

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE SUBMISSION

Leapwise evidence to support the Public Accounts Committee's inquiry on increasing police productivity

About us

1. **Leapwise is a mission-driven strategy consultancy helping police, justice and community safety organisations to maximise public impact and value for taxpayers.** Our work focuses on ensuring public money is invested wisely; building high performing inclusive workforces across these sectors; and shaping national, regional, and local policy and partnerships to help to build a safer society.
2. **Improving productivity is at the heart of our work across UK policing.** In the past 5 years, we have worked with the six national policing organisations, including the Home Office, and with the majority of UK police forces (including Police Scotland and PSNI), and our experience includes:
 - developing evidence-based business cases for multi-million-pound investments in services and infrastructure across the sector
 - identifying hundreds of millions of pounds in efficiency savings nationally and locally
 - building the most advanced police workforce insights capability in the UK
 - developing inspectorate-recognised service improvements at force level
 - developing ways of better measuring (and tracking) productivity improvements.
3. **As part of our commitment to public impact, we seek to significantly influence major national policy developments on an unpaid bases,** including through recent work on the potential benefits of live facial recognition and our 2024 work with the Police Foundation arguing for the need to establish the new National Centre of Policing, which was cited in the Home Office's press release announcing linked reforms in 2024.

Introduction

4. **We welcome this important inquiry by the Public Account Committee** and noted the recently published NAO Police Productivity report. We are **particularly supportive of its call for a review of HO approach to funding police forces, its recommendation to accelerate the benefits from adopting innovative practices and technology, and proactively horizon scanning to timely adapt for changing demands.**

5. **We agree that the planned police reforms present an opportunity to address some of the structural barriers** to improving police productivity, and have extensively discussed this in our previous publications on the future of policing¹
6. **We want to emphasise three main areas** where we feel progress is particularly urgently needed and provide additional insights on how to enact some of the changes the NAO suggested. The following sections cover these three issues – **funding strategy, workforce strategy and police structures** – in order.

Funding strategy: The current funding strategy leads to inefficiencies and fails to incentivise or enable long-term productivity improvement.

7. **A people-intensive policing model is financially unsustainable.** 77% of police funding is committed to staff pay², versus 49.2% for the NHS³. Good policing depends on having skilled staff and excellent face-to-face service delivery, of course. However, this degree of dependence on labour is excessive – and the product of historic under-investment in digital and physical infrastructure (e.g. facial recognition, automation capabilities, appropriately located, safe custody facilities). Dependence on labour exposes any sector to declining value for money – as the sector will face pressure to increase wages to remain competitive, regardless of whether productivity has improved⁴.
8. **Policing invests £102m less in productivity initiatives relative to the NHS.** As a proportion of total spend, the productivity initiatives funded by the 2024 Spring Statement represent 1.2% of total policing expenditure for FY 2024–5, compared with 1.8% for the equivalent funding made available for the NHS⁵. For policing, this is the difference between investing £230m into innovation versus approximately £332m, a gap of around £102m. Over time, this is likely to limit the capacity of policing to improve productivity. Rebalancing this to invest more in innovation is likely to help reduce the exposure to rising labour costs over time, as forces across the country become more productive through investment.
9. **Officer-headcount based funding strategy inhibits innovative models of service delivery.** By focusing on specific ‘inputs’ (officer numbers), the Police Uplift Programme drove ‘reverse- civilianisation’ – with police officers filling roles previously performed (usually as well or better) by less expensive police staff. We estimate that reverse civilianisation is now costing policing at least £55m per annum – and rising. We arrive at this estimate by comparing the ratio of police staff to officers, across four key areas of policing⁶, at two points in time: 2018 (pre- uplift) and 2024 (post- uplift). The £55m figure is the difference between staffing those areas of police business at the 2018 ratios versus the current set- up, holding the total workforce within each area constant. A sustainable

¹ Gash, T. and Muir, R., *Fit for the Future*, 2025

² NAO Police Productivity Report, Session 2024–2026

³ Kings Fund, <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/data-and-charts/key-facts-figures-nhs>

⁴ This is the ‘Baumol effect’ described here: <https://www.chicagobooth.edu/review/diagnosing-william-baumols-cost-disease>

