

From local to national: a new model for policing

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Background

The eagerly anticipated [Police Reform White Paper](#) was published today on the GOV.UK website, outlining the government's plan to modernise policing which experts have said is a "[defining moment](#)" for the sector. The [NPCC had stated](#) that the "current policing model will not serve us well in the decades to come" with public confidence falling and complexity increasing. Alongside the Police Provisional Settlement, Sarah Jones [stated](#) that the reforms will "bring policing into the modern age with the technology, innovation and structures they need to ensure policing can focus on the crimes that matter to the public and to drive out waste and inefficiency".

The release of this Paper follows the [announcement](#) on abolishing PCCs in which Sarah Jones stated that the "PCC model has weakened local police accountability and has had perverse impacts on the recruitment of chief constables". She went on to state that "we will abolish police and crime commissioners at the end of their current term in 2028 and transfer functions to mayors wherever possible".

In early December it was [reported](#) that the Home Secretary was considering merging police forces in England and Wales, as part of the reform of policing to be set out in the White Paper in the New Year. The TST wrote a [briefing](#) on the government's efforts to merge police forces in 2006 outlining some of the challenges that the then government faced. Today, the White Paper confirms that regional forces will be created after an independent review, aiming to publish their findings by the Summer, outlines exactly how many forces there will be.

This briefing will focus on the areas that are most likely to impact PACCTS members, namely, governance and finance. The full paper can be found on the [GOV.UK website](#). The paper delves into significant detail in many areas, some of which have only been covered at a high level for the sake of brevity. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Team.

Headlines

- PCCs to be abolished by 2028 with powers being transferred to Strategic Authority Mayors and local council leaders through Policing and Crime Boards.
- "Long term" ambition to have fewer, larger forces. An independent review is set to report by the Summer on the "optimal configuration" of regional police forces.
- Governance arrangements aim to be replicated across Wales.
- The Paper claims that the government expects spending on corporate governance to be significantly reduced, stating that it currently costs around £93m a year.
- Police and Crime Panels will no longer be necessary.
- The APCC are mentioned directly when referring to ongoing support for Victims' services.

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- The government intends to carry out a funding formula review after the new policing structures are in place.
- No money earmarked specifically for police reform.

The Case for Change

Since the last significant police reform in the 1960s, the nature of policing has changed dramatically, with the demand for police services growing substantially. The aim of The Paper is to “renew the Peelian model of policing for the very different conditions of the twenty-first century”. It goes on to state that radical reform is required for the three following reasons:

1. Public confidence in the police is falling.
2. Police performance has declined and is inconsistent across England and Wales.
3. Crime is changing radically, and the police are struggling to keep pace.

Public confidence in the police is falling

Compared to other public institutions, trust in the police is still “relatively high”. However, [trust in the police fell](#) from 80% in 2015-16 to 71% in 2024-25. [Confidence in local policing fell](#) from 79% in 2015-16 to 67% in 2024-25. Therefore, the White Paper posits that trust and confidence may continue to decline “undermining the legitimacy and effectiveness of policing itself”.

Police performance has declined and is inconsistent across England and Wales

Police performance has also declined. Incidents in which [victims reported](#) they were “very satisfied” with the police declined from 41% in 2015-16 to 23% in 2024-25. Those “not satisfied” increased from 28% to 49% in the same period.

Additionally, there is a significant variation of standards between forces. In 2024-25, the proportion of people who thought their local force was doing a good or excellent job [ranged from](#) 39% to 62%. The Paper suggests that this fall in public confidence can be linked to the decline of visible neighbourhood policing with the percentage of people who [reported](#) that they never see an officer or PCSO rising from 25% in 2010-11 to 54% in 2024-25.

Outdated policing structure

According to the Paper, the smaller areas of the 43 force model lack the ability to deliver effective specialist services and manage major incidents with many lacking financial resilience. The number of forces leads to inefficiencies such as separately designed IT systems that struggle to interact or share information. This can make coordinated responses difficult.

