

Home Affairs Committee

Police response to the 2024 summer disorder

Second Report of Session 2024–25

HC 381

Home Affairs Committee

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Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 1 April 2025, to be printed. It was published on 14 April 2025 by authority of the House of Commons.
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Summary

The disorder which took place in July and August 2024 shocked the country, as did the appalling murders of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar which preceded it. The events marked the worst disorder since 2011 and were alarming for their violence and targeted nature, with scenes of rioters trying to break into asylum hotels and attacking mosques, community centres and libraries. The level of violence meted out to police officers was deplorable.

This was not protest. Those participating in disorder were not policed more strongly because of their supposed political views but because they were throwing missiles, assaulting police officers and committing arson. It was disgraceful to see the police officers who bore the brunt of this violence being undermined by baseless claims of ‘two-tier policing’.

Thanks to the efforts of thousands of police officers, many of whom suffered serious injuries, the disorder was quelled swiftly, and loss of life was averted. Yet the effectiveness of welfare provisions for individual police officers varied significantly, including some police officers going without water and food for hours, and some injured officers having to convey themselves to hospital. The events also highlighted shortcomings in national policing structures, which meant that individual forces were not always able to access the support they needed, and the Government and police leaders did not always have an accurate picture of what was happening on the ground.

The Government intervened in August to support police forces to respond to the disorder and has since announced a White Paper to deliver major reforms to national policing structures in England. We expect the Government to be ambitious in its proposals to increase the effectiveness of our police forces and support them to rebuild trust.

But the disorder also demonstrated that effective policing relies on a supportive criminal justice system in order to prosecute crimes and imprison offenders. The Government acted in the summer to make sure that this support was in place, but wider problems remain in the courts and in the prison estate. The Government’s ambitions for reducing crime will require better long-term alignment between Home Office policies on crime and policing and those of the Ministry of Justice relating to the criminal justice system.

1 Introduction and overview of disorder

Our inquiry

1. The murders of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar in Southport and subsequent disorder shocked the whole country, and raised many important issues worthy of inquiry. Shortly after this Committee was established, we decided to conduct a short, focused inquiry into the summer disorder, anticipating that there would be a wider response from Government. We focused specifically on the immediate policing response to the disorder. We received written and oral evidence from 10 police forces to support our inquiry, including some of those who faced the most significant disorder, as well as the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and several other interested organisations.
2. When this inquiry began, the attack in Southport was still subject to a criminal trial and could not be discussed in Parliament. In choosing to focus on the policing response to the disorder we have not lost sight of the tragic events which preceded it. Our thoughts remain with the families of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar, and with all those harmed by the horrific attack in Southport. We will separately continue to scrutinise the Government's progress in improving the systems which failed to prevent the attack.

The disorder

3. Following the murders of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar in Southport on 29 July 2024, a group broke off from a peaceful vigil on the evening of 30 July and gathered outside Southport Mosque. Violence soon broke out, with both police and the mosque targeted.¹ Over the next week, disorder broke out across several towns and cities including in London, Hartlepool and Aldershot on 31 July; in Sunderland on 2 August; in Hull, Liverpool, Blackpool and Stoke-on-Trent on 3 August; in Rotherham,

1 [Q51](#)

Tamworth and Middlesbrough on 4 August; and in Plymouth on 5 August.² On Wednesday 7 August the National Police Chiefs' Council activated its national mobilisation plan, involving the creation of a national strategic reserve of public order officers. While further anti-immigration protests and counter-protests took place across the country, significant disorder was largely avoided after this date.³ In total, 246 events (including protests, counter-protests and incidents of disorder) took place, of which 88 were deemed significant, with many of these resulting in disorder.⁴ By 22 January 2025 the disorder had led to 1,804 arrests and 1,072 charges, the majority of which were for serious public order offences.⁵

4. The nature of disorder varied significantly so this report will not provide a comprehensive account of each incidence. Nonetheless, there were several common features. For example, in many cases violence emerged, sometimes quite rapidly, out of planned protest: South Yorkshire Police, Humberside Police and Staffordshire Police all reported having been notified of a peaceful protest in advance of at least one occurrence of disorder, and Merseyside Police, Humberside Police and the Metropolitan Police ('the Met') all reported disorder developing quickly after a protest had gathered.⁶ As well as having to quickly respond to rapidly escalating disorder, police officers were the target of significant violence. Chief Constable Webster of Cleveland Police described the level of violence towards officers as "quite incredible" including arson attacks on police vehicles and missiles being thrown, while Chief Constable Chris Noble of Staffordshire Police described police officers in Tamworth having petrol poured on them in an attempt to set them on fire.⁷ At least 199 officers were assaulted, with 302 injured.⁸
5. In many cases, aggression and violence was targeted at certain communities. In Southport, as we have stated, disorder broke out after a crowd gathered outside the local mosque. In Rotherham, the police were notified in advance that a protest was planned outside a hotel housing asylum seekers, while in Hull protesters made an unplanned move to do

2 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, ['An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1'](#), 18 December 2024

3 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, ['An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1'](#), 18 December 2024

4 National Police Chiefs' Council (SDR0013)

5 National Police Chiefs' Council, ['Public help sought to identify Summer 2024 disorder suspects'](#), 3 March 2025

6 [Qq2](#), [51](#), [66](#)

7 [Qq2](#), [3](#)

8 National Police Chiefs' Council (SDR0013); His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, ['An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1'](#), 18 December 2024

the same.⁹ In Tamworth, Chief Constable Chris Noble described how a hotel housing 135 asylum seekers was targeted by people who were trying to set fire to the hotel.¹⁰ Similarly, on 31 July in Newton Heath, Greater Manchester, 70 protesters took part in a protest outside a hotel housing asylum seekers, while in Aldershot disorder also took place outside an asylum hotel.¹¹ Other targets of violence included a community centre in Hartlepool and Spellow Library in Liverpool.¹²

6.

CONCLUSION

We received no evidence to dispute the characterisation of violent disorder between 30 July and 7 August 2024. Many events held during this period began as protests and remained as such. But while some instances of disorder may have originated as protests, they quickly degenerated into violence. In some cases the chosen sites of protests, such as asylum hotels, were at best controversial and at worst an incitement to violence. Police were left with no choice but to prepare for and provide a strong response. We commend the bravery and professionalism of those officers who worked for long hours in extremely difficult circumstances, many of them suffering injury and other trauma.

Social media mis- and disinformation

7. It has been asserted that mis- and disinformation surrounding the identity of the Southport attacker was a driver of disorder, including by the Home Office who stated that “the online environment played a significant role in inciting violence, with initial speculation and misinformation purporting that the attacker was an asylum seeker.”¹³ In particular, this false rumour that the attacker was an asylum seeker spread rapidly in the days following the murders of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar. The AI intelligence company Logically stated that between the false information being published on 29 July and midday the following day, it had received 30,000 mentions on X across 18,000 different accounts.¹⁴
8. On 29 July, between 13:07 and 19:18, Merseyside Police published several statements about the Southport attack, confirming certain details including, at 17:25, that a 17-year-old male from Banks had been arrested, and, at

9 [Q2](#) [Chief Constable Poultney, Chief Constable Heaton]

10 [Q4](#)

11 Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Police ([SDR0012](#)); BBC News, ‘[Further arrests over Aldershot protest disorder](#)’, 4 August 2024

12 [Q3](#) [Chief Constable Webster]; BBC News, ‘[City clean-up begins after ‘deplorable’ riots](#)’, 4 August 2024

