

FROM AMBITION TO IMPLEMENTATION

A report on the Police Foundation and
Accenture roundtable series on the
Government's policing reform agenda

October 2026

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About Accenture: Accenture is a leading global professional services company helping businesses, governments and organisations build their digital core, optimise operations, accelerate growth and enhance citizen services. Accenture has a long-standing history of collaboration with UK law enforcement agencies, working with the Home Office, across the criminal justice system and acting as a trusted transformation partner to major forces such as the Metropolitan Police Service and West Midlands Police.

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FOREWORD

The publication of the Government’s police reform white paper *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing* in January 2026 marked a significant moment. For the first time in at least a generation, there is a strong intent and shared commitment to police reform, with the ambition to match the scale of the challenges facing policing in an age of continuous disruption. The question is no longer whether reform is necessary. It is whether it can be delivered effectively.

Accenture, in partnership with the Police Foundation, hosted a series of six roundtables convening 90+ senior leaders from across policing, criminal justice, government and the private sector. The focus was on moving from ambition to delivery, with topics including: how to best enable the workforce to be the most productive and engaged they can be, how to align performance and governance across a local, regional and national landscape, and how reform can better enable policing to respond to a constantly evolving, technology enabled, threat risk and harm landscape.

With more than three decades of experience supporting public safety agencies in the UK and globally, Accenture has helped organisations navigate transitions of comparable complexity. From that experience, six considerations stand out as we reflect on the discussions.

First, sequence matters as much as structure. The instinct to reorganise is understandable and new structures can drive and critically lock in change, but the foundations of workforce capability, leadership, data, technology and efficiency of process must be considered before or alongside institutional change. Sequencing well does not and should not mean waiting: delivering early success is key to building momentum. Existing investments and capabilities, such as Single Online Home and ACRO, can be scaled today without new legislation or structures, delivering early benefits while larger institutional and structural changes are prepared. The risk is that poorly ordered transition consumes the leadership attention that reform depends upon.

Second, a stronger centre must serve local delivery, not supplant it. Neighbourhood policing, local relationships and the trust of communities are not a constraint on reform, they are its justification. National institutions need to be designed to support and enable local policing to be more effective, not more distant from the public it serves. Creating the right governance and enabling structures to deliver this will be critical.

Third, the workforce and leadership challenge is more urgent than the structural one. Unsustainable workloads, burnout, weakened supervision and difficulties attracting specialist talent will limit the benefits of any reformed service. Reform that does not

address these conditions and those highlighted by the Police Leadership Commission will struggle to deliver. Critically, workforce design needs to address not only the current challenges for officers and staff but also those of the future where the human workforce will be operating alongside a digital one, this human + machine workforce needs to be considered as whole.

Fourth, scaling technology is a greater barrier than technology innovation. Policing generates innovative solutions. Its persistent weakness is the inability to adopt and scale them consistently. Stronger national authority, clearer enterprise architecture and consistent AI assurance and governance are prerequisites for reform, rather than optional features.

Fifth, reform must not take place in a vacuum. Police reform alone, however ambitious, cannot deliver the outcomes the public needs if it feeds an overburdened court system or operates in isolation from criminal justice partners, health services, social services and education. True public safety reform delivering improved effectiveness and collective savings demands a whole-system approach, where the measure of success is not the performance of any single institution, but the impact of the entire system.

Lastly, savings can be unlocked but funding is a needed catalyst. There is the ability for reform to drive improved efficiency and effectiveness, whilst better enabling the frontline, but any transformation at scale requires initial investment. There is also the opportunity with the right commercial approaches to leverage investment and partnership with the private sector to help drive change at pace.

The discussions captured in this report reflect a policing sector that is engaged, realistic and ready to move. Since the roundtables concluded, the Leadership Commission has confirmed the urgency of reform, recommending a fundamental overhaul of police leadership anchored in the reform agenda. The HMICFRS Annual Assessment of Policing was also supportive, calling many of the white paper’s proposals ‘long overdue’. The direction of travel is set. The challenge now is not ambition but momentum, with the delivery of early success to fuel this. The task is delivery that is phased, carefully sequenced, and connected to the communities that reform is designed to serve.

