HMICFRS

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

State of Policing

The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales



2025–26

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary









His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2025–26

Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 54(4A) of the Police Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2026

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at: gov.uk/official-documents

This document is also available from our website at: hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at: HMICFRS, 8th Floor, 23 Stephenson Street, Birmingham B2 4BH

ISBN 978-1-5286-5476-0

E03305308 09/26

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office

Cover images © (clockwise from top left): Greater Manchester Police, West Midlands Police, Kent Police, Merseyside Police and Kent Police

CORRECTION SLIP

Title: State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2025–26

Session: 2026–27

ISBN: 978-1-5286-5476-0

Correction:

Text, on page 3, currently reads:

On 25 January 2026, the government published its long-awaited white paper on police reform.

Text, on page 3, should read:

On 26 January 2026, the government published its long-awaited white paper on police reform.

Date of correction: 21 September 2026

CORRECTION SLIP

Title: State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2025–26

Session: 2026–27

ISBN: 978-1-5286-5476-0

Correction 1:

Figure 1, on page 15, currently shows: 4 Adequate grades and 7 Requires Improvement grades for the ‘Investigating crime’ inspection question.

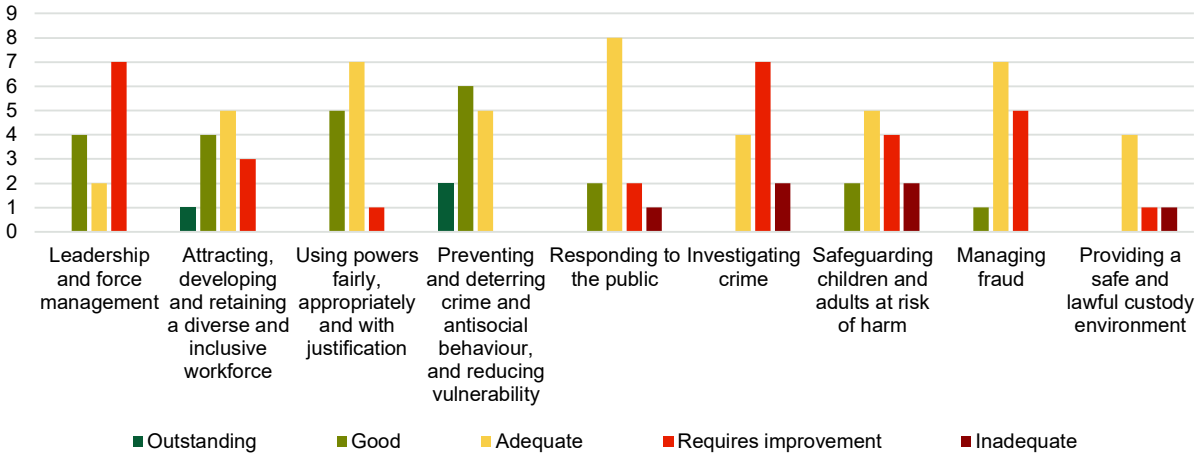
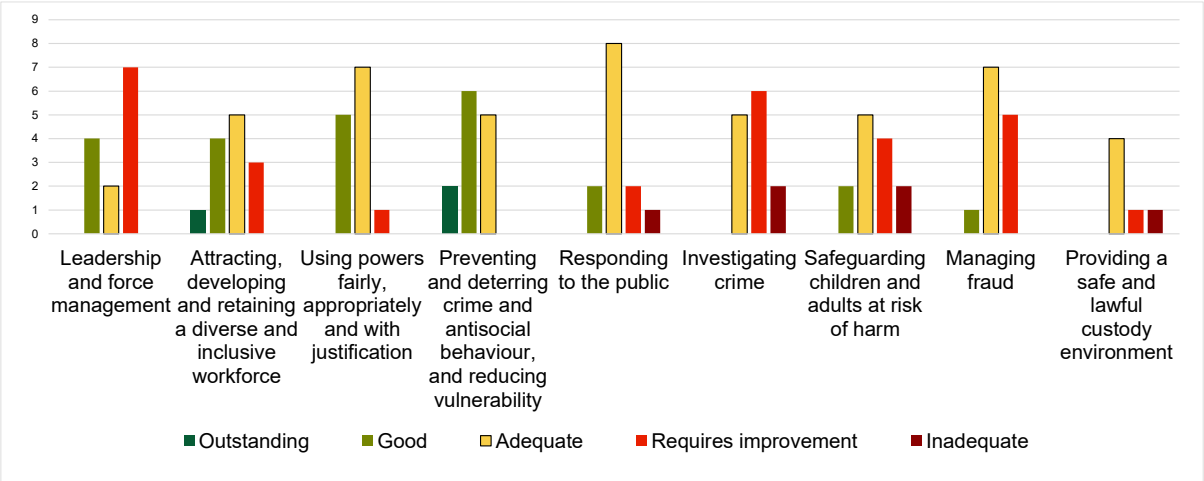


Figure 1, on page 15, should show: 5 Adequate grades and 6 Requires Improvement grades for the ‘Investigating crime’ inspection question.



Correction 2:

Figure 7, on page 26, currently shows: 4 Adequate grades and 7 Requires Improvement grades for the ‘Investigating crime’ inspection question.

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	0	0	4	7	2

Figure 7, on page 26, should show: 5 Adequate grades and 6 Requires Improvement grades for the ‘Investigating crime’ inspection question.

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	0	0	5	6	2

Date of correction: 21 October 2026

Contents

Foreword 1

1. Police reform 3

Police reform presents a major opportunity 3

Policing is still strong in both England and Wales 4

The police service is under increasing strain as crime, threats and expectations change 5

A National Police Service could provide much-needed strategic leadership 6

Reducing the number of forces could offer significant benefits, but reform needs a wider focus than force size 7

Effective leadership is essential 8

The police workforce must be supported 9

An increased focus on performance will help to promote improvements 10

Better use of technology and artificial intelligence could substantially improve productivity 11

Reform must extend beyond policing 12

2. Overview of our police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) 2025–27 inspections 14

We made changes in our 2025–27 inspection programme 14

Strong leadership and force management are essential to achieve effective performance 16

Many forces still need a better understanding of how to attract, develop and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce 18

Most forces can show they use their powers fairly and appropriately but still need to improve scrutiny and understanding 19

Forces prevent and deter crime, antisocial behaviour and vulnerability well, but performance is declining 20

Forces have made some improvements in how they respond to the public, but service quality is often still not good enough 22

Forces must make urgent improvements to how they investigate crime and secure justice for victims 24

Forces must get better at safeguarding children and adults at risk of harm 26

Forces are developing their response to fraud 28

Forces generally provide a safe and lawful custody environment but need to improve some processes 29

3. Overview of our regular inspection programme and thematic inspections 32

Improvements in police integrity arrangements should help to increase public trust and confidence 32

The police service is committed to tackling serious and organised crime, but inconsistencies remain 33

The National Crime Agency investigates serious and organised crime well 36

Police forces need to improve their child protection work 38

Forces have improved their response to group-based child sexual exploitation but still need to do more 39

The legal framework and governance arrangements for firearms licensing need a complete overhaul 40

The police need greater clarity about the role of safety advisory groups when planning for major public events 41

Annex A: Our reports – 1 August 2025 to 4 September 2026 43

Annex B: About us 46

Foreword

This is my report to the Secretary of State under section 54(4) of the Police Act 1996. It contains my independent assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of policing in England and Wales. It is based on the inspections we carried out between 1 August 2025 and 4 September 2026.

In the period covered by this annual assessment, we published 66 inspection reports related to policing. These reports and the force management statements that forces give us each year formed the main sources of evidence for my report.

When compiling my assessment, I wrote to chief constables, police and crime commissioners and their mayoral equivalents, and other interested parties. I invited them to give their views on the state of policing in England and Wales. I received a good range of responses, including a reply from every chief constable in England and Wales. Their responses provided me with strong evidence for my assessment. I am very grateful for their views.

In this report, I give my views on police reform. It is a pivotal time for policing. Police reform doesn't come without risk, especially the potential to disrupt service provision to the public in the short term. This must be carefully managed. If they are implemented well and supported by sufficient funding, I firmly believe that the reforms set out in the government's police reform white paper will strengthen the police service. They will also benefit the public as well as those who work in policing.

I also describe the findings from our regular inspection programmes, thematic inspections and police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections. Most police officers, staff and volunteers work tirelessly to serve their communities and keep people safe. I am pleased to see that forces are working hard to improve in many areas of their work. In other areas, such as investigating crime and safeguarding vulnerable people, I am concerned about the progress most forces still need to make.

We have also strengthened the impact of our work to make communities safer. In July 2026, we published information about the new Policing Performance System. For the first time, we are assigning every police force in England and Wales a performance level, which ranges from Level One, the default level, to Level Four (Special Measures). This is part of a system-wide approach to support improvements across policing and increase accountability and public confidence.

I have been honoured to lead HMICFRS as HM Chief Inspector on an interim basis since 1 April 2026. I remain committed to making sure we provide independent, evidence-based oversight that is focused on making sure the public receives the service it expects and deserves. Throughout my tenure, this vital work has continued.

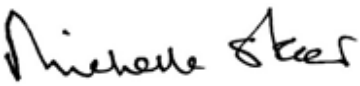
I would like to thank all our staff for their diligence, professionalism and support. Their dedication is what makes our work possible. I would also like to pay tribute to Sir Andy Cooke QPM DL, who left office on 31 March 2026. Throughout his long and distinguished career in policing and public service, he has made an outstanding contribution. He has always been passionate about better public services and serving communities well. I wish him all the best for the future.

Sadly, during the period covered by this report, six officers have lost their lives in the course of their duties. On 26 September 2025, Police Constable (PC) Faizaan Najeeb of Northamptonshire Police died a week after he was struck by a car at the scene of a traffic collision. On 21 March 2026, PC Bradley Corke of Kent Police died when his response vehicle was involved in a collision while responding to an emergency call. On 2 May 2026, PC Mark Chester of the Ministry of Defence Police died in a motorbike accident on his way home from work after a night shift. On 10 June 2026, PC Jess Turnbull of Northumbria Police died two days after being struck by a vehicle while attending a collision. Most recently, on 22 August 2026, PC Tom Clough and PC Matthew Blades of Cleveland Police died when their patrol car was hit by another car.

I send my deepest condolences to their families and colleagues for their loss.

Later this year, Sir Andy Marsh QPM will become HM Chief Inspector. I very much look forward to welcoming and working with him. He brings a wealth of policing experience from over 30 years in the police service, which includes time spent as chief constable of Hampshire Constabulary and of Avon and Somerset Police and as chief executive of the College of Policing.





Michelle Skeer OBE QPM

His Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary

1. Police reform

Police reform presents a major opportunity

On 25 January 2026, the government published its long-awaited white paper on police reform, 'From local to national: a new model for policing'. It sets out wide-ranging proposals to significantly change the policing model in England and Wales. The Home Secretary said that "taken together, they are the most significant modernisation in nearly 200 years". The proposals in the white paper include:

- the creation of a National Police Service;
- a plan to reduce the number of forces;
- revisions to the system of police funding;
- investment in neighbourhood policing;
- a renewed focus on performance and productivity;
- improvements to leadership; and
- the creation of a more capable police workforce.

Many of these reforms are long overdue, in some cases by decades. If the proposals in the white paper are implemented, they have the potential to substantially improve the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of the policing system.

For the first time in a generation, most leaders within the policing system agree about the need for change and how policing can be improved. On 23 July 2026, the chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council, the chief executive of the College of Policing, the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, the director general of the National Crime Agency, the head of Counter Terrorism Policing and I jointly wrote to the Prime Minister. We set out our firm support for the reforms. We are united in the belief that they will create a better policing system and benefit both communities and the police workforce.