⁵ All figures based on 2024 Spring Statement

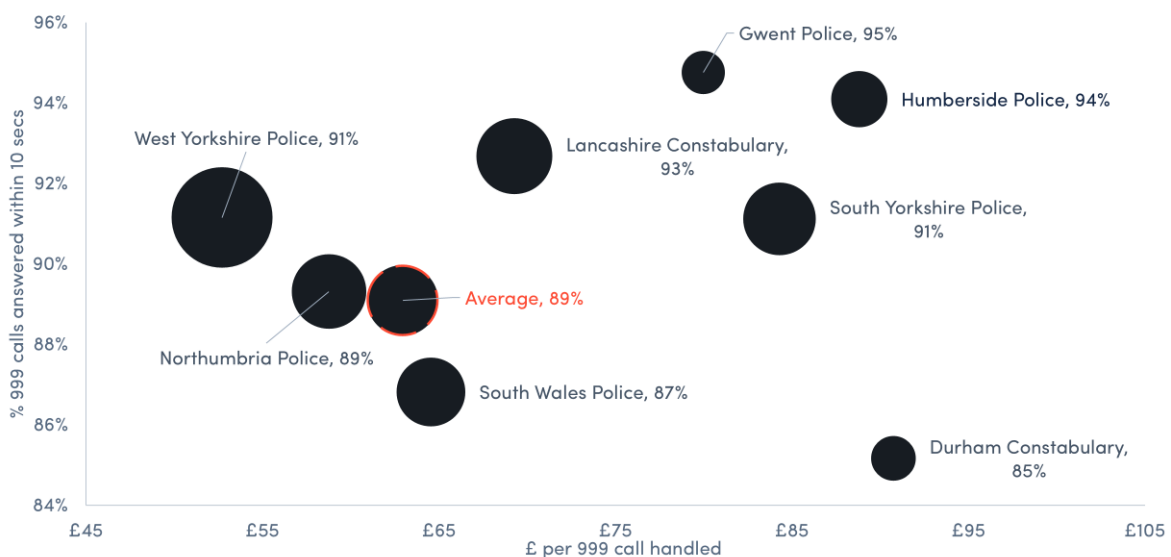
⁶ Specialist Community Liaison, Criminal Justice, Support Functions and Central Communications Units– all defined further at table F4 of ‘Police workforce, England and Wales, as at 31 March 2025’; data tables (second edition)

delivery model should involve a balanced funding strategy between officers, staff, technology and innovation.

- The absence of clear productivity measures makes it difficult to incentivise productivity improvement.** As highlighted in the NAO’s report, the lack of agreed Home Office productivity definitions reduce government’s – and public’s – ability to assess and reward productivity. While not deliberate, we believe that this allows declining productivity as a result of the funding strategy above to be hidden. Developing effective comparative measures of police productivity is technically challenging and requires improvements in police data infrastructure. However, the power of comparison is considerable – as shown in an example analysis from public data comparing the ‘unit cost’ of 999 calls with control room ‘performance’. The comparison is crude – with a range of measurement issues to be addressed – but it is still instructive of how simple comparisons can spark questions, and shift the focus towards value for money.

Leapwise example indicator to support Home Office in defining police productivity

999 performance target vs cost per call handled,
Year to date, September 2024- August 2025



Bubble size indicates total call volume
£ per call derived from total 999 calls handled divided by Police staff
FTE figures: Home Office Workforce statistics as at March 2025` `

LEAPWISE

Workforce strategy: The current approach to workforce planning and people management is undermining police productivity

- The current workforce mix within policing drives inefficiency.** As noted above, the current officer number targets have resulted in police officers perform roles that could be performed as well or better by police staff.⁷ Options exist to address this problem, with the most radical being to entirely remove officer number targets. A less drastic approach would be to redefine the police ‘officer’ targets into a broader ‘crime fighters/

⁷ <https://leapwiseadvisory.com/policing/the-police-uplift-programme-part-2/>

community support' definition. The Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee already follows this logic, by including PCSOs and Special Constables within its remit. We believe there is an urgent need for a police workforce strategy that assesses the appropriate workforce mix and skill-sets for the future.

