

# Emergency Services News Briefing

February 2026



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# Introduction

In this edition of our news briefing, we draw attention to some of the key developments and publications in the sector, including policing reforms and performance measures, a strategy for ending violence against women and girls, an Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2024–25 and updated statistics.

# Police

## Government white paper on police reform

The Government has announced its blueprint for reforming the policing model in England and Wales. The reforms are part of the Government's white paper on police reform, "From local to national: a new model for policing". The White Paper sets out that the new model for policing is driven by two objectives:

- Ensuring local police forces are equipped to make their local communities safer.
- Introducing a new approach to national policing that protects us all.

Some of the key takeaways from the white paper include:

- **Neighbourhood policing strengthened:** 13,000 more officers with more visibility and reduced bureaucracy so officers can focus on frontline tasks.
- **Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) abolished:** By 2028, PCCs will be ending, with governance moving to mayors or new local Policing and Crime Boards.
- **Force consolidation:** The current 43 police forces will be reduced to fewer, larger forces.
- **National Police Service created:** A single body taking over national leadership and setting mandatory national standards.
- **New performance system:** National targets will be set, as well as a public dashboard and intervention powers for failing forces.
- **Higher standards:** Mandatory vetting and stronger misconduct rules will be introduced, alongside a "Licence to Practise" and leadership reforms.
- **Technology and AI overhaul:** £115m investment in a National Centre for AI in Policing (Police.AI), expanded facial recognition and national data standards.
- **Crime prevention focus:** National crime mapping, youth intervention programmes, and stronger multi-agency action.



### Questions for committee's consideration

- How is the force preparing for major structural reforms including governance changes, force consolidation, and the introduction of mandatory national standards?
- What risks or gaps have been identified in readiness?

## Funding boost for Police

Ministers have announced that police forces across England and Wales are to receive up to £798 million additional funding in the next financial year, taking total funding up to £19.5 billion. It was reported that £746 million of the additional funding would be for local forces to prioritise crimes impacting their communities, such as antisocial behaviour, knife crime and shop theft.

## Police Performance Framework

A Police Performance Framework has been published by the Home Office to hold forces to account and improve the public's trust. The framework measures are grouped into six topics:

- Prevention, public safety and welfare.
- Contact and response.
- Investigations and supporting victims.
- Workforce and professional standards.
- Crime.
- Public perceptions, trust and confidence.

The framework sets out the measures to be reported and the frequency under each of the six topics.



### Questions for committee's consideration

- How is the force assuring the accuracy and use of data within the new Police Performance Framework and demonstrating that additional funding is delivering measurable improvements for local communities?

## Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-Government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls

A new strategy has been published by the Government to set out how it aims to meet its objective to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. The strategy details that ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a moral mission for the whole society and it will require a whole of society effort to achieve it.

The strategy focuses on prevention, pursuit of perpetrators and support for victims. A new action plan sets out delivery commitments and highlights the need for improved police training.

## Victims and survivors of rape and sexual assault to be provided greater privacy

Restrictions will be applied to Police and other agencies requesting victims private counselling notes in new measures announced by the Home Secretary. The changes are intended to protect privacy and improve the experience of victims, as part of the VAWG strategy.

A case review found that requests were made for counselling records in almost 30% of rape cases. In worst case examples, it was found the notes had been used to decide whether to proceed with prosecution, especially where victims had disclosed mental health issues.

## Children not recognised as domestic abuse victims

A joint report has been released by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) following inspections completed across six local authorities.

The report highlighted that practice across police, health and social care services in some areas focused on the adults' and less on the needs and risks of children. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises children as victims of domestic abuse if they have seen, heard or experienced the effect of the abuse.

The findings from the report included:

- Variations in capturing children's experiences in domestic abuse scenarios.
- Insufficient training for police, social workers and other professionals on the impact of domestic abuse on children.
- Information is not always shared or drawn together across agencies, limiting the ability to form a complete picture.



### Questions for committee's consideration

- When was the last time the Force approach to VAWG was subject to independent assurance and has the Audit Committee been sighted on any improvement areas or local outcomes against government objectives?



### Questions for committee's consideration

- How is the force improving its response to vulnerability including domestic abuse (especially recognising children as victims)?

## Police workforce statistics

The Home Office has published the latest police workforce statistics for England and Wales as at 30 September 2025. The total police workforce was 234,425 full-time equivalents (FTE), down 0.6% from six months earlier. This includes 145,550 FTE police officers, also down 0.6% from March 2024. Police staff and designated officers totalled 81,662 FTE, a decrease of 0.4%.

The report also reviewed progress against the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee (NPG) announced in December 2024. The report highlighted:

- There were 19,017 FTE police personnel in neighbourhood policing roles (12,968 FTE police officers and 6,049 FTE police community support officers (PCSOs)).
- 541 FTE personnel were in training for a neighbourhood policing role in the future.
- The combined total of 19,558 FTE in neighbourhood roles equated to growth of 13.9% FTE neighbourhood policing personnel compared to the numbers as at 31 March 2025.
- The growth in the first six months reached 80% of the neighbourhood policing growth target of 2,972 FTE target for year one.