13 Home Office ([SDR0015](#))

14 Logically ([SDR0011](#))

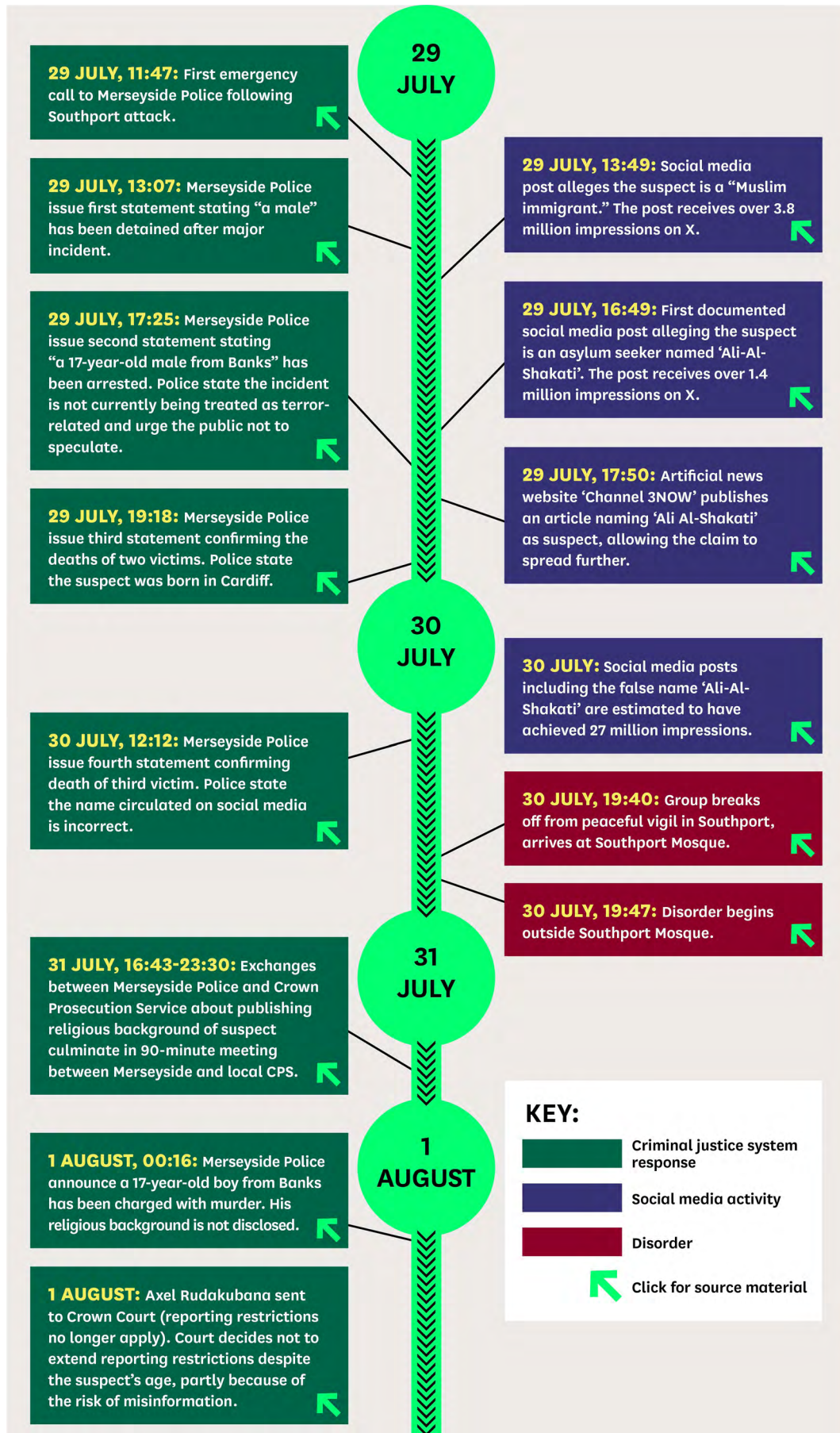
19:18, that the suspect was born in Cardiff. However, crucially, at this point Merseyside Police were unable to publish the identity of the suspect because he was under the age of 18.¹⁵ In the absence of information confirming the suspect's identity, misinformation began to circulate online suggesting that the attacker was an asylum seeker named 'Ali-Al-Shakati' (an invented name) who had arrived in the UK by boat in 2023. One tweet including this information was posted at 16:49 on 29 July and retweeted several thousand times; the claim was subsequently reported by the artificial news website 'Channel3Now' at 17:50, which we have heard allowed the claim to spread further still.¹⁶ At 12:12 on 30 July, the day of the Southport disorder, Merseyside Police confirmed that the information circulating on social media was false, but were still unable to confirm the suspect's real identity.¹⁷ The timeline below details how information was published in the immediate aftermath of the attack.

15 As the [Crown Prosecution Service](#) told us, "When Rudakubana appeared in the youth court an automatic reporting restriction under section 49 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 (CYPA) applied. Section 49 CYPA absolutely prohibits the publication of the name, address or school or any other matter that is likely to identify a person under 18 concerned in the proceedings."

16 Logically ([SDR001](#)); Written evidence received for the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee's inquiry into Social media, misinformation and harmful algorithms, Marc Owen Jones ([SMH0071](#))

17 Merseyside Police, '[Update on major incident in Southport](#)', 30 July 2024

Timeline of information published after Southport attack



Restrictions on the publication of information relating to criminal proceedings

9. As well as possible legal restrictions on the publication of a suspect's identity, there are restrictions on the publication of material if it "creates a substantial risk that the course of justice in the proceedings in question will be seriously impeded or prejudiced."¹⁸ The Crown Prosecution Service's 'Publicity and the Criminal Justice System' protocol sets out how the CPS, working with police and media organisations, aims to balance the principle of open justice "while at the same time balancing the rights of defendants to a fair trial."¹⁹ Alongside this guidance, the CPS works directly with the police where necessary to provide advice over what material may risk prejudicing a trial if published.²⁰
10. In the case of the Southport attacker, the CPS told us that there was a significant volume of material that was judged to be potentially relevant to the criminal trial, and therefore could not be published. This included the suspect's previous conviction and Prevent referrals. The CPS stated that where the police have a legitimate policing purpose to release such material they would listen to their views, but that ultimately would expect the CPS view to prevail, given the importance of not jeopardising a criminal trial.²¹ However, notwithstanding initial legal restrictions in the Southport case, the CPS told us that they were not averse to more factual information about the suspect being published in the immediate aftermath of the attack, as this was not deemed to be potentially prejudicial.²² A specific disclosure being considered was the publication of the suspect's Christian religious background, which Merseyside Police considered publishing on 31 July 2024. Chief Constable Serena Kennedy told us that this was being considered because of the negative impact that misinformation was having on Merseyside's Muslim communities.²³
11. The CPS told us that in the evening of 31 July, CPS headquarters was asked for advice on a press statement which confirmed the Southport suspect's religion; the national CPS initially suggested, and later confirmed, that there were no concerns about this information being published.²⁴ However, as the

18 [Contempt of Court Act 1981](#)

19 Crown Prosecution Service, '[Publicity and the Criminal Justice System](#)', 1 October 2005

20 Letter from the Crown Prosecution Service regarding process and guidance around publication of prosecution information, [21 February 2025](#)

21 Letter from the Crown Prosecution Service regarding process and guidance around publication of prosecution information, [21 February 2025](#)

22 Letter from the Crown Prosecution Service regarding process and guidance around publication of prosecution information, [21 February 2025](#)

23 [Q54](#)

24 Letter from the Crown Prosecution Service regarding process and guidance around publication of prosecution information, [21 February 2025](#)

CPS acknowledges, “simultaneous, fast-moving” discussions were taking place between Merseyside Police and the local CPS. The CPS states that “it was never suggested that this information risked prejudice to the trial”, while acknowledging that the local CPS had a “different view to the police as to whether this information should be released.”²⁵

12. Chief Constable Kennedy provided more detail on the discussions with her local deputy Crown Prosecutor, which took place during what she described as a 90-minute discussion almost entirely about whether or not to disclose the suspect’s religion.²⁶ While the CPS stated that no specific advice was given that this information would be prejudicial, Chief Constable Kennedy stated that it was the “very clear view” of the local CPS that information about the religion should not be included, and moreover that this was “because of the impact on the criminal justice process.”²⁷ Chief Constable Kennedy told us that it was this “direction” which meant the information about the suspect’s religion was not published.²⁸

Impact on disorder

13. Police forces told us, as the Home Office stated, that social media was a significant factor in the spread of disorder as it was used to disseminate information about protests and other action; however, the extent to which dis- and misinformation were a specific driver of disorder is not clear.²⁹ Chief Constable Kennedy was not able to say whether she thought publishing information about the suspect’s religion would have prevented further disorder, and told us that her main motivation in publishing the information was to try to protect Muslim communities, rather than to prevent disorder.³⁰ Moreover, Chief Constable Webster suggested that in Cleveland there was a significant amount of opportunistic participation driven by social deprivation, rather than social media:

Most of the people who came through Teesside Crown Court on the first day of sentencing had been out, had had too much to drink, had walked past and thought, “Why not?” That is not a representative sample, but much of that desperation, despair, lack of hope, lack of stake and nothing to lose certainly impacted on the disorder that took place in Cleveland.³¹

25 Letter from the Crown Prosecution Service regarding process and guidance around publication of prosecution information, [21 February 2025](#)

26 [Q52](#)

27 [Q58](#)

28 [Q52](#)

29 [Qq18](#), [67](#)

30 [Q57](#)

31 [Q45](#)

Impact on public trust

14. Whether or not the lack of disclosure helped to foment disorder, we heard that growing lack of trust in institutions overall, including the police, made it difficult to explain with credibility why certain information could not be released and enabled misinformation to take hold. Emily Spurrell, Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Chair of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), told us:

When you are trying to go out and explain to the public [...] why certain information is not being put in the public domain to protect that process [the judicial process], we were coming at it from a point where they did not trust what we were saying. [We] need to look at how we rebuild that trust in all the different sectors so people know that they are going to get the right service when they want it. Then when we do have to explain to them or make difficult decisions, they understand why that is happening.³²

Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist of the Met and Chief Constable Harrington, NPCC lead for public order during the disorder, both agreed that there was a general lack of trust in institutions, including the police, and that this was creating a vicious circle where low trust enables disinformation and misinformation, which in turn can further undermine trust.³³ Chief Constable Harrington told us that neighbourhood policing was key to building trust.³⁴

15. Chief Constable Kennedy told us that joint working between the CPS and Merseyside Police was regularised after July, with joint meetings taking place with the CPS, both nationally and locally, relating to communications in October and January about further developments in the case.³⁵ Despite this improvement, both Chief Constable Kennedy and the CPS acknowledged that the shared media protocol informing discussions of this nature, which was first published in October 2005, was not fit for the social media age.³⁶ The CPS stated that the revision of the guidelines, which is currently being finalised, will take into account several factors including the changing media landscape.^{37,38}

32 [Q71](#)

33 [Q72](#)

34 [Q72](#)

35 [Q56](#)

36 [Q57](#); Letter from the Crown Prosecution Service regarding process and guidance around publication of prosecution information, [21 February 2025](#)

37 Letter from the Crown Prosecution Service regarding process and guidance around publication of prosecution information, [21 February 2025](#)

38 The Speaker of the House of Commons has [separately announced](#) a review of the House's sub judice resolution, which provides that MPs should not bring up in Parliament matters which are subject to live court proceedings. The rule was last revised in November 2001.

16. Ultimately, both the CPS and Merseyside Police were limited by the Contempt of Court Act 1981, which restricts the publication of potentially prejudicial material in criminal proceedings. Prior to the murders of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar in Southport, the Law Commission had been asked to review the law on contempt of court and consider whether any improvements could be made. On 3 March 2025 the Law Commission published a supplementary consultation paper to consider the issues relating to contempt of court which were raised by the Southport case, namely “whether there should be contempt of court liability for those who risk prejudicing a criminal trial by releasing information in the interests of public safety or national security.”³⁹

17. **CONCLUSION**

Merseyside Police were put in a very difficult position given legal restrictions on communicating the identity of the Southport suspect and the need to withhold certain information in order to protect the trial. The inconsistent advice from the CPS over the publication of information about the suspect’s religion was particularly regrettable and hampered the police response. It cannot be determined whether the disorder could have been prevented had more information been published. However, the lack of information published in the wake of the murders of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar created a vacuum where misinformation was able to grow, further undermining public confidence. We respect the CPS’s commitment to minimising risks to successful prosecutions, but it is clear that neither the law on contempt nor existing CPS guidance for the media and police are fit for the social media age. We therefore welcome both the Law Commission’s supplementary consultation on contempt of court and the CPS’s review of media guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION

Notwithstanding potential changes to contempt of court laws, we recommend that the CPS publish its new media protocol as soon as possible and keep this updated at least every five years or earlier if there is a significant change to the media landscape. It should also work with partner organisations in the police and media to ensure there is a clear shared understanding of its interpretation and use.

39 Law Commission, [‘Contempt of Court: Supplementary Consultation Paper’](#), 3 March 2025

2 Policing response to disorder

Summary of local policing responses

18. The response of individual police forces to disorder that took place in their areas necessarily differed depending on the nature of the events, so this report will not provide a comprehensive account of the police response in each force area. Nonetheless, we heard of several commonalities among the police forces we heard from.
19. Some instances of disorder began as apparently peaceful anti-immigration protests which meant that forces had to balance the need to facilitate the protest with contingency to respond if violence developed.⁴⁰ Chief Constable Harrington described how this meant that police forces had to make difficult judgements about how to police incidents, highlighting the example of what equipment police officers used:

That leads to some of the discussions that you will have seen about whether officers are in full code protective equipment or whether in normal duty. There is a fine balance for commanders and officers to say if we can talk our way in and engage it is much better.⁴¹

In some cases, for example in both Rotherham and Hull, counter-protesters were also present, which also required policing. Chief Constable Poultney described how counter-protesters required a police escort to leave the site as tensions escalated, while Chief Constable Heaton also described how police officers ended up “in the middle” of escalating tensions between protesters and counter-protesters.⁴²

20. In addition, we heard that disorder developed rapidly. For example, Serena Kennedy, Chief Constable of Merseyside Police, described how on 30 July a group of approximately 70 people broke off from a peaceful vigil and moved towards the Southport mosque; violence began seven minutes after the group arrived at the mosque.⁴³ Similarly, Chief Constable Heaton described

40 [Q2](#)

41 [Q73](#)

42 [Qq2, 4](#)

43 [Q51](#)

how the planned protest in Hull city centre on 3 August “quite quickly descended into disorder,” while Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist stated that “very shortly” after protesters gathered in Whitehall on 31 July, the group made a co-ordinated move to breach the conditions of the protest.⁴⁴

21. This rapid escalation of violence led in some cases to police forces being overwhelmed. For example, Chief Constable Poultney stated that in Rotherham “it very quickly became apparent that [the initial allocation of police resources] was insufficient for us to be able to maintain safety at the location and our absolute priority was to protect life, to preserve the lives of people there, people inside the hotel.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Chief Constable Noble described how the lack of prior warning of a protest in Tamworth meant that “for several hours police officers were essentially bearing the brunt of individuals trying to get into the hotel,” and were unable to engage in more dynamic policing tactics.⁴⁶ This was exacerbated by the fact that in several cases the violence was targeted towards certain communities; we further heard that in Tamworth on 4 August there was “a clear focus by the [protesters] on injuring officers and gaining access to the hotel,” including using “industrial fireworks, pyros, flares, smoke grenades and rubble”.⁴⁷
22. Chief Constables Webster and Poultney described the risk assessment processes that police forces undertake. In Rotherham, Chief Constable Poultney told us that the assessment was based on a peaceful protest at the same site a year previously, as well as an assessment of intelligence and social media which suggested that a peaceful protest was planned.⁴⁸ Similarly, Chief Constable Webster described how the police consider factors such as social deprivation, crime levels, community tensions and events likely to drive disorder in the local area; he stated “there were no indicators [...] to indicate tension that would lead to this level of disorder.”⁴⁹
23. However, the report by His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) into the events of the summer suggested that disorder could have been better anticipated, given recent examples of unrest, particularly the significant riot in Harehills in Leeds in July 2024.⁵⁰ Moreover, the targeted nature of the planned protests could itself be said to be non-peaceful; as one Sheffield City Councillor wrote in reference to the violence in Rotherham, “peaceful protests do not target marginalised

44 [Q66](#)

45 [Q8](#)

46 [Q4](#)

47 Staffordshire Police Independent Consultant ([SDR0008](#))

48 [Q8](#)

49 [Q11](#)

50 His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, ‘[An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1](#)’, 18 December 2024

communities, do not seek to intimidate; do not encourage arson and attempted murder.”⁵¹ As well as this, by the time of the planned protest in Rotherham on Saturday 4 August, protests had already turned into disorder in several towns and cities including Southport, London, Hartlepool, Aldershot, Sunderland and Hull, and the National Police Chiefs’ Council’s National Mobilisation Co-ordinator had asked forces, on Thursday 1 August, to review their intelligence for upcoming events, adopt a risk-averse approach and ensure their forces could respond to disorder.⁵²

24. The HMICFRS review made several recommendations for police leaders to improve the capacity and capability of forces to respond to serious public order incidents, including assessing the suitability and availability of personal protective equipment, ensuring that all forces or regions can rapidly deploy drones during public order incidents, and reviewing public order training at all levels.⁵³ Chief Constable Harrington stated that the NPCC is working through the recommendations of the HMICFRS report.⁵⁴ However, the report also raised matters which may warrant consideration from the Government, such as the suitability of public order training facilities, which not all forces have access to and some of which cannot provide training in the full range of public order tactics. The report also highlighted the importance of Police Treatment Centres in supporting police officers with physical therapy and mental health support but noted that funding of these centres from forces is inconsistent and the centres receive no government funding.⁵⁵

51 Cllr Minesh Parekh ([SDR0014](#))

52 His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, [‘An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1’](#), 18 December 2024

53 His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, [‘An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1’](#), 18 December 2024

54 [Q81](#)

55 His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, [‘An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1’](#), 18 December 2024

25.

CONCLUSION

The levels of violence seen across the country last summer were the worst since 2011. Police officers worked tirelessly to respond to the disorder and it was only through their efforts that more serious injury and property damage was prevented. Nevertheless, in several cases it appears that police forces were unprepared for the level of violence and were initially unable to take a proactive approach to policing, leaving officers exposed to significant risk. Given the background of recent disorder, we agree with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services that police forces should have better anticipated the risk of disorder in general. After disorder in Southport, police forces should not have taken it for granted that subsequent planned protests would remain peaceful.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that the Government publishes a formal response, after the second tranche of the HMICFRS review is published, setting out how it will support police forces to implement the findings of the review, including any additional funding if required, and over what timeframe.