The Home Office and the policing system worked together to develop the white paper. The police service accepts that it needs to modernise and improve. The chief constables, police and crime commissioners and other senior leaders who responded to my call for evidence for this report broadly agreed on the need for reform.

But there isn't agreement on all points. Views differ on what the reforms should involve. This includes the priorities, the speed of change and the safeguards needed. In a system with so many decision-makers, a lack of agreement on all points is no surprise. This shouldn't stop the government from making much-needed changes. As the reforms progress, the Home Office must make sure that it listens to all viewpoints and concerns, fully considers them and reflects them in advice to ministers.

In this chapter, I set out my views on the police reform programme. My overarching point is that police reform should continue in the manner set out in the white paper.

Policing is still strong in both England and Wales

It is easy to focus on what must improve. That is quite right, as public services must always try to do a better job for the public with the funding available to them. But when making improvements, it is also important to recognise and consider what is working well and should continue.

Policing in England and Wales has many strengths. The greatest of these is the police workforce. Most police officers, staff, volunteers and special constables carry out their duties with professionalism, courage and a commitment to serve the public. The annual Police Federation Bravery Awards are a powerful reminder of how members of the police workforce often put other people's safety before their own. Tragically, as we have seen again recently, some officers lose their lives in the course of their duties. Acts of extraordinary bravery, such as confronting armed offenders, rescuing people from deep water or entering burning buildings, rightly attract national attention. But we should also note the equally important work that other members of the police workforce carry out daily to keep communities safe.

The police service is also operationally resilient. It has repeatedly shown it can respond effectively to crises, emergencies and national events. Policing continues to show a remarkable capacity to mobilise, work collectively and adapt rapidly to changing circumstances. This is the case whether it is dealing with large-scale public disorder, natural disasters, national security threats or major investigations. The police service often achieves this through the commitment of individuals, whose work isn't always helped by the systems and processes that should support them.

Another strength is the police service's deep commitment to continuous improvement. Throughout our inspections and work with forces, I have seen how much officers, staff and leaders want to provide the best possible service to the public. They don't avoid scrutiny, challenge or accountability. Instead, they want to learn from mistakes, improve performance and achieve better outcomes for victims and communities. Forces may not always make improvements as quickly as we would like. But I am confident that the police service has the talent, professionalism and determination it needs to continue improving in the years ahead.

The police service is under increasing strain as crime, threats and expectations change

The police service as we know it today was last designed from a whole-system perspective in the 1960s, after the 1962 Royal Commission on the Police. Since then, crime and society have changed dramatically. The British model of policing, founded on policing by consent, the office of constable and operational independence, is still strong. But the system that organises and operates policing is increasingly struggling to provide efficient, effective and legitimate services.

Traditional offences such as violence, theft and criminal damage have generally decreased over the last decade. We should recognise the police service for its contribution to preventing crime. But too many of the people who become victims of crime each year are left disappointed by the service they receive. The police service must focus on preventing and detecting crimes in local communities.

Over the same period, the police service has faced rising demands from changing crime, evolving threats and a greater recognition of vulnerability. A growing proportion of offending uses technology and is committed online or crosses local, national and international boundaries. Digital evidence is now part of almost every investigation, which makes police work more complex. Fraud has risen dramatically and is now the most prevalent crime the public experiences. The threat from serious and organised crime and terrorism continues to evolve and is causing great harm to individuals, communities and the economy.

Public expectations of how the police service should protect vulnerable people have rightly increased. Officers and staff are dealing with more domestic abuse, child sexual abuse and exploitation, sexual violence, mental ill health and other safeguarding concerns. These cases are often complex, high risk and resource intensive.

Our inspections and the force management statements that every force produces show the strain. Many forces are struggling to meet everyday demand and also to maintain the specialist capabilities they need to tackle complex threats. Forces aren't providing a consistent level of service across England and Wales. They aren't always working together as well as they could.

Although forces could still make improvements within the existing model and with the resources available to them, the model itself isn't promoting efficiency or effectiveness. The model creates inconsistency, duplication, fragmented capabilities and barriers to joint working. The way the police service is funded is outdated and is compounding these problems. Most of the chief constables and police and crime commissioners who responded to my call for evidence raised financial sustainability as a matter of significant concern. While police reform will carry risk, maintaining the existing system is far from risk free. The evidence points to a system

under increasing strain that must change dramatically before its weaknesses lead to further decline in efficiency and effectiveness.

A National Police Service could provide much-needed strategic leadership

The white paper proposes substantial changes to the structure of policing, including the creation of a National Police Service (NPS). This offers an opportunity to simplify a fragmented system, strengthen specialist capabilities and organise more functions centrally.

The NPS would be a new police force, under the direction and control of a national police commissioner. It would take a strategic leadership role for policing in England and Wales. The NPS would assume responsibility for strategy, standards, support services for territorial forces and the national response to terrorism and serious and organised crime. The government proposes combining the functions carried out by the National Police Chiefs' Council, the College of Policing, Counter Terrorism Policing, the National Crime Agency and regional organised crime units, among others.

The argument for establishing the NPS is strong. Policing lacks a single organisation that has the authority and responsibility to make and implement decisions across the system. As a result, decision-making can be too slow, forces take differing approaches without proper justification and capabilities are often dispersed across multiple organisations. The NPS could provide clear direction, improve co-ordination and joint working, reduce duplication and promote greater consistency. It could also provide stronger leadership against threats that increasingly operate across organisational and international boundaries.

But establishing the NPS will be exceptionally complex. It must be introduced carefully in stages so that the risks to the public are managed and minimised during the transition period. From the outset, its governance arrangements must establish clear responsibilities and robust accountability, oversight and transparency. As envisaged in the white paper, chief constables and local police governance bodies must form part of the governance of the NPS alongside the Home Secretary. This will help to make sure that decisions are informed by the operational needs of forces and are in the best interests of the public. The government must also give us appropriate inspection powers to subject the NPS to a rigorous and independent inspection regime.

Reducing the number of forces could offer significant benefits, but reform needs a wider focus than force size

The white paper committed the government to reducing the number of territorial forces by merging forces. The government has commissioned an independent review of police force structures, chaired by Lord Bernard Hogan-Howe, to recommend the most effective number and configuration of forces. The review will also consider the design of the proposed Local Policing Areas in the new model, governance arrangements, implementation, including minimising operational disruption, and the forces best suited to merge first.

Our evidence supports a careful, evidence-led approach to mergers. Fewer, larger forces should improve resilience, provide more reliable access to specialist capabilities, reduce duplication and make national co-ordination easier.
Our inspections suggest that smaller forces can find it difficult to maintain the type of capability modern policing needs. Collaborations and regional arrangements have helped to reduce this problem but haven't removed it. They can also create complex governance, accountability and joint working arrangements.

Our evidence on force size is mixed. We haven't identified a single optimal size. Our inspection evidence doesn't show that larger forces always perform better. Some smaller forces provide good services, while some of the largest forces have experienced serious performance problems. Leadership, governance, workforce capability, operating-model design and the ability to translate strategy into consistent operational services have a much greater effect on performance than the size of a force. Structural reform could bring significant benefits, but it needs a wider focus than force size alone.

Views shared with me about force mergers were the most divided. Some chief constables supported larger strategic forces, while others questioned whether there was enough evidence that larger forces would produce better outcomes for the public. In particular, many chief constables highlighted the risks during transition, including the potential for significant costs, workforce uncertainty, operational service disruption and IT challenges. Most police and crime commissioners are against force mergers and the plans to change local police governance. They are concerned that policing could become more remote from local community priorities, less accountable and less connected to local partnership organisations. There is general agreement that mergers should be judged on whether they will make policing more efficient, effective and legitimate. But there are considerable differences in views on the effect force mergers will have.

The number of forces has been reduced several times before. In 1900, there were 243 separate forces. Through the Police Act 1946, this number was reduced to 117. The existing 43-force model resulted from mergers under the Police Act 1964 that were fully implemented after local government reorganisation in 1974. It would be hard to argue that if a structure for policing in England and Wales were being designed today, it would lead to the existing 43-force structure.

I very much look forward to reading the independent review's report, including the evidence it has gathered, its conclusions and its recommendations on how to reduce the number of forces.

Effective leadership is essential

Effective leadership will be fundamental to every aspect of police reform. Our inspection evidence consistently shows that good policing performance depends on effective leadership. Effective leaders model high standards of behaviour, act in the public interest, set clear priorities, make effective use of people and resources and use evidence to manage performance.

Good leadership is needed at every level of policing, from constables and police staff equivalents through to chief constables. Leadership isn't derived from rank alone. Officers and staff throughout policing make decisions, influence colleagues and shape the service the public receives. At every rank and grade, individuals need the skills and confidence to act appropriately, uphold ethical standards, challenge poor behaviour and promote improvements.

The College of Policing's police leadership programme provides leadership standards and development programmes across five stages, covering the breadth of leadership within policing. The College of Policing relies on forces to provide leadership development programme stages one, two and three using its curriculum. In forces that do this well, we have already seen positive effects, especially for sergeants and other first-line supervisors. But more work is needed to strengthen police leadership.

On 6 July 2026, Lord Blunkett and Lord Herbert published the report of the police leadership commission. Drawing on substantial evidence, the commission found outstanding examples of leadership, often in the most challenging circumstances. But it also found systemic concerns about the consistency, capability and culture of leadership across the police service. The government and policing should give high priority to its 27 recommendations as reform progresses.

The white paper proposes a central appointments panel to support the selection process for chief constables. Although leadership at all levels is essential, no individual is more influential within a force than its chief constable. Chief constables set the strategy, direction and culture of their forces. The public has every right to expect that only suitably qualified candidates are shortlisted for interview. As at 4 September 2026, the government hadn't announced further details about this panel.

The police leadership commission said that HM Chief Inspector should be a member of the panel. I hope HM Chief Inspector will have the duty of chairing this panel.

The police workforce must be supported

While the workforce is still the police service's greatest strength, its effectiveness is at risk. Too many officers and staff experience low morale and poor well-being. These problems have accumulated over many years and reflect high workloads, inconsistent support and development and a widespread feeling among members of the workforce that they aren't valued enough by forces, government or the public.

The scale and persistence of these problems have been evident across successive State of Policing reports. For many years, the findings of National Police Wellbeing Service, Police Federation of England and Wales and Police Superintendents' Association surveys have shown the workforce's commitment and resilience. But they have also highlighted serious concerns about morale, fatigue, well-being and the support available to officers and staff. Our inspection evidence supports these findings.

Forces are also managing significant gaps in experience, skills and supervision. Some of these pressures should ease as those recruited during the Police Uplift Programme gain experience. But experience alone isn't enough. Forces must:

- understand the capabilities they will need in the future;
- strengthen supervision and professional development; and
- recruit and retain the right combination of officers and staff.

The police reform white paper contains several measures intended to create a more capable, professional and sustainable workforce. These include changing the focus on officer headcount targets to a focus on the results achieved for the public, something we recommended in 2024. This change should give chief constables more flexibility to hire a workforce mix that meets local need.

Importantly, the white paper commits to creating the first workforce strategy for policing in England and Wales. This strategy should help the police service to:

- understand workforce-related risk;
- establish what skills and capabilities it has;
- determine what policing will need in future considering the demands it expects to face; and
- define the choices facing police forces over the medium term.

Policing needs this system-wide view to help it make well-informed, evidence-led decisions. The strategy must create a more effective approach to attracting, recruiting, developing, supporting and retaining officers and staff.

Elements of the reform programme, particularly structural changes, will place extra demands on the workforce. Changes to organisational structures, roles and terms and conditions will create uncertainty. Great care must be taken so that policing doesn't lose talented and experienced people at the point they are most needed. Policing leaders must make sure there is effective communication and consultation with officers and staff.

Officers and staff who are motivated, supported, appropriately skilled, effectively supervised and empowered by their forces make better decisions and provide a better service to the public. This type of workforce will be essential to improving operational effectiveness.