## Police misconduct

Statistics for the number of police misconduct cases for the 43 police forces in England and Wales for the year ending 31 March 2025 cover three types of allegations:

- Complaints from the public investigated under Special Procedures.
- All internally raised conduct matters.
- All recordable conduct matters.

The reported statistics include:

- A total of 15,843 misconduct allegations involving police officers were finalised, a 20% increase from the previous year.
- 8,031 distinct officers were involved in a misconduct allegation, which is equivalent to 5.2% of the overall police officer workforce.
- 1,369 officers were found to have committed misconduct or gross misconduct, an increase from the 1,106 in the previous year.
- 695 police officers were dismissed, in comparison to the 563 in the previous year.

## Home Secretary to have the power to sack chief constables

The Home Secretary has announced plans to provide future Home Secretaries the power to sack chief constables who fail their communities. The power was removed under the previous administration through the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011.

The power to dismiss a chief constable is currently held by only the Police and Crime Commissioners, however, the Home Secretary has pledged to make police leaders accountable to Parliament and the public as part of the police reforms.

## Safer communities and falling knife crime

The Home Office has reported that targeted action from the Government has seen a reduction in knife crime and County Lines gangs dismantled. Statistics reported that knife crime robberies had been reduced by 15% since June 2024. The year prior to this saw a 14% rise. The report details that more than 60,000 knives had been taken off the street through the Government's knife surrender scheme.

Additionally, the report details that more than 8,000 arrests were made, more than 3,000 lines closed and more than 900 knives taken off the streets through a Government programme to take down County Lines. The scheme also supported 4,000 children and vulnerable people to turn away from County Lines gangs.



### Questions for committee's consideration

- What is being done to address rising misconduct cases, improve organisational culture, and strengthen workforce welfare?
- Given the increased numbers of allegations and associated statistics, is the Audit Committee sighted on your Forces statistics and any actions being taken?



## Data reveals a widespread failure of police forces to assess whether officers are overworked

The Police Federation of England and Wales (the Federation) reported that data has revealed that police forces were failing to assess if officers were being exposed to risks of fatigue, overwork and welfare. The Federation requested data from all police forces in England and Wales under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, including:

- Number of times officers exceed the 48 hour average weekly working limit (under the Working Time Regulations 1998).
- Number of occasions officers breached the minimum daily or weekly rest requirements.
- Number of times management action was taken in response to any of the breaches.
- How compliance with the Working Time Regulations 1998 was monitored.

The Federation highlighted that 26 forces were unable to provide working-time data and would take more than two days to compile as force-wide data wasn't held. Only four forces were able to provide the data at the time of reporting.

One force reported that in the period 1 December 2024 to 30 November 2025 that on 1,070 times officers had exceeded the 48 hour weekly limit, with a further force reporting 1,188 breaches in the same period.

The Federation noted that it would begin issuing legally-backed improvement notices unless forces take urgent action.

## Questions for committee's consideration

- Has the Force assessed support available for officers and considered this against the Federations Plan?

## Silent crisis of police suicide

Data compiled by the Federation identified that between 2022 and 2025 that more than 100 police officers and staff had died by suicide, including at least 70 police officers. There were more than 200 attempted suicides during this period. The Federation highlighted that there was a link between suicide and the police misconduct regime, citing the lack of welfare support to officers in the process.

A six point plan has been set out by the Federation to end the crisis:

- Begin recording and reporting workforce suicide and attempted suicide.
- The mandating of a 12 month limit for police officer disciplinary investigations.
- Suicide to be reportable and investigated under Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) under Health and Safety legislation.
- The Federation's STEP (Suicide Trauma Education Prevention) campaign to be implemented by all forces.
- The contributory factors of the police officer role to be reflect in the coronial system for suicide.
- Improved funding for the Police Covenant to support the welfare and wellbeing of police officers.

# Fire

## Annual assessment of fire and rescue services

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has published the "State of Fire and Rescue: The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2024–25."

The HMICFRS concluded that England's fire and rescue services (FRSs) had made steady progress, but cultural, leadership and workforce challenges continued to hold back sector-wide improvement.

The findings included:

- 73% of inspection judgments in the third full round of inspections were rated adequate, good or outstanding, showing improving performance across most services. However, progress remains inconsistent, with nearly half of the Areas for Improvement (AFIs) were uncompleted from previous years.
- Services have improved preparedness in response to Grenfell Inquiry recommendations, particularly in control room procedures and fire survival guidance. Some still lack electronic systems to track the location of people trapped by fire during high-rise incidents.
- Cultural issues remain widespread, with poor values, bullying and discriminatory behaviour still evident in some services.
- On-call firefighter availability continues to decline, with 70% of services reporting lower availability than the previous year, and recruitment / retention proving increasingly difficult, especially in rural areas.
- Leadership weaknesses, including limited strategic oversight and inconsistent performance management, continue to hinder improvement. Seventeen services were rated "requires improvement" for manging performance and developing leaders.

