



The Police Reform Agenda

An Oxon Advisory White Paper 01/24

Series: Emerging Technologies and Strategies for Public Safety

Oxon Advisory

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About Oxon Advisory:

Oxon Advisory (OXA) is a global strategic advisory and think tank specialising in enhancing public safety through collaborative partnerships and evidence-based approaches. With a team of expert associates possessing diverse skills in research, policy, technology, and community engagement, OXA is uniquely positioned to guide the implementation of innovative solutions like those presented in this paper. OXA's expertise lies in:

- **Data Collaboration and Analysis:** Supporting secure and effective data sharing across agencies.
- **Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning:** Designing and implementing AI-driven solutions for data visualisation, risk identification, and resource allocation.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** Building collaborative networks to address complex public safety challenges.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Equipping professionals with the knowledge and skills to implement and utilise new technologies and approaches.

Preface

The landscape of public safety is undergoing a profound transformation. Advances in technology, shifting societal expectations, and the evolving nature of crime itself demand a new approach to policing and community safety. Oxon Advisory is committed to providing thought leadership and practical guidance to navigate this complex terrain.

This White Paper, focusing on police reform in the UK, marks the first in a series dedicated to exploring **Emerging Technologies and Strategies for Public Safety**. This series will delve into the most pressing challenges facing law enforcement and community safety leaders, offering evidence-based insights and innovative solutions.

Future White Papers in this series will examine topics such as:

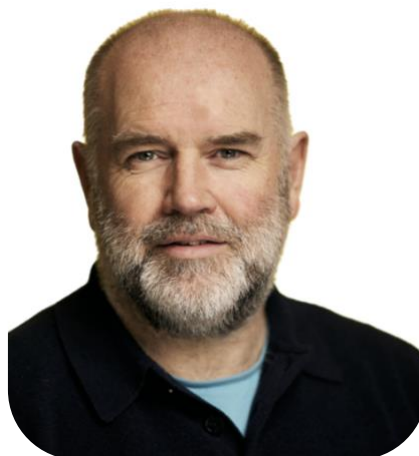
- **Analysing Risk Factors and Forecasting Needs with Generative AI.**
- **Neuro-disabilities, crime and criminal justice.**
- **Child Rights for those in contact with justice services.**
- **The role of technology in preventing and responding to cybercrime.**
- **Building community resilience in the face of terrorism and extremism.**
- **Data-driven strategies for crime prevention and reduction.**
- **The future of policing in a rapidly changing world.**

We believe that by fostering dialogue, promoting collaboration, and embracing innovation, we can build a safer and more secure future for all. This series is our contribution to that vital endeavour.

Oxon Advisory
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Foreword

The challenges facing policing in the UK are profound and complex. Years of austerity, coupled with a relentless focus on reactive measures, have left our police service stretched and under-resourced. Public trust has been eroded, and officer morale is at a low ebb. We stand at a crossroads, and the path we choose now will determine the future of policing for generations to come.



This White Paper, born from the Oxon Advisory's Policing Manifesto, offers a bold new vision for the future. It rejects the allure of quick fixes and simplistic solutions, advocating instead for a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to reform. It is a call for a fundamental shift in how we think about policing, moving beyond a narrow focus on crime control to embrace a broader understanding of community safety and wellbeing.

The proposals outlined in this paper are ambitious, but they are also achievable. They are grounded in the lived experience of police officers, community members, and experts in the field. They draw on the latest research and best practices from around the world. And they are driven by a deep commitment to building a police service that is truly representative of, and responsive to, the needs of the communities it serves.

This is not simply a matter of tinkering around the edges. It is about fundamentally reimagining the role of police in the 21st century. It is about investing in our officers, empowering our communities, and fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. It is about building a police service that is not only effective in fighting crime but also just, equitable, and compassionate.

Professor Stan Gilmour KPM FRSA
CEO, Oxon Advisory

A Narrative Approach to the Police Reform Agenda

Executive Summary

The UK police service stands at a critical juncture. Years of underfunding and reactive policies have hollowed out the centre, eroded public trust, diminished effectiveness, and led to a crisis of morale within the force. This white paper, inspired by the Oxon Advisory's Policing Manifesto, presents a bold vision for reform, rejecting quick fixes in favour of a sustainable, collaborative, and research-led approach.

The proposed agenda focuses on six key themes:

- **Rebuilding Public Trust:** Enhancing accountability and transparency, addressing bias and discrimination, and ensuring the ethical use of technology.
- **Modernising Policing:** Shifting to a proactive, prevention-oriented approach, leveraging technology and data analysis for resource allocation, whole systems collaborations, crime detection and investigation, and empowering local communities.
- **Supporting the Workforce:** Prioritising staff wellbeing, diversifying recruitment, and investing in continuous professional development.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Fostering integrated services, establishing multi-agency partnerships, and promoting seamless information sharing to enable whole of society efforts to improve community safety and wellbeing.
- **Ensuring Value for Money:** Utilising data-driven decision-making, prioritising evidence-based practices, and maximising resource efficiency.
- **Out-of-the-Box Thinking:** Exploring innovative solutions such as streamlined governance, specialised response units, community-based safety hubs, virtual reality training, and participatory budgeting.