James Slessor
UK and Global Public Safety Practice Lead, Accenture
james.w.slessor@accenture.com

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between February and June 2026, the Police Foundation and Accenture convened six roundtables to examine the reforms proposed in the Government’s White Paper, *From Local to National: A New Model for Policing*. The discussions considered the overall challenge of implementing reforms, performance and scrutiny, the proposed National Police Service (NPS), technology, the future workforce, and the relationship between policing and wider criminal justice reform.

Throughout discussions the case for reform was broadly accepted. Attendees at the roundtables generally agreed that the present policing model is too fragmented and needs a more cohesive, collaborative approach. They also agreed that there is considerable duplication of capability and the current structure is not correctly configured for changing crime, technology and wider social demands. Debate focused less on whether reform is necessary and more on how and in what order it should be implemented and how it should be governed.

There was broad support for stronger national capability, including the NPS, clearer standards and more consistent adoption and scaling of technology. A clear mandate for the NPS commissioner and their executive team will be important. This was not, however, an agreement or argument for an entirely centralised model. Attendees remained strongly protective of neighbourhood policing, local relationships, operational independence and democratic accountability. The desired destination was a more coherent and consistent system, not simply a more centralised one.

Workforce and leadership reform may prove more consequential than structural reform and indeed will be necessary as a result of any organisational changes. Unsustainable workloads reduced frontline experience, burnout, weak supervision and difficulties with retention all risk limiting the benefits of new institutions,

structures or technology. These concerns have since been reinforced by the Police Leadership Commission, which called for a fundamental overhaul of how policing attracts, develops, appoints and supports leaders, and highlighted inconsistent leadership development across the service.¹ Recommendations from the Commission, including its suggested foundations for the ‘license to practise’ were viewed as promising opportunities to strengthen leadership capability and support the successful delivery of reform.

Technology was viewed as a significant opportunity. Policing already generates promising innovations. Its major weakness is the inability to adopt and scale them consistently. Fragmented procurement and unclear leadership have repeatedly acted as barriers to national implementation. An empowered and centralised national body to drive consistency of service could accelerate what police reform can deliver.

Funding consistently arose as a theme in the roundtables. There was concern that current funding did not match that needed for the scale of these reforms. Conversely, it was suggested that the direction of reform has enhanced the appeal of investing in policing by the HM Treasury because it would address long-standing structural inefficiencies.

Finally, the series emphasised police reform as part of a wider public safety agenda. Making policing more productive could increase pressure on courts, prisons, probation and prosecutors unless reform is coordinated across the system. The test will not be the creation of a new organisation or the dismantling of another, it will be whether the reforms lead to safer communities, improved experience for victims and the public, a more supported workforce and overall improvements to the wider criminal justice system.

¹ Police Leadership Commission, *Professionalism and performance: Police leadership for the future*, July 2026

Six priorities flow from the discussions

1. Strong leadership for police reform should be established by early appointment of a national police commissioner and executive team, with a mandate to drive transformation.

2. Determine and publish a clear NPS operating model and transformation plan before making any major structural transition, including detailed sequencing of phasing. This should set out clear governance, decision-making responsibilities and leadership authority, and explain how these will evolve.

3. Make workforce and leadership reform an early implementation priority, reflecting the urgency and severity of the issues raised by the Leadership Commission and the need for a comprehensive workforce strategy.

4. Secure enough funding to deliver reform by making a strong, clear case to the Treasury in the next Spending Review that demonstrates where long-term efficiencies are possible.

5. Establish clear national authority for policing digital, data, and technology, so that common standards are followed across the system and effective solutions can be scaled nationally far more quickly than at present.

6. Deliver joined-up public safety reform through shared governance across government, such as a renewed Criminal Justice Board, so that policing and the justice system work closely together to tackle problems no single agency can solve alone.

To further support the delivery of reform, the Police Foundation and Accenture will reconvene the series in autumn 2026 to explore questions in greater depth, including the capability of the National Police Service, the future of police governance and accountability, the

implications of devolution, and how local needs can continue to be met within a more nationally coordinated model. The aim will be to generate practical insight to inform the next phase of police reform.

