



National Audit Office



The Police Uplift Programme

Home Office

REPORT

**by the Comptroller
and Auditor General**

**SESSION 2021-22
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HC 1147**

Key facts

128,434

the adjusted baseline, by headcount, of police officers in England and Wales against which progress in recruiting the 20,000 additional police officers will be measured

11,048

the number of additional officers recruited between October 2019 and the end of December 2021

148,434

the number, by headcount, of police officers in England and Wales the Home Office expects to have in place by March 2023

£3.6 billion expected spend on the Police Uplift Programme to March 2023, to cover recruitment, training and support

£18.5 billion estimated total cost of the Programme over ten years, including officers' and additional police staffs' salaries and associated costs, equipment, the programme team, and downstream costs to the criminal justice system

505,050 the Home Office's estimate of the number of crimes the new officers will help to prevent per year from 2024-25

42% proportion of new police officer recruits who are female. In total 34% of police officers are female as of December 2021

11.8% proportion of new police officers recruited from an ethnic minority background. In total 8% of police officers are from an ethnic minority background as of December 2021

Summary

1 The Home Office (the Department) has overall responsibility for policing in England and Wales. It allocates central government funding and decides how this is divided between the 43 territorial forces. A chief constable heads each force, with authority over all operational policing decisions and staff. Chief constables report to locally elected police and crime commissioners or mayoral authorities, which set strategic objectives, allocate funds and hold forces to account on behalf of the public.

2 Funding for police forces fell substantially after 2009-10, in line with government objectives to reduce the deficit. Between then and 2017-18, police officer numbers reduced by more than 21,000 to 122,405 full-time equivalent officers. Responding to this pressure on funding, and the changing nature of demands on policing, *Policing Vision 2025* set out how future local policing would be tailored to society's complex and diverse needs built on evidence-based demand analysis, with more specialist capabilities and an agile and professional workforce.

3 In July 2019, the government announced plans to recruit an additional 20,000 police officers in England and Wales by the end of March 2023. This represents a planned net increase, and to meet the target, while compensating for resignations and retirements, forces will have to recruit approximately 50,000 officers over the three years. The Department established the Police Uplift Programme (the Programme) to help forces to achieve this. It committed to putting the new officers on the streets to reduce crime, protect communities and respond to changing demands on policing. The scope of the Programme includes:

- supporting forces to recruit 20,000 additional police officers by March 2023;
- identifying and improving workforce processes to attract, recruit and retain officers to ensure forces recruit the additional officers; and
- supporting forces to use the uplift as an opportunity to become more representative of the communities they serve.

4 The Department expects to spend £3.6 billion on the Programme up to March 2023 on recruitment, training and equipment for the officers, and the programme team. It expects the Programme to cost £18.5 billion in total over the next 10 years.

5 This report examines whether the Department is well placed to deliver value for money from the Programme. It covers the:

- aims of the Programme (Part One);
- management of the Programme and progress against its objectives (Part Two); and
- challenges in maximising the impact from the Programme (Part Three).

6 It is too early to assess whether the additional officers are delivering the wider aims of government to improve public safety and help to reduce crime, as they will need time to become fully effective in their roles. Furthermore, improvements in wider criminal justice outcomes depend on many more factors than the number of police officers. We have focused our report on progress to date in recruitment, and how the Department plans to demonstrate the impact of the additional officers in the future.

Key findings

Managing the Police Uplift Programme

7 The Department has managed the Programme well. To date, the Programme is a positive example of engagement between the Department and policing. The Department placed a senior police officer in the role of programme director to ensure decision-making was informed by a strong operational perspective. The central programme team has remained broadly stable from the outset, which has helped maintain continuity and supported relationships between stakeholders. It has put in place appropriate controls to monitor recruitment and release funding to forces and acts quickly where it finds forces need support. Our survey of chief constables was positive about the support offered by the programme team. The tightly scoped objectives have helped to maintain a focus on delivery, and the Programme also benefits from strong support from police forces for recruiting 20,000 additional police officers (paragraphs 1.7 to 1.10, 2.2 to 2.9 and Figures 4 and 5).