Social media

26. Social media was a significant organising tool for disorder, with many protests and eventual instances of disorder being promoted on social media. All of the police forces we heard from described using social media as a source of intelligence about planned protests, as well as an investigative tool following the disorder; Chief Constable BJ Harrington confirmed that “all the forces across the country were using social media analysis and content monitoring to identify and try to assess where the threat, the risk and the harm was,” while Chief Constable Poultney stated that 108 images of people had been distributed on social media to aid with investigations.⁵⁶
27. Nevertheless, we heard how using social media in this way was resource intensive for police forces: Chief Constable Poultney described monitoring social media as “incredibly challenging and resource intensive,” while Chief Constable Webster stated that analysing social media is “more complex and maybe [...] slightly slower” than more traditional forms of intelligence sharing.⁵⁷ Forces particularly stressed the burden of verification on social

56 [Qq74, 20](#)

57 [Qq16, 20](#)

media and the risk of “false positives,” with Chief Constable Chris Noble stating “if we reacted to everything that social media said was going to happen I am not sure what else we would deliver”.⁵⁸

- 28.** Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist also emphasised the impact of these false rumours on the public, and the importance of the police being able to assess and dispel false intelligence where necessary:

We saw Telegram channels indicating that there would be cultural and nationalist protests at 15 sites, most of which was completely fictitious but, as a result, led to a reaction from left-wing and anti-right-wing groups, counter-protests. In the most extreme example, it led to a mobilisation of 10,000 people in Waltham Forest to counter-protest against a protest that was never going to happen in the first place.⁵⁹

Assistant Commissioner Twist highlighted positive examples of police officers conducting instant rebuttals where possible, but questioned whether the police had sufficient reach or access to the right channels in order to use social media effectively in this way.⁶⁰

- 29.** Despite the challenges associated with social media, most of the forces we heard from wanted to retain their own capacity for monitoring social media as an important source of local intelligence. Chief Constable Webster told us:

I do not want a national body being the response if I need to find out about some social media issue on the streets of Hartlepool. I need that to be local, I need it to be quick and I need it to be informed by my operational people on the ground. I need something locally to do that.⁶¹

However, he and others did see a potential role for more support at the national level, particularly where closed platforms such as Telegram were being used, where posts may be originating from abroad, or when activity on social media presents a wider national security risk.⁶²

- 30.** The role of social media during the disorder is currently being reviewed by HMICFRS, but the Policing Minister, Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP, did agree that “there is still much more work to do around social media and how police use it.” In particular, in the context of proposed reforms to the national policing system, the Minister stated that she “[recognises] the need for that local intelligence and the local use of social media, but

58 [Q18](#)

59 [Q67](#)

60 [Q74](#)

61 [Q42](#)

62 [Q75](#) [Chief Constable Harrington, Chief Constable Kennedy]; [Q42](#) [Chief Constable Webster]

also bringing it up to that national level when necessary.” Andrew Johnson, Deputy Director of the Police Powers Unit, highlighted that the volume of material on social media meant there was potential for automation to help forces monitor social media more effectively.⁶³

31.

CONCLUSION

Individual police forces did their best to monitor social media ahead of and during the disorder as a source of intelligence. It is important that forces retain local capacity to monitor social media on a business-as-usual basis. However, it is clear that the volume of social media activity, including some originating abroad, as well as the amount of activity taking place on closed platforms such as Telegram, means that in many cases more national support is required. Some of this support was available during the summer disorder but it did not go far enough. It was welcome to hear the Policing Minister suggest that new national functions for social media are being considered, and that the role of technology is being considered to increase cost-effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATION

The new national system for policing should include enhanced capacity to monitor and respond to social media at the national level, while also supporting forces to develop the necessary capacity.

National and regional response

Access to mutual aid

32. The events in Rotherham, in which rioters attempted to violently breach a hotel housing asylum seekers, demonstrate the importance of police forces being able to effectively access mutual aid, the process by which one force requests support from another in an emergency.⁶⁴ Chief Constable Poultney described how the insufficient police resources available presented a risk to life for people inside the hotel, so a mutual aid request was made, with nearby police officers (from West Yorkshire and the British Transport Police) arriving “very quickly” to provide support.⁶⁵ Similarly, Merseyside Police requested mutual aid during the Southport disorder, and similarly received officers very quickly, with Chief Constable Kennedy describing being “well supported” through the Regional Information and Coordination Centre (RICC, the regional units of the National Police Co-ordination Centre).

63 [Qq102, 103](#)

64 [Q8](#) [Chief Constable Poultney]

65 [Q8](#)

Overall, the NPCC estimates that the total cost of mutual aid provided during the whole period of disorder was £6.5 million, made up of overtime payments as well as costs such as transport and accommodation for officers on mutual aid.⁶⁶

33. Greater Manchester Police, which hosts the RICC for the North West, highlighted the importance of their standing public safety public order capability which is in place because of high volumes of protest in Greater Manchester. It had been escalated recently because of the GMP response to ongoing protests related to Israel-Palestine and protests following the violent incident at Manchester International Airport on 23 July 2024.⁶⁷ As a result of this additional resource, GMP was able to provide mutual aid to Merseyside Police quickly.⁶⁸ Similarly, Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist of the Metropolitan Police described how the resilience the Met has built following “chronic” demand since 2022 enabled them to provide 208 officers on mutual aid.⁶⁹
34. Despite the positive experiences of some Chief Officers, HMICFRS ultimately found that “officers sent on mutual aid often arrived later than would ideally have been the case,” meaning that forces had to manage disorder “for extended periods” without sufficient officers. Moreover, while the provision of mutual aid through RICCs was sometimes successful as we heard, HMICFRS also found inconsistency in the process for providing mutual aid across different regional centres, and in the capability of RICCs to handle requests for mutual aid.⁷⁰ HMICFRS concluded that additional public order public safety resources were being deployed more efficiently after Tuesday 6 August due to national co-ordination.

35. **CONCLUSION**

While we heard of several instances of mutual aid being quickly and effectively provided, there were also some problems in its provision, and inconsistencies in the way mutual aid requests were handled.

RECOMMENDATION

As part of a formal response to the HMICFRS reports the Government should set out in particular how it is supporting forces to improve the provision of mutual aid, including how changes to the national policing system will support it.

66 National Police Chiefs’ Council ([SDR0013](#))

67 Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Police ([SDR0012](#))

68 Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Police ([SDR0012](#))

69 [Q68](#)

70 His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, ‘[An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1](#)’, 18 December 2024

National policing response

36. Nationally, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and its National Police Co-ordination Centre (NPoCC) were responsible for the response to the disorder, which was called Operation Navette. This involved a national Gold group led by Chief Constable BJ Harrington of Essex Police, the then NPCC Public Order and Public Safety Lead; an intelligence co-ordination group led by the NPCC Intelligence Lead; and, on Wednesday 7 August, the activation of a national mobilisation plan, with NPoCC assuming a central co-ordination function for all public order assets.⁷¹
37. In her statement to the House on 2 September, the Home Secretary said that “the co-ordination infrastructure and systems that [police leaders] had to work with were too weak.” In a subsequent speech to the NPCC/APCC annual conference she said that successful leadership during the disorder was “in spite of, not because of, the systems we had in place.”⁷² The Policing Minister cited the example of Ministers not being able to access information about the number of officers able to be deployed during the disorder, stating that “the structures that exist could not provide that certainty [that there were sufficient police officers on the streets].”⁷³
38. HMICFRS highlighted several aspects of the national response in the first tranche of its report into the disorder, but in particular stated that with hindsight, the decision to commit to national mobilisation was made too late. The NPoCC’s national gold structure was established on Sunday 4 August ahead of formally activating the national mobilisation plan on Wednesday 7 August, with national mobilisation having been previously ruled out on Thursday 1 August.⁷⁴ HMICFRS further highlighted the tension that comes as a result of neither NPCC nor NPoCC having the explicit authority to require forces to supply resources through mutual aid.
39. Discussing the decision not to activate national mobilisation sooner, Chief Constable Harrington, the national Gold Commander for NPoCC, acknowledged the findings of HMICFRS, stating that with hindsight, “[of course] I would have mobilised more and more quickly.” However, he emphasised that a significant mobilisation did ultimately take place, supported by joint working across law enforcement and government.⁷⁵

71 National Police Chiefs' Council ([SDR0013](#))

72 HC Deb, 2 September 2024, [col 55](#); Home Office, '[Home Secretary's vision for police reform](#)', 19 November 2024

73 [Q88](#)

74 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, '[An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1](#)', 18 December 2024

75 [Q81](#)

He said that the NPCC is working on the recommendations of the HMICFRS report, working with partners such as the College of Policing in a structured programme of work.⁷⁶