12. **Skills gaps are growing, as investments continue to prioritise 'traditional' policing skills.** The service, supported by the College of Policing, has undertaken considerable and important work to develop policing skills and knowledge. However, recent investments – for example the development of the Neighbourhood Policing career pathway – can still feel inadequately focused on critical skills gaps in areas such as digital investigation, cybercrime, and technology improvement (particularly skills to develop and intelligently deploy new digital solutions, automation and AI). A key reason for this is that many in policing believe that investing in the development of staff (rather than officers) is 'risky' – believing that staff who receive expensive training may move on to higher paid private sector roles. This approach does not appear to us to be sustainable – and ultimately it may be necessary to entirely rethink approaches to both staff pay and training and career paths in these domains.
13. **Poor workforce wellbeing is reducing workforce productivity.** Wellbeing is a key challenge, leading to growing sickness absence that reduces deployable capacity by £71-124m a year. The National Police Wellbeing Survey 2025, delivered by Leapwise, highlighted that 45% of the police workforce often or always feel burnt out because of their job (compared to 30% in the NHS), and 46% find are emotionally exhausted by their work (compared to 34% in the NHS).⁸ These rates are much higher among police officers: with 67% often feeling physically exhausted, and 58% burnt out and emotionally exhausted due to their job.⁹ Many report 'compassion fatigue' – i.e. the inability to empathise with victims of crime and colleagues specifically due to the demands of the job. The proportion of police officers on long term sick leave has increased from 1.5% in March 2021 to 2.2% in 2025 – a 47% increase in the proportion of officers sick for more than 28 days.¹⁰ This means that 3,165 officers are off-duty for considerable periods – with a staffing cost of approximately £52.3-91.6m a year for policing.¹¹ Additionally, 1.9% of staff and 2.5% of PCSOs were also on long term sickness absence of more than 28 days, costing the service £18.7-32.7m a year.
14. **Rising numbers of officers on adjusted and recuperative duties are adding to pressures on the remaining workforce.** Increasing officer numbers on adjusted and recuperative duties pose a growing challenge to police capacity and productivity. There has been an increase in the proportion of officers on adjusted and recuperative duties – from 9.3% in 2022, to 10.6% in 2025. We should not assume that all officers on adjusted and recuperative duties are less productive – though some officers with restricted working time and significant adjustments certainly will be. However, the trend remains worrying

⁸ [National police wellbeing survey results published | Oscar Kilo](#)

⁹ [National police wellbeing survey 2025 – Deep dive: Drivers of wellbeing | Oscar Kilo](#)

¹⁰ Home Office 2025, 'Police workforce, England and Wales, as at 31 March 2025'; data tables (second edition)

¹¹ Data on the duration of long-term sickness absence is not published nationally, but [FOI data from West Yorkshire](#) (April 2025) shows that of long-term sick employees, 68% recorded 60-120 days absence, and 32% recorded 120-365 days absence. The cost estimation (i) assumes the distribution of long-term sick duration holds nationally; and (ii) uses minimum duration as the lower bound, and midpoint duration as the upper bound.

for two reasons. First, our work finds that many officers and staff on recuperative/adjusted duties do not feel adequately supported to make a full contribution (there are considerable variations across forces in the type and extent of support available to support those on recuperative duties a sustainable recovery to full duties). Second, this trend combines with growing sickness absence to reduce overall deployable strength and increase workloads for the remaining workforce. This highlights the need for careful workforce planning and temporary redeployment to avoid aggravating burnout among remaining workforce.

15. **Overspends on overtime are reducing productivity in the short and long-term.** Many forces have high overspends on overtime and officers are frequently unable to take rest days. Significant overtime budgets are registered especially in large forces (e.g. estimated 22% of pay costs in GMP and 17% in the MPS), which indicates significant capacity pressures and increased operational risk.^{12 13} While there is no single 'right' amount to spend on overtime across the country and short-term spikes are to be expected, our work with forces suggests that overtime rates of 10–15% are typically more optimal. In addition, although data on rest days is not systematically published, there is evidence that in many forces a high number of rest days are owed to officers – an average of 7–10 days owed per officer across GMP, MPS and Norfolk Constabulary.¹⁴ This may be exacerbating wellbeing and burn-out issues highlighted above.
16. **Resolving conduct matters more quickly could save around £61 million annually.** In 2025, 16% of the workforce reported experiencing bullying or harassment in the past 12 months, and 12% reported discrimination within the force.¹⁵ While these incidents are investigated, timeliness challenges come at a cost, reducing deployable capacity and impacting productivity. Less than half (45%) of conduct matter cases involving police officers were resolved within 3 months in 2024, and 15% took more than 12 months (614 cases, with officers off deployment).¹⁶ For recordable conduct matter cases that represent more serious cases, 43% of cases took over 12 months to resolve (with 692 officers off deployment during this time). This impacts productivity by reducing deployable capacity – costing policing £211m (equivalent to 2,816 officers), and an increase of 146% compared to 2022. If all cases were resolved within 9 months, this would save policing ~£61m per year through avoided pay during long delays for investigations (as officers could either be deployed or dismissed in a timely way), and ~£144m per year if all cases were resolved within 3 months. The impact of the Police (Conduct) (Amendment) Regulations 2024 on productivity is open-ended, increasing short-term workload but with opportunities for long-term gains if misconduct processes, early interventions, and organisational alignment are implemented effectively.