This white paper calls for a renaissance in community safety and wellbeing, moving beyond reactive policing to embrace a proactive, public health approach. By implementing these reforms, we can build a police service within, and supportive of,

a whole of society system, that is more effective, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the communities it serves.

Introduction

The British bobby, a symbol of community trust and safety, stands at a crossroads. Nearly two decades ago, Professor Ian Loader cautioned against the endless cycle of reactive legislation, likening it to "putting a plaster on a broken leg." His words, resonate even louder today. Despite escalating costs and plummeting public confidence, we find ourselves trapped in a loop of populist quick-fixes, failing to address the deep-rooted issues plaguing our police service.

The recent General Election serves as a stark reminder of this crisis. Years of funding cuts, highlighted by the National Audit Office's grim report of a 19% reduction, have left our police service doubly decimated. The consequences are undeniable: public trust has eroded, performance outcomes are dismal, and officers are leaving the service at an alarming rate. We face a crisis of social inequality, where a marginalised segment of society is trapped in a cycle of violence, addiction, and criminalisation.

This white paper, inspired by the Oxon Advisory's Policing Manifesto, offers a beacon of hope. It rejects the allure of simplistic solutions, advocating instead for a sustainable, collaborative, and research-based approach to policing. This is not merely a call for reform; it is a call for a renaissance in community safety and wellbeing.

Policing in the UK: Navigating Late Modernity (1969 - Present)

This report offers a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of policing strategies in the UK, commencing in 1969 and extending to the present day. This starting point is deliberately chosen to coincide with the onset of late modernity, a period characterised by profound social, political, and technological transformations that have shaped the landscape of law enforcement. By beginning with an examination of the politics of policing in late modernity, this report seeks to provide a contextualised understanding of how policing has adapted to the challenges and complexities of this era.

Late modernity has witnessed a shift away from grand narratives of progress and universal truths towards a more fragmented and pluralistic society. This has had significant implications for policing, requiring a move towards more nuanced and responsive strategies. The rise of globalisation, individualisation, and information technology has further complicated the policing landscape, demanding new approaches to crime prevention, community engagement, and the use of technology.

This report begins by tracing the key developments in policing through various governmental eras, highlighting the interplay between political priorities, social changes, and policing strategies. It analyses the contrasting approaches to crime reduction, community engagement, and police accountability, drawing attention to the ongoing challenges of maintaining public trust and ensuring effective law enforcement in a rapidly changing world.

By examining the historical trajectory of policing within the context of late modernity, this report aims to provide valuable insights into the current state of policing in the UK and the potential pathways for its future development. It will be of interest to policymakers, academics, and anyone concerned with the challenges of maintaining social order and ensuring public safety in a complex and dynamic society.

Starting a timeline of policing in the UK from 1969 is therefore significant from both criminological and political perspectives for several key reasons:

- **A Period of Transition:** The late 1960s marked a period of significant social and political change in the UK, with growing concerns about crime, social unrest, and police accountability. This makes it a pivotal point to begin examining shifts in policing strategies and priorities.
- **Emergence of Modern Policing:** Many of the foundational elements of modern policing in the UK, such as community policing and the formalisation of complaints procedures, emerged or were significantly developed in this era. Examining these developments provides valuable context for understanding contemporary policing practices.
- **Political Context:** The late 1960s saw a shift in political power, with both Labour and Conservative governments grappling with how to respond to rising crime rates and public anxieties. This highlights the political dimension of policing and how different ideologies influence approaches to law enforcement.
- **Criminological Significance:** From a criminological perspective, the late 1960s witnessed important debates about the causes of crime, the role of punishment, and the effectiveness of different policing strategies. These debates continue to shape criminological thinking today.
- **Data Availability:** Reliable crime statistics and other relevant data become increasingly available from the late 1960s onwards, enabling a more evidence-based analysis of trends and changes in policing over time.

In summary, 1969 serves as a valuable starting point for this timeline as it captures a period of significant transformation in UK policing, marking the emergence of many contemporary practices and debates that continue to shape the landscape of law enforcement today.

Policing in the UK: A Timeline

1969 - 1979: Community

This era, marked by societal change and rising crime, saw a focus on building relationships and trust between the police and the public. Key changes included an increased emphasis on community policing and the establishment of the Police Complaints Board (1976) to investigate complaints against the police.

1979 - 1997: Enforcement

The Conservative governments of this period prioritised "law and order" policies, emphasising crime reduction and public order. This led to stricter sentencing, increased police powers (including stop and search), and a focus on performance targets and "zero tolerance" policing. This approach, while potentially effective in reducing crime, raised concerns about police discrimination and the over-policing of certain communities.

1997 - 2010: Balance

New Labour sought to balance crime reduction with social justice concerns. This led to the introduction of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) and neighbourhood policing teams, aiming to address local crime and disorder issues. The government also emphasised multiagency collaboration for crime prevention and addressing the social factors contributing to crime.