1. Introduction

The Government published From Local to National: A New Model for Policing in January 2026. The White Paper sets out reforms intended to address systemic weaknesses and create a service that is more rooted in local communities, more consistent nationally and better equipped to deliver for the public. The first legislation to implement the proposed White Paper reforms is expected in late 2026. At the time of writing, that legislation is awaited.

On the back of the White Paper, the Police Foundation and Accenture convened six roundtables between February and June 2026. The events brought together policing leaders, government representatives, national policing and oversight bodies, academics, industry specialists, criminal justice partners and community perspectives. The discussions took place under the Chatham House Rule to enable candid reflection on the opportunities and challenges associated with reform.

The series aimed to test the assumptions underpinning reforms; examine practical implementation challenges; explore the relationship between national capability and local policing; identify the workforce, leadership, technology and governance conditions required for success; and consider the consequences for the wider criminal justice system. Each event examined a different theme: implementation; performance and scrutiny; the NPS; technology; the future workforce; and wider government and criminal justice reform.

This report synthesises the discussions across the series, pulling out the six key priorities raised, along with identifying areas of convergence and the trade-offs and unresolved questions.

2. Police reform agenda

Although the White Paper contains a broad programme, the first set of roundtables concentrated on a group of proposals with the greatest implications for how policing is structured, led and delivered.

A new National Police Service

The proposed NPS was discussed as a strategic centre for policing, combining stronger national leadership, standards, enabling services and operational capabilities for serious, cross-border and technology-enabled crime. Roundtable attendees also considered how existing national bodies and functions might be brought

together, including the National Crime Agency, the College of Policing and counter-terrorism capabilities.

Performance, local policing and governance

The new Police Performance Framework prompted debate about how stronger national expectations and intervention could co-exist with operational independence and local accountability. The White Paper’s commitment to a service rooted in local communities was reflected in discussion of neighbourhood policing, local leadership, visibility and public contact and prevention. Local policing was treated, in discussions, not as a separate component of reform but as the foundation on which the legitimacy of the wider model will depend.

Workforce, leadership and professionalisation

The series examined a future workforce strategy, Licence to Practise, more flexible employment and career arrangements, reforms to leadership pathways and stronger support for workforce wellbeing. The Police Leadership Commission has since provided a comprehensive route map on these matters, including proposals on career-long learning, bolstering frontline leadership, a new leadership fast stream, targeted direct entry, workforce data and a National Academy of Police Leadership within the NPS.²

Technology, data and structural reform

Discussions focused on interoperability, national standards, Artificial Intelligence (AI), procurement and the division of responsibility between national and local bodies. Attendees considered force size, possible mergers and new governance arrangements as being impactful to technology and data reform. There was considerable concern that debates about policing structures could distract attention from the equally important challenges of workforce and technology reform.

Reform aligned with the wider criminal justice system

The roundtables also considered how the policing reforms should align with change across the wider criminal justice system. Roundtable attendees stressed that improvements in police capability, productivity and investigative performance could increase demand

² Police Leadership Commission, Professionalism and performance: Police leadership for the future, July 2026

on prosecutors, courts, prisons and probation unless reforms are planned across organisational boundaries. This points to the need for shared outcomes, better-aligned data and technology, and coordinated governance and implementation, so that changes in one part of the system improve end-to-end public safety outcomes rather than transferring pressure elsewhere.

3. The case for change is strong

Perhaps the most striking feature of the series was how little disagreement there was about the need for significant reform. Roundtable attendees broadly accepted that existing arrangements are becoming more and more difficult to sustain. Fragmentation across forces, national bodies, governance structures, technologies and employment models creates duplication and limits the ability to take strategic decisions or respond consistently to threats that cross force boundaries.

Changing crime and demand strengthen the case for reform. Digital material is now central to routine investigations, while cybercrime, fraud, serious and organised crime and online exploitation require capabilities that cannot always be developed or sustained independently by every force. The final roundtable showed how communications data, devices and disclosure have moved from specialist concerns to everyday features of local casework, adding volume and complexity throughout the criminal justice process.

