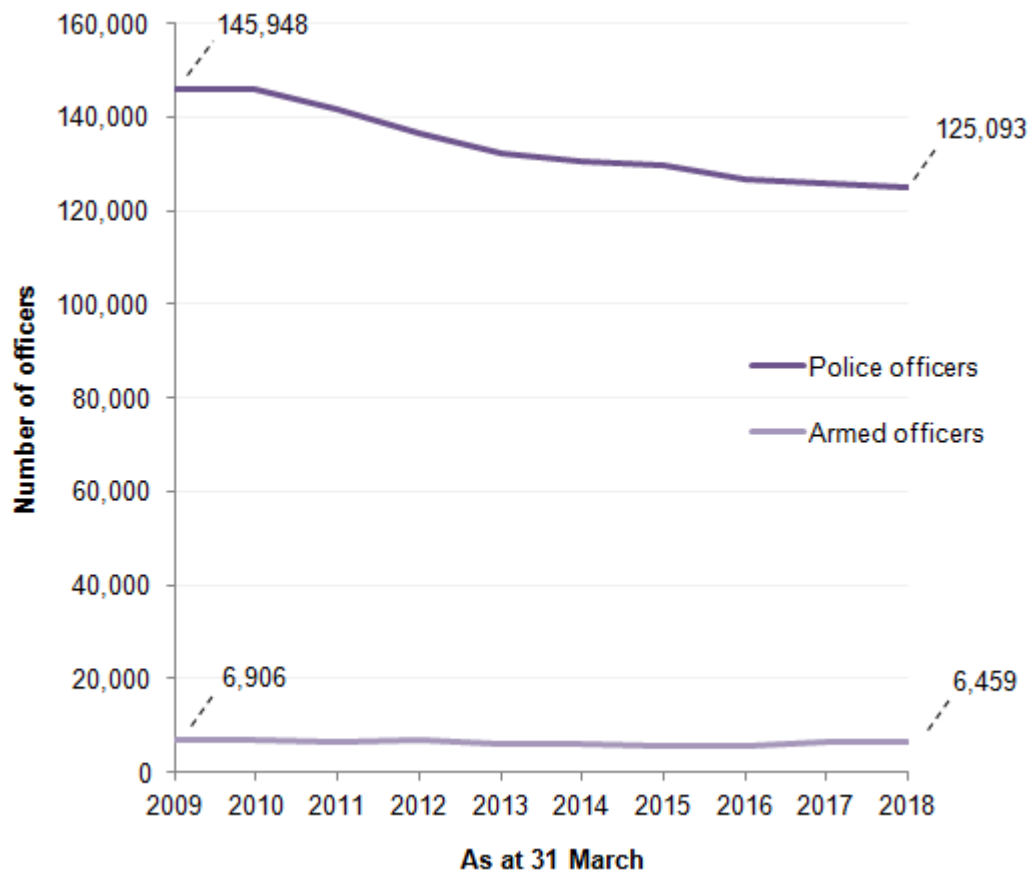


Chart notes:

Source: Home Office [Police use of firearms, England and Wales: April 2017 to March 2018 data tables](#), Table 3; [Police workforce open data tables](#).

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

A small number of forces submitted revisions to previously published figures for the year ending March 2017, in light of the data confirmation exercise that was carried out for the current release.

As shown in Table 2, forces submitted revisions which resulted in an overall increase in the total number of police firearms operations, and an overall decrease in operations involving ARVs for the year ending March 2017.

Table 2: Revisions to figures published in the 2016-17 release

	Previously published figures for 2016-17 (in 2016-17 release)	Revised figures for 2016-17 (in 2017-18 release)	Numerical change	% change	Number of forces that made revisions
Police firearms operations	15,705	15,809	104	0.7%	4
Police firearms operations involving ARVs	13,223	13,214	-9	-0.1%	4

Table notes

Source: Home Office, [Police use of firearms, England and Wales: April 2017 to March 2018 data tables](#), and [Police use of firearms statistics, England and Wales: April 2016 to March 2017 data tables](#).