40. The Government has said that, in response to the issues highlighted by the summer disorder, it will bring forward plans to reform national policing structures to create a ‘National Centre of Policing’. The Home Office said in November 2024 that “work is underway to determine the scope and scale of the unit,” but that it is expected to include specialist and supportive functions like forensics, aviation and IT. The Home Office emphasised that the proposals would be developed in conjunction with police leaders.⁷⁷
41. In November 2024 the Police Foundation, a policing think tank, published a report on the potential for policing reform informed by interviews with policing leaders.⁷⁸ As well as areas which the Government has identified to date such as forensics, aviation and IT, the report identified several areas in which a reformed national centre of policing could be beneficial, including national workforce planning and complex investigations such as for fraud.⁷⁹ In a further report on AI adoption in policing, the Police Foundation noted that a central body supporting AI adoption would be more efficient than the current system, in which all 43 forces as well as several national organisations all have different responsibilities for AI.⁸⁰
42. In evidence to this inquiry the Policing Minister said that the White Paper would be published “this year” (the Government previously said it would be published in the spring), but did not provide any further detail on scope; she again highlighted the examples of aviation, forensics and IT which have already been outlined.⁸¹

76 [Q83](#)

77 Home Office, ‘[Home Secretary announces major policing reforms](#)’, 19 November 2024

78 The Police Foundation, ‘[Fit for the future: The case for a reformed national policing landscape](#)’, November 2024

79 The Police Foundation, ‘[Fit for the future: The case for a reformed national policing landscape](#)’, November 2024

80 The Police Foundation, ‘[Policing and Artificial Intelligence](#)’, February 2025

81 [Q89](#)

43.

CONCLUSION

We agree that despite the best efforts of policing leaders, shortcomings in national policing structures inhibited the response to the disorder and national mobilisation came too late. The disorder highlighted deficiencies that also affect business-as-usual policing, such as a lack of reliable national data. We welcome the Government's commitment to reforming the national policing landscape, and to consulting with police leaders to define it. However, there are opportunities beyond the areas the Government has already outlined, for example in tech adoption, workforce planning and investigations.

RECOMMENDATION

Given the importance of the Government's ambitions on crime and policing, including halving knife crime and halving Violence Against Women and Girls, and the significant challenges facing the policing system, we encourage the Government to be ambitious in setting out its proposals for reform and not just focus on easy, short-term wins.

3 Impact on police forces

Police workforce

44. A total of 44,438 public order police officer shifts were worked to support the national response to the disorder between 1 August and 18 August 2024. Many officers had rest days or leave cancelled and saw disruption to their day-to-day roles, which in itself will have had an impact on the wellbeing of the police officers affected.⁸² For those who policed disorder directly, the impacts will have been still more acute: we heard how officers had bricks, petrol bombs and other missiles thrown at them, faced abuse, and worked without breaks in hot conditions wearing full personal protective equipment. 302 police officers were injured, including between 54 and 69 who required hospitalisation.⁸³ As Chris Noble, Chief Constable of Staffordshire Police, put it, “this will change some officers for the rest of their lives and they will live with the impacts of it for the rest of their lives.”⁸⁴
45. Police forces recognised the risk to officer welfare and as well as ensuring that officers on duty were fed and watered, Chief Constables told us about efforts they had taken such as providing occupational health support during the disorder, and running welfare roadshow events afterwards to give officers a chance to speak to counsellors, chaplains or occupation health staff.⁸⁵ A survey by the NPCC found that police officers were appreciative of these efforts, with just over half of respondents reporting their line manager balanced their welfare with the needs of the force.⁸⁶
46. Nonetheless, despite the best efforts of forces, there were instances, as Chief Constable BJ Harrington put it, where officers “did not get everything they needed.”⁸⁷ Most significant was the finding by HMICFRS that some officers had to make their own way to hospital after suffering injuries due

82 National Police Chiefs’ Council ([SDR0013](#))

83 [Q3](#) [Chief Constable Webster]; [Q8](#) [Chief Constable Poultney]; National Police Chiefs’ Council ([SDR0013](#)); His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, ‘[An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1](#)’, 18 December 2024

84 [Q29](#)

85 [Qq27-28](#)

86 National Police Chiefs’ Council ([SDR0013](#))

87 [Q87](#)

to ineffective protocols in place with ambulance services.⁸⁸ Moreover, the disorder came at a time when police officers were already struggling with wellbeing issues: the National Police Wellbeing Survey in 2023 found that 69.6% of police officers reported high levels of fatigue, while the intention to quit among officers increased to the highest level since 2019/20.⁸⁹ The Policing Minister told us that she was “very conscious” of wellbeing issues among police officers and acknowledged that there is “much more we can do” to support the retention of officers.⁹⁰

47. **CONCLUSION**

Police officers worked for long hours in extremely difficult circumstances during disorder incidents, many of them suffering injury and other trauma. Those that were re-deployed but did not face significant disorder will still have experienced fatigue and an increased workload. Police forces did their best to ameliorate the impact on officers but it is clear that the disorder has had a detrimental effect at a time when many officers were already struggling with heavy workloads, fatigue and stress.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government should outline a comprehensive strategy for police officer retention alongside its recruitment efforts.

Financial impact

48. As well as workforce impacts, the disorder had a significant financial impact for forces, which includes the cost of paying for additional shifts by cancelling rest days and leave and paying for mutual aid, as well as the kind of welfare spend referred to above. The NPCC estimates that the total cost across all forces amounted to just over £28 million.⁹¹ Chief Constable Chris Noble also highlighted the ongoing impact of investigations, as well as the fact that unplanned spending on police disorder took place against a challenging financial backdrop:

88 His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, ‘[An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1](#)’, 18 December 2024

89 Oscar Kilo, ‘[National Police Wellbeing Survey 2023 results](#)’, 12 December 2023

90 [Q107](#)

91 National Police Chiefs’ Council ([SDR0013](#))

[Chief Constable Noble]: I have a budget gap in 2025–26 of £7 million already. The outlay we have already spent, not just in the immediate response but over the next 18 months, will be very significant, and if there is not that effective opportunity to reimburse policing then service levels to communities will have to shift and change.⁹²

49. Under the Riot Compensation Act 2016, victims of criminal damage or loss can make a claim to the Police and Crime Commissioner for any uninsured losses as a result of rioting.⁹³ Alongside direct costs to police forces, the disorder caused significant property damage: in Humberside, the amount of property damage claimed under the Riot Compensation Act was £226,000, while in Cleveland the property damage was £416,000.⁹⁴ On 2 September 2024 the Home Secretary said that the Home Office would “work with [PCCs] to ensure that the Riot Compensation Act works effectively in the areas that are affected”—but despite this, on 10 December Chief Constable Webster told us that his PCC was not expecting to be reimbursed for claims made under the Riot Compensation Act.⁹⁵

50. Also on 2 September, the Home Secretary committed to using the policing special grant, which allows police forces to apply to the Home Office for exceptional funding, to reimburse forces for the costs incurred during the disorder. In oral evidence on 10 December Chief Constables welcomed this commitment; however, Chief Constable Webster stated that delays to the reimbursement being provided were making financial planning for the 2025/26 financial year more difficult.⁹⁶ Despite this, by 25 February funding had not yet been released to police forces, with the Policing Minister saying only that the issue of reimbursement was being “looked at”.⁹⁷

51. **CONCLUSION**

The costs incurred by police forces during the course of the disorder look modest in the context of overall policing budgets, but these unexpected costs have nonetheless had a significant impact and are being disproportionately borne by certain forces. We welcome the Government’s earlier commitment to reimbursing forces through special grant funding, but we are concerned about the significant delays to releasing this money which put forces in a difficult position in planning for this financial year. It would not be acceptable for Police and Crime Commissioners to have to find funding for Riot Compensation Act claims from within their existing budgets.

92 [Q25](#)

93 Home Office, [‘Riot compensation: a quick guide for claimants’](#), 25 March 2019

94 [Qq21–23](#)

95 HC Deb, 2 September 2024, [col 55](#); [Q21](#)

96 [Q22](#)

97 [Q109](#)

RECOMMENDATION

If it has not done so already the Government should release funding to cover costs incurred during the disorder as soon as possible.