¹² [FOI data on GMP overtime financials](#) (February 2024)

¹³ [FOI data on MPS overtime financials](#) (July 2024)

¹⁴ FOI data published showed [Greater Manchester Police](#) owed 52,730 rest days to officers from constable to chief inspector rank, an average of 7 rest days per officer (Sep 2024); the [Metropolitan Police Service](#) owed 266,145 rest days, an average of 8 days per officer (May 2024); and [Norfolk Constabulary](#) owed 19,000 rest days to officers from Constable to Chief Inspector ranks, amounting to an average of 10 days per officer.

¹⁵ National Police Wellbeing Survey 2025

¹⁶ Home Office. Police misconduct, England and Wales: year ending 31 March 2024

Police structures: Current policing structures fail to balance local responsiveness and national productivity appropriately

17. **The localised policing model in England and Wales has clear strengths, but there are several areas of clear inefficiency.** Leapwise has summarised key issues in the current policing model and structures in our joint publication with the Police Foundation, *Fit for the future: the Case for a reformed national policing landscape*.¹⁷ The most relevant issues to this inquiry are the excessive decentralisation of work and approaches to police technology, procurement, 'HR' (particularly in relation to recruitment, learning and development, and workforce planning) and operational support functions (e.g. forensics, air support). We are wary of an over-centralised approach that creates bureaucracy and stifles innovation. However, the inefficiency of 43 forces doing individual work to assess which critical systems they require, procure these systems from suppliers (sometimes with very underpowered commercial teams), and then incentivise suppliers to continuously improve is clear – and a reason for the current government's reforms in this area.
18. **National policing structures are excessively fragmented and underpowered.** The fragmentation of national policing capabilities drives significant inefficiency – with somewhat overlapping remits still evident across the major national policing delivery bodies (Home Office, NPCC, College of Policing, Police Digital Service, Bluelight Commercial, etc.).¹⁸ Work is underway to establish the National Centre of Policing to address this fragmentation (though the precise scope and nature of planned arrangements remains unclear at the time of writing). However, as a test of system governance and accountability, we would be keen for the Inquiry to identify who is responsible for improving police productivity at present and in future – noting that an important new function has been established within the College of Policing (Centre for Police Productivity) but its remit, funding and authority to drive required improvements is not immediately apparent.
19. **Wider structures may also be sub-optimal.** There have been many high profile calls to restructure policing and create a more 'regionalised' policing model through force mergers (e.g. moving from 43 forces to 9, and bringing counter-terrorism and serious and organised crime policing structures closer together). Leapwise has not conducted in-depth work on this topic, but we do believe that such work needs to be undertaken urgently. We note, however, that choices about police structures cannot relate to on-paper efficiencies from 'economies of scale' alone. Ultimately, policing will only improve its productivity over the long-term if there is appropriate local and national democratic oversight – and this will likely best be achieved by building on existing mayoral governance models operating at city-regional level, rather than 'invented' structures.

Leapwise welcomes the opportunity to provide further evidence on specific points above, if needed. We will follow the Inquiry's work and conclusions with interest, and continue to support improvements in police productivity as the Committee tracks the sector's progress in future.

Leapwise, November 2025

¹⁷ Gash, T. and Muir, R., [Fit for the Future](#), 2025

¹⁸ Gash, T. and Muir, R., [Fit for the Future](#), 2025