A lack of capabilities

The Paper asserts that the previous Government focussed excessively on how many total police officers there were, rather than the services’ ability to respond to threats. It gives the Officer Maintenance grant as an example, suggesting that this caused many officers that could have been working on the front line to instead work in a back-office capacity.

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Additionally, forces' use of technology varies significantly across forces meaning that some areas are under-utilising technology and data.

The current reforms aim to create a police service that is:

- More focused on the needs of local communities.
- Supported by a more coherent organisational structure.
- Consistently delivers high standards.
- Possesses the capabilities required to keep pace with criminals.

Better policing for local communities

Neighbourhood Policing

Since 2010, visible neighbourhood policing has declined. For example, there was a [57% decline](#) in the number of PCSOs between 2010 and 2025. This led to the Prime Minister announcing the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee in April 2025. The policy commitments are as follows:

- *"Every neighbourhood now has named, contactable officers dedicated to tackling the issues in their neighbourhood.*
- *"There are guaranteed response times to neighbourhood queries of 72 hours, with the commitment being transparent to the public when they submit a neighbourhood query.*
- *"Every force has an Anti-Social Behaviour lead and has increased patrols in town centres and other hotspots based on local demand and intelligence."*

This is in addition to the [Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee Performance Framework](#).

The targets for the end of the parliament are as follows:

- *"Deliver visible, accessible and community-focused policing, including delivering 13,000 additional neighbourhood policing personnel in police forces across England and Wales.*
- *"Design new standards so that neighbourhood officers are not routinely abstracted to other areas.*
- *"Ensure that shop theft and assaults on shopworkers will no longer go unpunished by bringing in new powers and providing additional funding to policing, working with retailers, to take further action.*
- *"Professionalise neighbourhood policing with every neighbourhood police officer and Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) completing enhanced additional training.*
- *"Publish a dashboard to measure and monitor performance of the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee commitments."*

The guarantee is being delivered through six pillars:

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Pillar 1: Police Back on the Beat
Pillar 2: Community Led Policing
Pillar 3: Professional Excellence
Pillar 4: Crackdown on Anti-Social Behaviour
Pillar 5: Safer Town Centres
Pillar 6: Volunteering in Policing

Pillar one will deliver 13,000 *additional* neighbourhood policing personnel in forces across England and Wales by the end of this Parliament with officers freed up from non-operational roles wherever possible. **Neighbourhood policing areas will “consist of a team of officers and PCSOs dedicated to covering that area and who spend most of their time providing a visible policing presence”**. The government will work to ensure that trials of hotspot patrols will be embedded in business as usual.

Pillar two means that every neighbourhood *now* has named and contactable officers and that local neighbourhood policing priorities will be published online. Public contact with neighbourhood policing teams will be standardised.

Pillar three recognises that there has been no dedicated training for neighbourhood policing officers. The Home Office has provided funding to the College of Policing to change this. The reforms seek to put national standards in place to underpin what it means to be a neighbourhood officer.

Pillar four means that every force now has a dedicated ASB Lead. Neighbourhood policing teams will now be equipped with enhanced powers through the Crime and Policing Bill (currently being legislated) to tackle persistent anti-social behaviour.

Pillar five relates to a series of initiatives aimed at reducing street crime including the [Summer Street Initiative](#) and legislation to create new offences for assaulting retail workers and repealing legislation that makes shop theft below £200 a summary-only offence.

Pillar six emphasises the importance of special constables noting their decline in numbers, [down 73%](#) between 2012 and 2025. **The ambition of the Home Office is to grow and stabilise these numbers**, something which they are currently determining how to do. The Home Office will also look to expand opportunities for volunteering in other roles, such as PCSOs and Police Support Volunteer roles.