Effect on neighbourhood policing

52. As we have noted, the national mobilisation of public order police was instrumental in bringing an end to the disorder. However, it necessitated the removal of some police officers from their ordinary roles, including neighbourhood policing teams; Greater Manchester Police, Durham Constabulary and Cleveland Police all stated that they had been forced to abstract officers from neighbourhood policing teams.^{98,99} As Chief Constable Webster pointed out, this impact will continue to be felt because of deferred rest and leave days.¹⁰⁰
53. Chief Constable Harrington said that the use of neighbourhood policing officers in public order policing is partly an advantage of the policing model in England, as it means public order officers are more likely to understand the area they are policing.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, forces stressed the importance of protecting neighbourhood policing, particularly in the context of disorder which threatened community cohesion: Chief Constable Heaton highlighted “the importance of local connection [...] for people who felt vulnerable,” while Chief Constable Poultney said that “it was important that we maintained our neighbourhood policing activity and invigorated it.”¹⁰² As a result, police forces took additional steps to try to ensure that neighbourhood policing was unaffected, including cancelling rest days and extending shifts to 12 hours. As a result, many forces including South Yorkshire, Humberside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester Police were able to maintain business-as-usual policing within neighbourhood teams.¹⁰³ The NPCC particularly highlighted the fact that business-as-usual policing continued even while disorder coincided with the beginning of the English football league season.¹⁰⁴

98 Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Police ([SDR0012](#)); Durham Constabulary ([SDR0009](#)); [Q34](#) [Chief Constable Webster]

99 In policing, “abstraction” is the redeployment of a police officer from their usual neighbourhood or role to support a different policing function, for example public order.

100 [Q32](#)

101 [Q73](#)

102 [Q30](#)

103 [Qq30](#), [33](#); West Midlands Police ([SDR0004](#)); Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Police ([SDR0012](#))

104 National Police Chiefs’ Council ([SDR0013](#))

54. The Policing Minister acknowledged the impact of abstractions on neighbourhood policing teams, saying that it is a “problem” but emphasising the Government’s recognition that abstractions should include neighbourhood police only in exceptional circumstances. She added that the Government’s Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, a commitment to recruit an additional 13,000 neighbourhood police officers, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and special constables, was being designed to enable police forces to minimise the abstraction of neighbourhood police officers.¹⁰⁵
55. The Government’s commitment to neighbourhood policing has been welcomed by police forces, in particular the recent commitment of £200m additional funding to support recruitment under the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, under the previous Government’s Police Uplift Programme police forces warned that a focus on numerical recruitment targets may reduce their flexibility to deploy their resources, for example in recruiting specialist police staff.¹⁰⁷ In December 2024 the NPCC stated that the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee ringfence left forces “unable to invest in other specialist areas of policing that are critical to our service.”¹⁰⁸
56. The Home Secretary told us in December 2024 that the Government expects police forces to make their own decisions about the mix of police officers, PCSOs and special constables recruited, emphasising that the government “want[s] to see a mix of people in policing teams.” The Home Secretary confirmed that this flexibility would include police forces being able to count existing police officers being redeployed to frontline duty towards their recruitment targets.¹⁰⁹
57. However, in February 2025 the then Permanent Secretary said that as well as further Government funding being required to implement the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, police forces would need to do “a more ambitious job” in finding financial savings to pay for the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee.¹¹⁰ In this context of financial pressure, and given that the annual cost of employing a police officer is greater than the cost of employing a PCSO, there is a clear risk that police forces will be forced to

105 [Q91](#)

106 Home Office, ‘[£200 million boost to transform neighbourhood policing](#)’, 31 January 2025

107 National Audit Office, ‘[The Police Uplift Programme](#)’, 25 March 2022, paragraph 12

108 National Police Chiefs’ Council, ‘[NPCC statement on police funding settlement](#)’, 17 December 2024

109 Oral evidence taken on 17 December 2024, [Q46](#)

110 Oral evidence taken on 4 February 2025, [Q26](#)

recruit more non-officer staff in order to meet their recruitment targets.¹¹¹ Sir Matthew Rycroft stated that the Government “reserve[s] the right [...] to be more directive at later stages of this programme.”¹¹²

58. CONCLUSION

We commend the efforts of police forces to maintain business-as-usual policing, particularly the importance attached to maintaining neighbourhood policing. Nonetheless, the disorder and subsequent investigations have had a knock-on impact on other areas of policing, including neighbourhood policing. The Government’s focus on strengthening neighbourhood policing is welcome, as is the flexibility that the Government is allowing forces to recruit to neighbourhood teams. However, it is important that the right mix of staff, including experienced officers, are being brought into neighbourhood policing teams. The use of numerical targets for recruitment, at a time when police budgets are under pressure, risks introducing an incentive to hire cheaply.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government should benchmark recruitment plans under the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee to ensure that, while flexibility for forces to recruit is maintained, minimum numbers for the recruitment of police officers can be set by the Home Office if required, or more flexibility in funding provided if forces cannot meet their staffing needs through the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee.

111 For example, [figures published](#) by the Metropolitan Police under the Freedom of Information Act suggest that the annual cost of employing a police officer in 2024/25 (including average basic pay, allowances, national insurance and pension contributions) is £70,464 compared to £54,011 for a PCSO.

112 [Q33](#)

4 The political response

Government interactions with police forces

59. On 1 August 2024, the Prime Minister held a meeting in Downing Street with police chiefs alongside the Home Secretary to discuss the disorder. Afterwards, the Prime Minister announced that a new “National Violent Disorder Programme” was being established to support the national mobilisation of police resources to respond to violence.¹¹³ The Policing Minister told us that the Home Secretary was “very searching” in seeking reassurances about the police response but that the tone of the meeting was about assuring the police that the Government would support them to address disorder.¹¹⁴ She emphasised that the “intrusion” was necessary because national structures were not sufficient to reassure the Government that the situation was under control.¹¹⁵
60. In oral evidence in December 2024, the Home Secretary further explained her approach towards working with the police, stating that while operational independence is fundamental to British policing, this does not mean that the Home Office should “[stay] way away from policing and just [shout] from a distance.”¹¹⁶ She argued that the police “overwhelmingly” want to work in partnership with the Government, explaining that the Government would be working with policing to develop proposals for reform to the national policing system.¹¹⁷
61. The evidence we received from police forces welcomed the number and character of interactions they had with members of the Government in the aftermath of disorder. For example, Chief Constable Heaton told us she had received a phone call from the Home Secretary to “see how we were, how it had gone and whether we had what we needed,” as well as a visit from the Policing Minister. Chief Constable Poultney also reported a call from

113 Prime Minister’s Office, [‘Prime Minister launches new clamp down on criminal and violent disorder’](#), 1 August 2024

114 [Q105](#)

115 [Q88](#)

116 Oral evidence taken on 17 December 2024, [Q66](#)

117 Oral evidence taken on 17 December 2024, [Q66](#)

the Home Secretary as well as a visit from the Deputy Prime Minister. Chief Constable Chris Noble told us “there were appropriate levels of intrusion” from the Government.¹¹⁸

62. Similarly, the national Gold Commander for the disorder response, Chief Constable Harrington, said that the Government was “questioning, [but] supportive” and that the interest from the Home Office and Ministers was “intrusive, but rightly so.”¹¹⁹ Emily Spurrell, Chair of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, added that Police and Crime Commissioners also worked “very closely” with the Home Office, and that PCCs themselves also acted as a “critical friend” to the police, providing scrutiny as well as support rather than interfering with operational independence.¹²⁰

63. **CONCLUSION**

The Government’s approach to working with police forces during the disorder was clearly seen as appropriate by the police leaders involved, who welcomed the level of support and challenge they received. The assurances that the Government provided helped to ensure that the police were able to mobilise effectively nationally. However, while some level of government involvement in an emergency will always be necessary, and some level of assurance will always be required, ideally the national policing system would be sufficiently resilient to respond to emergency situations without requiring government intervention.

RECOMMENDATION

The Government should ensure that its policing reforms empower the national policing system to respond effectively to emergency situations, without requiring significant Government intervention.

Swift justice

64. A key aspect of the Government’s response to the disorder was action to enable the swift prosecution of the people involved. On 2 September the Home Secretary said that the CPS had deployed over 100 additional prosecutors to support 24-hour charging, the Ministry of Justice had made 500 additional prison places available, and the courts had made time to hear cases.¹²¹ In August, the Director of Public Prosecutions wrote in *The Times* that within eight days of the Southport disorder, three people had been jailed, while some offenders had been jailed for disorder in Plymouth

118 [Qq34-35](#)

119 [Q77](#)

120 [Q78](#)

121 HC Deb, 2 September 2024, [col 55](#)

within 72 hours of the event.¹²² By 22 January 2025 1,804 arrests had been made with 1,072 of those arrests resulting in charges being brought by the CPS.¹²³

65. Chief Constable Harrington praised the joint working across the police, CPS and Government to deliver swift justice, stating that it was both quick and fair. He was unequivocal that it was this action, including the police mobilisation which supported it, which stopped the disorder:

There is no doubt in my mind, and certainly when I talk to colleagues, that it was that swift action, response, engagement and justice supported by the Government that brought this to a swift close.¹²⁴