An increased focus on performance will help to promote improvements

Good performance is critical to better outcomes for the public. But too often, we found that forces didn't provide the most effective services they could with the resources they had. Substantial reform, particularly structural reform, could make this problem worse in the short term because it will divert leadership capacity and resources towards implementing change. Reform mustn't be allowed to distract forces from their primary responsibility to prevent and detect crime. One of the most important tests for forces will be maintaining services and improving operational performance throughout the period of change.

On 16 July 2026, we published details of our new Policing Performance System. We have assigned every police force in England and Wales a performance level, ranging from Level One, the default level, to Level Four (Special Measures) for the most significant performance issues. This replaces our previous 'Scan' and 'Engage' monitoring system. It combines our assessments, the Home Office's new Police Performance Framework and tailored College of Policing support.

This strengthened, system-wide approach will support all police forces in England and Wales. It will use a range of data, evidence and insight to identify concerns earlier. Forces can then be given the appropriate level of support so that they can address performance issues before they become more serious. This is one of the most significant elements announced in the white paper to have been implemented so far. It will help to make communities safer.

The new Police Performance Framework has addressed our previous recommendation for a single framework covering all core aspects of police performance. The Home Secretary has said she wishes to take a more active role in overseeing police performance. She has set targets in several areas, including neighbourhood policing levels and 999 call answer times. The Home Office developed the framework collaboratively, and its breadth and content are welcome.

The final decision on the level assigned to each force rests with HM Chief Inspector, after consideration by the Policing Performance System monitoring group.

The Home Secretary has an important and legitimate role in the oversight of policing and is accountable to Parliament for the government's stewardship of policing and the maintenance of the King's Peace. Operational independence for chief constables is similarly a fundamental part of the constitutional arrangements for policing. Operational independence must never be used to avoid scrutiny and challenge, but operational decisions must stay free from political interference. The reintroduction of national targets mustn't compromise that independence or encourage perverse behaviour that worsens outcomes for the public.

In deciding the level assigned to a force, HM Chief Inspector will consider all relevant evidence. This includes HMICFRS inspection findings, analysis from the Police Performance Framework and contextual information from other policing bodies. The framework is part of the assessment process, but no single measure or target determines the outcome. Local context, including the demand and risks forces are managing, will also be taken into account.

The new system has an appropriate balance between clearer national expectations, independent assessment and proportionate support. It should help forces identify and address weaknesses earlier, spread positive practice and lead to a more consistent service for the public.

Better use of technology and artificial intelligence could substantially improve productivity

Technology is now a core policing capability. Effective systems are essential across policing, including for public contact, intelligence, resource deployment and case file preparation. Almost every investigation involves digital evidence. Criminals are increasingly using new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI). Policing must do so too.

The potential benefits of making better use of technology are substantial. In the 'Policing Productivity Review', technology is called a 'productivity multiplier'. It is estimated that introducing existing science and technology innovations across all forces could release up to 15 million hours of police time each year. This could ease pressure on officers and staff and allow them to spend more time preventing crime, investigating offences and supporting victims. Policing can't meet rising demand simply by asking its workforce to work harder.

There has already been some encouraging progress. Forces are increasingly using mobile technology, robotic process automation and AI. Automated redaction, video analytics and AI applications in control rooms are having practical benefits. The College of Policing estimates that innovations supported by its Centre for Police Productivity generated around £7 million in productivity savings during 2025–26. The 'National Policing Digital Strategy 2025–2030' provides the basis for more secure, connected and capable technology.

But significant problems still exist. Most police spending on technology is on sustaining old systems. Many of these systems are outdated and poorly integrated and rely on manual processing. Several chief constables told me how these weaknesses hampered productivity, effective information sharing and responses to crimes that cross force boundaries.

In many of our inspections, we found similar problems. For example, in our 2025 joint inspection of case building by the police and Crown Prosecution Service, we found that the Crown Prosecution Service used one case-management system, but the 43 territorial police forces used many different systems. Inconsistent and outdated technology often made it harder to share information and more difficult to locate case material. This wasted time and contributed to delays for victims.

The reforms proposed in the white paper, including the creation of the National Police Service and PoliceAI, provide an opportunity to accelerate modernisation. Greater use of common systems and standards in forces across England and Wales could improve joint working, reduce duplication and strengthen policing's collective understanding of threat, risk and harm. Co-ordinating technology provision within the National Police Service offers opportunities to achieve economies of scale. But many chief constables told me that the government would need to make sustained capital investment in policing for it to significantly modernise.

Policing must take care when introducing new technologies so that it reduces risks. Implementation needs to be well structured. Practitioners must receive effective training. Any new technology must be used lawfully, ethically, openly and proportionately. Despite the possible risks, technology and AI could reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, improve decision-making and help to make communities safer.

Reform must extend beyond policing

The police service is judged on how effectively it prevents and detects crime. It may be seen as responsible for the control of crime. But the causes of crime and the factors that determine whether offenders are brought to justice extend across society and the criminal justice system. Wider reforms are needed to make communities safer.

Crime prevention must be a shared responsibility. Government, businesses and public services must do more to prevent crime and harm. Technology companies have a responsibility to make online environments safer. Schools, health services and local authorities should intervene before vulnerability develops into victimisation or offending. Ambitions such as halving violence against women and girls need co-ordinated action across society, not simply an effective police response after harm has occurred.

The police service must stay able to respond to unforeseen risks and help people in moments of crisis. Too often, it attends incidents better suited to other agencies or manages the consequences when other services have failed to fulfil their responsibilities. There has been extensive and positive work to address this, which includes the introduction of Right Care, Right Person to reduce police attendance at incidents involving mental ill health. But there is still much to do.
A recurring theme in the evidence I received was that the police mission still wasn't clear enough. That mission cannot and should not be defined too rigidly because adaptability is one of policing's greatest strengths. But government must be clearer about the respective responsibilities of policing, health, social care, housing, education and other public services and make sure that each has the capacity and accountability to fulfil them.

Reform must also encompass the wider criminal justice system. Delays in charging decisions and court hearings delay justice, increase the likelihood of victims and witnesses withdrawing their support and damage confidence in policing. Outdated disclosure and case-building processes increase investigators' workloads. Changes to sentencing, prison releases and probation may also transfer demand to the police service. As a result, police effectiveness and efficiency can't be considered separately from the capacity and performance of the Crown Prosecution Service, courts, prisons and probation. As successive HM Chief Inspectors have highlighted in their annual State of Policing reports, the wider criminal justice system is dysfunctional.

Police reform presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make sure policing can succeed. It has my full support. It must be accompanied by wider reforms across society: greater shared responsibility for preventing crime, clearer accountability across public services and a criminal justice system that is capable of bringing offenders to justice promptly and supporting victims effectively.

2. Overview of our police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) 2025–27 inspections

We made changes in our 2025–27 inspection programme

In April 2025, we started our 2025–27 inspections of police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) in the 43 police forces in England and Wales. At the end of each PEEL inspection cycle, we review the inspection programme to consider changes in the policing environment and our inspection findings. We used what we learned from the PEEL 2023–25 inspection programme to develop our 2025–27 methodology.

After assessing our previous findings, changes in policing and the views we gathered from extensive external consultation, we changed the content, structure and focus of the core questions. The main changes are:

- the quality service review has replaced the separate victim service assessment and is included in relevant questions;
- dip sampling of crime recording and reporting our findings in the relevant question has replaced the separate crime data integrity audit;
- our regular custody inspection programme has become part of PEEL;
- fraud inspection activity has been added to PEEL;
- managing suspects and offenders is no longer a core question within PEEL; and
- leadership and the reducing crime assessment are now included in the HM Inspector's summary, along with vulnerability, instead of being separate sections.

In our PEEL 2025–27 inspection programme, we grade forces across nine areas:

1. leadership and force management;
2. attracting, developing and retaining the workforce and creating a diverse and inclusive workplace;
3. using police powers fairly, appropriately and with justification;
4. preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behaviour, and reducing vulnerability;
5. responding to the public;

6. investigating crime;
7. safeguarding children and adults at risk of harm;
8. managing fraud; and
9. providing a safe and lawful custody environment.

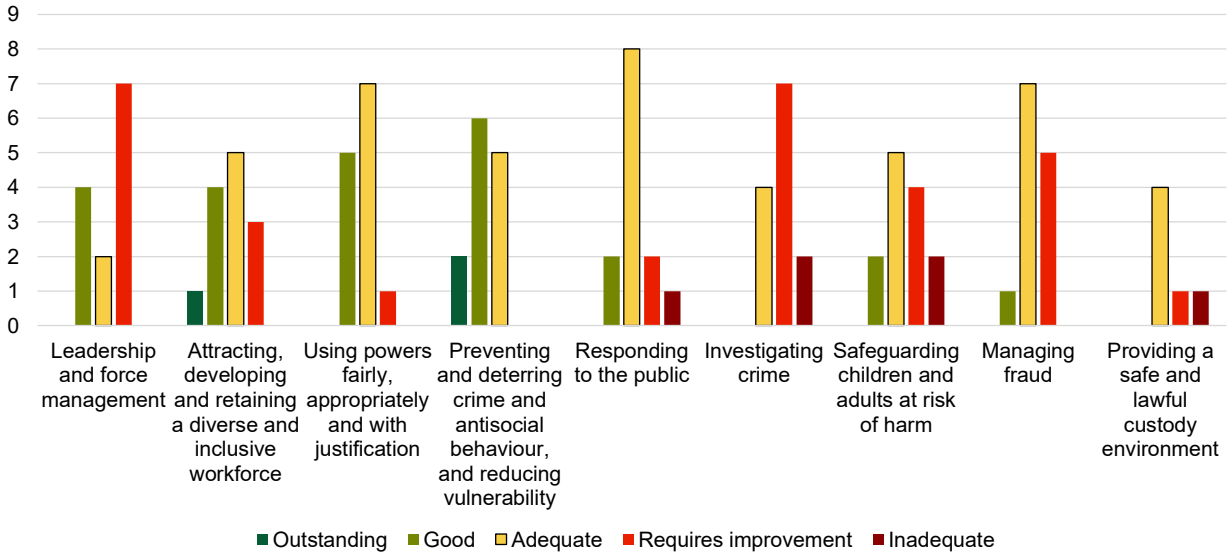
As at 4 September 2026, in the 2025–27 cycle of PEEL inspections, we had published 13 reports. The police service is undoubtedly under significant pressure. It faces high demands and operates with limited resources. Many officers, staff and leaders are continuing to work hard to protect the public and improve outcomes for victims and communities. We found examples of promising and innovative practice and progress in areas such as early intervention, work with communities, risk assessment, response to calls for service, scrutiny of stop and search, suspect management and safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable people and children.

But we found that too many forces still weren't getting the basics right or providing the public with a consistently good service in the areas that matter most to victims. Forces that performed less effectively often failed to identify risk when deciding how to manage demand more efficiently. They also didn't always introduce ways to reduce the impact of revised processes or restructuring.

Those forces that performed more effectively were improving their understanding of demand and how to align their resources to risk and high demand. This helped them to maintain an appropriate service to the public. Despite this challenging environment, we found many that forces were continuing to improve, innovate and focus on better outcomes for the communities they serve.

The professionalism and commitment of officers and staff across policing should also be recognised.

Figure 1: HMICFRS judgment grades by inspection question assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections



Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

Chart description: In six of the nine inspection questions, ‘adequate’ is the most common grade awarded. In two questions, ‘requires improvement’ is the most common grade. ‘Good’ is the most common grade in one question. Only two questions include grades of ‘outstanding’: workforce and prevention. Overall, grades for the prevention question are the most positive, being either ‘outstanding’, ‘good’ or ‘adequate’. Investigating crime is the poorest-performing question. Investigating crime and providing a safe and lawful custody environment are the only two questions without grades of ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’. No inspection question includes all five inspection grades.