Removing Barriers

The government aim to increase the amount of time spent on the public’s priorities *“reducing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and apprehending those who break the law. Too often the police find themselves fighting crime with one hand tied behind their backs, dealing with excessive bureaucracy, obsolete technology and outdated legislation”*. To ensure that officers are able to focus on fighting crime, the government will:

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- *"Work with key criminal justice partners to explore how to reduce the burden on policing, including continuing to support the rollout of Right Care, Right Person to all parts of the country.*
- *"Set out a definition of police productivity and work with policing to develop a core set of Productivity Priorities.*
- *"Explore how we can use AI to free up officers for the front line.*
- *Work closely with sector partners to streamline training, including integrating it into everyday work where possible."*

Additionally, the government believe that there has been a disproportionate response to policing social media. The College of Policing and NPCC have undertaken a review of how the police record 'non-hate crime incidents' to assess whether these practices are proportionate to the threats communities face. It is worth noting that in the media rounds prior to the publication of the White Paper, Shabana Mahmood wanted [non-crime hate incidents to be scrapped in their current form](#).

Work will also be carried out with the Ministry of Justice and the Crown Prosecution Service to examine changes that could reduce the burden on policing, as this has been identified as a significant area/cause of paperwork for forces.

Productivity

In order to improve productivity, the Police Efficiency and Collaboration Programme will tackle "foundational issues" with a target of freeing up thousands of hours of officers' time by 2028-29. These are:

1. *"Set out a definition of police productivity that can form part of our new Performance Framework so we can measure how well forces are doing.*
2. *"Develop a set of Productivity Priorities and provide resource to support the roll out of these innovative solutions based on what works locally. This will include the much more widespread deployment of AI across policing.*
3. *"Support the Centre for Police Productivity within the College of Policing. They will build on their recent work to support police forces through fast-tracking proven innovations.*
4. *"Continue our Data Reform Project on 'Unleashing the Power of Our People Through Data and Technology' which will make sure officers spend less time searching for data and information."*

A new system of local police governance

The government wants to create a system of governance that strikes the right balance between the Home Secretary, local accountability structures and Chief Constables. According to the Paper, the Home Secretary will play a stronger role to "drive performance and standards" and create new structures to improve the delivery of operational policing.

Despite PCCs having worked hard to reduce crime and hold the police to account, [public understanding of, and engagement](#) with, PCCs remains low despite efforts to raise their profile.

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Given this, the government will:

We will:

- **Abolish Police and Crime Commissioners, transferring police governance in 2028 to Strategic Authority Mayors and local council leaders through Policing and Crime Boards.** Over time, these Boards will then be adapted to provide the governance of future fewer, larger police forces.
- **Require every Policing and Crime Board to appoint a Policing and Crime Lead.** This will ensure Boards have the day-to-day support they need to provide dynamic and robust oversight of policing.
- **Improve the process of appointing, suspending and dismissing Chief Constables** so that it is fair, transparent and has the confidence of the public and policing.
- **Engage with the Welsh Government and Welsh policing and criminal justice partners on what the desired governance end state for policing is in Wales** to ensure it reflects the different partnership and governance arrangements.
- **Set out what functions Policing and Crime Boards and their supporting secretariats should have.** This will reduce the cost of corporate governance and bring greater consistency as Offices of Police and Crime Commissioners have grown based upon PCC wishes.

The PCC model will end in 2028 with the transfer of police governance to existing local government structures. **Functions will transfer to the Strategic Authority Mayors wherever possible, or elected council leaders where it is not, through Policing and Crime Boards.**

The government's **long-term** ambition is to have fewer, larger forces (discussed further in this briefing). An independent review (announced in The Home Secretary's speech to the House of Commons) will give "further consideration" to the governance of merged forces. The Paper makes clear that transferring oversight of policing to local government has many advantages, including better collaboration across many services.