2010 - 2024: Austerity

This period has been defined by austerity measures, leading to significant cuts in police budgets and staffing levels. Alongside this, the rise of terrorism and cybercrime has led to increased focus on these areas. The introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) aimed to increase local accountability, while advancements in technology have led to a growing emphasis on data-driven policing.

2024: Preventive

In the context of rising concerns about serious crime and anti-social behaviour, the Labour Party is proposing significant reforms to the policing system. These include:

- **Community policing and visibility:** Increasing the number of neighbourhood police officers for a more visible presence.
- **Tackling anti-social behaviour:** Introducing "Respect Orders" to address persistent anti-social behaviour and its root causes.

- **Reducing violence against women and girls:** Establishing specialist rape and domestic abuse units in every police force.
- **Early intervention and prevention:** Investing in youth services and early intervention programmes to prevent crime.
- **Police accountability and standards:** Strengthening the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and improving police training and vetting procedures.

Labour's proposals represent a potential shift in policing strategy towards a stronger role for the Home Office and a renewed emphasis on community policing, early intervention, and addressing specific challenges like violence against women and girls.

Comparison and Contrast

Era	Government	Priorities	Key Changes	Approach
1969-1979	Labour/Conservative	Social unrest, crime, police accountability	Community policing, Police Complaints Board	Community
1979-1997	Conservative	"Law and Order", crime reduction	Stricter sentencing, increased police powers, "zero tolerance" policing	Enforcement
1997-2010	Labour	Crime reduction, social justice	ASBOs, neighbourhood policing, crime prevention	Balance
2010-2024	Conservative and Coalition	Austerity, counterterrorism, police reform	Budget cuts, PCCs, technology-driven policing	Austerity
2024-present	Labour	Neighbourhood crime, violence against women and girls, public trust	Increased community policing, "Respect Orders", specialist units, early intervention	Preventive

Policing strategies in the UK have undergone significant changes since 1969, reflecting shifts in government priorities and societal challenges. While the focus on crime reduction has remained constant, approaches have varied. The current landscape is marked by a potential turning point, with Labour's proposed reforms offering a different approach to addressing crime and building public trust in the police. The future of policing in the UK will likely be shaped by the ongoing debate between different approaches to law enforcement, crime prevention, and community safety.

Labour's "Mission Driven" Approach to "Taking Back Our Streets"

The Labour Party has unveiled a comprehensive plan to "take back our streets" by addressing the rising rates of crime and anti-social behaviour across the UK. This plan is firmly rooted in their "mission driven" approach to governance, which prioritises achieving measurable goals in key policy areas.

Understanding the Problem

Labour acknowledges the complex factors contributing to the current situation, including cuts to police forces, lack of opportunities for young people, and the influence of social media. They argue that years of Conservative neglect have eroded public safety and community confidence.

A Multi-Faceted Strategy

Labour's plan tackles the issue from multiple angles:

- **Reinforcing Neighbourhood Policing:** A cornerstone of the plan is the "Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee." This involves recruiting 13,000 additional neighbourhood police officers and PCSOs, ensuring every community has access to visible and responsive policing with a named officer to contact.
- **Reforming the Justice System:** Labour proposes reforms to make the justice system more effective at preventing crime and rehabilitating offenders. This includes tougher sentences for violent and repeat offenders while addressing underlying causes of criminal behaviour.

- **Empowering Communities:** The plan aims to give communities more power to tackle anti-social behaviour, including introducing a new Anti-Social Behaviour Order and providing resources for local initiatives.
- **Halving Knife Crime:** Labour has set a bold target of halving knife crime within a decade. This will involve investing in early intervention programs, tackling the root causes of youth violence, and introducing tougher sentences for carrying knives.
- **Tackling violence against women and girls:** Focusing on tougher enforcement with specialist police teams and fast-tracked court cases, better support for victims including domestic abuse experts and legal advocates and addressing root causes like misogyny through education. Introducing specific measures to tackle stalking and spiking and strengthen rights for cohabiting couples and workplace whistleblowers.

Alignment with the "Mission Driven" Approach

This plan exemplifies Labour's commitment to "mission driven" governance in several ways:

- **Clear Mission:** The mission is unambiguous: to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, making communities safer. This directly contributes to improving public services and quality of life.
- **Measurable Goals:** The plan includes specific, measurable targets, such as halving knife crime in a decade, allowing progress to be tracked and evaluated.
- **Focus on Outcomes:** The emphasis is on achieving desired outcomes (reduced crime, safer streets) rather than solely focusing on inputs (like police numbers).
- **Long-Term Vision:** The plan addresses both immediate concerns and long-term challenges by investing in preventative measures and addressing root causes, demonstrating a commitment to sustainable solutions.

By framing their policing strategy within the "mission driven" approach, Labour aims to demonstrate a clear commitment to achieving tangible results and improving people's lives. This resonates with their broader message of focused governance and delivering on promises.

The plan's success will depend on effective implementation, adequate funding, and cross-departmental collaboration. However, it represents a comprehensive and ambitious effort to address pressing issues facing communities across the UK.

Redefining Policing Principles for a New Era

Recent research by Bradford et al. (2024¹) has illuminated a critical gap between public expectations and current policing practices. This gap underscores the need for a fundamental shift in policing principles, moving away from a purely crime-centric model towards a more holistic, service-oriented, and community-centric approach.