The accessible data table for figure 1 is available on our website.

Note: Analysis includes 13 forces published as at 4 September 2026. We inspected and graded six of these forces for ‘Providing a safe and lawful custody environment’. We carry out custody inspections on a regular basis, inspecting all forces over two PEEL cycles.

Strong leadership and force management are essential to achieve effective performance

Policing needs strong and effective leaders who can improve force performance and secure better outcomes for the public and communities they serve. We have seen many examples of effective leadership in difficult circumstances. Senior leaders are making decisions about how to structure their workforce to better manage growing demand and complexity in crime and prevention. Often, they must do this while also dealing with increasingly challenging financial constraints or the legacy of underinvestment in technology.

We found that many officers and staff were positive about the standards and behaviours their leaders showed and promoted. We saw clear leadership in chief officer teams and other supervisory ranks. Clear leadership helps to promote an environment that prioritises supporting victims and the wider public. Many officers and staff believed their leaders considered the needs of communities in setting priorities. Members of the workforce couldn’t always clearly explain their force’s strategic objectives, but we found that most were clearly committed to achieving good outcomes for the public.

We graded four forces as ‘good’ in this question area: Cumbria Constabulary, Kent Police, Merseyside Police and North Yorkshire Police. We found that the best-performing police forces had visible leaders with a strong understanding of demand and risk. They also had effective governance arrangements. We found that senior leaders in these forces could identify demand, used performance information to make effective decisions and understood risks to service provision. These forces used governance arrangements that combined information about operational performance, financial planning, workforce capacity and improvement activity, giving leaders a clear understanding of demand, risk and overall organisational performance. This helped leaders to see where problems may be building and act before they had a wider impact and affected public outcomes.

But this level of organisational oversight wasn't consistently evident across the 13 forces inspected as part of our 2025–27 PEEL inspection cycle. During our inspections, we found limitations. These included poor demand analysis, poor connections between strategic plans and operational implementation and performance frameworks that didn't give leaders enough information about what was happening across the force. We have previously found that many forces don't use data effectively. We found that some forces still weren't using data well enough to assess productivity and quality of service, manage risk and evaluate improvement activity. Complex or disconnected governance arrangements slowed decision-making and hindered lasting improvement.

We also found that leadership challenges were often linked to workforce resilience, financial planning and productivity. Forces need to make sure that they align staffing levels, skills, supervision and capacity with operational demand and financial plans. When forces don't connect workforce strategies, financial planning and operational priorities, they struggle to make sustainable decisions about resources, specialist capabilities and future service provision. This is particularly important at a time when policing is under pressure to improve outcomes for victims, respond to high public expectations and meet national priorities while managing limited resources.

Technology, data analytics, demand modelling and performance dashboards can improve understanding of the relationship between resources, activity and outcomes. We found that some forces weren't fully exploiting these opportunities. Inefficient processes, inconsistent data quality and fragmented systems make it harder for leaders to understand productivity or redirect capacity to areas of greatest risk.

Ultimately, leadership and force management directly affect the areas that have the greatest impact on the public: responding to calls, protecting vulnerable people, investigating crime and supporting victims.

We found that the strongest-performing forces had leaders who used data and evidence effectively, set clear priorities, strengthened accountability, simplified governance and focused relentlessly on service quality. The challenge for policing is to make these characteristics more consistent across forces so that leadership at all levels translates into better outcomes for the public.

Figure 2: HMICFRS judgment grades for 'Leadership and force management' assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	0	4	2	7	0

Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

Many forces still need a better understanding of how to attract, develop and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce

We found that some forces continued to prioritise recruitment, leadership development, well-being and inclusion. The forces that did this well showed that clear workforce planning, effective supervision and a focus on inclusion supported better operational performance. These forces had a clearer understanding of the skills and capability they needed. They invested in professional and talent development. They used workforce information to support decisions about recruitment, posting, training and progression. They were also more likely to have arrangements that helped leaders understand well-being, morale, workloads and the lived experience of officers and staff.

We graded Kent Police as 'outstanding' and Cumbria Constabulary, Merseyside Police, North Yorkshire Police and Thames Valley Police as 'good' for the work they do to attract, develop and retain a diverse and inclusive workforce. We found that better-performing forces also looked for innovative ways to recruit and support workforce retention. For example, they introduced apprenticeships or collaborated with military resettlement organisations that support personnel leaving the armed services. They also made effective use of special constables and volunteers. We found that most forces had effective early intervention processes to encourage people to stay and exit processes to better understand why people were leaving.

But we also found that too many forces still didn't have a good enough understanding of their workforce capability, resilience and future needs. In some forces, shortages in specialist skills, high workloads and inconsistent supervision and staff development affected the quality of service that officers and staff provided to the public.

We found persistent limitations in some forces' understanding of inclusion and well-being. Forces may have relevant policies and strategies, but these weren't always improving the workforce's experience. Forces need to make sure that officers and staff have fair access to opportunities for development, promotion and support. If they don't, forces won't be able to build the diverse and inclusive workforce they need.

This is an operational issue as much as a workforce issue. Where forces don't understand the capabilities of the workforce, don't support supervisors well enough or don't provide consistent development, performance suffers. In these forces, officers and staff are often less able to manage vulnerability, progress investigations, make good decisions at first contact or provide the quality of service that victims deserve. The best-performing forces show that workforce planning, professional development, well-being and inclusion aren't separate corporate activities but instead are essential to improving policing performance and sustaining public confidence.

Police officers and staff must deal with situations that many people could never imagine facing, such as traumatic accidents, devastating crimes and moments of deep human distress. They often carry those experiences with them long after the incident is over. Sometimes, the relentless nature of this work can prove difficult to deal with.

The results of the 2026 National Police Workforce and Wellbeing Survey show that workforce well-being is a serious concern. The survey had 55,602 respondents: 45 percent of them reported always or often feeling burnt out because of work and 56 percent reported always or often feeling fatigued or physically exhausted by work. Thirty-three forces participated in the 2026 survey. I encourage all forces to participate in future surveys. It is important that forces understand the well-being of their workforces so that they can better support officers, staff and volunteers. Forces have well-being strategies and policies. They must make sure that they carry out work to understand workforce well-being needs and that officers and staff feel well supported.

Figure 3: HMICFRS judgment grades for 'Attracting, developing and retaining a diverse and inclusive workforce' assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	1	4	5	3	0

Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

Most forces can show they use their powers fairly and appropriately but still need to improve scrutiny and understanding

Many chief constables and police and crime commissioners have told me that maintaining trust and confidence in policing is a challenge, especially in an increasingly polarised society. Legitimacy is still central to public confidence in policing.

We graded Merseyside Police, North Yorkshire Police, Northamptonshire Police, Surrey Police and Wiltshire Police as 'good' for this question. In the strongest-performing forces, we found that leaders understood that legitimacy isn't secured by policy alone. It depends on officers and staff using their powers lawfully, proportionately and openly. Positively, in the 13 forces inspected as part of our 2025–27 PEEL inspection cycle, we didn't issue any force with an area for improvement for recording reasonable grounds for stop and search. In our previous inspection cycle, we found that this needed improvement in some forces.

Forces also need to show that they understand the effect of those powers on different communities. We found that stronger forces had effective internal and external scrutiny arrangements, made better use of body-worn video, analysed stop and search and use of force data and acted on learning when they identified problems. This helped them understand disproportionality, improved officer decision-making and strengthened public trust.

This was one of the best-performing inspection areas across the previous two cycles of PEEL. But we found that there were still some common areas that forces needed to improve. Forces didn't always have a good enough understanding of outcomes. They also couldn't always identify and thoroughly understand the causes of disproportionality.

We welcome the forthcoming review of the authorised professional practice for stop and search, which will focus on the quality and legitimacy of encounters. This review should help to promote further improvements in this essential area of policing.

Figure 4: HMICFRS judgment grades for 'Using powers fairly, appropriately and with justification' assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	0	5	7	1	0

Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

Forces prevent and deter crime, antisocial behaviour and vulnerability well, but performance is declining

Many of those who responded to my request for their views on the state of policing told me that the main strengths of policing included neighbourhood and prevention work. Our findings during the 2025–27 PEEL inspection cycle support this view. We found that prevention was still one of the strongest areas. We graded Humberside Police and Merseyside Police as 'outstanding' for preventing and deterring crime, reducing antisocial behaviour and protecting vulnerable people. We graded six other forces as 'good'. We found that these forces had invested in neighbourhood policing, understood local priorities and worked effectively with partners to solve problems and reduce harm.

This is particularly relevant to the government's Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee (NPG) and associated performance framework. This sets a national expectation for dedicated neighbourhood teams, named and contactable officers, visible patrols in town centres and hotspot areas and a stronger focus on tackling antisocial behaviour. We found that some forces were well placed to meet these expectations, but good practice still wasn't consistent.

Some chief constables and police and crime commissioners highlighted problems with the sustainability of the NPG model. For example, funding arrangements for neighbourhood resources can limit forces' ability to respond flexibly to competing operational demands. Some of our findings about forces' ability to protect neighbourhood policing capacity from abstraction reflected these issues.

Prevention has stayed the strongest PEEL question area overall. But we found that performance was showing some signs of decline. We gave 4 of the 13 forces we inspected a lower grade than before. An increasing reliance on neighbourhood policing teams to meet immediate and wider policing demand had reduced their ability to carry out their core roles of prevention and problem-solving. Some forces needed to make their problem-solving more consistent and evaluate prevention initiatives more effectively. They also needed to identify and respond to repeat victims and vulnerability sooner.

We found a strong link between neighbourhood policing and overall organisational performance. Higher-performing forces used additional investment from the NPG to strengthen neighbourhood teams and protect them from routine abstractions. Their leaders took a long-term approach. They prioritised visibility, worked with communities and problem-solved, even if this created short-term pressures elsewhere. As a result, neighbourhood officers and staff had the time and capacity to understand local concerns, tackle repeat offending and address the underlying causes of crime and antisocial behaviour. This helped reduce future demand. These forces' performance was reflected in better PEEL grades.

By contrast, forces that performed less well often showed only a slight increase in neighbourhood policing capacity. These forces may have recruited extra officers and staff through the NPG. But they often diverted them to meet other demands or allocated them an excessive number of crimes to deal with. This meant that their communities saw little improvement in police visibility or proactive policing. The Home Office is monitoring the success of the NPG. I urge it to focus most on the outcome measures within the NPG performance framework.

If there isn't enough capacity for prevention and problem-solving, repeated demand continues. This creates a cycle in which rising demand leads to further abstractions, which further weakens neighbourhood policing. This leads to poorer outcomes for the public.

Our evidence suggests that poor neighbourhood policing performance is rarely an isolated issue. High abstraction rates and weak problem-solving are often symptoms of wider organisational challenges. These include ineffective operating models, resources not aligned to demand and weaknesses in demand-management processes.

Figure 5: HMICFRS judgment grades for 'Preventing and deterring crime and antisocial behaviour, and reducing vulnerability' assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	2	6	5	0	0

Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

Forces have made some improvements in how they respond to the public, but service quality is often still not good enough

The public should be able to rely on the police to answer calls quickly, assess risk thoroughly and attend incidents when needed. We found some improvement in this area. As at 4 September 2026, we had graded fewer forces as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' and more forces as 'adequate'. We found that 999 performance had improved, and in many forces, emergency calls were being answered more quickly. We saw better use of structured triage and stronger identification of repeat callers and vulnerability at the first point of contact. But this progress wasn't consistent.

As at 4 September 2026, we had graded only two forces as 'good' for responding to the public: Humberside Police and Cumbria Constabulary. In other forces, we found that delays in answering emergency and non-emergency calls, backlogs in control rooms, inconsistent risk assessment and delayed attendance continued to affect the service victims received. These weaknesses can have serious consequences, particularly if forces don't identify vulnerability quickly enough, don't recognise repeat callers or miss opportunities to safeguard people.