Policing and Crime Boards will be comprised of the Strategic Authority Mayors and/or council leaders so that all forces are represented by elected individuals. Each board will have "*co-optees*" to provide additional skills and experience. **Each board will appoint a Policing and Crime Lead**, akin to a Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime. **These boards will be able to be scaled to cover any expanded force area once mergers happen and will include upper tier elected local government leaders in the force area and Strategic Authority Mayors.** They will also appoint a day-to-day lead for policing and crime.

Boards and Mayors will hold the Chief Constable to account at the force level but will set each Local Policing Area their own priorities based upon community needs.

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"The force's Chief Constable and the area's local police commander will be responsible for the delivery of these priorities, with oversight from both the Mayor or Policing and Crime Board and the local elected leader of the Local Policing Area. The size, composition and accountability arrangements for Local Policing Areas will be considered further as part of the Independent Review of police structures"

The government aims to replicate arrangements across England and Wales. This will mean working closely with both the Welsh Government and Welsh local government.

Policing and Crime Boards will have the necessary powers to support their governance and hold Chief Constables to account for their force's performance.

Governance for the fire element of PFCCs will also be transferred together with policing.

Transferring Policing to Local Government

The government believe that transferring policing to local government will allow for more collaboration as both Mayors and council leaders sit across a range of different policy areas and budgets.

"Subject to Royal Assent, the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill which is currently before Parliament, will create powers to transfer police governance functions to Mayors by default, where boundaries align, and a power to amend force boundaries at the same time as the transfer of police governance functions to Mayors"

Additionally, the government proposes that where a force area is wholly within the area of a Strategic Authority Mayor, that Mayor should become responsible for its governance.

Police and Crime Boards

When it isn't possible to transfer existing functions to Mayors, **the government will give functions to existing leaders who will be brought on to Police and Crime Boards. These boards are expected to have *broadly* the same powers as PCCs, including powers to appoint, suspend and dismiss the Chief Constable, set the police budget and agree the policing precept.**

The size of these boards will be scalable depending on the size of the force area. These boards will be made up of:

- Strategic Authority Mayors/Council Leaders
- Local government leaders
- Co-optees

A stronger and more streamlined system

"Corporate governance costs around £93 million in 2023/24 employing over 1,000 people. The size of PCC offices varies hugely, with some having more than 40 staff. As we move away from PCCs we must ensure that the system that replaces them costs less with savings reinvested in delivering stronger neighbourhood policing."

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The Government expects spending on corporate governance to be significantly reduced. As part of the reforms, government will consider creating a specific grant for governance which will control spending. ***"Cancelling future PCC elections will also achieve significant savings to the taxpayer. MHCLG has estimated the cost of PCC elections in 2024 as approximately £87 million"***

Scrutiny and Oversight

Under the new system Police and Crime Panels will no longer be necessary. The support and challenge previously provided by Panels will be delivered by the "existing overview and scrutiny functions of each Board member's authority". No changes will be made to scrutiny arrangements in London.

Victims championing and accountability

The Paper recognises the importance that the PCCs have played with regards to victims. **The government plans on "working closely" with other government departments, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and the Victim's Commissioner to ensure ongoing support.**

Chief Constable appointments, suspensions and dismissals

According to the Paper, the process for the appointment, suspension and dismissal of Chief Constables will be reformed to introduce greater fairness, transparency and balance. This means that Policing and Crime Boards will need to seek views from His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary before taking any action to suspend the Chief Constable, as well as introducing a requirement to give the Chief Constable written notice and introduce a time limit on any suspension from office.

A Stronger Policing System

As mentioned by the Home Secretary in her statement to the House of Commons, and the introduction of this report, the Paper reiterates that the 43 local police force system is no longer fit for purpose. The Paper states that there is a clear consensus amongst policing leaders on the need for reform. Local policing will now be delivered by Local Policing Areas (LPAs) that will sit within regional forces.