The research identified key domains where public expectations are not being met, including:

- **Responsive Service:** The public desires readily available police services that respond efficiently to calls for assistance, prioritising public safety and addressing local problems.
- **Community Engagement:** There is a strong demand for proactive community engagement, building trust, understanding local values, and fostering ongoing communication and collaboration.
- **Procedural Justice:** The public expects fair and respectful treatment, with proportionate responses and transparent decision-making.
- **Multi-Agency Collaboration:** Recognising the complexity of social issues, the public supports collaborative approaches with other agencies to provide comprehensive solutions.
- **Addressing Vulnerability:** The public sees a role for police as first responders in situations involving vulnerable individuals, but with an emphasis on collaboration and referral to appropriate support services.

These findings suggest a need to revisit policing principles and focus on principles that prioritise service, collaboration, and community well-being. These principles should guide police reform and ensure that the police service is truly aligned with the needs and expectations of the communities it serves. If we compare these with earlier thinking on principled approaches to policing, using a small sample from an exhaustive list of reviews and reports we can glean some insights:

¹ Available at <https://vulnerabilitypolicing.org.uk/what-do-the-public-want-from-police-towards-a-minimum-policing-standard/> [Accessed 8 October 2024]

Peelian Principles

The Peelian principles, though never formally codified, outline a framework for ethical and effective policing. They emphasise crime prevention, public approval, and the importance of police impartiality and accountability. The principles advocate for a minimal use of force and prioritise the protection of individual liberties.

Scarman Inquiry

The Scarman Inquiry, commissioned in response to the 1981 Brixton riots, examined the underlying causes of social unrest and racial tensions in Britain. The inquiry highlighted the need for police reform, emphasising community policing, improved police training, and greater representation of minority groups within the police force.

Key Recommendations and Findings

Feature	Bradford (et al)	Peelian Principles	Scarman Inquiry
Core Focus	Public-defined service standards, police responsiveness, community engagement	Crime prevention, public approval, minimal force	Community policing, police training, minority representation
Police Role	First responders, risk assessment, multi-agency collaboration	Maintain order, prevent crime, serve the public	Community-oriented, responsive to local needs
Police Conduct	Fairness, respect, proportionality, trustworthiness	Impartiality, accountability, minimal force	
Community Engagement	Essential for building trust and cooperation	Implicit in the concept of public approval	Central to effective policing
Crime Priorities	Context-dependent, responsive to community concerns		

Consistent Recommendations

1. **Community-Oriented Policing:** All three emphasise the importance of police being responsive to community needs and concerns. This includes regular engagement, building trust, and understanding local priorities.
2. **Fair and Impartial Treatment:** Bradford and the Peelian principles stress the need for police to treat all individuals fairly and impartially, regardless of background.
3. **Minimal Use of Force:** The Peelian principles explicitly advocate for minimal force, a concept echoed in Bradford's emphasis on proportionality in police response.
4. **Accountability and Trust:** The Peelian principles and Bradford highlight the importance of police accountability and building public trust. This includes transparency, responsiveness, and following up on reported crimes.

Contrasting Points

1. **Proactive vs. Reactive Policing:** The Peelian principles lean towards proactive policing to prevent crime, while Bradford focuses on the police's role as first responders, suggesting a more reactive approach.
2. **Crime Prevention:** The Peelian principles prioritise crime prevention, while Bradford focuses on the broader service aspects of policing, including risk assessment and multi-agency collaboration.
3. **Specific Recommendations:** The Scarman Inquiry provides concrete recommendations on police training and minority representation, aspects not explicitly addressed in Bradford or the Peelian principles.

Bradford, the Peelian principles, and the Scarman Inquiry offer valuable insights into the role of police in society. While there are differences in emphasis and scope, they consistently recommend a community-oriented approach, fair treatment, minimal force, and the importance of building public trust. These shared recommendations

provide a good point of departure for police reform and improvement, ensuring that the police effectively safeguard and support the communities they are a part of.

Theme 1: Rebuilding Public Trust - A Foundation of Integrity

Imagine a police service where accountability and transparency are paramount. Where a reformed version of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) has the teeth to investigate complaints and hold officers accountable, its reach extending to issues like discriminatory practices and the use of technology. Envision community scrutiny panels, reflecting the diverse voices of the public, empowered to review police policies and practices. Picture a world where police data is readily accessible, allowing for public scrutiny and informed decision-making.

This is the foundation upon which we rebuild public trust. By addressing bias and discrimination head-on through mandatory unconscious bias training, data-driven analysis, and a zero-tolerance policy, we can foster a police service that truly reflects and respects the communities it serves.

Theme 2: Modernising Policing - Embracing the 21st Century

The challenges facing our police force are evolving rapidly. To keep pace, we must move beyond reactive responses and embrace a proactive, preventative approach. This means investing in early intervention programs, diverting individuals, particularly young people, away from the criminal justice system. It means proactively identifying and supporting vulnerable individuals before they become victims or perpetrators of crime.