66. Yet the Director of Public Prosecutions, writing in *The Times*, himself acknowledged that the swift justice applied to those involved in disorder would invite questions about “why all crime isn’t punished so briskly.”¹²⁵ Challenges in the criminal justice system are well-documented: at the end of September 2024, the Crown Court backlog stood at a record high of 73,105 open cases, which was an increase of 10% on the previous year.¹²⁶ At the same time, the adult male prison estate was operating at 98.0% to 99.7% occupancy between October 2022 and August 2024, and plans to deliver 20,000 additional prison places in England and Wales by the mid-2020s have been delayed until 2031.¹²⁷ In evidence to the Committee of Public Accounts, the then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, Dame Antonia Romeo, highlighted that additional police recruitment has further increased demand on the criminal justice system.¹²⁸

67. While the Director of Public Prosecutions discussed several actions that the CPS is taking itself to reduce delays to justice, such as recruiting more advocates and improving casework between police and prosecutors, ultimately he highlighted that the joint action taken in response to the disorder “require[d] considerable investment in the criminal justice system.”¹²⁹ The Policing Minister also acknowledged that the swift justice applied in the case of disorder “shows very starkly” the delays to justice

122 Crown Prosecution Service, [‘All justice is best served swiftly’](#), 20 August 2024

123 National Police Chiefs’ Council, [‘Public help sought to identify Summer 2024 disorder suspects’](#), 3 March 2025

124 [Q76](#)

125 Crown Prosecution Service, [‘All justice is best served swiftly’](#), 20 August 2024

126 Committee of Public Accounts, Twelfth Report of Session 2024–25, [‘Crown Court backlogs’](#), HC 348, para 1

127 Committee of Public Accounts, Fifteenth Report of Session 2024–25, [‘Prison estate capacity’](#), HC 366, summary

128 Oral evidence taken by the Committee of Public Accounts on 9 January 2025, [Q2](#)

129 Crown Prosecution Service, [‘All justice is best served swiftly’](#), 20 August 2024

elsewhere, specifically highlighting the length of time victims of rape have to wait. She acknowledged the role of the Government in addressing these delays.¹³⁰

68. CONCLUSION

The joint working, supported by the Government, between the police and the criminal justice system was essential in bringing about swift justice to the perpetrators of the disorder. This helped to prevent further disorder. However, we agree with the Policing Minister that it is not right for other serious crimes to see significant delays to justice. The Government's broader ambitions to reduce crime will require better long-term alignment between Home Office policies on crime and policing and those of the Ministry of Justice relating to the criminal justice system and the prison estate.

'Two-tier policing'

- 69.** During the disorder, the police began to face accusations of 'two-tier policing,' suggesting that those involved in disorder had been policed more strongly than previous protesters. In particular, some drew a parallel with the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, which saw some violent clashes, particularly in London on 6 June 2020.¹³¹ For example, allegations of 'two-tier policing' were made by the far-right activist Tommy Robinson (Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) and by the former GB News presenter and founder of the Reclaim Party, Laurence Fox, on X during the disorder, receiving widespread attention.¹³² In 2020, Robinson had accused the police of being "soft-handed" with Black Lives Matters protesters.¹³³ The parallels with Black Lives Matters protests, and the accusation of two-tier policing, were subsequently echoed by mainstream commentators, for example in *The Telegraph* and *The Spectator*.¹³⁴
- 70.** Following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020, Black Lives Matter protests took place across the world, including in the UK. According to statements made by the then Home Secretary, Rt Hon Dame Priti Patel MP, across the weekends of 6–7 June 2020 and 13–14 June 2020, more than

130 [Q106](#)

131 BBC News, ['George Floyd death: Thousands turn out for UK anti-racism protests'](#), 7 June 2020

132 Tommy Robinson, [post on X](#), 31 July 2024; Laurence Fox, [post on X](#), 6 August 2024

133 The Times, ['Black Lives Matter: 'Perfect storm' fears as far right descends on Parliament Square'](#), 10 June 2020

134 The Telegraph, ['Michael Deacon: Two-tier Keir showed his true colours years ago. We should have seen the warning signs.'](#) 8 August 2024; The Spectator, ['Alex Klaushofer: The truth about two-tier policing in Britain'](#), 9 August 2024

210,000 people attended 360 Black Lives Matter protests in the UK.¹³⁵ The majority of the protests were described as peaceful, although violence developed in London on 6 June 2020 when missiles and flares were thrown at police officers outside Downing Street.¹³⁶

71. On 13 June 2020, significant disorder occurred in London and elsewhere following counter-protests which the Home Secretary then described as being led by “racists and far-right hooligans.” 38 officers were reported to have been injured having been “kicked, punched or pelted with missiles” and 137 arrests were made on 13 June for offences including assaults on officers, violent disorder and possession of offensive weapons. The Home Secretary stated that “many of the so-called protesters came with the deliberate intent of causing harm to those around them and to police officers.”¹³⁷ Overall, 360 protests took place during the Black Lives Matter protests, compared to 250 protests or events which took place during the 2024 disorder.¹³⁸ Despite being of comparable scale, the 2024 disorder led to 1,804 arrests to date and saw 302 police officers injured, compared to 135 arrests and 35 injuries to police officers during the Black Lives Matter protests.¹³⁹

72. In evidence to our current inquiry, Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist told us:

One of the common characteristics of policing protest is you have protest and counter-protest, and almost inevitably one group will think you have gone too far and the other group will think you have not done enough.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, shortly after the 13 June 2020 counter-protest, mirroring later complaints regarding the 2024 disorder, Katrina Ffrench, then the Chief Executive of StopWatch, a charity campaigning for accountability in policing, told the previous Home Affairs Committee that:

We had the far right come out in London at the weekend. I did not see the police adopting as heavy-handed an approach as they did to the Black Lives Matter protesters. [The] feeling from the community [is] when the far right are out, they are allowed to get away with what they want.¹⁴¹

135 HC deb, 15 June 2020, [col 541](#)

136 HC deb, 8 June 2020, [col 40](#)

137 HC deb, 15 June 2020, [col 541](#)

138 HC deb, 8 June 2020, [col 40](#); National Police Chiefs’ Council ([SDR0013](#))

139 National Police Chiefs’ Council, ‘[Public help sought to identify Summer 2024 disorder suspects](#)’, 3 March 2025; His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, ‘[An inspection of the police response to the public disorder in July and August 2024: Tranche 1](#)’, 18 December 2024

140 [Q79](#)

141 Oral evidence taken on 17 June 2020, [Q22](#)

73. In the case of the summer disorder, police forces were very clear that the key factor determining their response was the level of violence on display. Chief officers acknowledged both their responsibilities to facilitate protest and the difficulty inherent in policing protests, but were categorical that these considerations were not relevant in the case of violent disorder.¹⁴² Chief Constable Noble stated his force was “dealing with thugs and criminals who are trying to kill police officers, set fire to buildings and commit serious criminal offences,” while Chief Constable Harrington was clear that “when we see violence, when somebody throws a punch, throws a bottle, tries to smash up a mosque or a community centre or a citizen, that is not protest.”¹⁴³
74. Assistant Commissioner Twist told us of his concern that ‘two-tier policing’ had become “a bit of a catchphrase for people who want to criticise without meaningfully engaging,”¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Chief Constable Webster said that accusations of ‘two-tier policing’ “[have] a negative effect on my officers” and are “unhelpful.”¹⁴⁵ On 2 September the Home Secretary accused those making claims of ‘two-tier policing’ of wanting “to legitimise attacks on the police” and called the claims “wrong.”¹⁴⁶

75. **CONCLUSION**

The right to protest is fundamental in our democracy and we would take seriously any evidence that peaceful protest was being suppressed based on the political views expressed. However, we have seen no evidence that this was the case during the summer. Far from being evidence of ‘two-tier policing’, the policing response last summer was entirely appropriate given the levels of violence and criminality that were on display. It was disgraceful to see unsubstantiated commentary about ‘two-tier policing’ undermining the efforts of police officers who served bravely in the face of violence.

142 [Qq79, 37](#)

143 [Qq37, 79](#)

144 [Q79](#)

145 [Q37](#)

146 HC Deb, 2 September 2024, [col 55](#)

Conclusions and recommendations

The disorder

1. We received no evidence to dispute the characterisation of violent disorder between 30 July and 7 August 2024. Many events held during this period began as protests and remained as such. But while some instances of disorder may have originated as protests, they quickly degenerated into violence. In some cases the chosen sites of protests, such as asylum hotels, were at best controversial and at worst an incitement to violence. Police were left with no choice but to prepare for and provide a strong response. We commend the bravery and professionalism of those officers who worked for long hours in extremely difficult circumstances, many of them suffering injury and other trauma. (Conclusion, Paragraph 6)

Social media mis- and disinformation

2. Merseyside Police were put in a very difficult position given legal restrictions on communicating the identity of the Southport suspect and the need to withhold certain information in order to protect the trial. The inconsistent advice from the CPS over the publication of information about the suspect's religion was particularly regrettable and hampered the police response. It cannot be determined whether the disorder could have been prevented had more information been published. However, the lack of information published in the wake of the murders of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe and Alice da Silva Aguiar created a vacuum where misinformation was able to grow, further undermining public confidence. We respect the CPS's commitment to minimising risks to successful prosecutions, but it is clear that neither the law on contempt nor existing CPS guidance for the media and police are fit for the social media age. We therefore welcome both the Law Commission's supplementary consultation on contempt of court and the CPS's review of media guidelines. (Conclusion, Paragraph 17)
3. Notwithstanding potential changes to contempt of court laws, we recommend that the CPS publish its new media protocol as soon as possible and keep this updated at least every five years or earlier if there is a significant change

to the media landscape. It should also work with partner organisations in the police and media to ensure there is a clear shared understanding of its interpretation and use. (Recommendation, Paragraph 17)

Policing response to disorder

4. The levels of violence seen across the country last summer were the worst since 2011. Police officers worked tirelessly to respond to the disorder and it was only through their efforts that more serious injury and property damage was prevented. Nevertheless, in several cases it appears that police forces were unprepared for the level of violence and were initially unable to take a proactive approach to policing, leaving officers exposed to significant risk. Given the background of recent disorder, we agree with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services that police forces should have better anticipated the risk of disorder in general. After disorder in Southport, police forces should not have taken it for granted that subsequent planned protests would remain peaceful. (Conclusion, Paragraph 25)
5. We recommend that the Government publishes a formal response, after the second tranche of the HMICFRS review is published, setting out how it will support police forces to implement the findings of the review, including any additional funding if required, and over what timeframe. (Recommendation, Paragraph 25)
6. Individual police forces did their best to monitor social media ahead of and during the disorder as a source of intelligence. It is important that forces retain local capacity to monitor social media on a business-as-usual basis. However, it is clear that the volume of social media activity, including some originating abroad, as well as the amount of activity taking place on closed platforms such as Telegram, means that in many cases more national support is required. Some of this support was available during the summer disorder but it did not go far enough. It was welcome to hear the Policing Minister suggest that new national functions for social media are being considered, and that the role of technology is being considered to increase cost-effectiveness. (Conclusion, Paragraph 31)
7. The new national system for policing should include enhanced capacity to monitor and respond to social media at the national level, while also supporting forces to develop the necessary capacity. (Recommendation, Paragraph 31)
8. While we heard of several instances of mutual aid being quickly and effectively provided, there were also some problems in its provision, and inconsistencies in the way mutual aid requests were handled. (Conclusion, Paragraph 35)

9. As part of a formal response to the HMICFRS reports the Government should set out in particular how it is supporting forces to improve the provision of mutual aid, including how changes to the national policing system will support mutual aid. (Recommendation, Paragraph 35)

National policing response

10. We agree that despite the best efforts of policing leaders, shortcomings in national policing structures inhibited the response to the disorder and national mobilisation came too late. The disorder highlighted deficiencies that also affect business-as-usual policing, such as a lack of reliable national data. We welcome the Government's commitment to reforming the national policing landscape, and to consulting with police leaders to define it. However, there are opportunities beyond the areas the Government has already outlined, for example in tech adoption, workforce planning and investigations. (Conclusion, Paragraph 43)
11. Given the importance of the Government's ambitions on crime and policing, including halving knife crime and halving Violence Against Women and Girls, and the significant challenges facing the policing system, we encourage the Government to be ambitious in setting out its proposals for reform and not just focus on easy, short-term wins. (Recommendation, Paragraph 43)

Impact on police forces

12. Police officers worked for long hours in extremely difficult circumstances during disorder incidents, many of them suffering injury and other trauma. Those that were re-deployed but did not face significant disorder will still have experienced fatigue and an increased workload. Police forces did their best to ameliorate the impact on officers but it is clear that the disorder has had a detrimental effect at a time when many officers were already struggling with heavy workloads, fatigue and stress. (Conclusion, Paragraph 47)
13. The Government should outline a comprehensive strategy for police officer retention alongside its recruitment efforts. (Recommendation, Paragraph 47)
14. The costs incurred by police forces during the course of the disorder look modest in the context of overall policing budgets, but these unexpected costs have nonetheless had a significant impact and are being disproportionately borne by certain forces. We welcome the Government's earlier commitment to reimbursing forces through special grant funding, but we are concerned about the significant delays to releasing this money which put forces in a difficult position in planning for this financial year.

It would not be acceptable for Police and Crime Commissioners to have to find funding for Riot Compensation Act claims from within their existing budgets. (Conclusion, Paragraph 51)

15. If it has not done so already the Government should release funding to cover costs incurred during the disorder as soon as possible. (Recommendation, Paragraph 51)
16. We commend the efforts of police forces to maintain business-as-usual policing, particularly the importance attached to maintaining neighbourhood policing. Nonetheless, the disorder and subsequent investigations have had a knock-on impact on other areas of policing, including neighbourhood policing. The Government's focus on strengthening neighbourhood policing is welcome, as is the flexibility that the Government is allowing forces to recruit to neighbourhood teams. However, it is important that the right mix of staff, including experienced officers, are being brought into neighbourhood policing teams. The use of numerical targets for recruitment, at a time when police budgets are under pressure, risks introducing an incentive to hire cheaply. (Conclusion, Paragraph 58)
17. The Government should benchmark recruitment plans under the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee to ensure that, while flexibility for forces to recruit is maintained, minimum numbers for the recruitment of police officers can be set by the Home Office if required, or more flexibility in funding provided if forces cannot meet their staffing needs through the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee. (Recommendation, Paragraph 58)

The political response

18. The Government's approach to working with police forces during the disorder was clearly seen as appropriate by the police leaders involved, who welcomed the level of support and challenge they received. The assurances that the Government provided helped to ensure that the police were able to mobilise effectively nationally. However, while some level of government involvement in an emergency will always be necessary, and some level of assurance will always be required, ideally the national policing system would be sufficiently resilient to respond to emergency situations without requiring Government intervention. (Conclusion, Paragraph 63)
19. The Government should ensure that its policing reforms empower the national policing system to respond effectively to emergency situations, without requiring significant Government intervention. (Recommendation, Paragraph 63)

- 20.** The joint working, supported by the Government, between the police and the criminal justice system was essential in bringing about swift justice to the perpetrators of the disorder. This helped to prevent further disorder. However, we agree with the Policing Minister that it is not right for other serious crimes to see significant delays to justice. The Government's broader ambitions to reduce crime will require better long-term alignment between Home Office policies on crime and policing and those of the Ministry of Justice relating to the criminal justice system and the prison estate.
(Conclusion, Paragraph 68)
- 21.** The right to protest is fundamental in our democracy and we would take seriously any evidence that peaceful protest was being suppressed based on the political views expressed. However, we have seen no evidence that this was the case during the summer. Far from being evidence of 'two-tier policing', the policing response last summer was entirely appropriate given the levels of violence and criminality that were on display. It was disgraceful to see unsubstantiated commentary about 'two-tier policing' undermining the efforts of police officers who served bravely in the face of violence.
(Conclusion, Paragraph 75)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 1 April 2025

Members present

Karen Bradley, in the Chair

Paul Kohler

Robbie Moore

Margaret Mullane

Chris Murray

Bell Ribeiro-Addy

Police response to the 2024 summer disorder

Draft report (*Police response to the 2024 summer disorder*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 75 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Second Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 29 April at 2pm.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 10 December 2024

Lauren Poultney, Chief Constable, South Yorkshire Police; **Mark Webster**, Chief Constable, Cleveland Police; **Chris Noble**, Chief Constable, Staffordshire Police; **Judi Heaton**, Chief Constable, Humberside Police [Q1-47](#)

Tuesday 25 February 2025

Emily Spurrell, Chair, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners; **Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist**, Assistant Commissioner, Metropolitan Police; **Chief Constable Serena Kennedy**, Chief Constable, Merseyside Police; **Chief Constable BJ Harrington**, Public Order Leader, National Police Chiefs' Council [Q48-87](#)

Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson DBE MP, Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention, Home Office; **Andrew Johnson**, Deputy Director, Police Powers Unit, Home Office [Q88-113](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

SDR numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1	Behavioural Research UK	SDR0005
2	Durham Constabulary	SDR0009
3	Greater Manchester Combined Authority; and Greater Manchester Police	SDR0012
4	Home Office	SDR0015
5	Logically	SDR0011
6	Muslim Women's Network UK	SDR0007
7	National Fire Chiefs Council	SDR0010
8	National Police Chiefs' Council	SDR0013
9	Parekh, Cllr Minesh	SDR0014
10	Police Service Scotland	SDR0003
11	Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service	SDR0016
12	Staffordshire Police	SDR0008
13	West Midlands Police	SDR0004

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–25

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Appointment of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration	HC 713