



Police use of firearms statistics

England and Wales: April 2019 to March 2020

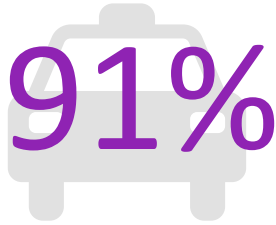
This release contains statistics on firearms operations and armed officer numbers for the 2019/20 financial year.

Key results

There were **19,372 police firearms operations** in the financial year ending March 2020, a **4% decrease** (-820) from the previous year, ending the yearly increase seen since the year ending March 2016.

-4%

The **two largest police forces, Metropolitan Police Service and West Midlands Police** accounted for **35%** of these operations.



Of the 19,372 operations, **91% (17,687) involved an Armed Response Vehicle** the highest proportion since records began (March 2009).

91%

There were **5 incidents** in which police firearms were discharged, compared with 13 incidents during the previous year.

There were **6,518 armed officers** as at March 2020, a **2% decrease** (-103) which ends a three year upward trend.



-2%

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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 financial year ending March 2020. 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 [Police use of firearms statistics data tables](#) include figures from years ending March 2009 to March 2020.

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 2020, there were **19,372 police firearms operations** in England and Wales, which is a **4% decrease** of 820 from the previous year.

Of these incidents, **91% (17,687) 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 2011 to March 2020, England and Wales