Imagine a police force equipped to tackle the complexities of cybercrime, fraud, and online child exploitation. A force empowered by technology and data analysis, ethically and responsibly deployed, to enhance crime detection and investigation. This is the future of policing, a future where resources are used effectively to deliver better outcomes for all.

Theme 3: Supporting the Workforce - Investing in Our Guardians

The men and women who serve on the front lines of policing deserve our unwavering support. This means prioritising their wellbeing, providing accessible mental health services, stress management training, and promoting a healthy work-life balance.

Attracting and retaining the best talent requires a commitment to diversifying the workforce, offering competitive salaries and benefits, and providing clear pathways for career progression. Continuous professional development, with a focus on social and emotional skills and evidence-based policing, is crucial for ensuring our officers and staff are equipped to handle the complexities of their roles.

Theme 4: Collaboration and Partnerships - A Unified Approach to Safety

No single agency can solve the complex social issues that contribute to crime. We must foster a culture of collaboration, building strong partnerships with social services, healthcare providers, housing agencies, and community organisations and develop the systems leadership required to make these successful. Imagine integrated service hubs where professionals from different sectors work together to provide holistic support to individuals and families. Picture technology platforms facilitating secure and efficient information sharing between agencies. This is the power of collaboration, a unified approach to community safety, health, and well-being.

Theme 5: Ensuring Value for Money - Maximising Impact

In a time of budget constraint, ensuring value for money is paramount. This means utilising data-driven decision-making to allocate resources effectively, prioritising research-based programs, and exploring opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing. By measuring performance based on joint outcomes, conducting regular evaluations, and publicly reporting on progress, we can ensure that every pound invested in policing delivers maximum impact for our communities.

Theme 6: Out-of-the-Box Thinking - Reimagining Policing

To truly transform policing, we must be willing to challenge conventional thinking and embrace innovative approaches. Imagine specialised response units staffed with social workers, youth workers, and mental health professionals, freeing up police officers to focus on crime prevention and investigation. Envision community-based safety hubs, bringing together police officers, social workers, and community leaders to provide integrated services for families.

The responsible use of technology, such as virtual reality training and predictive policing with ethical safeguards, can revolutionise how we train and deploy our officers. Body-worn cameras with enhanced transparency can promote accountability and build public trust.

Empowering communities through participatory budgeting and restorative justice approaches can foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for safety. By addressing the social determinants of crime and cultivating a "guardian" mindset within policing, we can create a more just and equitable society for all.

Proposed New Police Structure for England and Wales

The Case for Wholesale Reform in Policing:

The policing landscape in England and Wales is at a crossroads. While incremental reforms have been implemented over the years, persistent challenges remain. Issues such as declining public trust, concerns about accountability and transparency, and a perceived disconnect between the police and the communities they serve highlight the need for a more fundamental shift in approach.

Restructuring existing forces, while potentially offering some improvements, is akin to rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. It fails to address the deeper systemic issues that hinder the effectiveness and legitimacy of policing.

Wholesale reform, on the other hand, provides an opportunity to reimagine the very foundations of policing. It allows for a comprehensive re-evaluation of structures, processes, and cultures to create a service that is truly fit for the 21st century. This approach enables a move away from reactive, incident-driven policing towards a proactive, community-focused model that prioritises prevention, early intervention, and building trust.

This section proposes a bold new vision for policing in England and Wales. By shifting power to local communities, fostering collaboration between agencies, and investing in preventative strategies, we can create a police service that is more effective, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the people it serves.

Understanding the Current Structure

The current policing structure in England and Wales is a complex system with various organisations and bodies playing key roles. Here's a brief overview of the main players:

- **Home Office:** The government department responsible for policing.. It sets national policing priorities and allocates funding to police forces.

- **Police Forces:** 43 territorial police forces, each responsible for policing a specific geographic area. Led by Chief Constables, they are responsible for day-to-day policing operations.
- **Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs):** Elected officials who oversee police forces outside of London. They are responsible for holding Chief Constables to account and setting local policing priorities.
- **Local Police Boards:** Scrutiny bodies that hold the PCC and Chief Constable to account on behalf of the local community.
- **College of Policing:** The professional body for policing. It sets standards for training, leadership, and ethical conduct.
- **National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC):** A national body that brings together Chief Constables to coordinate operational policing and develop national approaches to policing challenges.
- **Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC):** Represents PCCs nationally and provides a forum for them to share best practice and work together on national issues.
- **His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS):** The independent inspectorate that assesses police forces and fire and rescue services in England and Wales. It provides independent scrutiny and assurance of policing effectiveness and efficiency.
- **Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC):** The independent body responsible for overseeing the police complaints system in England and Wales. It investigates the most serious matters, including deaths following police contact, and serious misconduct allegations. The IOPC aims to improve public confidence in policing by ensuring accountability and driving learning from complaints.

This existing structure has been criticised for being weak and fragmented, lacking clear accountability, and not being sufficiently responsive to local needs. The proposed new structure aims to address these issues by creating a more integrated, community-focused, and accountable system.

A New Police for a new era.