Structural change is underway following the 2025 transfer of fire policy to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), creating what the Inspectorate calls a "critical opportunity" for long-awaited reform.

The inspectorate warns that the Government needs to be decisive on its commitment to reform.

## Memorandum of understanding with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed to formalise the partnership between the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the EHRC to improve how discrimination is tackled across fire and rescue services. The MoU aims to address race and sex-based discrimination, harassment, and victimisation by setting out expectations under the EHRC's Uniformed Services Programme.

The EHRC will deliver a support package, including webinars, peer to peer learning and case studies, to support the NFCC's work to improve culture and inclusion.

## Provisional local Government finance settlement

The Government has outlined plans for future FRSs funding, proposing a real-terms funding floor for standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities across the multi-year settlement. Ministers say this protection is needed because standalone authorities have fewer financial flexibilities and are more exposed to changes in the national needs assessment. Additionally, Fire and Rescue Authorities have the ability to increase their council tax precept by £5.

Chair of the NFCC, Phil Garrigan commented that:

"This provisional settlement shows that the financial pressures being experienced by fire and rescue services are at last being acknowledged. We are seeing things starting to move in the right direction on fire and rescue service funding, but on the back of huge disinvestment in previous years there is still more to do."



### Questions for committee's consideration

- What actions are being taken to address potential cultural, leadership and workforce challenges identified by HMICFRS?
- How is the service measuring whether these interventions are improving workforce culture and leadership?



## Road Safety Strategy

The NFCC has welcomed the Road Safety Strategy published by the Government in January 2026, following warnings that over the past decade progress on road safety had stalled. The NFCC particularly highlighted that they were encouraged by:

- The introduction of measures to strengthen young driver safety.
- The establishment of a new Road Safety Investigation Branch to analyse collision patterns and inform prevention strategies.
- Adoption of the “Safe System” approach to ensure that road design, vehicle safety, enforcement and education work together to protect all road users.

It was noted that whilst the Strategy is progress, the NFCC noted that the Government must back its commitment to road safety with the necessary investment in prevention and emergency response capabilities.

## Modernisation of building regulations

The NFCC has warned that the UK’s Building Regulations 2010 and guidance are no longer fit for purpose, claiming the current guidance fails to reflect modern construction practices, changes in building use, and the needs of today’s population. Much of the existing guidance is still rooted in post-war research and has not kept pace with emerging risks or key legislation, including the Equality Act 2010 and the Building Safety Act 2022.

In a newly released “Building Regulations and Guidance Position Statement”, the NFCC urges the Government to take action in three key areas:

- **Regularly update approved documents:** The NFCC calls for full reviews at least every five years, clearer guidance for common building scenarios, mandatory evacuation lifts in all new residential buildings, retrofitted sprinklers in single-stair high-rises, better firefighter access and water supplies, and clearer long-term management requirements.
- **Strengthen competence across the system:** The statement highlights the need to implement the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 recommendations, including licensing for principal contractors on higher-risk buildings and mandatory accreditation for fire risk assessors. It also calls for a government-led Construction Skills Strategy to address workforce shortages.
- **Improve oversight and accountability:** Recommendations include shielding building control bodies from commercial pressures, making fire and rescue service advice statutory, reviewing “non-worsening” provisions to stop avoidance of safety upgrades, and ensuring consistent enforcement of operational standards rules.



## Workforce and pension statistics

Workforce and pension statistics for the year ended March 2025 have been published by the MHCLG to be used by government and fire and rescue services to inform national fire policy, effectively allocate resources and support funding decisions.

Key findings include:

- 30,601 FTE firefighters were employed by FRSs on 31 March 2025, a decrease of 0.5% from the previous year. The number of firefighters has decreased by 14% in the past decade.
- 2,631 firefighter personnel were injured during the year, a 9.3% increase compared to the previous year.
- 53 of the injuries were classes as “major” injuries, an increase from the 35 in the previous year.
- 933 instances of an attack on firefighters, a 3.7% decrease from the previous year.
- Expenditure from the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme totalled £1,159 million, an increase of 11% compared to the previous year.
- There were 52,052 pensioner members, of which 86% were members who had retired and were in receipt of benefits from the 1992 Scheme.



## Questions for committee’s consideration

- What steps are being taken to address declining on-call firefighter availability and rising firefighter injuries?
- What assurance can be provided that recruitment, retention and safety measures are sufficiently robust to manage service requirements?

## Fire chiefs call for Government action on flooding

Following the disruptions caused by Storm Chandra, the NFCC has cautioned that flood risk in England is escalating faster than the legislative and financial structures in place to manage emergency response.

The NFCC is pressing the Government to consider a statutory duty for fire and rescue services in England to attend flooding incidents that pose a risk to life. Adopting such a duty would match arrangements already in place across the devolved administrations and improve clarity for both the public and frontline responders.

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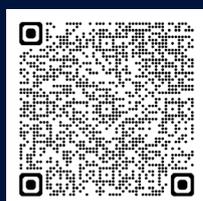
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