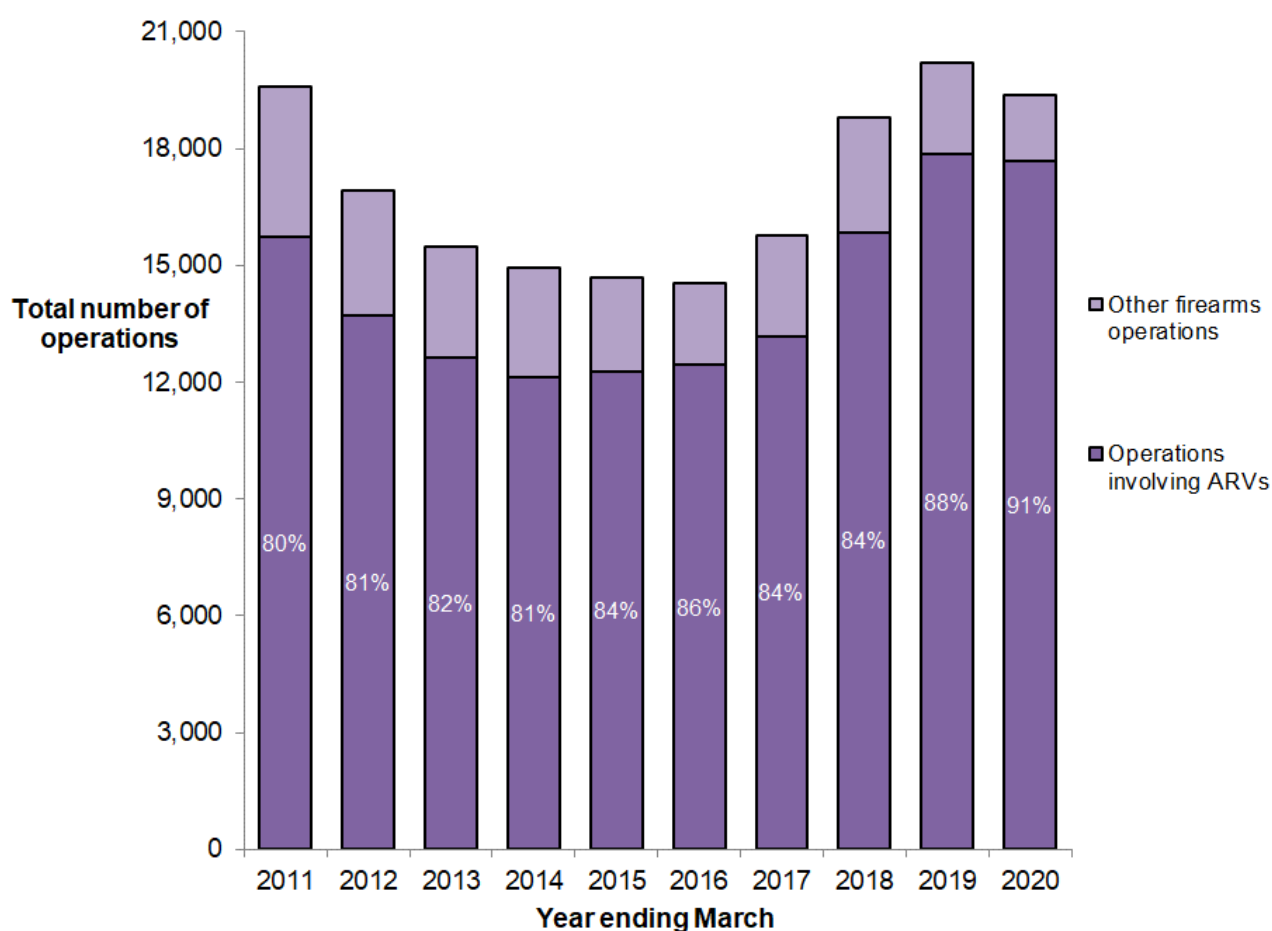


Chart notes:

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

There were 19,372 police firearms operations in the financial year ending March 2020, a 4% decrease (-820) in the latest year, ending the yearly increase seen since the year ending

March 2016. As shown in Figure 1, the total number of operations are now similar to the level seen in the year ending March 2011.

Data collection note

There are certain types of operations that are excluded from the data collection and will not be reflected in our charts. Please see [Section 6](#) for the full list of excluded operations.

For the years ending March 2011 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 2020, 91% (17,687) of all firearms operations involved ARVs, which is the largest proportion of operations involving ARVs since the time series began in 2009.

Armed Response Vehicles (ARVs)

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

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

In the year ending March 2020, the London region had the largest proportion of all police firearms operations accounting for around 1-in-5 (22%; 4,280) of the total operations. The West Midlands region had the second highest number of police firearms operations, with this region accounting for 17% (3,370) of the total. These two regions also accounted for the highest number of operations in the year ending March 2019.

The London region showed a continuing decrease of operations falling 9% (down 408) while the West Midlands region experienced the largest numerical decrease of all regions, with 863 fewer firearms operations (down 20%) in the year ending March 2020 than in the previous year.

Figure 2: Total police firearms operations by region, years ending March 2019 and March 2020, England and Wales