Imagine a policing landscape in England and Wales where the focus is not just on reacting to crime, but on preventing it. A landscape where every community, regardless of size or location, has equitable access to high-quality policing tailored to its unique needs. This is the vision behind a proposed restructuring that would replace the current fragmented system with a single, unified police service, empowered by regional oversight and driven by a community policing ethos.

At the heart of this new structure would be a strengthened Home Office body, acting as the strategic centre for policing policy and national standards. This body would ensure consistency and clarity in how policing is approached across England and Wales, setting clear expectations for training, use of force, and ethical conduct. It would also be responsible for overseeing a unified police oversight and standards body, providing independent scrutiny and ensuring accountability at every level. This dual approach would foster a culture of transparency and continuous improvement, driving excellence in policing across the nation.

Currently, 43 separate forces operate across England and Wales, leading to inconsistencies in service, resource allocation, and even policing practices. This fragmentation can create disparities, where some communities receive a higher standard of service than others. A unified service would ensure greater consistency and equity, with national standards for training, use of force, and complaint handling promoting professionalism and accountability across the board. Resources could be distributed based on need, ensuring that communities facing greater challenges receive the support they deserve.

Beyond fairness, a single service offers the potential for greater efficiency and effectiveness. Imagine streamlined administrative functions, reduced bureaucracy, and enhanced collaboration between regions. Information sharing and operational coordination would improve, enabling a more agile and effective response to cross-border crime and major incidents. Economies of scale in areas like technology and training could lead to cost savings, allowing more resources to be directed to frontline policing.

In an increasingly complex world, a national policing structure can better support the development and deployment of specialised units to tackle sophisticated crimes like cybercrime, organised crime, and terrorism. A unified service allows for strategic coordination and intelligence gathering, enhancing the ability to identify and disrupt criminal networks operating across multiple regions.

Perhaps most importantly, this reimagined structure places communities at its heart. Regional oversight with strong community representation ensures that policing priorities reflect local needs and concerns. Community Policing Teams, embedded within neighbourhoods, would build trust and foster collaboration, working proactively to address the root causes of crime and prevent issues from escalating.

This shift towards a more preventative and collaborative approach could lead to significant benefits. Stronger community relationships, improved public safety, and a more equitable and effective policing system are all within reach. While transitioning to this new model would undoubtedly present challenges, the potential rewards for individuals, communities, and society make it an idea worthy of serious exploration.

Proposed New Police Structure:

1. Home Office - Policing Directorate

This directorate replaces the current policing responsibilities within the Home Office, providing strategic oversight of policing in England and Wales.

Key Responsibilities:

- **National Strategy:** Develops and maintains the national policing strategy, setting overarching priorities and objectives.
- **Outcome-Focused Funding:** Allocates funding to Regional Policing Authorities based on achieving specific whole systems outcomes, such as crime reduction, increased public trust, and addressing social factors contributing to crime and community safety.
- **Legislation and Policy:** Develops and implements legislation and policies related to the police and wider systems collaboration.

- **Oversight and Accountability:** Oversees the performance of the National Police Commission and Regional Policing Authorities, ensuring they meet national standards and deliver on their objectives.
- **Data and Technology:** Invests in collaborated national information technology and analytical tools to support crime analysis, joint needs assessments and response plans, identify vulnerabilities, and measure the effectiveness of police and collaborative strategies.

2. National Police Commission

A National Police Commission could have a broad mandate encompassing the following functions:

- **Setting Standards:** Develop and maintain national standards for police training, ethics, professional development, and use of force (currently done by the College of Policing).
- **Oversight and Inspection:** Conduct independent inspections and assessments of police forces and Regional Policing Authorities to ensure effectiveness, efficiency, and compliance with standards (currently done by HMICFRS).
- **Complaints and Investigations:** Investigate serious complaints and misconduct allegations against police officers (currently done by the IOPC).
- **Leadership and Coordination:** Facilitate collaboration and information sharing between regional forces, coordinate national responses to major incidents, and provide strategic guidance to chief constables (currently done by the NPCC).
- **Research and Innovation:** Conduct research to identify best practices and promote innovation in policing.
- **Performance Management and Improvement:** Develops a national framework for performance management, setting clear expectations for Regional Policing Authorities. Works to identify learning from inspections and investigations and use this to inform performance improvement strategies.
- **Advice and Guidance:** Provide expert advice and guidance to the Department for Police and other government bodies on policing matters.

Potential Benefits

- **Streamlined Oversight:** A single commission could provide more coordinated and efficient oversight of policing, reducing duplication and potential conflicts between different bodies.
- **Enhanced Accountability:** A unified commission could strengthen accountability by providing a clear and transparent framework for setting standards, conducting inspections, and investigating complaints.
- **Improved Coordination:** The commission could foster better collaboration and information sharing between police forces and other agencies, leading to more effective responses to crime and community safety challenges.
- **Stronger Voice for Policing:** A national commission could provide a stronger and more unified voice for policing, advocating for resources and reforms needed to improve the service.