We found that many of the weaknesses in this area were at the first point of contact. Most forces needed to better understand demand across 999, 101, online reporting and other contact channels. They needed to make sure that they assessed calls and contacts consistently and allocated the right response to the caller. If forces don't understand or manage demand well, call queues build, risk is sometimes missed and control room staff may not have enough time or support to make good decisions. This is particularly important for domestic abuse, missing people, mental health-related incidents and repeat or vulnerable callers. In these cases, the quality of the first contact can determine whether forces identify and act on risk quickly enough.

In some forces, we continued to find delays in answering non-emergency calls. Members of the public should be able to contact the police without facing excessive delays or having to abandon their calls because they aren't answered. We have repeatedly noted that effective contact management is vital to public confidence. If calls aren't answered promptly, it can discourage reporting, hide true levels of demand, increase the risk of vulnerability being missed and reinforce perceptions that policing is difficult to access. Forces that don't provide a timely and accessible service at the first point of contact risk undermining public confidence and legitimacy.

We still have concerns about attendance at incidents. As at 4 September 2026, most of the areas for improvement we issued related to this aspect of force performance. We found in weaker-performing forces that the public sometimes waited too long for a response. These forces didn't always have a good enough understanding of whether they were attending incidents within expected timescales. Delays can reduce public confidence, allow risk to escalate and make it harder for officers and staff to secure evidence or provide early safeguarding.

We found that stronger-performing forces had clearer governance of contact and response performance. Their quality assurance of call handling and risk assessment was better. They also had stronger links between control rooms, response teams and safeguarding arrangements.

There are important national developments that should help forces improve their response to calls for service. With appropriate governance, artificial intelligence offers forces opportunities to improve decision-making and efficiency, which will allow them to better manage demand. We found that some forces used artificial intelligence to support risk assessment at the first point of contact, which helped staff identify vulnerability and prioritise responses more effectively. Solutions such as the chatbot 'Bobbi' in Thames Valley Police were helping forces to manage non-emergency demand, improve the experience of those contacting the police and direct members of the public to the most appropriate service at the earliest opportunity. Alongside technological developments, some forces were making greater use of analysis. This helped them to identify repeat and persistent contact, understand the causes of demand and adopt problem-solving approaches to bring about sustainable reductions in demand while also improving outcomes for the public.

Improving response isn't simply about answering calls faster. It is about making sure that the first contact with the police identifies risk, protects vulnerable people, deploys resources where they are needed most and gives victims confidence that the police will act.

Figure 6: HMICFRS judgment grades for 'Responding to the public' assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	0	2	8	2	1

Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

Forces must make urgent improvements to how they investigate crime and secure justice for victims

Investigating crime is fundamental to the legitimacy of policing and to public confidence. It helps to prevent future offending. It also influences how safe people feel. The police must record all reports of crime accurately, carry out thorough investigations and update victims regularly in accordance with the rights contained in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. But in the 13 forces inspected as part of our 2025–27 PEEL inspection cycle, we found that investigating crime was still one of the clearest and most persistent areas of concern.

The demands placed on forces have increased considerably. In March 2025, we published our thematic report on how effectively the police investigate crime. This thematic inspection included examining forces' crime-related demand. In our report, we said that crime experienced by individuals and households had generally decreased over the last ten years. But since 2015, police-recorded crime rates per 1,000 population had increased by 44 percent. Better recording practices and victims' greater willingness to report offences were likely to have contributed to this increase. The police must assess and deal appropriately with every crime they record. This increase has created extra work for forces. But between 2010 and 2025, after accounting for changes in population, the number of police officers in England and Wales decreased by 6 percent and the number of police staff by 13 percent.

The nature of investigations has also changed. In responding to my call for evidence, several chief constables told me that investigations increasingly involved more complex offending that needed lengthier investigations. They told me that almost every investigation involved digital evidence and needed extra investigative steps. They also said that criminal justice requirements, including disclosure, had become a greater burden. Our inspection findings support their views.

In our thematic inspection we highlighted that chief constables didn't have enough resources to investigate all volume crime to a standard that they and the public would like. But we found that even with their limited resources, forces could still make substantial improvements and achieve better outcomes for victims.

Overall, I am extremely disappointed that since we published our thematic inspection, we have seen little evidence of improvement. Some aspects of performance have been declining. In the 13 PEEL reports we have published as part of the 2025–27 inspection cycle, we hadn't graded any force as 'outstanding' or 'good' for investigations. The grades we have given are 'adequate', 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'. This is especially disappointing because the weaknesses we found weren't new. Across PEEL and wider inspection evidence, including thematic inspections, we found that forces continued to struggle with the basic characteristics of good investigation. These included:

- gathering evidence during the golden hour;
- identifying and progressing proportionate lines of enquiry;
- allocating crimes to appropriately skilled investigators;
- using investigation plans effectively;
- keeping victims updated; and
- providing meaningful supervisory oversight.

This is more than an issue of individual case quality. We found wider weaknesses in governance, understanding of demand and workforce planning, training and supervision. Forces often didn't have a clear enough understanding of crime-related demand or the skills and capacity they need to manage it. Investigators were overwhelmed by their workloads. If forces don't give them the right training, development and accreditation, investigators won't be able to achieve what is expected of them.

Many factors can affect the quality and timeliness of investigations. These include high workloads, inexperienced investigators and supervisors, gaps in specialist capability, ineffective IT systems, digital forensics delays and wider criminal justice system pressures.

These problems are closely connected to our findings on leadership and workforce. Forces that didn't have a good understanding of demand, capability and performance were more likely to take much longer carrying out investigations. They were less likely to give victims timely updates. They were also more likely to miss opportunities to bring offenders to justice.

The impact on victims is significant. Poor investigation quality can mean that victims don't receive their entitlements under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. They are less likely to understand what is happening in their case and may lose confidence in the police response.

We found that better-performing forces had clear allocation models, active governance, stronger audit arrangements, better oversight of outcomes and supervisors who gave direction rather than simply checked compliance. But as at 4 September 2026, none of the forces we inspected showed all the characteristics of good performance we expect to see.

Our findings are still concerning. Unless forces improve investigative standards, victim contact, allocation decisions and supervision, too many victims will continue to receive an inconsistent service, and too many offenders will avoid justice.

Figure 7: HMICFRS judgment grades for 'Investigating crime' assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	0	0	4	7	2

Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

Forces must get better at safeguarding children and adults at risk of harm

Safeguarding is still one of policing's most important responsibilities. In our PEEL inspections, we assess how effectively forces recognise, respond to and protect children and adults at risk of harm. We expect forces to safeguard the most vulnerable. Forces need to make sure that officers and staff can identify those at risk of harm. They should work with partners to give vulnerable people appropriate support. They should also use police powers to protect children and adults at risk of harm, if necessary.

Police forces are becoming better at recognising risk factors for vulnerable individuals. This is increasing the demand on safeguarding arrangements and placing greater pressure on systems and processes. For example, safeguarding referrals, common law disclosure requests and applications for protective orders have all increased.

In the 13 forces inspected as part of 2025–27 PEEL inspection cycle, we found that better-performing forces responded proactively. They invested in IT capabilities. And they deployed the right personnel in the right roles to manage this demand and provide timely safeguarding interventions. But the increased complexity and amount of safeguarding demand, combined with finite resources, mean that safeguarding continues to be a challenge.

We graded both North Yorkshire Police and Cumbria Constabulary as 'good' for safeguarding children and adults at risk of harm. We found that both forces identified risk well, worked effectively with partners and had well-established governance structures that provided oversight of the most serious harm.

We graded most other forces as ‘adequate’ or ‘requires improvement’. While some forces had the foundations of effective safeguarding in place, we found that forces often weren’t performing to the standard we expect. We found persistent weaknesses in how forces identified, assessed and managed vulnerability, particularly when demand was high or when risk first came to police attention.

Common issues included inconsistent risk assessment, delays in referrals, variable quality of protection plans and not enough supervisory oversight of safeguarding decisions. In some forces, officers and staff didn’t always identify vulnerability early enough, record it consistently or make timely referrals to partner agencies. This can delay safeguarding action and mean children and adults at risk don’t receive help quickly enough. We have seen some developments within forces to address these issues. For example, some forces had introduced digital workers to help support workload management.

Missing person reports often involve children, adults at risk or people experiencing mental ill health. The quality of the first response is critical. We found a variety of problems in the response to missing persons. In six forces we found issues such as inconsistencies in identifying vulnerability at first contact, recording missing episodes, assessing risk accurately, deploying resources quickly enough or providing enough supervisory oversight as risk changed. Delays in attendance, poor recording of risk and inconsistent reviews can mean that forces miss opportunities to safeguard a missing person.

We found stronger practice in some forces, such as Cumbria Constabulary. This constabulary had clear governance of missing person demand, effective links between control rooms and response officers and good partnership arrangements. This helped it to manage repeat missing episodes and reduce future risk. The force had introduced a daily ‘team around missing’ meeting, which it used to quality assure its actions and risk assessments for missing people who may also be wanted by police for offences. It also had missing and tactical exploitation officers to enhance its response to missing people.

Stalking is another area where safeguarding, investigation and first-contact risk assessment need to work together well. Stalking can have a devastating effect on victims and can escalate to serious harm or murder if forces don’t recognise and manage risk properly. In the 2024 super-complaint on stalking, we found examples of good police practice but also clear evidence that forces were letting too many victims down. These concerns are consistent with our wider PEEL findings. Officers and staff may not always recognise stalking behaviours, particularly if reports are recorded as harassment, domestic abuse or separate incidents rather than as a pattern of persistent offending. Forces need to make sure that they identify stalking early, record it accurately, risk assess it properly and carry out thorough investigations. It is also vital they safeguard victims well and take proactive action to disrupt perpetrators.

Figure 8: HMICFRS judgment grades for 'Safeguarding children and adults at risk of harm' assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	0	2	5	4	2

Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

Forces are developing their response to fraud

Fraud is now a distinct PEEL question area. It reflects both the scale of the threat and the harm it causes victims. This is the first time we have inspected fraud in this way. As at 4 September 2026, we had graded most of the forces we inspected as 'adequate' or 'requires improvement'. We found that forces were developing their fraud arrangements. But a sharper focus on fraud is needed. We found weaknesses in performance and governance, training, triage and allocation, fraud-related calls for service and how forces protect the public from fraud.

We graded North Yorkshire Police as 'good' for managing fraud. Many other forces were still developing their approach. Cases of fraud are often high in number, complex and under-reported. We found that forces' local arrangements for governance, prevention, investigation and victim support remained inconsistent.

The emerging evidence shows that forces need stronger ownership of fraud as a local policing responsibility rather than viewing it as a crime type managed through national systems. We found that some forces didn't have robust governance or performance arrangements to understand fraud demand, assess the threat to their communities or hold themselves to account for outcomes. We also found gaps in training outside specialist fraud teams. This meant that frontline officers, investigators and call handlers didn't always understand fraud reporting routes, vulnerability, triage and allocation or the support victims should receive. As a result, forces also didn't follow the fraud investigation model effectively, which meant that they missed evidential opportunities, investigations took longer and they didn't give enough consideration to disrupting further criminal behaviour.

We found risks at the first point of contact. Some forces were unclear about when they should refer cases to Report Fraud, when they should respond directly and how they should identify and act on vulnerability. If forces don't recognise fraud calls for service or vulnerable victims quickly enough, they can miss investigative opportunities. This also means victims can experience delays, confusion or a lower quality of service. We found that triage and allocation were still inconsistent. Some forces lacked a clear fraud triage model and didn't always allocate investigations according to complexity, solvability, vulnerability or investigator capability.