Many existing central bodies will be replaced with a new national police force, The National Police Service (NPS). The Paper suggests that this will provide *"strategic leadership, set standards and provide education, equipment and technology to police forces. It will also provide a much stronger response to fast-changing serious, cross-border and online crime"* and will be the biggest reform to policing in 200 years.

The government aims to achieve the following:

We will:

- Stand up an **independent review of force structures**, to design an end-state with policing which will equip forces to deliver high quality public service and tackle modern day crime and threats.
- Reduce fragmentation and inefficiency by **significantly reducing the number of police forces** by the end of next parliament.
- **Simplify the Home Secretary's powers** to alter force boundaries, smoothing the path towards new force geographies.
- Identify opportunities to deliver a **pathfinder merger this parliament**, to make progress towards our ultimate ambition for fewer, larger forces.

The Paper outlines five reasons for moving to fewer police forces:

1. "The current structure is highly inefficient, with each of the 43 forces having its own headquarters, management teams, operational and business support functions and many specialist capabilities. These costs are particularly high in smaller forces, some of whom are struggling to maintain financial resilience.
2. "It is ineffective to disperse specialist policing functions across a large number of police forces. The evidence suggests that concentrating functions such as cybercrime, firearms, major crime and roads policing in fewer 'centres of excellence' will improve learning and development by bringing together expertise and will enable better targeting of resource, with specialist units being deployed across a wider area.
3. "The current model results in wide variation in service quality, with victims' experiences and investigative outcomes differing markedly depending on geographic location. Fewer forces will enable higher-quality investigations and more consistent support for victims, helping to bring offenders to justice and rebuild public trust.
4. "Larger forces are better equipped to respond to major incidents and mass-deployment events. Currently, smaller forces routinely struggle to handle major crime investigations or respond to critical incidents, often relying on mutual aid from others.
5. "It is harder to achieve national coordination and collaboration in a system with 86 decision-makers (Chief Constables and PCCs)."

Local Policing

LPAs will deliver the majority of public facing policing. The government intends for these LPAs to operate at a level of local towns, cities and boroughs, although the precise geography will be determined by the Independent Review of Force Structures.

Independent Review

The government will set up an independent review of police structures with the aim of reporting the findings in the summer. The review will be led by an independent chair, with the recommendations informing the final design and delivery of the new forces.

The Home Secretary's powers to alter force boundaries will be simplified.

The National Police Service

The National Police Service will reshape the way key policing functions are organised and coordinated across England and Wales. The government aims to achieve the following:

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We will:

- Provide a stronger policing system by **establishing a new national police force, the National Police Service (NPS)**.
- Empower the NPS to provide a single source of **strategic leadership** for the police service and **set standards** in areas like data, technology and training.
- Bring together the delivery of national **enabling capabilities** within the NPS (e.g. consolidating delivery and oversight of national IT and commercial services).
- Consolidate accountabilities and decision-making authority for the delivery of police forensics in the NPS and establish the legal mandate to **deliver forensics as a national service** to policing and ultimately benefit victims and the criminal justice system.
- In the final phase expand the NPS to be the single national **operational law enforcement body**, including Counter-Terrorism Policing, the National Crime Agency, Regional Organised Crime Units, and the Senior National Coordinator role for public order policing.

If you would like to understand the government's "case for change" regarding the NPS, more detail can be found on page 46 of the White Paper. This briefing focusses more on the governance and financial elements of the Paper.

Police Funding

According to the White Paper, the government recognises that transforming policing will require investment. It continues to state that it has already invested "close to £2bn" across the SR period, although it doesn't highlight any additional funding earmarked specifically for police reform.

On the funding formula, the White Paper states:

"Where previous Governments failed to deliver on repeated promises to reform police funding, we will not shy away from this reform. We intend to review the police funding formula and the distribution of funding to local forces. To reflect a new policing system, this must be done following the implementation of policing reforms and in a way that reflects the force-level impacts this will have. The new policing structures will take time to implement and a future funding formula review will take into account those new structures."