Potential Risks

- **Over-centralisation:** A powerful national commission could lead to over-centralisation of power and reduce local autonomy in policing.
- **Reduced Independence:** Combining the functions of currently independent bodies (like HMICFRS and IOPC) could raise concerns about the independence of oversight and investigations.
- **Bureaucracy and Inefficiency:** A large and complex commission could become bureaucratic and inefficient, hindering its ability to respond effectively to emerging challenges.
- **Loss of Expertise:** Merging different organisations could lead to a loss of specialised expertise and knowledge within specific areas of policing.

Mitigating the Risks

To mitigate these risks, it would be crucial to:

- **Ensure clear separation of functions:** Maintain clear separation between standard-setting, inspection, investigation, and coordination functions within the commission.
- **Guarantee independence:** Establish robust mechanisms to guarantee the independence of oversight and investigations, potentially through separate divisions or committees within the commission.
- **Promote regional and local input:** Establish strong channels for regional and local input into the commission's work, ensuring that local needs and priorities are considered.
- **Maintain specialised expertise:** Ensure that the commission retains and develops specialised expertise in areas like training, investigations, and research.

Creating a National Police Commission is a bold idea with the potential to significantly improve policing in England and Wales. However, it is not without significant cause for concern, and it is essential to carefully consider the potential risks and implement safeguards to ensure that the commission is independent, effective, accountable, and responsive to the needs of communities.

3. Regional Policing Authorities

- **Collaborative Governance:** Replaces Police and Crime Commissioners with Boards of Directors. Board members would be appointed from local communities, social services, education, housing, local businesses, and youth representatives.
- **Local Needs Assessment:** Each Authority conducts a comprehensive assessment of crime and social issues within its region.
- **Tailored Service Delivery:** Develops a regional policing plan based on local needs, potentially including:
 - **Community Policing Hubs:** Visible and accessible locations for reporting crime, seeking advice, and accessing support services.

- Mobile Response Units: Teams for rapid leadership response to emergencies and other immediate support needs.
- Partnership Programs: Collaboration with schools, mental health services, and community organisations for preventative programs.
- **Performance Monitoring:**
 - **Setting Clear Objectives:**
 - **Outcome-Focused Goals:** The Home Office - National Policing Directorate would set overarching national objectives, but Regional Policing Authorities would translate these into specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals for their region. These goals should focus on outcomes like reducing crime rates, improving public safety, increasing public trust and confidence in policing, and addressing social factors that contribute to crime.
 - **Local Priorities:** Regional Policing Authorities would also set objectives based on local needs and priorities identified through their community engagement and needs assessment processes. This ensures that policing activity is tailored to the specific challenges and concerns of each region.
 - **Performance Measurement:**
 - **Data Collection and Analysis:** Regional Policing Authorities would collect and analyse a range of performance data, including crime statistics, public satisfaction surveys, community engagement metrics, and feedback from partner agencies. This data would be used to track progress towards objectives, identify areas of strength and weakness, and inform decision-making.
 - **Balanced Scorecard Approach:** A balanced scorecard approach could be used to measure performance across a range of perspectives, including community safety, public trust, efficiency and effectiveness, and staff well-being. This ensures a holistic view of performance and avoids an over-reliance on crime statistics alone.

- **Reporting and Transparency:**
 - **Regular Reporting:** Regional Policing Authorities would regularly report on their performance to the Home Office - National Policing Directorate, the National Policing Executive, and the public. These reports should be clear, concise, and accessible, providing a transparent account of progress and challenges.
 - **Community Feedback:** Mechanisms for community feedback on police performance should be established, such as public forums, online surveys, and engagement with community groups. This feedback would be used to inform improvement efforts and ensure that policing is responsive to community needs.
- **Continuous Improvement:**
 - **Identifying Learning:** Regional Policing Authorities would actively identify learning from their performance data, community feedback, inspections and investigations. This learning would be used to inform changes to strategy, policy, and practice.
 - **Collaboration and Best Practice:** Regional Policing Authorities would collaborate with each other and with the National Policing Commission to share best practices and identify innovative approaches to policing. This would help to drive continuous improvement across the service.
 - **Investing in Staff Development:** Performance management should also focus on supporting and developing police officers and staff. This could include providing training, mentoring, and opportunities for professional development.
- **Accountability:**
 - **Performance Reviews:** Regular performance reviews would be conducted by the Home Office - National Policing Directorate to assess the progress of Regional Policing Authorities. These

reviews would consider performance data, community feedback, and independent inspections.

- **Intervention Powers:** In cases of significant underperformance or failure to meet objectives, the Home Office - National Policing Directorate would have the power to intervene and take action to improve performance. This could include providing additional support, requiring the development of improvement plans, or, in extreme cases, making changes to governance arrangements.