The National Police Chiefs' Council, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, the City of London Police as the national lead force for fraud, the College of Policing and other organisations have collaborated on a national response to fraud. Our inspection findings have contributed to this. The national response includes briefings to forces, workshops, new guidance on fraud calls for service and e-learning packages for frontline officers and call takers. Further work is being carried out on a national fraud triage matrix, training for detectives and a new national fraud strategy.

We found some evidence that our inspection findings were helping to bring about change. Some of the forces we inspected had introduced new fraud governance and processes. They had also provided extra resources or reallocated existing resources. For example, they had improved call-taker scripts and analytical support and provided training to identify fraud calls for service and vulnerable victims. They had also created new governance and performance structures and improved their quality assurance. These are encouraging developments. But they also emphasise the scale of the problem. Forces will only manage fraud effectively if they understand demand, train their workforces, protect vulnerable victims, allocate investigations properly and work with national partners to provide a more consistent service to the public.

Figure 9: HMICFRS judgment grades for 'Managing fraud' assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	0	1	7	5	0

Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

Forces generally provide a safe and lawful custody environment but need to improve some processes

In the year ending 31 March 2025, Independent Office for Police Conduct data shows that eight detainees died either in police cells or in hospital having become ill in a police cell. While any loss of life is deeply saddening, these statistics suggest that police custody in England and Wales is very safe.

Many people entering police custody are vulnerable for reasons such as mental ill health, drug intoxication, alcohol use, medical conditions or a risk of self-harm. Many detainees have also been the subject of use of force by police during their arrest. It is important that oversight of police custody arrangements is effective and improvements to processes are made where necessary to keep detainees safe. For these reasons, we expect high standards in the management of police custody.

We have replaced our national custody inspection programme. Custody inspections are now part of the 2025–27 PEEL inspection programme. This means we inspect custody more often and monitor it using continuous assessment. We give custody a graded judgment.

We focus on the areas of greatest risk to detainees, particularly issues affecting safety, legality and detainee welfare. This allows us to identify more quickly where forces are managing risks well and where they need to improve.

As at 4 September 2026, we hadn't graded any force as 'good' or 'outstanding' for custody. The grades we assigned ranged from 'adequate' to 'inadequate'. This suggests that while some forces had good basic custody arrangements in place, policing needs further leadership, governance and improvements to meet the custody standards the public should expect.

In our inspections, we found examples of forces increasingly using custody as a last resort for children and people experiencing mental ill health. Detainees could access their rights and entitlements, which are important safeguards that help protect vulnerable people.

But we found common issues, such as:

- inconsistent leadership and supervision in custody suites;
- superficial quality assurance of custody records and processes;
- continuing difficulties securing local authority accommodation for children remanded into custody; and
- concerns about how forces train, authorise, use and oversee strip searches.

We found that leadership and supervision were stronger where custody leaders were visible, accountable and closely connected to operational practice. In better-performing forces, leaders met regularly with custody sergeants and detention officers, built time into shift patterns for meaningful discussions and used quality assurance to understand risk and solve problems. But this wasn't consistent. In weaker-performing forces, leadership arrangements didn't give senior officers enough insight into daily custody practice or the risks facing detainees.

Quality assurance was also too variable. Some poorer-performing forces carried out limited reviews of custody records. And where custody sergeants reviewed each other's work, often it added little value. Monthly performance packs sometimes included qualitative measures that leaders couldn't explain or use to understand custody performance. In better-performing forces, they routinely reviewed custody records and detainee outcomes against both quantitative and qualitative measures, which gave leaders a clearer understanding of performance, risk and improvement priorities.

We found concerns linked to custody staff shift handovers, particularly where processes didn't meet authorised professional practice requirements. In some custody suites, outgoing and incoming custody teams didn't have enough time for a thorough enough handover. This was often because extended shift patterns meant that staff had worked to their maximum hours. We also saw disjointed briefing arrangements, where different staff groups received separate and inconsistent briefings that resulted in no shared understanding of detainee risks.

Figure 10: HMICFRS judgment grades for 'Providing a safe and lawful custody environment' assigned to forces in PEEL 2025–27 inspections

Inspection grade	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Number of forces	0	0	4	1	1

Source: PEEL judgment grades from HMICFRS

3. Overview of our regular inspection programme and thematic inspections

Improvements in police integrity arrangements should help to increase public trust and confidence

In 2023, we introduced our police integrity inspection programme. In this programme, we assess how well forces vet their officers and staff, maintain high standards of professional behaviour and prevent and respond to misconduct or corruption. Between the programme's introduction in 2023 and 4 September 2026, we inspected 12 forces.

Forces need to make sure that only the right people can join and stay in the police. Vetting applicants is an important part of how forces do this. We found that forces were investing in their vetting units and had a better understanding of designated posts. They were using formal vetting-decision rationale forms to record their decisions. But forces still weren't consistently identifying, assessing, understanding and mitigating risk. Forces' quality assurance processes for vetting decisions need to improve. A lack of national vetting training is also leading to inconsistency in vetting decision-making.

In professional standards investigations, forces were generally making reasonable and proportionate decisions. But too often, particularly during the initial handling of complaints, the officers or staff making these decisions didn't have a high enough rank or grade. This is contrary to the Independent Office for Police Conduct's statutory guidance. We also found that forces needed to improve how they recorded the terms of reference, plans and supervision for investigations. Forces weren't always making voluntary and mandatory referrals to the Independent Office for Police Conduct when they should. Forces need to improve their training on dealing with complaints, including how to use complaint-recording IT systems. This would improve data consistency and case management and oversight.

I am pleased to see that all forces inspected as at 4 September 2026 had IT monitoring as part of their counter-corruption approach. This helps them to identify and investigate corrupt officers and staff. But we found that forces' IT monitoring often had gaps in coverage that limited the overall effectiveness of the capability. All forces had produced an annual counter-corruption strategic threat assessment. We found that these were of a good standard. Some forces could improve their assessments by identifying main locations for corrupt activity and creating profiles for people outside the police who may intend to corrupt police personnel.

Despite forces' investments and the positive action they have taken, they still need to do more. High-profile cases of police misconduct continue to harm public trust and confidence in the police. Perceptions of police legitimacy can also influence public co-operation with the police. It is essential that forces maintain the highest standards in their integrity arrangements.

In addition to our regular programme of integrity inspections, in September 2025, the Home Secretary commissioned us to carry out an inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service's recruitment and vetting practices. This was in response to the Metropolitan Police Service's own internal review, Operation Jorica. In its internal review, the force found that between 2013 and 2023, it had changed its risk tolerances and hadn't followed national standards for selection, recruitment and vetting standards. Later in 2026, we will publish the findings of our inspection.

We have reviewed the scope of our integrity inspection programme for all police forces in England and Wales. From autumn 2026 onwards, we will broaden the scope of the programme to include oversight of forces' selection and recruitment arrangements. This recognises the critical role these functions have alongside vetting, professional standards and counter-corruption in making sure only suitable candidates join and stay in policing.

The government's end-to-end review of the police accountability system, led by Dame Lynne Owens DCB CBE QPM DL and Jason Beer KC, should also improve public confidence in policing. I welcome this development. I look forward to seeing the impact of a quicker, simpler and more effective way to hold police officers to account.

The police service is committed to tackling serious and organised crime, but inconsistencies remain

Serious and organised crime (SOC) causes significant harm to people, communities and businesses. It often targets the most vulnerable people in society. Policing can only tackle SOC effectively through strong local, regional and national arrangements. Forces, regional organised crime units (ROCUs) and national agencies must work together to understand threats, prioritise resources and co-ordinate activity against organised crime groups.

I am pleased to see that the National Police Chiefs' Council SOC portfolio is co-ordinating work across the SOC system. It is leading a substantial programme of work to improve ROCU governance, funding, workforce sustainability, digital capabilities, performance management and long-term capability planning. This work is closely linked to wider police reform. It aims to create a more sustainable, consistent and effective response to SOC.

Importantly, many of the areas that the National Police Chiefs' Council SOC portfolio is addressing relate to problems we found during our regional SOC inspections. These include workforce sustainability, funding arrangements, capability, consistency, performance measurement and understanding demand across the SOC system.

Between 2022 and 4 September 2026, we carried out regional SOC inspections in the 9 ROCUs and their 38 regional forces. We also inspected equivalent SOC collaboration in the London region between the Metropolitan Police Service, the City of London Police and British Transport Police. After each inspection, we published a regional report and issued graded judgments for each ROCU and constituent force.

These inspections have helped us develop a comprehensive understanding of how effectively forces and ROCUs identify, manage and disrupt SOC threats across England and Wales.

We gave the nine ROCUs the following grades:

- one outstanding;
- four good;
- three adequate; and
- one inadequate.

We found that officers and staff working within ROCUs were dedicated to tackling SOC. They used an impressive range of specialist skills and capabilities to tackle complex threats professionally and effectively.

In our inspections, we consistently found that ROCUs provided critical specialist capabilities. These included intelligence development, surveillance, undercover policing and regional co-ordination arrangements that helped forces tackle the highest-harm organised crime threats.

We found many strengths in how most ROCUs were operating. All ROCUs used strategic threat assessment processes to identify regional SOC threats and governance arrangements to manage them. ROCUs also managed requests for support through gateway functions. This helped them understand demand, prioritise resources and formally record whether they had met the demand.

We also found examples of innovative practice. Yorkshire and Humber ROCU had developed an approach to identifying and disrupting courier fraud at an early stage. This approach was later adopted by the City of London Police as the national lead force for fraud. Tarian ROCU, which covers Southern Wales, had developed technology to automatically analyse large amounts of data in organised exploitation investigations, which reduced review times from weeks to as little as 30 minutes.

But ROCUs didn't always assess, prioritise and manage regional threats consistently. Their governance arrangements and whether they used strategic threat assessments and could measure their performance varied greatly across regions. In several regions, these weaknesses limited how well forces and ROCUs understood demand, allocated resources and assessed performance. Many of these issues reflect wider challenges across the SOC system that the National Police Chiefs' Council SOC portfolio is trying to address.

Police reform is an opportunity to strengthen ROCU governance, improve consistency across regions and create a more effective and sustainable response to SOC.

Since 2022, we have assessed 41 forces. We gave them the following grades:

- 3 outstanding;
- 9 good;
- 12 adequate;
- 12 requires improvement; and
- 5 inadequate.

Most SOC occurs locally and is dealt with at a local level by police forces. It is disappointing that 17 of these forces received grades of 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate'. This means that their work to keep the public safe wasn't as good as it should be. The strongest forces prioritised SOC, understood the threat and allocated the right resources to tackle it proactively.

Lead responsible officers (LROs) are responsible for managing all SOC threats. In our 2025 state of policing report, we highlighted how weaknesses in leadership, training, support and SOC management processes reduced the effectiveness of some LROs. In our more recent inspections, we found that improved training and support had helped forces to address these issues.

For example, we found that the Tarian ROCU SOC community co-ordinator was co-ordinating LRO training and strengthening the LRO network across the region. This was a positive development. During our next SOC inspection programme, we will assess whether other regions have made similar progress.

In September 2026, we started our second programme of regional SOC inspections. This programme places greater emphasis on understanding how effectively the components of the system work together. At a regional level, we assess how effectively forces, ROCUs and partner organisations collaborate to tackle SOC. We also evaluate regional performance, the effectiveness of leadership and governance arrangements and how well forces and ROCUs work together to tackle SOC.

In this second programme, we have placed greater emphasis on how regions:

- understand and manage demand;
- assess threats consistently;
- align resources to threat, harm and risk; and
- identify and manage unmet demand.

In these inspections, we assess whether forces make effective use of ROCU capabilities and whether regional capabilities remain sufficient, sustainable and accessible. We examine whether leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses in existing SOC arrangements. We also assess forces' plans to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the response to SOC in line with police reform and their plans to protect critical SOC capabilities during the transition to new structures and governance arrangements.