However, until this happens the "first priority" is to maintain a *"robust police funding system which offers the correct incentives and provides clear lines of accountability, ensures the best possible use of public money and above all maintains the safety of the public"*.

A brief summary of chapter four and five can be found below. These chapters signal a shift towards a more directive national policing model with the Home Office setting clear strategic priorities, establishing stronger national standards and coordinating capabilities that, according to the White Paper, individual forces struggle to deliver. Should you want more information, please read the source material from 56 onwards.

Consistently High Standards

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A more active Home Office

The government aims to:

- Set Clear National Strategic Policing Priorities.
- Reform the Policing Protocol to articulate roles and responsibilities of all policing leaders.
- Solidify the boundaries of operational independence.

Improving police performance

The government aims to:

- Implement a new Police Performance Framework “to provide a shared picture of comparative force performance”.
- Introduce a “tiered performance system” to identify and support improvement within under-performing forces.
- Set up a new “Home Office Police Performance Improvement Unit” that will ensure a stronger central government oversight.
- Establish new policing Guarantees that will set out a minimum standard that the public can expect to receive from the police.

Raising individual standards

The government aims to:

- “Take focussed action to improve the culture of policing”. This will include reforming the vetting and misconduct systems and tackling discriminatory behaviour.
- Work with the Office for Police Conduct to “enhance accountability, scrutiny and transparency in the police complaints and misconduct system”.

A more capable police service

The future workforce

The government aims to:

- Create a modern workforce in which Chief Constables have greater flexibility to recruit and retain those with the required skills to tackle prevalent threats.
- Deliver a national workforce strategy to ensure that the workforce has the skills to meet current and future demands.
- Mandate national leadership standards by reforming the process for appointing chief constables and responding to the recommendations of the Police Leadership Commission.
- Introduce a “License to Practice” for police officers to raise standards and promote professional development.
- Allow greater flexibility for entry and exit of the workforce by developing a multi-route specialised pathway that supports entry in policing at different ranks.
- Improve workforce culture by increasing support, development and leadership.
- Use the Police Covenant to deliver a package of wellbeing support as well as mandating national wellbeing standards.

Unleashing the Power of Our People Through Data and Technology

- Investing £115m over the next three years to enable the rapid adoption of AI and automation technologies by the police. This will include the creation of a National Centre for AI in Policing called “Police.AI.”

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- Roll out the use of Live Facial Recognition (LFR) technologies – including 40 new LFR vans to be deployed in town centres across England and Wales.
- Create a bespoke legal framework for the use of technologies such as facial recognition.
- Create a public register of the AI in use by police forces.
- Simplify the governance of data by creating a single decision-maker for taking decisions on national datasets.
- Establish clearer accountability for policing data and how it is shared.
- Work with policing to define specific national standards for police data and quality requirements.
- Work with forces to understand the barriers to technology adoption.

Smarter crime prevention

- Take a stronger lead on crime prevention by:
 - Delivering an integrated crime mapping system for England and Wales.
 - Testing new crime prevention interventions.
 - Establish “more effective” crime prevention partnerships at the national level.
 - Provide clearer strategic direction on crime prevention.
- Begin the creation of a clearer and more effective local landscape for crime prevention, including:
 - Reducing the flow of young people into crime through delivery of the [Young Futures Programme](#).
 - Bring together prevention tools from policing with those from local government and communities.
 - Strengthen the link between centre and local areas on crime prevention.
 - Encourage the sharing of best practice.

Conclusion

The Police Reform White Paper sets out an ambitious programme of structural and governance reform, signalling a shift towards stronger national oversight with the aim of creating more consistent standards across policing. Many of the elements are subject to future legislation and the outcome of the Independent Review. The potential implications for funding, governance and financial planning are significant, with the full impact only becoming clear as further details emerge. The Team will continue to provide updates to members with any developments pertaining to police reform. Should you have any questions, please contact us in the usual way.