4. A single unified police service supporting:

- **Community Policing Teams**
 - Community-Oriented Roles: Officers act as community liaisons, building relationships, identifying risks, and connecting people with resources.
 - Problem-Oriented Policing: Focus on identifying and addressing the underlying causes of crime in specific locations.
 - Early Intervention: Work with vulnerable individuals and families to prevent crime through referrals to support services and programs.
- **Regional Policing Support Centres**
 - Centres of Excellence: House specialised units for areas like cybercrime, economic crime, and organised crime.
 - Regional Collaboration: Share resources and expertise across regions for efficient and effective responses to major incidents.
 - Research and Development: Invest in forensic science, technology, and investigative techniques.
 - Custody: Custody facilities management.
 - Accessibility: Strategically located to provide easy access for Community Policing Teams to consult with specialists.
- **Regional Response Policing Service**

- **Dedicated Emergency Response:** Provides a rapid response to emergency calls, like the ambulance service model.
- **Specialised Training:** Officers receive specialised training in handling emergency situations, including first aid, crisis intervention, and de-escalation techniques.
- **Centralised Dispatch:** Operates with a centralised dispatch system to ensure efficient deployment of resources and quick response times.
- **Integration with Other Emergency Services:** Works closely with ambulance and fire services to provide a coordinated response to emergencies.

Considering the Balance of Power

Any significant reform of policing must consider its impact on the delicate balance of power between the police, the judiciary, and the government.

The potential implications:

Current Tripartite Balance

In the current system, the balance is maintained as follows:

- **Police:** Responsible for enforcing the law, investigating crime, and maintaining order. They operate with operational independence but are accountable to the government (through the Home Office) and the judiciary (through the courts).
- **Judiciary:** Independent of the government and the police. Courts interpret the law, ensure fair trials, and hold the police accountable for their actions.
- **Government:** Sets policing priorities, provides funding, and oversees the police through legislation and policy. However, the government cannot interfere with operational policing decisions or individual investigations.

Potential Implications of the Proposed Structure

The proposed reforms could shift this balance in several ways:

- **Strengthened Government Oversight:** The Department for Police, with its expanded role in setting strategy and allocating funding, could potentially increase government influence over policing.
- **Empowered Local Communities:** Regional Policing Authorities, with their community representation, could shift power away from central government and towards local communities.
- **Increased Accountability:** The National Policing Executive, with its combined oversight and investigative functions, could strengthen accountability mechanisms for police conduct.
- **Potential for Blurring of Lines:** The combination of functions within the National Policing Executive could blur the lines between operational policing, standard-setting, and investigations, potentially impacting the separation of powers.

Maintaining the Balance

To ensure the tripartite balance is maintained, the following safeguards would be crucial:

- **Clear Legal Framework:** A robust legal framework should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the Department for Police, the National Policing Executive, Regional Policing Authorities, and the judiciary.
- **Independent Judiciary:** The judiciary must remain completely independent of the police and the government, ensuring that courts can continue to hold the police accountable without interference.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Decision-making processes within the new structure must be transparent and accountable to the public, with clear mechanisms for scrutiny and challenge.
- **Checks and Balances:** A system of checks and balances should be built into the structure to prevent any one body from accumulating excessive power. This could include parliamentary oversight, independent audits, and public consultations.

While the proposed reforms offer the potential for a more effective and community-focused police service, it's essential to carefully consider their impact on the tripartite balance of power. By implementing strong safeguards and ensuring clear separation of functions, the reforms can strengthen accountability and improve policing while upholding the fundamental principles of justice and democracy.

This revised structure has the potential to significantly improve policing in England and Wales. By focusing on community engagement, early intervention, and collaborative working, it could lead to a more effective, accountable, and trusted police service.

Feature	Traditional Policing	"New Policing"
Mindset	Primarily reactive, incident-driven, focused on enforcement and apprehension	Proactive, problem-solving oriented, focused on prevention, early intervention, and community partnership
Role	Primarily crime fighting and law enforcement	Expanded role encompassing social service, community building, and addressing social determinants of crime
Structure	Hierarchical, centralised command and control	Decentralised, flexible, with greater autonomy for local officers and community input
Relationship with Community	Often distant, with emphasis on authority and control	Collaborative, built on trust, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for safety
Use of Technology	Primarily for information gathering and communication	Leveraged for prevention, data analysis, virtual training, and enhanced transparency
Response to Social Issues	Limited engagement, often referring to other agencies	Active involvement in addressing social determinants of crime, partnering with social services and community organisations
Accountability	Internal investigations, limited external oversight	Robust independent oversight, community scrutiny panels, and transparent data reporting

Training	Focused on law enforcement and use of force	Expanded to include de-escalation techniques, social and emotional skills, cultural awareness, and ethical use of technology
Measurement of Success	Primarily based on crime statistics and arrests	Broader metrics encompassing community well-being, public trust, whole of society approaches and reduction in social harms
Examples	Traditional patrol, rapid response to calls, investigation of reported crimes	Specialised response units for mental health crises, community safety hubs, restorative justice programs, predictive policing with ethical safeguards

This table highlights the key differences between traditional policing models and the emerging paradigm of "new policing." While traditional policing remains essential for law enforcement and responding to crime, the "new policing" model recognises the need for a more holistic, preventative, and community-centred approach to address the complex challenges facing society today.

Conclusion: A Path Forward

This white paper has laid out a bold vision for the future of policing in the UK. It is a vision rooted in collaboration, innovation, and a deep commitment to public service. By embracing these reforms, we can build a police service that is not only effective and accountable but also truly reflective of the communities it serves. The choice is ours: continue to apply plasters to a broken leg or embark on a journey of genuine transformation. This white paper illuminates the path forward.

The Police Reform Agenda

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