Figures for percentage change are rounded to 1 decimal place.

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 corporate revisions policy](#).

6. Quality and methodology

6.1 Data collection

The statistics in the 'Police use of firearms statistics, England and Wales: April 2017 to March 2018' release are based on aggregated figures for the year ending 31 March 2018 submitted by the 43 Home Office 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 the previous releases, a data confirmation exercise was carried out by Home Office statisticians. Validation and variance checks were carried out on the data as part of the quality assurance process. This reduces the risk of incorrect figures being published, and supports the Home Office in any subsequent disagreement with a police force over the figures published for that force.

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 incidents involving accidental discharges, discharges for animal destruction, during police training, or for the purpose of deflating tyres.

The total numbers of police firearms operations includes 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 conventional firearms were discharged by police. The figures exclude discharges of less-lethal weapons (see [Glossary](#)). These figures exclude incidents involving accidental discharges, discharges for animal destruction, during police training, or for the purpose of deflating tyres.

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

6.2 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), which 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 officers as at 31 March 2017. As such, the figures for 31 March 2017 and onwards are regarded as comparable to figures from previous publications.

6.3 Comparability of the data

The '[Police use of firearms, England and Wales: financial year ending 31 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 year ending March 2009 to the year ending March 2014.

While data from the year ending March 2002 onwards are available, any comparisons between data before and after the year ending March 2009 should be exercised with caution. This is because figures prior to the year ending March 2009 were not subjected to the same rigorous data validation or variance checks which have been applied to the data covering the year ending March 2009 onwards. Therefore, the quality of these figures may not be of the same standard.

This is the fourth 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 were supplied by the NPCC who collected the information from forces. The data submitted to NPCC were not a mandatory requirement, and the figures were not quality assured in the same way that the discharge data collected via the ADR has been. Therefore, any firearms discharge data prior to 2012 should also be treated with caution.

With this in mind, figures for the year ending March 2002 to the year ending March 2008, which include police force level breakdowns, can be accessed [here](#).

6.4 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 per cent using the round-half-away-from-zero method. For example, 23.5 per cent will be rounded to 24 per cent, and -23.5 per cent will be rounded to -24 per cent. Percentages under 1% are rounded to the nearest significant figure.

Where data are rounded, they may not sum to the totals shown, or, in the case of percentages, to 100 per cent, because they have been rounded independently.

7. Glossary

Armed Response Vehicle (ARVs) – ARVs are police vehicles carrying armed officers who have been 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 incidents 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 who have been 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](#).

Firearm – This includes any kind of firearm that is routinely deployed by firearms officers that is not a less-lethal weapon. Examples of less-lethal weapons are: Attenuating Energy Projectile (AEP, a soft-nosed impact round which can be used to distract and dissuade the subject who poses the threat), or Conducted Energy Devices (CED, e.g. a 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, (b) has immediate access to a firearm or (c) is otherwise so dangerous that the officer's use of a firearm may be necessary.

Each incident is classed as only one operation regardless of the number of personnel (or deployments) or tactics employed to deal with the incident.

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

Uses made of the statistics on police use of firearms are listed below using the standard categorisation for official statistics (as shown in the UK Statistics Authority monitoring brief 6/2010, The Use Made of 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 cases 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 capability 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

9.1 Releases in this series

Forthcoming publications are pre-announced on the GOV.UK website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>

'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: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-use-of-firearms-statistics>

Figures for the year ending March 2002 to March 2008 can be found on the following webpage:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/98275/police-firearms-use-2007-2008.pdf

9.2 Police use of force

Statistics on police use of force will be released in autumn 2018 on GOV.UK. The publication will include statistics on when firearms are used as a tactic in incidents where police officers use force, the outcomes of such incidents, and further details on the subject involved in the incident, such as age, ethnicity and gender.

10. Feedback & enquiries

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.gsi.gov.uk or write to: Fire, Licensing and Public Order Analysis Unit, 14th Floor, Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road, Croydon, CR9 2BY.

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