Acceptance of the case for change was not, however, the same as unconditional support for every proposed change set out in the White Paper. Roundtable attendees agreed on the diagnosis of the problems but did not assume that structural changes would be the solution. Force mergers may be necessary, but bigger organisations are not automatically more effective, agile or connected to communities. The NPS by itself was also not seen as a singular way to resolve poor leadership, incompatible technology or weak workforce planning. The debate has moved from whether policing needs reform to how it can be delivered without creating similar challenges and weaknesses in a new structure.

4. Foundations before structures

Sequencing was one of the strongest themes across the series. Participants warned that prominent structural proposals, like merging forces, could draw

attention away from the capabilities needed to make the new model work. Workforce planning, leadership, technology, data and national enabling capabilities were repeatedly described as foundations that must be developed before or alongside institutional change.

Reform must also remain firmly focused on outcomes, with a clear sight between each proposed change and the benefits it is intended to deliver for the public. Whether structural or otherwise, changes should be tested against how they will help policing prevent harm, respond more effectively to changing demand and provide a better and more consistent service to communities.

This does not weaken the case for significant change. Rather, it means that structural reform should be treated as a means of improving policing, not as an end. Participants warned that mergers and organisational transfers could create operational disruption, divert leadership attention and resources, and contribute to the loss of experienced staff. The expense and distraction of transition should therefore not be underestimated, and any disruption must be justified by a clear and credible account of the improvements it will enable, and how much time it will realistically take to deliver.

At the same time, the roundtables did not support a slow or indefinite design process. Long implementation periods could slow momentum and be unravelled in political change. The suggested approach was a phased programme. National alignment of existing capabilities, common technology standards, accreditation of proven tools, stronger workforce planning and shared data can begin before legislation is passed. Even a leadership team and governance structure for the NPS could be set up in shadow form before the legislation is approved by Parliament. A clear urgent priority was creation of legislation to enable the NPS to exist, its leadership to be established and to provide clarity about governance after elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) are replaced in May 2028. Interim operating models and phased implementation could then enable the NPS to establish its value gradually, helping people to see the benefits, and by extension keep up the momentum of reform.

Funding was a recurring concern across the roundtables. Participants questioned whether the resources available would be sufficient to meet the upfront costs of reform while building the necessary workforce and technological foundations and

maintaining operational delivery. Conversely, it was suggested that the clearer direction of reform had strengthened the case for investment from HM Treasury by presenting a more coherent proposition for improved productivity, consistency and long-term value. The discussions highlighted both the risk of under-resourcing reform and the opportunity to make a stronger case for sustained investment.

5. A stronger centre, not simply more centralisation

Across all topics discussed, attendees noted that voluntary collaboration between separate organisations has limitations. There was support for a stronger centre able to set standards, model and predict demand, provide shared services, support improvement and take decisions where fragmented local choice has prevented progress.

Some contributors concluded that progress in delivering reform could be enabled by early appointment to new leadership posts. Mandates can then be used to centralise functions, infrastructure and standards where appropriate. Common digital infrastructure and data standards will not emerge reliably if every organisation can opt out. Others stressed that national mandates must be legitimate, technically sound and informed by operational requirements. If they are not trusted, they risk weakening service delivery across all of policing.

This did not equal support for a command-and-control model. The preferred role of the NPS was enabling, supportive and strategic in its authority. Local policing remained the foundation of legitimacy; neighbourhood teams understand the communities they serve, support prevention and connect policing with local partners. Larger delivery units must therefore protect local relationships rather than assume they will survive change.

Attendees also identified an accountability gap. If the NPS sets standards against which local forces are assessed, it must itself be subject to meaningful scrutiny and transparency. The emerging conclusion was that policing needs greater coherence rather than uniformity, more decisions taken once nationally where that adds value, while retaining meaningful local responsibility for priorities, partnerships and delivery.

6. Workforce and leadership at the centre

Workforce reform emerged as potentially the most consequential component of the programme. Roundtable attendees reported increasing demand on officers and staff, while simultaneously having more complex investigations, and alongside reduced experience and growing wellbeing concerns. The discussion was not simply about workforce numbers. There was criticism of officer headcount as a proxy for capability, particularly where reductions in police staff leave warranted officers undertaking administrative work where police powers are not needed. The central question is whether policing has the right skills and experience, and how to address issues like retention that risk weakening organisational capabilities.

This led to a deeper debate about policing’s professional model. One position favoured an integrated, capability-based workforce in which officers, staff and specialists are valued according to the skills they contribute. The National Crime Agency was presented as an example of complex operational work that can be delivered by people without a traditional police career. While a parallel argument stressed the continuing value of the office of constable, including its powers, obligations, independence and flexibility. Greater specialisation must not create silos or reduce the capacity to redeploy rapidly, which are essential functions in areas like public order and civil emergencies.

There was a similar division over Licence to Practise proposals. Supporters saw it as a foundation for accredited competence and professional recognition, while also supporting greater public confidence. Critics questioned whether it would make a visible difference to public safety compared with investment in training, vetting, supervision and manageable workloads. The roundtables supported greater professionalisation, but not the assumption that a single mechanism will achieve it. It is worth noting that the Leadership Commission set out a recommendation for a complete digital professional passport, which would be a career long record of competence, skills, training and development and could act as a foundation for a future Licence to Practise.

Leadership was the most consistent factor linking workforce reform to performance. Participants connected good leadership with the effectiveness of teams, workforce support, positive behaviours and ultimately the service delivered to the public.³

Weak supervision and the absence of regular management conversations were cited as a sign that basic organisational practices are not always in place. The Police Leadership Commission reached a similar conclusion to points made in the roundtables, describing leadership quality as inconsistent and calling for a fundamental overhaul of leadership selection, development and support at every level.

The performance discussion also suggested that some cases entering the conduct system are better understood as performance, supervision or organisational failures. A punitive response can delay learning and encourage defensive behaviour. Wellbeing was similarly connected to the conditions of work rather than individual resilience alone. Burnout and disengagement were described as responses to excessive workload, trauma and an inability to deliver the service officers believe the public should receive. A reformed policing model that did not alleviate some of these workforce pressures would not have succeeded.

7. From innovation to implementation

The technology discussion produced one of the clearest diagnoses in the series. Participants were clear: policing does not have an innovation problem. Policing has an implementation and scaling problem. Technology provides a clear example of this. New technology implemented locally can already reduce administrative burdens and support the preparation and analysis of investigative material. Yet promising local initiatives frequently struggle to become national capabilities.

Different procurement decisions and governance processes make implementation slow and costly. Similar ideas may be piloted repeatedly in different forces while solutions that have shown value remain unevenly adopted. The history of video-enabled justice capabilities illustrated how a model with multi-agency support can lose momentum when leadership changes or it conflicts with an established national programme.

The case for stronger national leadership in technology was clear. Attendees supported joined up approaches on IT and clearer enterprise architecture, along with stronger AI oversight. They also argued that senior

³ Police Leadership Commission, Professionalism and performance: Police leadership for the future, July 2026

technology expertise must be present where operational and investment decisions are made, and that the service should be prepared to pay more for the talent needed at this critical level.

8. Performance without distortion

The roundtable on performance frameworks supported clearer national expectations but was acutely conscious of the risks of target-driven agendas. Previous periods of central performance management showed how intense focus on numerical targets and league tables, when poorly implemented, can distort priorities and, in extreme cases, encourage manipulation. Participants preferred a limited, balanced and learning-oriented framework rather than league tables or a return to a “blizzard of targets”.

Policing addresses threats, harm and vulnerability that cannot be represented purely in a set of numbers. A narrow framework may improve selected measures while displacing attention from prevention or other important work. Roundtable attendees favoured a broad set of performance measures covering public safety, trust, victim experience, prevention, workforce wellbeing, organisational health and service quality.

These measures still present challenges. Recorded crime and caseloads may not provide a reliable account of incidence or performance, while national surveys may lack the scale and timeliness required for local improvement. Public surveys and qualitative data could help but must be robust and interpreted carefully.

Participants wanted the framework to identify problems early and support action before they become crises. Stronger intervention should include peer support and organisational learning, not only inspection or sanction. Any national powers should be clearly defined, with distinct roles for setting standards, supporting improvement and directing operational activity.

9. From police reform to public safety reform

The final roundtable brought into focus a theme present throughout the series: policing cannot be reformed successfully in isolation from the wider criminal justice and public service system. Attendees described a series of organisations with separate priorities, budgets, and data. Police, prosecutors, courts, prisons and probation can each improve their own part without improving the end-to-end outcome.

The relationship between police and prosecutors provided a clear example of the consequences of fragmented working. Roundtable attendees described cases moving repeatedly between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) through successive action plans, creating delay and duplicated effort without necessarily bringing the case closer to resolution. Whereas earlier conversations between investigators and prosecutors and the active review of cases with multiple action plans were reported to have reduced pressure and enabled faster decisions. A police charging pilot was also cited as having shortened charging times without increasing attrition or reducing

guilty plea rates, and previous experience of co-locating CPS staff in police stations was associated with quicker, more constructive problem-solving.

Digital evidence provides further knock-on effects. The volume of communications data, device material and disclosure obligations increases the workload for police, prosecutors and courts. Improving police capability without coordinated change in other areas could increase the number and complexity of cases entering an already pressured system.

Participants also argued for shifting demand upstream. Diversion, prevention, mental health provision, education and local multi-agency work can reduce offending and reoffending more effectively than relying solely on prosecution. This does not mean that police reform should wait for every other part of government. It means that major decisions should be made with a better understanding of their effects on other services.

The question should not be ‘does each agency meet its own targets?’, but whether the public experiences less harm, better support, timely justice and reduced reoffending. Police reform is an essential component of public safety reform but cannot deliver the outcomes the public depend on by itself.

Conclusion

The six roundtables demonstrated substantial support for the ambition to reform policing. The present model was widely regarded as fragmented, difficult to coordinate and increasingly ill-suited to future threats and technological change. The White Paper has therefore largely established the case for change. The more difficult task is translating that ambition into a coherent and deliverable programme.

Several tensions will need to be managed rather than eliminated: stronger national capability and meaningful local accountability; standardisation and innovation; specialist skills and operational flexibility; faster improvement and service stability; stronger accountability and organisational learning.

Six clear priorities came from the discussions and should be addressed with urgency, so that the reform programme does not lose momentum:

Six priorities flow from the discussions

1. Strong leadership for police reform should be established by early appointment of a national police commissioner and executive team, with a mandate to drive transformation.

2. Determine and publish a clear NPS operating model and transformation plan before making any major structural transition, including detailed sequencing of phasing. This should set out clear governance, decision-making responsibilities and leadership authority, and explain how these will evolve.

3. Make workforce and leadership reform an early implementation priority, reflecting the urgency and severity of the issues raised by the Leadership Commission and the need for a comprehensive workforce strategy.

4. Secure enough funding to deliver reform by making a strong, clear case to the Treasury in the next Spending Review that demonstrates where long-term efficiencies are possible.

5. Establish clear national authority for policing digital, data, and technology, so that common standards are followed across the system and effective solutions can be scaled nationally far more quickly than at present.

6. Deliver joined-up public safety reform through shared governance across government, such as a renewed Criminal Justice Board, so that policing and the justice system work closely together to tackle problems no single agency can solve alone.

These conclusions provide a starting point rather than the final word on reform. As the programme moves from initial policy design towards legislation and implementation, the Police Foundation and Accenture will reconvene the roundtable series in autumn 2026 to examine in greater depth some of the questions that remain unresolved. The next series will consider the capabilities and operating model of the National Police Service, the future of police governance and accountability, the implications of devolution, and how local priorities, relationships and legitimacy can be enhanced within a more nationally coordinated system. It will also provide an opportunity to test how the emerging reforms are developing in practice.

Ultimately, success of the reform programme will not be demonstrated by legislation creating the NPS, the completion of some force mergers or the publication of new performance frameworks. It will be demonstrated if communities are safer, victims experience a more coherent service, the workforce is better equipped and supported, and the police and criminal justice system together are better able to prevent crime and harm and deliver timely and effective outcomes.

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