8 The Department adjusted the Programme to stay on course and respond to new challenges. It responded swiftly at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic so it could maintain momentum during lockdown. The Department, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing quickly set up a national online assessment process and moved initial training online to allow recruitment to continue. The Department also plans to increase capacity within regional organised crime units (units with specialist policing capabilities equipped to deal with more complex crimes, including fraud). The details for such moves (originally envisaged to involve 1,150 experienced officers moving to these units by March 2023) were worked through after the start of the Programme. Following engagement with policing, the Department now expects 725 officers to move into these units by March 2023, with the remainder moving after the end of the Programme (paragraphs 2.9 and 2.14).

9 The Programme is currently on track to recruit 20,000 additional officers by March 2023. By the end of December 2021 forces had recruited 11,048 of the 20,000 additional officers, against the March 2022 target of 12,000. The Department expects the remaining officers will be recruited in the final year of the Programme, although it accepts this will be more challenging. The net increase to date has been boosted by fewer officers retiring or resigning since the COVID-19 pandemic began than in previous years. Additionally, the Department estimates that approximately one quarter of those recruited during the first year of the Programme had previously worked in policing as police community support officers (PCSOs), special constables or civilian staff. While these moves supported forces to reach their first-year targets comfortably, the increased officer numbers might not translate to an equivalent increased visible police presence in communities, unless forces backfill the vacant PCSO or special constable positions (paragraphs 2.12 to 2.15 and Figures 6 to 8).

10 Diversity in policing is slowly improving. The Department has an objective to support forces to become more representative of the communities they serve, although it has not put recruitment targets in place, and recognises that this will not be sufficient in itself to change the culture in policing. Before the Programme began, 32% (39,800) of police officers were female and 7% (8,400) of those who reported their ethnicity came from ethnic minority backgrounds compared with 51% and 14% of the population in the 2011 census. By December 2021, 42% of newly recruited police officers were female, increasing the proportion of female officers in England and Wales to 34%. Almost 12% of new recruits report they are from an ethnic minority background, contributing to an overall proportion of 8% of all officers in December 2021, although this hides considerable variation within different ethnicities. Representatives of some forces told us that building trust in ethnic minority communities will take years and cannot be addressed within the timeframe of the programme (paragraphs 1.8 to 1.9, 2.4, 2.16 to 2.19 and Figures 9 and 10).

11 The Programme has helped standardise some recruitment practices and data collection and has improved the Department's understanding of the police workforce. Before the Programme, there was no standard approach to collecting and analysing workforce data across the 43 police forces in England and Wales. The programme team has worked with forces to standardise some processes (such as a single application form and online assessment) and has created a system to capture data about recruitment and the police workforce in a consistent format. This has helped identify trends across the 43 forces and enabled earlier intervention where forces are at risk of failing to meet recruitment targets (paragraph 3.2 to 3.3 and Figure 11).

Challenges in maximising the impact of the additional police

12 Recruiting so many new officers in a short timeframe creates challenges. It is unprecedented to recruit so many new officers in such a short time, and it will take time for the positive impacts of the uplift to be realised. The Department, which oversees the policing system, has an important role to work with police forces, the College of Policing and the NPCC on processes and support to help forces maximise the benefits. In doing so the Department will need to recognise challenges including:

- **the distribution of officers, which may not reflect current and future policing needs.** The Department allocated officers to forces using the existing Police Allocation funding formula, despite acknowledging as far back as 2015 that the formula was “more and more detached from the real demands on policing”. The Department has committed to reviewing the funding formula before the next general election, and this may affect forces’ abilities to maintain officer numbers if their funding allocation changes. The Department will have a role in understanding what these impacts may be and helping forces to manage them (paragraphs 1.12 and 3.7);
- **a reduction in forces’ organisational flexibility.** Since 2010, many police forces have made increased use of civilian staff in some operational roles which do not require a warranted police officer, or that demand specialist skills. However, many chief constables told us they are concerned that the focus on increasing and maintaining officer numbers means they will have less flexibility in how they can use resources in the future, potentially undermining previous efforts to modernise their workforce. In our survey of chief constables, 39 of the 40 respondents anticipated that they would need to find further efficiencies to maintain their target officer numbers after 2023. The Department has tried to address this concern by confirming additional funding until 2024-25 (paragraph 3.8);
- **the operational burden on more experienced officers to train all the new recruits.** Historically a key part of a new police officer’s development is a period of coaching by a ‘tutor constable’ to help them develop their skills and experience as an officer. Half (20) of the chief constables we surveyed told us this can take up to about 50% of an experienced officer’s time, reducing their operational capacity while they are supporting new recruits (paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6); and
- **an increasing reliance on an inexperienced frontline workforce.** Almost all the new officers will be deployed within their force’s local policing function. The new 20,000 officers, coupled with normal workforce turnover, means that by 2023-24, 38% of police officers nationally will have fewer than five years’ experience (compared with 12% in 2014-15). This will be exacerbated by the need for most new recruits to spend substantial amounts of time in college or otherwise learning (more than 50% of their time in the first year and approximately 30% in their second year). Additionally, some experienced officers will move into regional and national functions such as organised crime units (paragraphs 3.4, 3.13 and Figure 12).