The National Crime Agency investigates serious and organised crime well

The National Crime Agency (NCA) has a critical role in leading the national response to SOC. It has developed substantial strengths in investigating high-risk and complex criminality. The NCA benefits from a dedicated, professional and resilient workforce. It also has specialist capabilities. This helps it to achieve effective operational outcomes and contribute significantly to disrupting SOC.

In recent years, the NCA has grown considerably. It has set out ambitious plans to expand further so it can respond to the changing SOC threat. The funding settlement from the 2025 Home Office Spending Review will help it to carry out these plans.

During 2025/26, we carried out an inspection of the NCA's effectiveness and efficiency. Our terms of reference were to assess how well the NCA discharges its statutory functions and how well leadership, strategic direction and the culture in the NCA contribute to it discharging these functions. This was the first organisation-wide inspection of the NCA since it was established in 2013. We examined its performance, resource management and strategic planning arrangements.

We found that the NCA had a clear understanding of its statutory functions and responsibilities. A particular strength was its collaborative approach to tackling SOC. The NCA had established effective partnerships across law enforcement, government and the private sector, both within the UK and internationally.

But we found several significant challenges that affected the NCA's ability to operate as effectively and efficiently as it should. Most notably, we found that its IT infrastructure wasn't fit for purpose. The NCA was using outdated IT systems. A long-term lack of investment in IT infrastructure meant it had to prioritise quick IT fixes over long-term investment and solutions. This limited opportunities for modernisation. It also hampered operational effectiveness and efficiency. This affected its capacity to respond well to emerging threats and demands.

We also found weaknesses in the NCA's strategic and financial planning arrangements. At the time of our inspection, the NCA didn't have a medium-term financial strategy and still depended on annual funding settlements. The NCA also received a proportion of its funding through ring-fenced allocations from external sources. This approach limited its ability to make longer-term plans and reduced its flexibility to respond to changing operational requirements.

We found that senior leaders understood the scale and significance of these challenges. Since our inspection, the NCA has carried out substantial work to improve its IT infrastructure and strengthen its approach to financial planning. It has developed detailed improvement plans, supported by clear governance arrangements and timescales to complete this work.

The proposed changes should strengthen its efficiency and effectiveness, better position it to meet future threats and demands and further improve its ability to protect the public from SOC.

We found that the NCA was taking a proactive approach to the police reform programme. It had established a reform directorate and allocated appropriate resources to support this work. This directorate was working closely with a broad range of strategic partners to help plan and co-ordinate the transition to the National Police Service.

Senior leaders showed a clear understanding of the scale and complexity of the reform programme. They also recognised the importance of maintaining operational continuity throughout the transition period. The NCA was making sure it can could keep its operational strengths and effective ways of working while adapting to future organisational and structural changes.

Police forces need to improve their child protection work

Child protection is one of the most important areas of the police's work.

We inspect the child protection work of every police force through our national child protection inspections. These inspections focus on the outcomes for, and experiences of, children who come into contact with the police when there are concerns about their safety or well-being. We examine cases, review files, speak with officers and staff and work with safeguarding partners to understand what happens in practice.

We make five main judgments on whether a force:

- has effective leadership of its child protection arrangements;
- works effectively with safeguarding partners to help safeguard, protect and promote the welfare of children;
- responds appropriately to help safeguard children at risk;
- effectively assesses risk to children and makes appropriate referrals; and
- effectively investigates all reports of sudden and unexpected death, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children.

We also carry out joint inspections, called joint targeted child protection inspections in England and joint inspections of child protection arrangements in Wales. These inspections bring together expertise from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HMICFRS and HM Inspectorate of Probation. We jointly examine how agencies work together to safeguard and support children. Unlike many other inspection activities, these joint inspections don't focus solely on police performance. Instead, they assess how effectively the entire safeguarding partnership responds to the needs of children and families.

Since 2025, we have seen some progress. For example, Cumbria Constabulary is using body-worn video to give duty social workers access to live images at incidents that involve children. This allows the police and social workers to immediately assess and safeguard children.

But we found that many forces needed to improve:

- the leadership of child protection functions;
- their understanding and recording of the voice of the child; and
- how well they investigated incidents involving children, including online child sexual exploitation.

Some forces told us that child protection was a priority for them, but this wasn't always reflected in their strategies or policies and how they worked in practice. Forces need to make sure they include the child's behaviour and demeanour when they record the voice of the child. This helps forces and safeguarding partners to have a clearer understanding of any risks or vulnerabilities. We found that when forces investigated incidents involving children, they often missed investigative opportunities, such as seizing and examining electronic devices.

These are issues that we have brought to forces' attention before. I am concerned that forces haven't addressed them. The failure to address these issues increases risks to vulnerable children. Forces must make sure they address any concerns we raise in a timely manner.

Forces have improved their response to group-based child sexual exploitation but still need to do more

Group-based child sexual exploitation is one of the most serious and harmful forms of criminality. It involves groups of offenders grooming, coercing and abusing vulnerable children, often over prolonged periods. The consequences can be profound and lifelong, with many victims experiencing lasting physical, emotional and psychological harm. It is vital that the police and their safeguarding partners consistently understand, identify and investigate these crimes.

In 2023, we published 'An inspection of the effectiveness of the police and law enforcement bodies' response to group-based child sexual exploitation in England and Wales'. In 2025, we reviewed progress against our recommendations. We found clear evidence that policing had improved its response to group-based child sexual exploitation. Better training, stronger leadership, improved investigations and a more victim-focused culture were helping forces protect more children and pursue more offenders.

But forces need to continue their efforts to achieve a consistent response. They should improve data quality, strengthen partnerships and make sure past failings are addressed by continual improvements. Children who have been victims of exploitation deserve nothing less.

National leadership has been important in achieving improvements. The National Police Chiefs' Council's Hydrant Programme and Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce have helped forces strengthen safeguarding arrangements, develop specialist expertise and improve investigative practice. We found that nearly all police forces had adopted the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse definition of organised networks related to child sexual exploitation. This creates a more consistent basis for identifying and assessing offending.

We found improvements in the quality of child sexual exploitation investigations. More trained specialists investigated child sexual exploitation cases, with support from exploitation teams and specialist analysts. We found that forces took safeguarding action sooner, used stronger supervision and took more preventative measures to disrupt offenders and reduce risk to victims. We also found evidence of positive cultural change. Almost all forces had taken steps to address victim-blaming language. Investigators also showed a greater understanding of trauma, vulnerability and the importance of victim-centred approaches.

But we found that significant challenges remained. Too many forces still struggled to develop a comprehensive understanding of the threat posed by group-based child sexual exploitation. More than half of forces didn't include information from other organisations in their child sexual exploitation assessments. This limited their ability to identify risk and target resources effectively. Some forces also failed to apply the inquiry's definition of organised networks related to child sexual exploitation correctly. This further undermined the reliability of data and analysis. This is important because incomplete and unreliable data continues to make it difficult for policing and the government to understand the scale and nature of offending at local and national levels.

The legal framework and governance arrangements for firearms licensing need a complete overhaul

Firearms licensing affects hundreds of thousands of people and has a critical role in protecting the public. Most certificate holders comply with the law and use firearms responsibly. For everyone's safety, the firearms licensing system should be clear, consistent and robust. In our 2026 thematic inspection of the firearms licensing system, we found that the system was none of those things. The firearms licensing system in England and Wales isn't fit for purpose. Change is overdue.

We found that policing hadn't adequately addressed the recommendations we made in our 2015 inspection of firearms licensing. We also found that firearms licensing legislation needed major changes. The original legislation was developed in a very different social and policing environment. Amendments mean the legal framework has also become increasingly complex over time. As a result, forces across England and Wales interpret and apply the law differently.

In 2025, the government introduced extensive statutory guidance on firearms licensing. This has led to some improvements. But the guidance isn't clear enough. This leads to different interpretations and variation instead of firm and enforceable rules. We recommended that clear, legally enforceable rules for firearms licensing should be introduced.

We made 23 recommendations to keep the public safe and support lawful firearms ownership. Because of the scale of the problems we found, we recommended that the government removed responsibility for firearms licensing from chief constables and placed it with a new national firearms licensing authority for England and Wales.

For the first time in a thematic inspection, we issued an accelerated cause of concern. This highlighted serious concerns with aspects of a collaboration between three forces on firearms and explosives licensing. I was pleased that the forces' chief constables accepted our findings in full and committed to "a step change in performance and customer service". We will revisit these forces to assess the collaboration's progress against our recommendations.

The police need greater clarity about the role of safety advisory groups when planning for major public events

The Home Secretary commissioned us to inspect the contributions police forces in England and Wales make to safety advisory groups and other bodies responsible for public safety and the licensing of high-profile public events. This included a rapid inspection of the match assessment and categorisation that West Midlands Police provided to the Birmingham City Council safety advisory group in respect of the Aston Villa versus Maccabi Tel Aviv fixture on 6 November 2025.

Usually, safety advisory groups, and the part the police play in them, don't attract attention from the wider public, senior politicians or the media. Some events do attract more attention. The scale, nature of attendees, performers or players or different countries involved in events may give them greater national significance. Actions and decisions relating to these events can have far-reaching consequences.

The safety advisory group decided to reduce to zero the ticket allocation for travelling Maccabi Tel Aviv supporters, which prevented them from attending. This led to extraordinary international political and media outcry. This included accusations that politics had influenced the police to exaggerate intelligence and that this had affected the safety advisory group's decision. These accusations damaged public trust and confidence in the police.

In our rapid inspection into West Midlands Police's handling of that fixture, we found concerns such as:

- the way the force used artificial intelligence in preparing risk assessments;
- the lack of an effective command structure and strategic oversight;
- the lack of a coherent escalation process for events of greater significance; and
- the role confirmation bias played in creating an imbalance in operational plans and internal and external communications.

The wider commission required us to consider how well the police assess risks associated with public events. It also asked us to examine the police's role in working with local authority safety advisory groups.

We don't inspect local authorities, other agencies, landowners or private event organisers. Their roles and legal responsibilities, along with their ability to meet those responsibilities, are considerations for the police when they carry out the police risk assessment. The police must judge how to balance their own enduring duty to protect the public with the reliability of event safety plans.

Safety advisory groups have no basis in law. Most local authorities have them, but some don't. The way they operate and the events they assess differ greatly.

In the UK, much of the legislation and governance arrangements for safety at public events relate to sporting events. Sadly, some of these have resulted from previous disasters. Since the 1990s, safety at sports grounds, particularly football stadiums, has significantly improved. This is partly due to improved stadium design, safety certification and regulation. But over that period, threats and risks to public safety have changed dramatically. Music concerts, fairs, airshows and celebrations have all been settings for serious injury and deaths. Some of these large events have been targets for acts of terrorism. Unlike events at certain sports stadiums or football matches, there is no safety certification regime or regulation for most other public events.

We found that the framework of legislation and governance arrangements for safety at these other events wasn't good enough. Legislation doesn't cover many of these public events, which don't have the same type of governance arrangements as some sports stadiums and football matches. We found that the lack of legislation, statutory guidance and regulation for many public events left the police having to deal with inconsistency. This inconsistency was clear in the training available to the police and other safety advisory group attendees. It was also clear in how police can legitimately recoup the substantial extra costs involved with public safety operations at events.

In our report '<u>An inspection of the police's role in safety advisory groups: planning for major public events</u>', we made 37 recommendations. These focused on giving police forces the clarity they need to collaborate effectively with local authorities and event organisers and improve public safety. Our final recommendation was for the government to carry out a wide-scale review of the framework of legislation and governance arrangements for the roles and responsibilities of parties involved in planning public events.