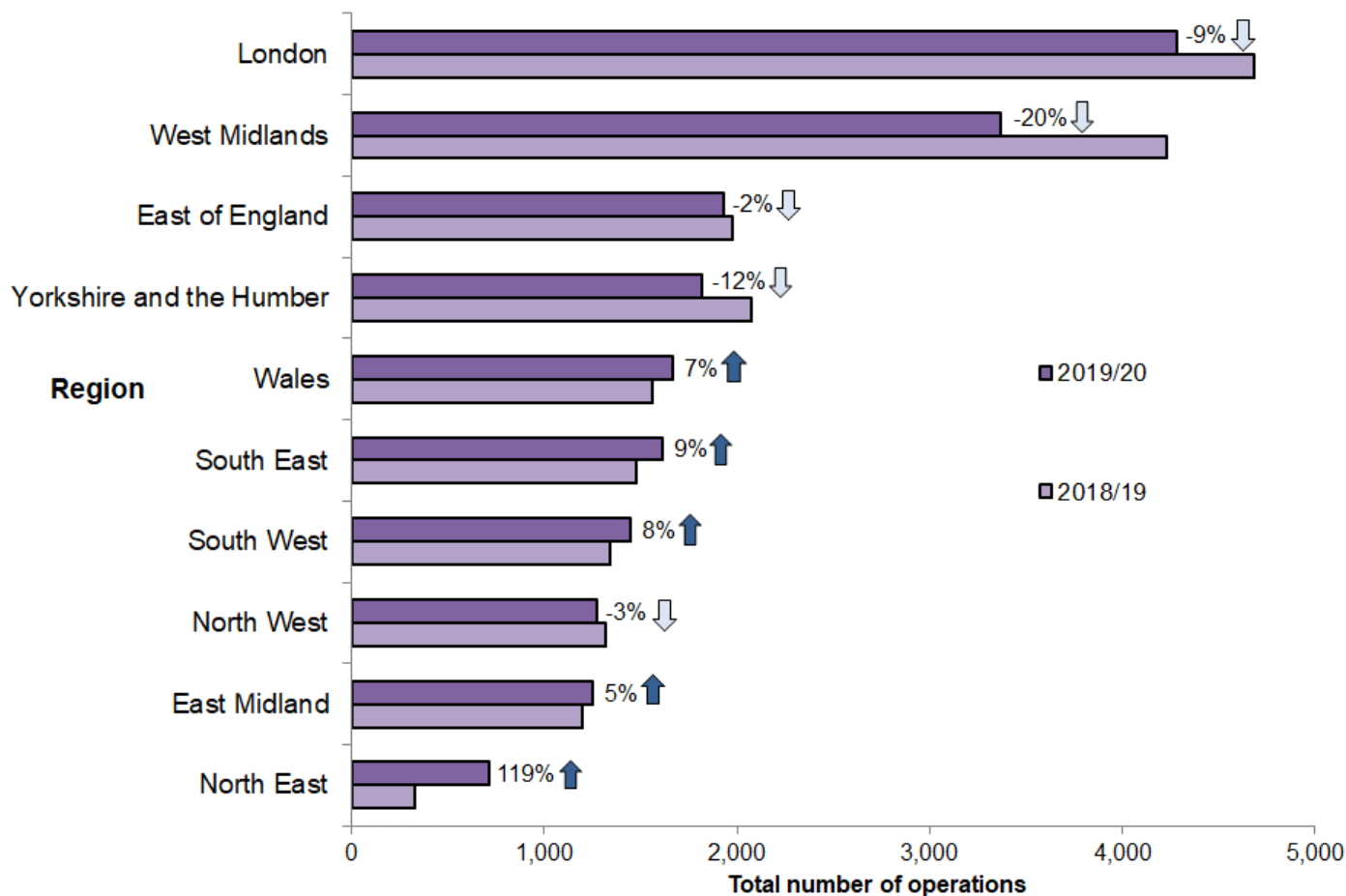


Chart notes:

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

The North East region showed the largest percentage increase of 119% (up 387). This was driven by a large increase in the Cleveland police force (+267%) and the Northumbria police force (+127%). Despite having the largest percentage increase this year, the North East region also had the lowest number of operations in the year ending March 2020. The largest percentage decrease occurred in the West Midlands region, which had 863 fewer operations (down 20%).

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 2020 were the Metropolitan Police Service (4,195) and West Midlands Police (2,562). Together these forces accounted for 35% 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 2020, England and Wales

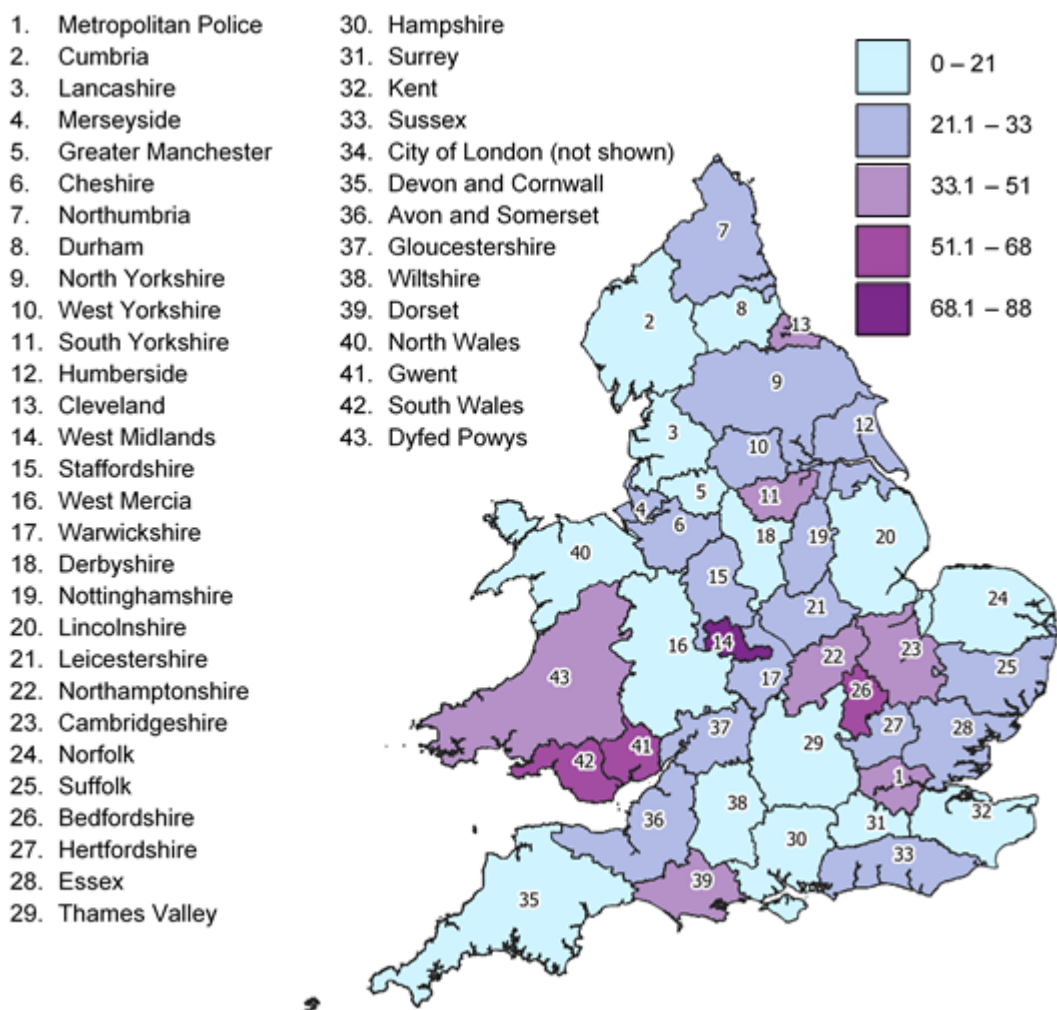


Chart notes:

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-2018 population estimate is less than 100,000.

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

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 2020, there were 5 incidents in which police discharged firearms. Table 1 shows that this is the lowest number of incidents since year ending March 2014. This represents 0.03% of total operations.

Table 1: Number of incidents in which police firearms were discharged, England and Wales, years ending March 2011 to March 2020

Year ending	March 2011	March 2012	March 2013	March 2014	March 2015	March 2016	March 2017	March 2018	March 2019	March 2020
Number of incidents	4	4	3	4	6	7	6	8	13	5

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.

4 Armed officers

Key results

In the year ending March 2020, there were **6,518 armed police officers**, a **2% decrease (-103)** compared with the previous year.

Number of armed officers decreases for the first time in 3 years

This is the first year in which the number of armed officers has decreased (-103; -2%), following a year on year increase lasting three years. The previous increase in armed officers is likely to be linked to the armed uplift programme. 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 2011 to March 2020, England and Wales

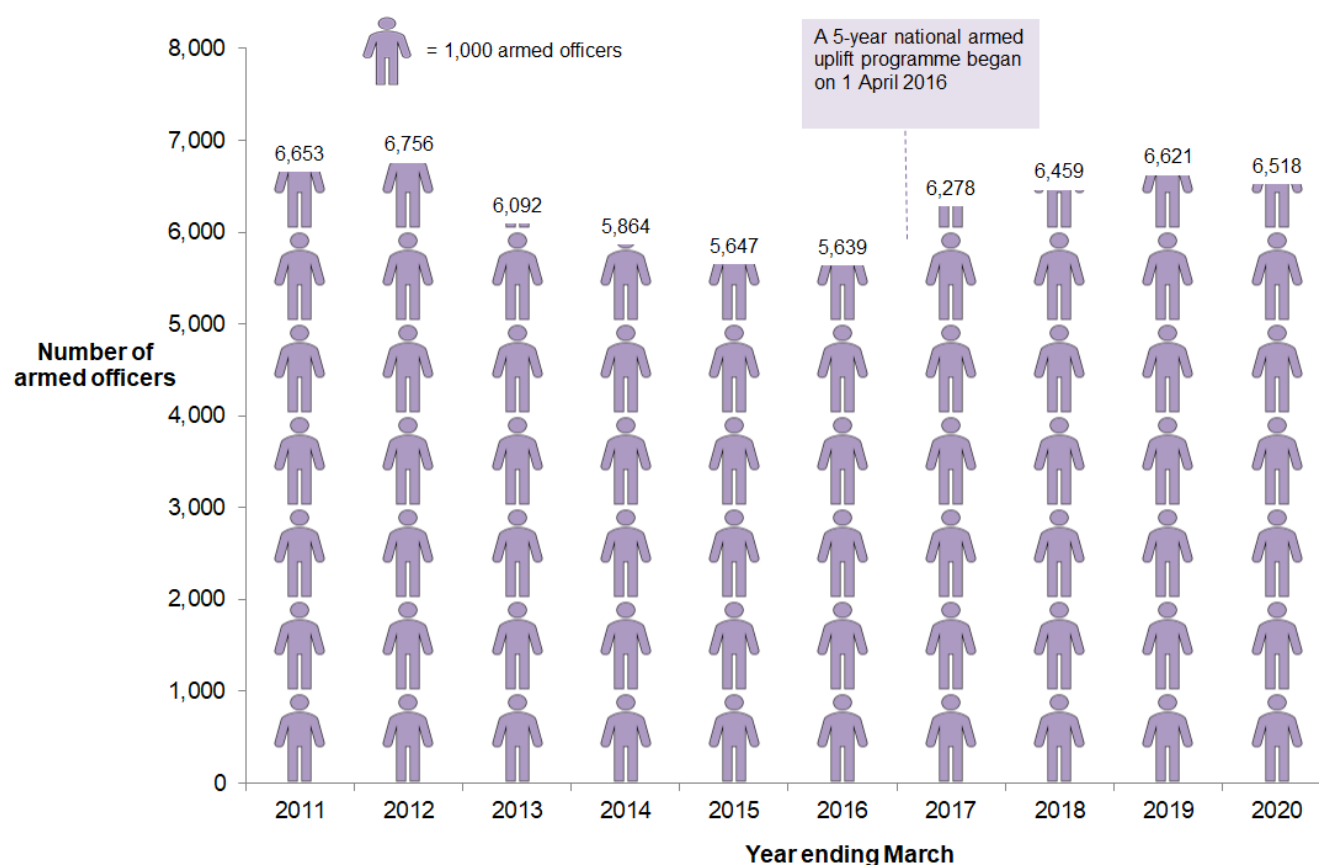


Chart notes:

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

Proportion of armed officers to unarmed officers remains stable

As at March 2020, there were 131,576 police officers in England and Wales, an increase of 5% (+5,765) compared to the previous year. This does not follow the recent decrease in total police officers. This increase is likely to be linked to the [police officer recruitment drive](#) announced on 5 September 2019. The proportion of armed officers to unarmed officer has remained stable over the last 4 years at around 5%. There was a fall of -0.3% to 5% as of March 2020.

Figure 5: Total number of police officers and armed officers, as at March 2011 to March 2020, England and Wales

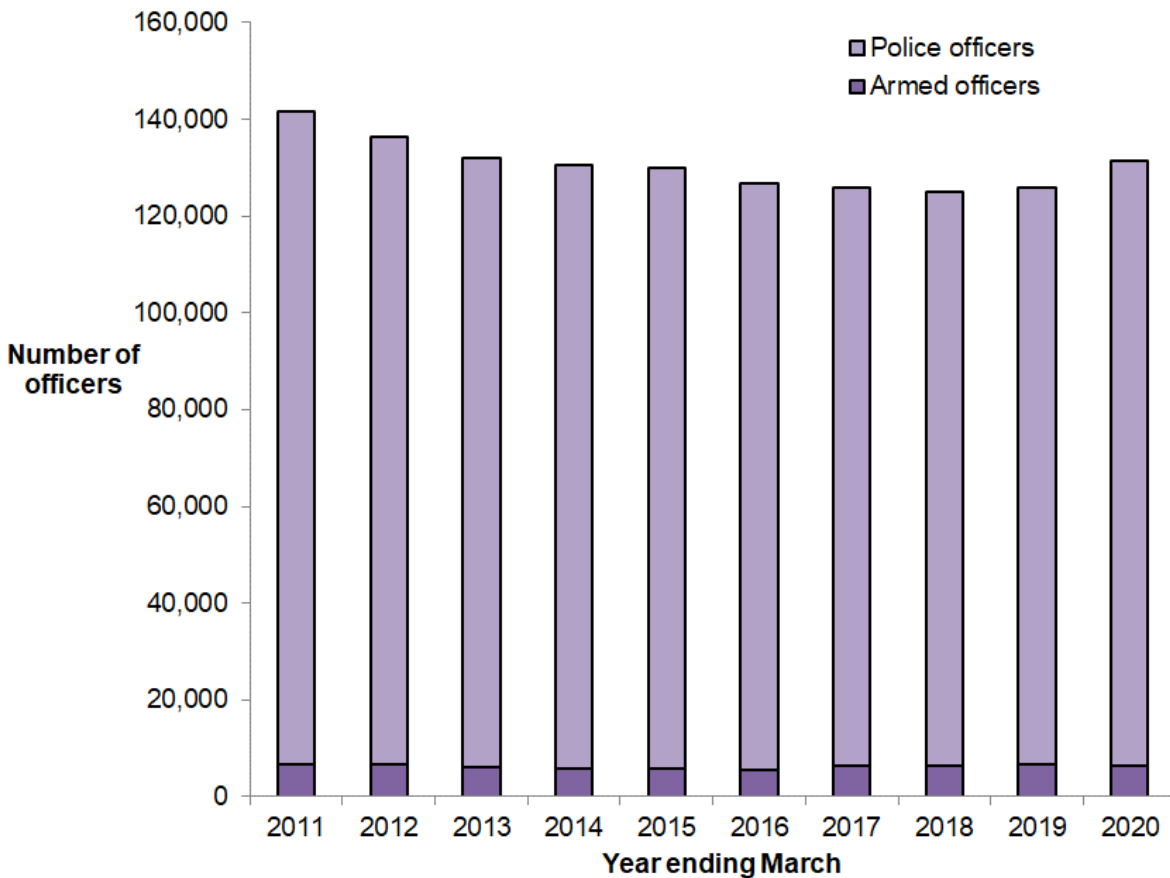


Chart notes:

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 details these changes.

Table 2: Revisions to figures published in year ending March 2019 release

Financial year	What was revised	Number of forces that made revisions	Previously published figures (in 2018-19 release)	Revised figures (in 2019-20 release)	Numerical change	% change
2018-19	Police firearms operations	2	20,186	20,192	+6	+0.03%
2018-19	Police firearms operations involving ARVs	2	17,742	17,844	+102	+0.6%
2018-19	Number of armed officers	1	6,653	6,621	-32	-0.5%

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.

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

Data quality

During the data collection process, Home Office statisticians discovered a possible discrepancy in the reporting of operations that were “stood down prior to arrival”.

Upon review with police forces, the statisticians found a minority of data entries were affected. These police forces resubmitted their data to include all operations “stood down prior to arrival”. This resulted in an increase of 106 (+0.6%) firearms operations.

This has improved the accuracy of the data for this year's collection, but there may be inaccuracies in previous years. In future years the Home Office will be improving the guidance making it clearer for police forces which operations should be reported.

Armed officer numbers should be as at 31 March (where possible). In 2020, Warwickshire were only able to provide armed officer numbers as at 1 June 2020.

Data assurance

These statistics are compiled by statisticians within the Home Office. They undertake a wide range of quality assurance checks and work closely with all 43 police forces with regular contact as needed. These checks follow the [QAAD guidance](#) (Quality Assurance of Administrative Data) and include:

- variance checks, i.e. investigating substantial changes in figures compared with the previous year,
- including safeguards within the return to improve data quality,
- ensuring all returns are accounted for, and that no duplicate returns are provided.
- querying incomplete data, or invalid data/combinations of data, provided in returns
- explaining to users about the data quality and the impact upon the statistics.

Data collection

The statistics in this release are based on aggregated figures for the year ending March 2020 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 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.

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

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 to authorised officers who have been specially trained in its use. This gives specially trained officers 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 (**AEPs** and conducted energy devices (CED) i.e. 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

Uses of the statistics on police use of firearms are listed 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 and feedback

Releases in this series

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

'[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 19 December 2019, 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.

Feedback and enquiries

We're always looking to improve the accessibility of our documents. If you find any problems, or have any feedback, relating to accessibility please email us at PublicOrderStatistics@homeoffice.gov.uk. Additionally, if you would like to make an enquiry or have any general feedback about this release, please contact PublicOrderStatistics@homeoffice.gov.uk.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office/about/statistics>

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