13 The Department has not yet set out how it will evaluate the Programme's impact on crime. The Department intends that the additional officers will support forces to deliver the government's priorities to reduce crime, protect communities and respond to changing demands on policing, but it has not set out how it will measure the extent to which this is achieved. Decisions on how to deploy the additional officers are a matter for chief constables and the relationship between the number of police officers and crime outcomes (for example, charges, summons or out of court settlements) is complex. In its business case the Department estimated the additional officers will provide net positive benefits of £4.7 billion over the next 10 years through additional charges, reduced reoffending and deterrents, and will reduce the number of crimes by around half a million a year by 2024-25. However, it acknowledges its evidence base is weak and highly sensitive to what appear to be optimistic assumptions based on limited evidence. The COVID-19 pandemic has also changed the nature of crime, making it even more challenging to demonstrate a causal link between changes in crime and police numbers (paragraphs 1.7, 1.10, 3.10 to 3.13 and Figures 15 and 16).

14 The increase in police officers will exacerbate demand pressures on a criminal justice system that is already under strain and struggling to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department is working with criminal justice system partners to support their demand planning. But at this stage its understanding of the likely impact of an additional 20,000 officers is still developing. It recognises that an increase in officers will put pressures on courts, the Crown Prosecution Service and prison places, but admits it has more to do to understand the downstream impacts of the additional officers. It expects to complete this work in early 2023 (paragraphs 3.14 and 3.15).

Conclusion on value for money

15 The Police Uplift Programme has benefited from tightly defined objectives, strong support for its aims and effective joint working between the Department, National Police Chiefs' Council, College of Policing and police forces. The Department is on track against its recruitment target and, through standardising processes and data collection, it has a richer understanding of the police workforce that should help support decision making in the future, both locally and nationally. In the narrow terms set for it – to provide forces with an additional 20,000 police officers – the Police Uplift Programme is on course to achieve value for money.

16 Ultimately, the benefits the additional officers are intended to bring will only be seen in the longer term. The Programme's success will be judged on the impact it has on strengthening the ability of police forces to reduce crime, improve public safety and adapt to the changing demands they face. These outcomes may take several years to materialise and will depend on a complex range of factors, in addition to the skills and experience of the police workforce. To maximise the impact of the Programme and secure a positive legacy from its investment in additional officers, the Department will need to work closely with policing and the wider criminal justice system to manage the implications of rapidly recruiting such a large number of police officers. This will include providing clarity over future funding arrangements, so that forces are able to plan effectively and develop the capabilities necessary for 21st century policing.

Recommendations

- 17** To maximise the impact of the Police Uplift Programme the Department will need to work closely with policing to:
- a** **learn from and build on successes.** The Department should identify and share what has worked well from this positive example of collaboration with policing so it can apply these lessons to future programmes;
 - b** **build on the benefits already delivered.** The Department, College of Policing and NPCC should review the benefits of standardising processes across policing and consider with forces if there are opportunities for further standardisation;
 - c** **support development of workforce plans.** As forces move beyond the focus on recruiting officers, the Department should build on its understanding of the workforce to help forces create evidence-based, up to date and actionable workforce plans built on capabilities needed to address current and future demand;
 - d** **complete the funding formula review** and ensure it is informed by a wider understanding of capabilities, and local needs and circumstances. As it implements any changes to the formula the Department should ensure that the impacts on forces are understood and managed;

- e develop detailed benefits realisation plans.** The success of the Programme will ultimately be judged on the impact the additional officers have in supporting police forces to reduce crime and protect communities. The Department should put in place the means to demonstrate what impact the additional officers have had in strengthening the capability of policing; and
- f support cross-system demand planning.** If the 20,000 additional officers are successful in increasing crime outcomes, this will increase demand in courts, prisons and probations services. The Department should work with its criminal justice partners to ensure that there is a shared, up to date and realistic understanding of the future demand facing the criminal justice system.