Annex A: Our reports – 1 August 2025 to 4 September 2026

PEEL inspections

- How effectively do the police record crime?
- West Mercia Police: accelerated cause of concern
- An inspection of the Yorkshire and Humber regional response to serious and organised crime
- Surrey Police: closure of causes of concern
- East Midlands Special Operations Unit: closure of cause of concern
- North Wales Police: closure of cause of concern
- Lincolnshire Police: closure of cause of concern
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Humberside Police
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Kent Police
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of North Yorkshire Police
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Wiltshire Police
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Surrey Police
- Suffolk Constabulary: accelerated cause of concern
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Devon and Cornwall Police
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Northamptonshire Police
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of West Yorkshire Police
- Warwickshire Police: closure of cause of concern
- An inspection of the Southern Wales regional response to serious and organised crime
- The Police Service of Northern Ireland: An inspection of police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Merseyside Police
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Staffordshire Police
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Thames Valley Police
- Cambridgeshire Constabulary: closure of causes of concern

- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Cumbria Constabulary
- PEEL 2025–2027: An inspection of Suffolk Constabulary

Child protection inspections

- Joint child protection inspection of children who are victims of domestic abuse in Hillingdon
- Northamptonshire Police: National child protection inspection
- Joint child protection inspection of identification of initial need and risk in Telford and Wrekin
- The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending
- Inspection of the effectiveness of police and law enforcement bodies' response to group-based child sexual exploitation: A progress report
- South Wales Police: National child protection inspection
- West Midlands Police: National child protection inspection
- Joint child protection inspection of child sexual abuse in the family environment in Brighton and Hove
- Staffordshire Police: National child protection inspection
- Lincolnshire Police: accelerated causes of concern
- Multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse
- Joint child protection inspection of child sexual abuse in the family environment in Leicestershire
- Derbyshire Constabulary: accelerated cause of concern
- The policing response to the investigation of online child sexual abuse and the management of registered sex offenders
- Joint child protection inspection of child sexual abuse in the family environment in Oxfordshire
- Joint child protection inspection of child sexual abuse in the family environment in Tower Hamlets
- Durham Constabulary: National child protection inspection
- Joint child protection inspection of child sexual abuse in the family environment in Gateshead
- Cumbria Constabulary: National child protection inspection
- Lincolnshire Police: National child protection inspection
- Joint child protection inspection of identification of initial need and risk in Warrington

- Joint child protection inspection of child sexual abuse in the family environment in Staffordshire
- Joint child protection inspection of identification of initial need and risk in Stockport

Specialist inspections

- Report on an inspection visit to police custody suites in the Metropolitan Police Service
- National Crime Agency inspection: The effectiveness and efficiency of the National Data Exploitation Capability
- Report on an inspection visit to the British Transport Police custody suite
- A report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Avon and Somerset Constabulary
- A report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Devon and Cornwall Police
- A report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Wiltshire Police
- Inspection of Bedfordshire Police, Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Hertfordshire Constabulary's firearms and explosives licensing: accelerated cause of concern
- Inspection of police forces' contributions to safety advisory groups: West Midlands Police
- A report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Durham Constabulary
- A report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in Thames Valley Police
- National Crime Agency: An inspection of effectiveness and efficiency
- How effective is His Majesty's Revenue and Customs at preventing and investigating internal corruption?
- A report into the effectiveness of integrity arrangements in the Metropolitan Police Service
- An inspection of firearms licensing across police forces in England and Wales
- An inspection of the police's role in safety advisory groups: planning for major public events

Non-inspection publications

- State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2024–25
- Evaluation of PEEL inspections
- Value for money profiles 2025

Annex B: About us

Biographies for each of the Inspectors and information about who we inspect are available on our website.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary



Michelle Skeer OBE QPM

In April 2026, Michelle Skeer was appointed as HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary and HM Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services for an interim period.

His Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary



Lee Freeman KPM

In April 2023, Lee Freeman was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services.



Kathryn Stone OBE

In June 2025, Kathryn Stone was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services.



Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM

In October 2021, Roy Wilsher was appointed HM Inspector of Constabulary and HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services.

Assistant His Majesty's Inspector



Nicola Faulconbridge

In October 2022, Nicola Faulconbridge joined HMICFRS as Assistant HM Inspector.

Finances and workforce

Our finances

We are funded mainly by the Home Office. We also receive funding for inspections commissioned by others (such as the National Crime Agency). We spent about 90 percent of our funding on our workforce, with the rest spent on IT, surveys and other expenses.

Expenditure breakdown 2025/26

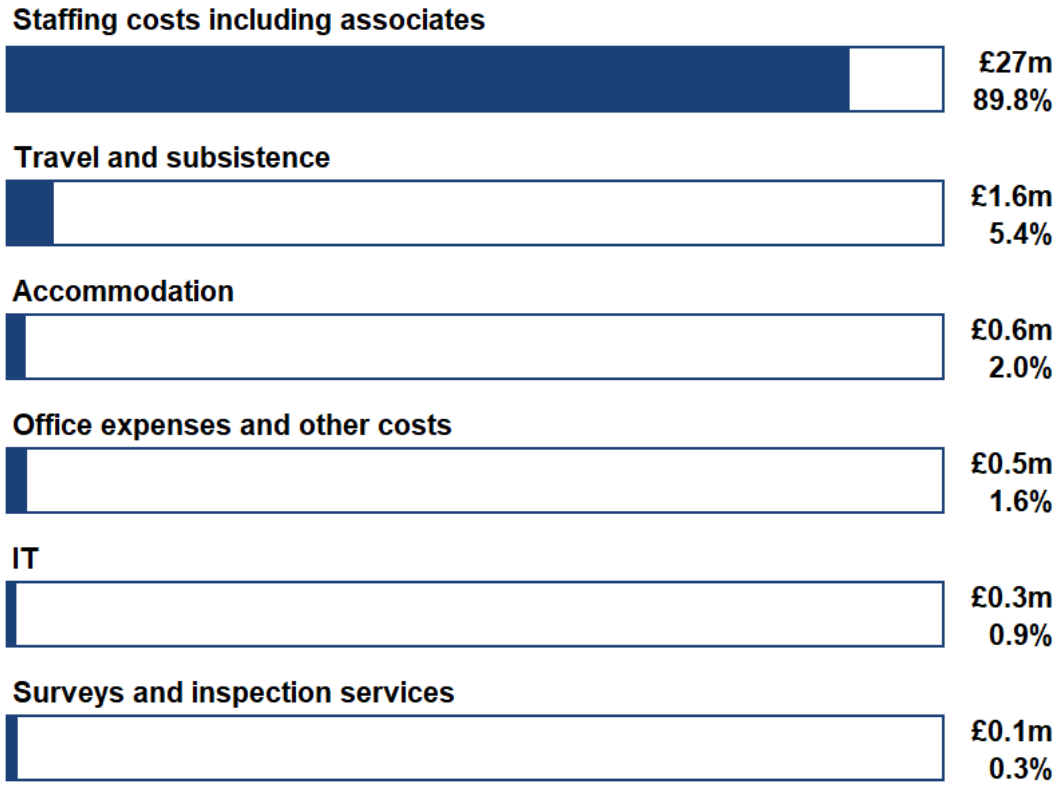


Chart description: We spent £27 million (89.8 percent of our funding) on staffing costs including associates; £1.6 million (5.4 percent) on travel and subsistence; £0.6 million (2.0 percent) on accommodation; £0.5 million (1.6 percent) on office expenses and other costs; £0.3 million (0.9 percent) on IT; and £0.1 million (0.3 percent) on surveys and inspection services.

Note: numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Our workforce

Our workforce comprises the inspectors of constabulary and fire and rescue services, civil servants, seconded police officers and staff and secondees from fire and rescue services. We also have a register of associates who provide specialist resource and skills.

Staffing breakdown 2025/26

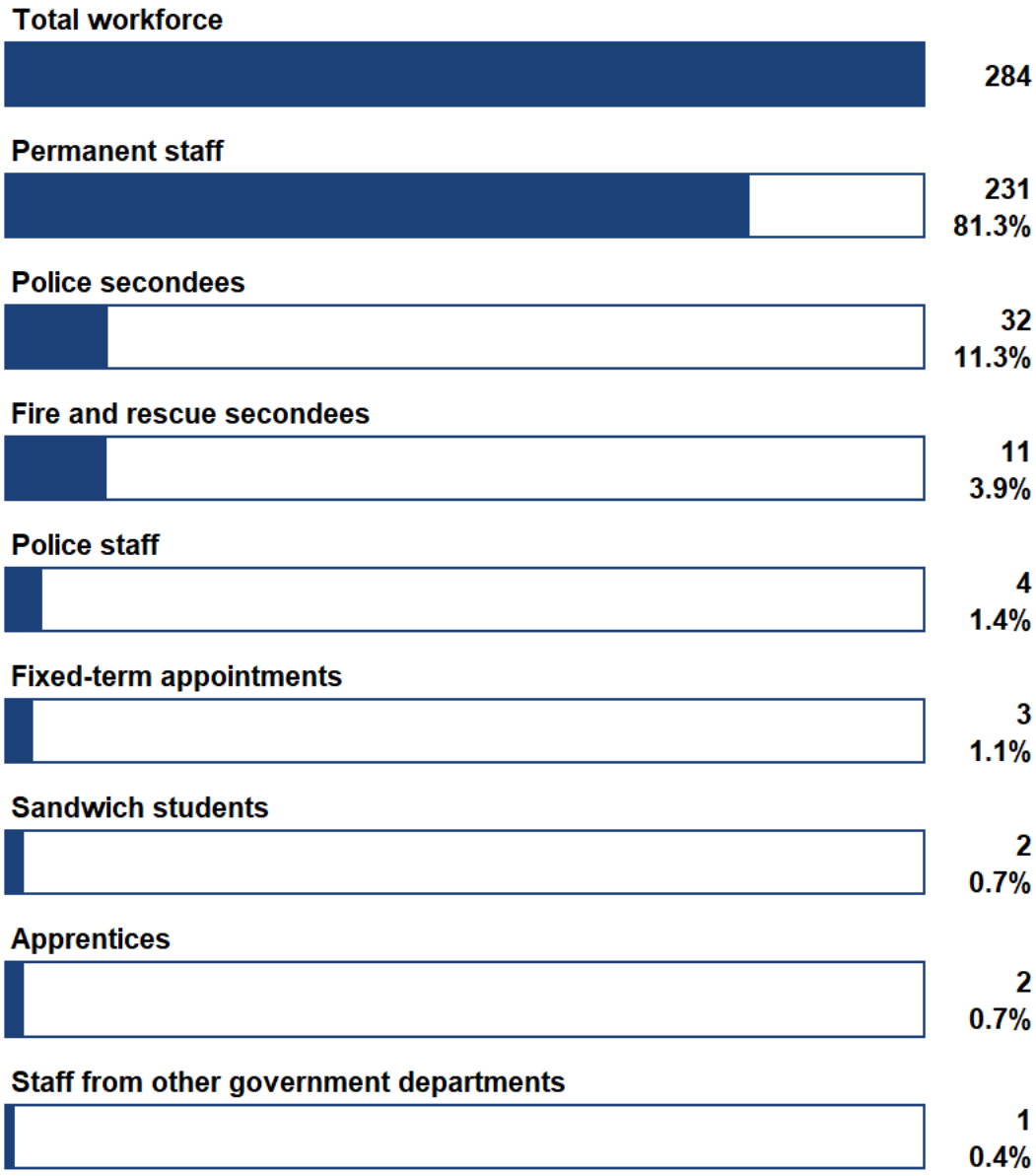


Chart description: Our total workforce is 284 staff. This consists of 231 permanent staff (81.3 percent of our workforce), 32 police secondees (11.3 percent), 11 fire and rescue secondees (3.9 percent), 4 police staff (1.4 percent), 3 fixed-term appointments (1.1 percent), 2 sandwich students (0.7 percent), 2 apprentices (0.7 percent) and 1 staff member from other government departments (0.4 percent).

Note: numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

ISBN 978-1-5286-5476-0 | E03305308
© HMICFRS 2026
hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk