

BLUEPRINTS: DESIGNING LOCAL POLICING  
MODELS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

PROJECT LAUNCH PAPER

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THE  
POLICE  
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The UK's policing think tank



# BLUEPRINTS: DESIGNING LOCAL POLICING MODELS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

## A new project by the Police Foundation

This paper marks the launch of a new research project by the Police Foundation examining the design choices made by English and Welsh police forces in delivering local policing. It takes as its starting point the large variation and frequent change in local operating models that has occurred over the last 10 to 15 years. The project will seek to capture learning from police strategists and practitioners, as well as from data analysis and international comparisons, about the narratives, rationales and consequences of organisational design, to inform thinking about the policing models best suited to the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century operating environment.

The paper is accompanied by a slide pack presenting analysis for every English and Welsh territorial police force, available at [https://www.police-foundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/local\\_police\\_models.pdf](https://www.police-foundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/local_police_models.pdf).

We welcome comment and engagement and can be contacted at [lpmodels@police-foundation.org.uk](mailto:lpmodels@police-foundation.org.uk).

## About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is the only independent think tank focused exclusively on improving policing and developing knowledge and understanding of policing and crime reduction. Our mission is to generate evidence and develop ideas which deliver better policing and a safer society. We do this by producing trusted, impartial research and by working with the police and their partners to create change.

Andy Higgins is the Research Director of the Police Foundation.

## Acknowledgements

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# 1. POLICING BY DESIGN

How should the police deliver the everyday services that the public experience in their communities? What is the best way to configure resources, design processes and organise tasks and responsibilities to keep people safe, respond to local need and provide value for money? What operating models not only meet today's profile of police demand but can help the service develop the capabilities it will need during the middle part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

As we shall see, questions like these (or at least the first two) regularly exercise the minds of chief police officers but have received strikingly little general attention or comparative study. This means that, although most police forces have undergone significant remodelling programmes over the last decade and a half (sometimes several times over), little has been learned systemically about which organisational designs are better suited to delivering different local policing outcomes, or what trade-offs forces make by choosing one approach over another. As the recent Policing Productivity Review (2023) noted with obvious frustration: *'The divergences and the all-too-frequent changes in operating model that take place in forces indicate that there is no consensus, nor "industry" certainty, as to what works'*.<sup>1</sup>

This degree of design plurality and inconsistency – both between police forces and within some over time – is the departure point for a new research project by the Police Foundation. In it, we will seek to:

- Describe and (as far as possible) codify, the variety of local police operating models being practiced across England and Wales, explain why they have developed and explore the rationales behind them.

- Investigate what (if anything) can be concluded about the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches, based on quantitative performance analysis (where possible) and local experiences and learning.
- Look, in-depth, at the way policing models enable and constrain police practitioners working in four functional areas: incident response, neighbourhood policing, local investigation and public protection.
- Explore what can be learned from the way local policing is organised in other countries.
- Assess the suitability of different design options against future policing challenges, drawing on the analysis presented in the *Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales* (The Police Foundation, 2022), and focusing on strategic enablers such as preventative partnership and public co-operation.

We have begun the work already with a set of scoping interviews and conversations with strategic stakeholders (senior personnel in national police organisations who play a role in system stewardship). As the work progresses, we will expand our coverage to include a wider set of partners and practitioners. We have also conducted a detailed analysis of the available workforce data, as a way in to the myriad local narratives of organisational change.

This paper presents some emerging insights and questions from these initial steps, as an introduction to the project. We hope that, along with the force-level analysis pack that accompanies it, it will provide a starting point for numerous conversations about the design choices made in delivering local policing, the reasons for variation and change, the lessons learned from the recent period of experimentation, and the organisational models best suited to the fast-changing communities of the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century.

1. The point was made about investigation processes but could equally apply to their analysis of other local policing functions as well.



## 2. HOW WE GOT HERE

Local policing models have not always been so varied and changeable. At the start of the millennium, despite vast differences in size, all police forces in England and Wales adhered to a broadly similar template. Executive functions (strategy setting, performance monitoring, resource allocation etc.), along with some specialist and business support capabilities, were provided once, from a central headquarters, while *local* policing (emergency response, vehicle and foot patrol, most crime investigation, public protection work and partnership crime reduction) was delivered multiple times over, by a territorial jigsaw of Basic Command Units (BCUs), each under local leadership, usually headed by a superintendent or chief superintendent. Although there was some variation in how far specialist functions (like armed and roads policing), and back-office support (such as HR and finance), were devolved down to the local level, these were minor caveats to the Audit Commission's overall conclusion that, in 2001, '*BCUs are now established as the primary vehicle for tackling volume (that is, non-major) crime*'.

The emergence of the BCU template from policing's organic administrative history of beats, divisions and districts, owed much to government efforts during the 1990s and 2000s to promote autonomous local decision making and partnership working, which went as far as proposing that BCUs should be put on a statutory footing to ensure co-terminosity with local authorities (Mawby, 2008). Although that plan was eventually dropped, BCU-level inspection regimes and targeted funding streams served to cement their status, while Home Office initiatives like the National Neighbourhood Policing Programme, the introduction of the National Intelligence Model and the roll-out of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) (subsequently, Community

Safety Partnerships (CSPs)) ensured BCUs became firmly established as the basic building blocks of the national policing infrastructure.

Sustainability, however, was always an issue, and even before the austerity period, BCU mergers and expansions saw their number contract from 318 across England and Wales in 2001 (Audit Commission, 2001), to 228 in 2008 and then 194 in 2012<sup>2</sup>. Between the last two dates, the number of police officers assigned to BCUs (nationally) fell by five and half per cent, while numbers in force headquarters rose by three percent<sup>3</sup> – reflecting both forces' efforts to unlock economies of scale and an (initially modest) shift towards functional centralisation – themes that would be repeated and amplified over the following decade.

The story of how the BCU model then unwound is more complex. During the 2010s, public sector spending cuts saw police force budgets fall by 19 percent in real terms, although this fell unevenly across forces (National Audit Office, 2018a), while cuts to local authorities and other partner agencies were even more severe (National Audit Office, 2018b). At the same time, a very different brand of localism, under the Coalition and Conservative governments, saw the Home Office step away from national delivery initiatives and performance management, and roll various ringfenced funding streams into the Police Main Grant. This gave individual police chiefs – now answerable only to their locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) or Mayors – both the imperative and flexibility to find more economical ways of delivering services. What followed (along with a complex patchwork of back office and specialist inter-force collaborations) was a period of major and un-coordinated force restructuring that reduced the prominence of local territorial command structures and (often) curtailed the remit of BCU level leadership.

2. See: Police Workforce, England and Wales data tables for 2008 and 2012 available at: <https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/0441e07d-5e07-4387-8e56-9d1e8babe84/police-workforce-england-and-wales>

3. See police workforce data tables, as above.

As well as a new economic climate, these redesigns also needed to respond to shifting crime and public safety priorities. With traditional volume crime historically low, and public confidence apparently robust during the early/mid 2010s, attention increasingly moved to 'hidden' (including online) harms, particularly following high-profile cases of child sexual exploitation and 'non-recent' abuse, and the emergence of complex 'high harm' crimes like modern slavery. At the same time, criticism of police target culture (Curtis, 2015) and concerns over crime recording led to a changes in the way the police managed operational business and performance. Concurrently, the saliency of antisocial behaviour (ASB) gave way to a focus on acute welfare concerns and the impact of issues such as mental ill-health on 'demand', as the police unwittingly stepped into gaps left in wider service provision.

New, leaner policing models therefore needed to be less focused on public visibility, community engagement, and on investigating acquisitive crime, but more responsive to risk, threat and vulnerability, and on resourcing complex sexual crime investigations. As a result, neighbourhood policing often dwindled and become more reactive (or, where reimagined, was given a new focus on 'demand reduction'). Public protection

units (responsible for protecting vulnerable people and investigating domestic abuse, child abuse and sexual violence) expanded, and the investigation of 'volume' crime became subject to earlier 'resolution' and/or was undertaken by 'omni-competent' police officers with wider and more varied job descriptions. The focus of partnership working also shifted from crime and ASB prevention/reduction to safeguarding, and its locus from local authority geographies up to force-level, particularly as CSP funding arrangements changed.

But nothing stands still. The late 2010s saw the re-emergence of serious violence and knife crime as urgent police priorities, putting considerable pressure on reduced, reconfigured and (often) more locally disengaged policing models. The 2020s then brought their own set of challenges: Covid lockdowns and new imperatives around public trust and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) following high-profile police misconduct cases. Central government also renewed its attention to 'neighbourhood crime' and provided some new officer resources to address it through Operation Uplift, although integrating large numbers of inexperienced officers into the workforce has presented its own organisational and performance comparison challenges.

# 3. DRIVERS OF INCONSISTENCY

Looking beneath this high-level narrative, and despite some identifiable trends and themes, the clearest conclusion is that policing has not settled on a preferred method for doing its local business. The BCU footprint has faded, but no clear replacement model, or 'industry standard', has emerged to take its place, and oscillations between permutations of local to central, and specialist to generalist, continue to play out.

This is perhaps to be expected, to some extent: a changing society requires new and evolving ways of addressing security and (as noted already) the shifts in operating context have been frequent and significant. Funding differences between forces have persisted and (arguably) become more marked. Localism also deliberately resists a 'one size fits all' approach, particularly when applied to forces as divergent in size, geography and demand profile as those in England and Wales.

Yet, we might equally note that the outcomes that police forces seek – less crime, more detections, public trust, balanced budgets – apply regardless of context, and that all forces and PCCs have signed up to a common Policing Vision (APCC, College of Policing and NPCC, 2023). The major currents of contextual change have also generally applied nationally (even internationally). One might, therefore, expect *some* level of stability or consensus to have emerged from this extended period of experimentation, or at least a more developed platform of evidence from which to make decisions. That this has not happened – that the cycles of design and redesign continue to play out – represents a deficit of organisational and systemic learning and a widespread failure to evaluate.

There may be more embedded and political dimensions at play here as well. Several well-placed observers have described a power-play made by some police chiefs in the early 2010s, using cost cutting to justify the dissolution of BCU 'fiefdoms' whose leaders were felt to be too autonomous and inward looking, in favour of more 'thematic' centralised command structures. It is also clear that, whatever the underlying motive, the consequences of the widespread loss (or at least ambiguity) of local accountability and partner connectivity have been deeply felt and a variety of corrections, adjustments and reconfigurations have since been applied.

Other informants have pointed to the regular turnover of chief officers, the incentives towards 'mark making' and the way re-modelling decisions sit at the boundaries of operational independence, particularly when police chiefs are newly hired by their PCCs. Funding arrangements, performance imperatives and a cultural preference for task-and-finish 'Action Planning' also tends to favour short term planning cycles over strategic stability. The role of inspection regimes, the emergence of 'beacon' forces whose change programmes become associated with performance improvement, the movement of chief officers between forces and the hand of consultancies in transmitting ideas, may all also contribute to the continuing story of structural diversification and churn.

Perhaps above all, regular reinvention serves to signal the service's recognition of its perennial (possibly intractable) problems, and of the imperative to demonstrate commitment to 'change'. Whether such issues can ever be 'designed out', however – whether *re-forming* can ever amount to *reform* – is a question for debate.

# 4. THEMES AND PERSPECTIVES

As hinted already, trends and themes run throughout the design variation. Geographic expansion has been one recurrent response to financial pressure: in London, for instance, the MPS Local Policing Model, introduced in 2013 (MOPAC, 2015), saw most neighbourhood policing resources shifted ‘upwards’ from wards to larger ‘clusters’, then from 2017, the roll-out of the One Met Model saw 32 long-established Borough BCUs consolidated into 12 Area Commands (Metropolitan Police Service, 2018).

The thematic/centralised/directorate-based (rather than geographic) reorganisation and ownerships of various local policing functions (incident response, local crime investigation, safeguarding, intelligence etc. – in various combinations) has also regularly occurred, although there appears to be a recent trend towards re-instating local structures. We have encountered some strong senior-level advocacy for the place-based alignment and control of response, neighbourhood and crime investigation functions to promote connections between them, and with communities and partners. Others have emphasised the importance of specifying what (in context) needs to be done centrally (for instance, where concentrating expertise is desirable), versus the functions that most benefit from localisation (e.g. for proximity to the public, partners and information).

Thirdly, forces have experimented with the degree of specialism versus generalism in their allocation and organisation of functions. Several have tried combining response and neighbourhood functions into a more general ‘local policing’ role (while in others, regular abstraction has made this the *de facto* norm) (HMIC, 2017; Higgins, 2018). Despite the recent publication of a ‘National Operating Model’ by Operation Soteria<sup>4</sup>, rape and serious sexual offence investigations, as well as domestic

abuse cases carrying various degrees of risk, might be conducted by ‘generalist’ officers or specialists within public protection units. Routine crime investigations can either sit with ‘omni-competent’ response and/or neighbourhood officers, or alternatively, can be divided into task or crime-type specialisms (Policing Productivity Review, 2023). Interviewees have suggested that length of service profile may be relevant here, with narrower and more centrally directed job roles suiting a less experienced workforce, but also potentially hampering skills development over the longer term. Local context could also be important: more generalised officer roles may be sustainable in ‘quieter’ areas, but where reactive response work is more intense, greater specialism may offer benefits (but also present different risks of occupational stress and exposure to trauma). Notably, however, these remain professional observations, without a more formal grounding in evidence.

For the public, it is no exaggeration to say that all this amounts to a post-code (and a date-stamp) lottery in service provision, but one where the value of the prizes on offer is rather opaque. Although forces are subject to regular inspection and grading of their local (and other) policing provision, very little methodical comparison has been undertaken to examine the impact of organisational design choices on service quality. We simply do not know which approaches are associated with faster attendance times, better detection rates or victim satisfaction outcomes (for instance), or which are more likely to result in stronger community relations, healthier workplace cultures or better trained or resilient staff.

Asking ‘what works’ (best) from among this diversity of organisational design is clearly overly simplistic. Differing contexts,

4. See: <https://www.college.police.uk/national-operating-model-rasso/about-national-operating-model>



complex combinations of outcomes, and the interdependencies of factors like leadership, culture, professionalism, technology and investment (which are perhaps the *real* drivers of performance, that operating models can only ever enable or inhibit) make such analyses difficult to approach. However, embarking on a more

nuanced and 'realist' enquiry into '*what works, for whom and in what circumstances and respects, and how?*' (Pawson and Tilley, 2004) – with a view to enabling forces to make more informed strategic decisions, and the public to engage in better-informed scrutiny – seems to be a legitimate and overdue endeavour.

# 5. CLUES IN THE DATA

Beyond a few broad trends, the national picture of local policing delivery is obscured by a lack of consolidated data. Neither the Home Office nor any of the national policing bodies keeps a register of the different operating models in place across the 43 English and Welsh police forces, and even the service's inter-force coordinating portfolios for functions like response and neighbourhood policing, do not have a log of the different ways these services are provided nationally. Geographically, there has been no census of policing's sub-force territorial structure since 2012. Some clues, however, can be found in the regular police workforce data returns, collated and published by the Home Office<sup>5</sup>.

Since 2012 these datasets have included an annual functional breakdown of the numbers of (full-time equivalent) police officers, police staff and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) that each police force allocates to various areas of business. The categories vary a little over time and the data is peppered with footnote caveats about off-menu job descriptions created by some forces, but these are National Statistics and can provide some insight into the different ways local police work is configured and delivered, particularly when forces change their approach.

In this analysis we are interested in four functional component parts of local policing: incident response, neighbourhood policing, local investigation and public protection<sup>6</sup>. Although there are clear interdependencies with other areas such

as intelligence, custody and contact management – particularly while desk-based 'resolution' and 'remote response' functionality expands – we view these four parts as the 'essentially local' aspects of policing provision that the public are most likely to experience, while the other areas remain on the edges of our scope<sup>7</sup>.

As of March 2023, these four functions accounted for 62 percent of all police officers in England and Wales and 45 percent of the entire police workforce (i.e. officers, police staff and PCSOs combined)<sup>8</sup>.

As shown in Figure 1, broadly following the trajectory of overall police numbers, the headcount of (force-designated)<sup>9</sup> response officers in England and Wales declined (by around 7,500) between 2012 and 2016, but has since recovered under Operation Uplift, and (as of March 2023) stands at almost 43,000. The national neighbourhood police officer tally has fluctuated more widely, owing mainly to some local flexing of role definitions (especially) in the mid-2010s (Higgins, 2018), but has also shown some, more modest, recovery during the Uplift period – although the national trend in PCSOs, (despite large variations between forces), has been consistently downwards. Local investigation and public protection functions are generally smaller in size; overall officer numbers in the former category have declined over the decade, while the later function has grown.

These trends, however, represent the *aggregated* consequences of the service design decisions

5. See annual (31st March) data tables, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-workforce-england-and-wales>

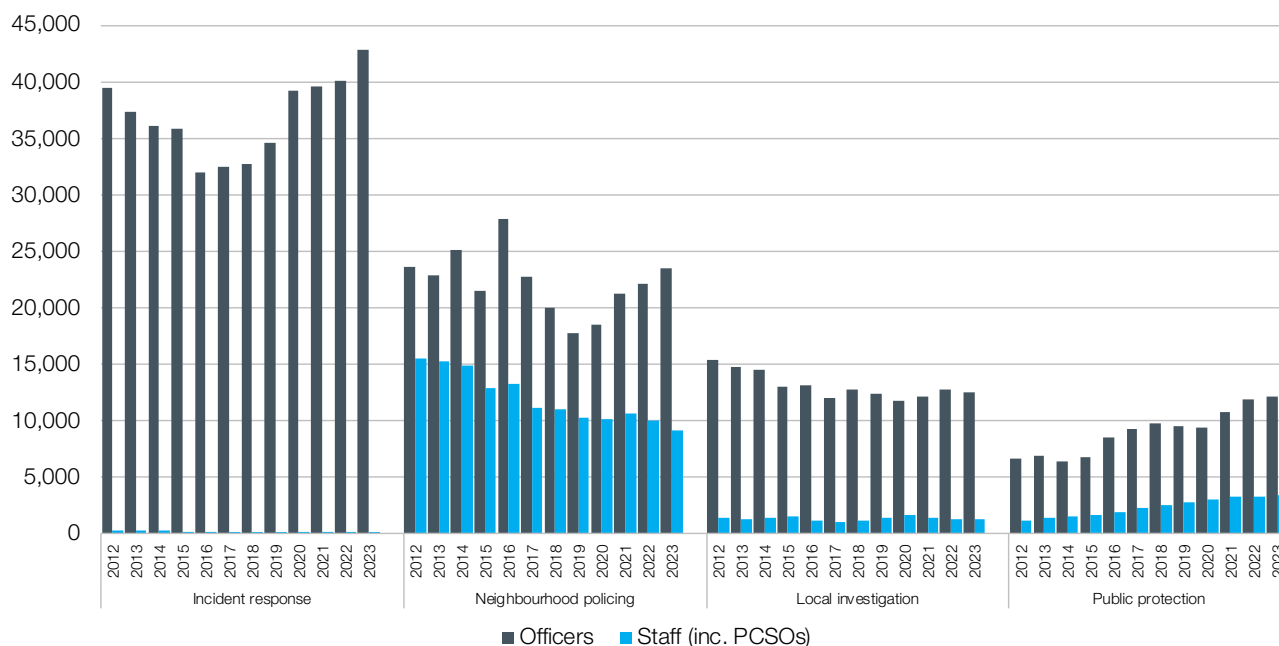
6. We note that this differs from the workforce data itself, which restricts its 'Local Policing' category to Neighbourhood Policing, Incident (Response) Management, Specialist Community Liaison and Local Policing Command and Support Overheads, while local investigation and public protection fall within other main categories. It also differs from the remit of the NPCC Local Policing Co-ordinating Committee, which, again, does not include investigation and public protection.

7. We draw here on our Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales (2022) and previous strategic discussion (e.g. National Debate Advisory Group, 2015) which identified these four functions as unsuitable for regional or national provision.

8. For 2023, our four categories have been derived from the workforce data as follows: Incident response: 1b Incident (Response) Management. Neighbourhood policing: 1a Neighbourhood Policing and 1c Specialist Community Liaison. Local investigation: 7g Local Investigation/Prisoner Processing. Public protection: 13c Protecting Vulnerable People and 13d Monitoring Dangerous and Repeat Offenders. For previous years, see methodological notes in accompanying slide pack.

9. As will become clear, there are notable differences in the actual job roles performed by those designated to the categories in different forces (e.g. response officers may also carry out crime investigations in some forces etc.). While forces are instructed to categorise according to, "primary role or function", this inevitably leads to some ambiguity in the data.

**Figure 1:** Police officers and staff (including PCSOs) in local policing functions in England and Wales, 2012 to 2023



made across 43 autonomous police forces. Figure 2 compares the relative sizes of each of these four functions (measured in terms of comparative officer numbers) in each force. The data is a snapshot of the situation in March 2023, when, on average, forces allocated just under half of their ‘local policing’ officer cadre<sup>10</sup> to incident response roles, and a quarter to neighbourhood policing, with the remaining quarter split between local investigation and public protection, with slightly more in the former category.

Some individual forces approximate these ratios: Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire, Wiltshire, Hampshire and the Metropolitan Police are among the closest to average, while others opt for comparatively larger response functions (Derbyshire, Cumbria, Lincolnshire, Dorset and North Wales among them) and some for larger neighbourhood cadres (Avon and Somerset, Merseyside, Suffolk and Staffordshire).

Outside of this rough continuum however, some forces appear to be operating with

radically different functional workforce designs. Four forces (North Yorkshire, Essex, Kent and Gloucestershire) currently declare no, or very few, designated response officers but have very large neighbourhood policing teams, suggesting that these roles are combined. Two forces, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, have no separate local investigation cadre (and in three further forces, these make up only around five per cent of the local policing cohort), again suggesting other officers carry out various aspects of this work. In contrast, Humberside, Northumbria, Warwickshire and Hampshire allocate more than 20 percent of local officers to investigations. In some forces, including the Metropolitan Police (MPS), West Midlands, Sussex and Surrey, around one in five local officers works in public protection, while in Dorset, Devon and Cornwall, Dyfed-Powys, Cheshire and Lancashire this is around one in 20. Gloucestershire told the Home Office that they have no officers specifically dedicated to either response or public protection functions.

10. The combined total for our four derived categories: incident response, neighbourhood policing, local investigation and public protection.



Further investigation is required to fully understand these differences. To some extent, they will reflect force-level demand patterns and/or geography: many of the more rural forces, for instance, appear to need higher proportions of response officers to cover their territories, and the country's two largest and most urban forces have sizable, specialist public protection teams. They may also reflect funding differentials and the legacy of previous decisions made in difficult financial circumstances, (for

instance, by PCCs to raise council tax to preserve neighbourhood policing, or by chief constables to retain police officers by cutting PCSOs).

The most striking departures, however, appear to echo divergent choices about the best way to divide, combine, ringfence and prioritise different aspects of the local policing workload, which are grounded in different policing philosophies (or as one commentator put it "*differences of strategic intent*").



# 6. TRACKING CHANGE

These contrasting approaches are most clearly apparent when a force changes the way it operates. For example, Figure 3 shows the annual officer and police staff headcounts within the four local policing functions in North Yorkshire Police. As can be seen, the force’s structure is relatively consistent between 2012 and 2022 (notwithstanding a modest, incremental shift of resource from response to local investigation and neighbourhood functions, from around 2016). In 2022 however we see an abrupt shift in police officer numbers from incident response to neighbourhood policing categories.

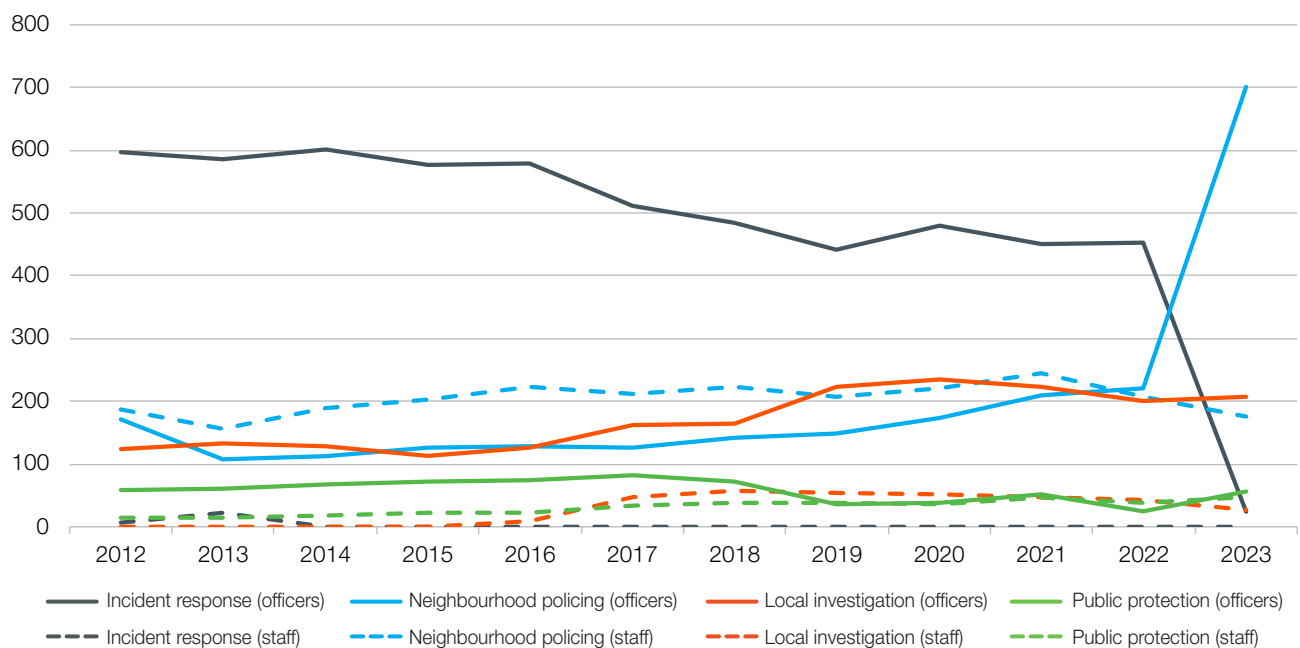
Of course, this does not mean that North Yorkshire Police stopped attending emergency calls. What it does indicate however, is a significant change in their local policing approach which (it seems highly likely) reflects the implementation of the force’s Early Action Together programme, that aims to “see prevention and early intervention truly embedded as a way of working across the whole organisation”, including through a concerted

focus on place-based working, problem solving and partnership collaboration (North Yorkshire Police, 2022; North Yorkshire Community Safety Partnership, 2022).

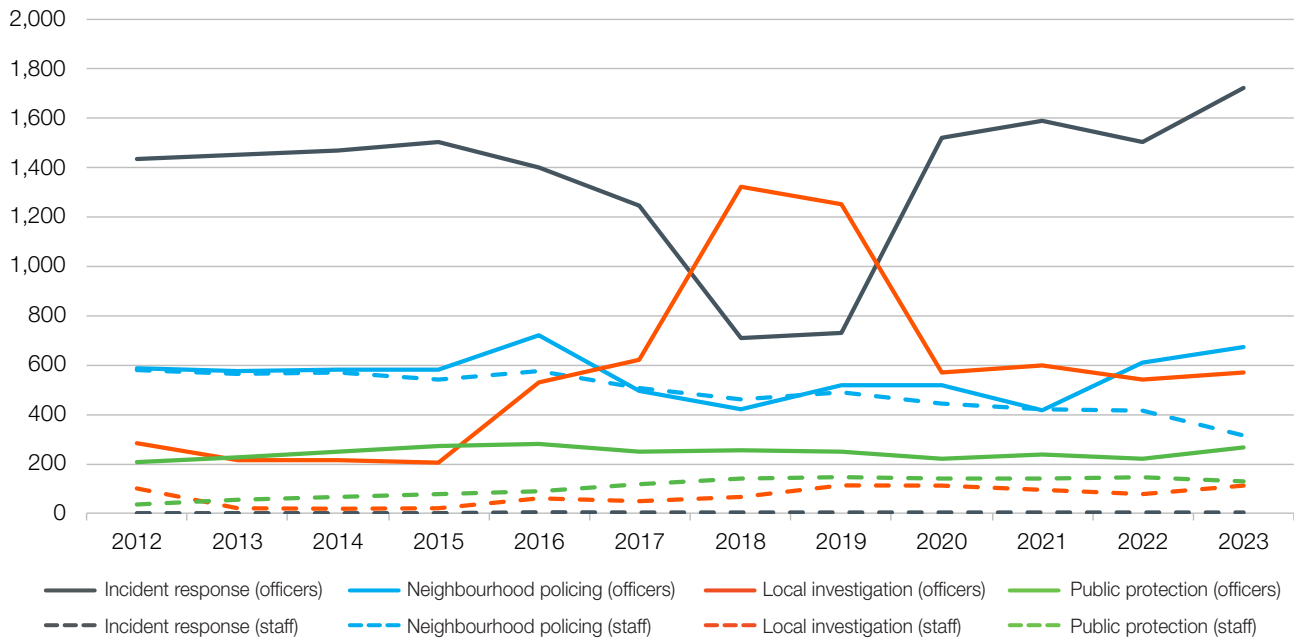
Figure 4 illustrates a different form of re-organisation, this time in Thames Valley Police. In 2017/18, substantial numbers of police officers were moved from the incident response category into local investigation, as part of an initiative to create a ‘borderless’ response function and specialist investigation hubs. Notably, however, between 2019 and 2020, this move was reversed.

Local documentation provides a fascinating insight into a thoroughly planned change programme, designed to improve demand management, protect local neighbourhood teams and reduce the number of handovers experienced by crime victims, but which came under intense pressure from surges in demand and unanticipated establishment reductions, created ‘silo-mentality’, impacted poorly on officer welfare and was eventually abandoned (Wong, no date).

**Figure 3:** Officers and staff in local policing functions 2012-2023: North Yorkshire Police



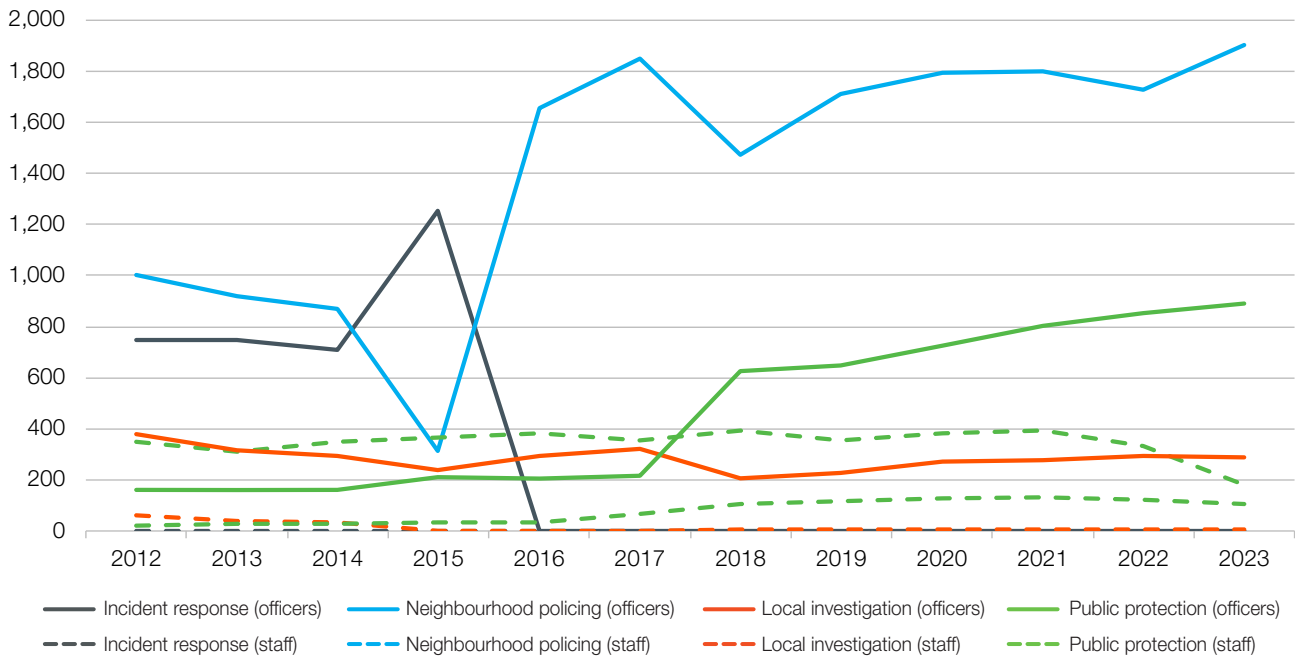
**Figure 4:** Officers and staff in local policing functions 2012-2023: Thames Valley Police



The data give fewer clues to the design and delivery of public protection, but in Kent Police for instance, (where response and neighbourhood functions have not been separated for an extended period), we see a marked change in public protection officer numbers during 2017/18 (see

Figure 5), apparently relating to the introduction of the New Horizon model (Chief Constable of Kent Police, 2017), which sought to enhance the focus on vulnerability and involved transferring ownership of rape and sexual offences investigations to local policing divisions.

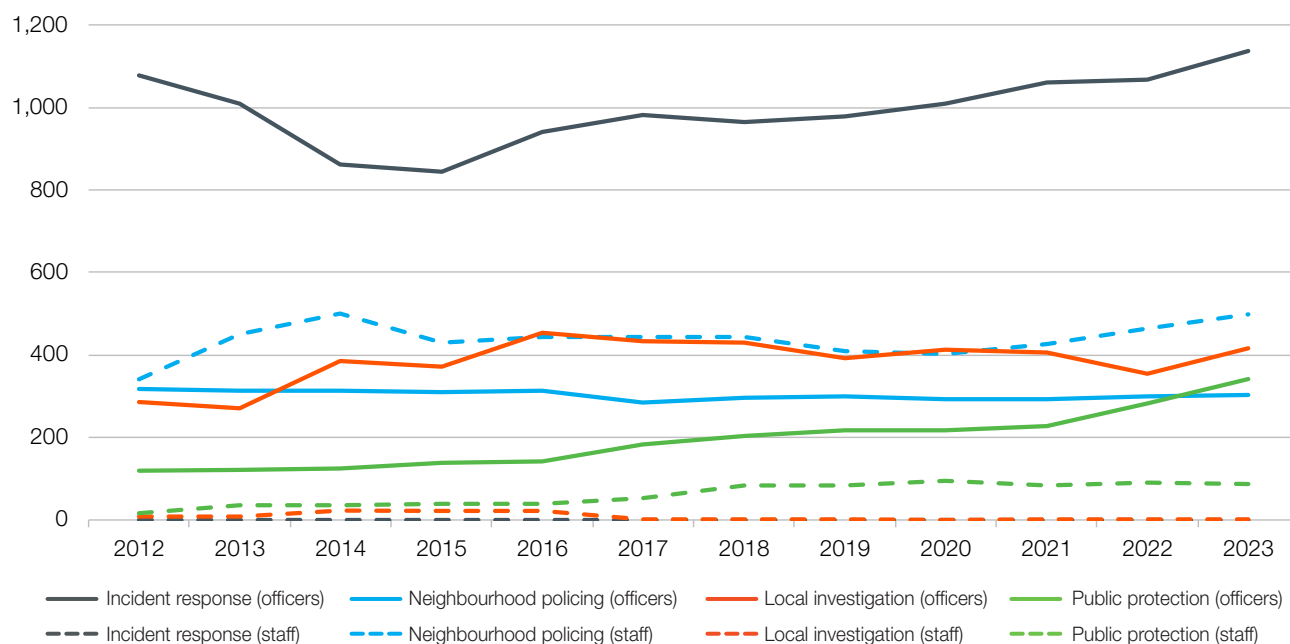
**Figure 5:** Officers and staff in local policing functions 2012-2023: Kent Police



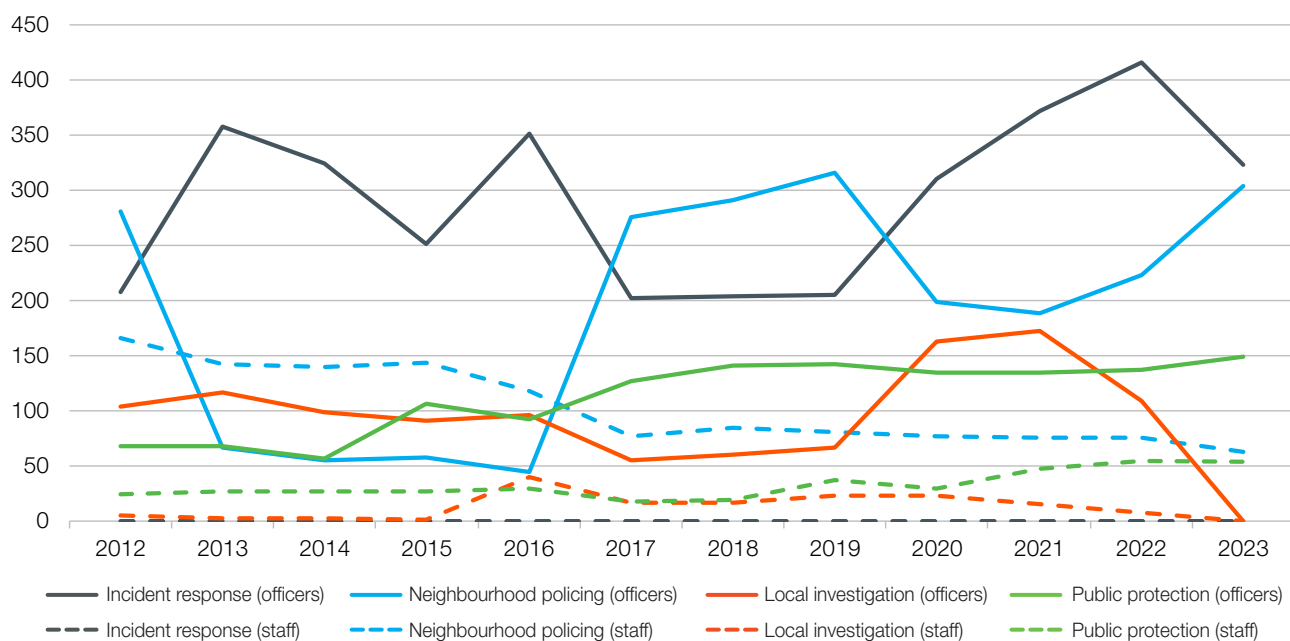
Not all forces show such abrupt operating readjustments within their workforce data, South Wales Police (Figure 6) is among those with a more consistent profile (although, it's worth noting that some forms of e.g. geographical, multi-year

or more subtle sub-categorical remodelling, may not show up so clearly in these data), whereas others, such as Bedfordshire Police (Figure 7), give the impression of near continual change and readjustment.

**Figure 6:** Officers and staff in local policing functions 2012-2023: South Wales Police



**Figure 7:** Officers and staff in local policing functions 2012-2023: Bedfordshire Police



Across the entire data set we have found more than 100 instances like these, of substantial year-to-year changes within forces' workforce data returns, that appear to indicate significant remodelling activity<sup>11</sup>.

We found 27 cases of sizeable decreases in response officer numbers at the same time as increases in neighbourhood policing numbers (as

in North Yorkshire in 2022/23 (Figure 3) and Kent in 2015/16 (Figure 5)), but we also found 25 cases of the opposite occurring (for instance, this happened twice in Bedfordshire in 2016/17 and 2022/23 (Figure 7)). We found 13 cases of notable shifts from incident response to local investigation (as in Thames Valley in 2017/18 (Figure 4)) but also 11 cases of the opposite (as in Thames Valley in 2019/20).

11. We applied a threshold of a combined year-on-year change in officer numbers, summing across the four functions, equal to at least 20 percent of the total numbers in the four functions in the earlier year. While accepting this is relatively arbitrary, the intention was to distinguish abrupt, significant changes, likely to have resulted from substantial remodelling, from more incremental change and natural variation.

**Figure 8:** Number of substantial year-on-year shifts between local policing functions within police forces' officer function dataset (2012-2023)

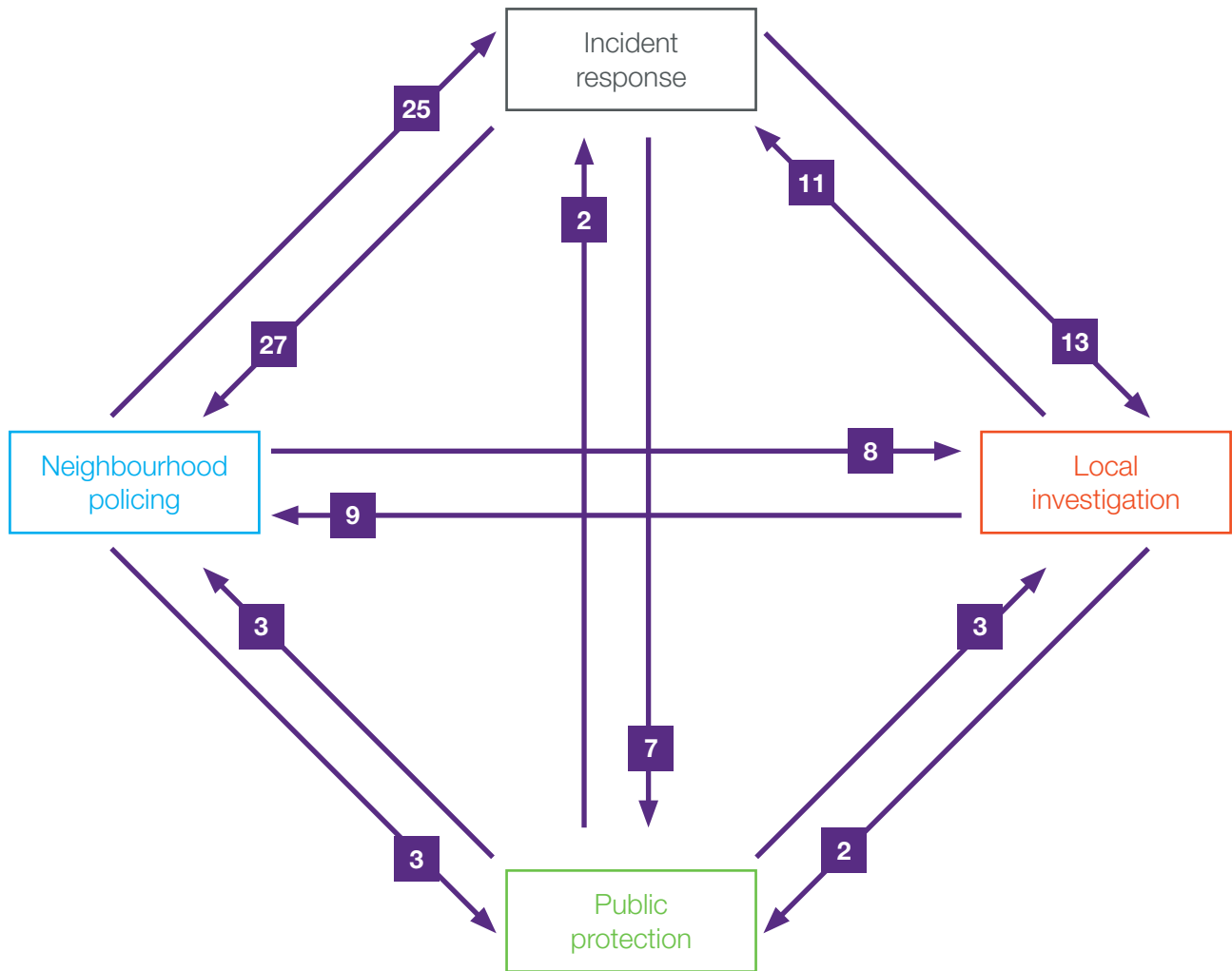
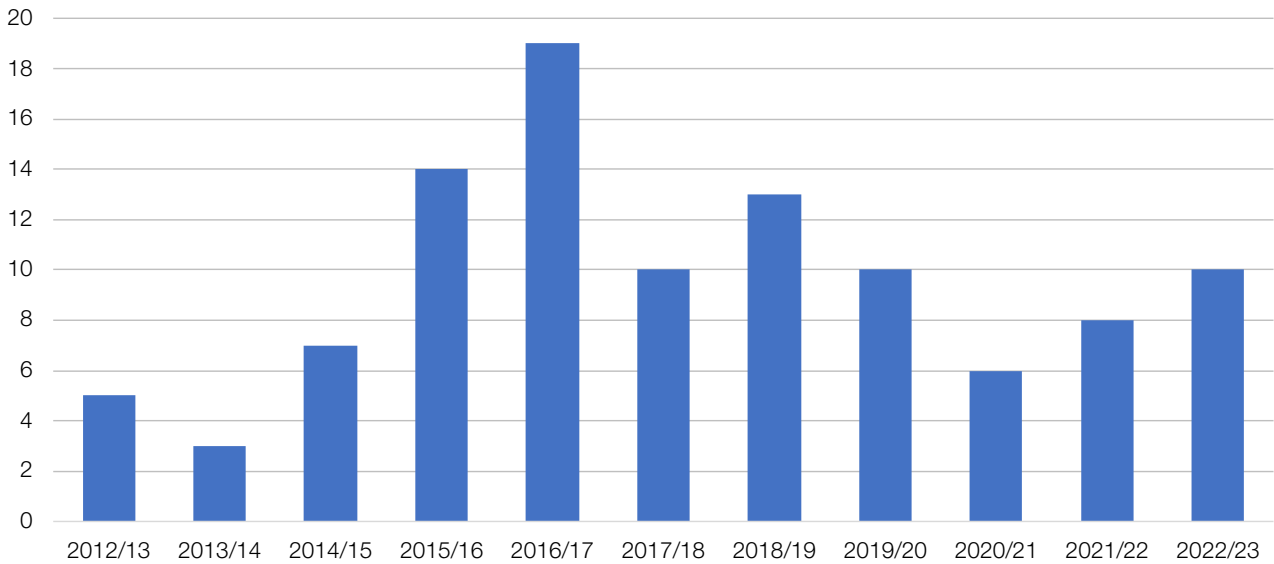


Figure 8 summarises the overall tally. Not all of the rearrangements counted here are as large as those illustrated in the above charts, and in some cases three, or even all four of the functions changed markedly in the same year<sup>12</sup>, but the overall degree

and patterning of flux is clear, and the pace of change – which appeared to be slowing around 2020 (perhaps curtailed by Covid) – seems to be accelerating again (see Figure 9).

12. This results in some multi-counting in the chart e.g. if response officers numbers decline and both neighbourhood and local investigation numbers rise, this is counted in both the response-to-neighbourhood and response-to-local investigation totals.

**Figure 9:** Substantial changes within police force functional officer allocations, by year

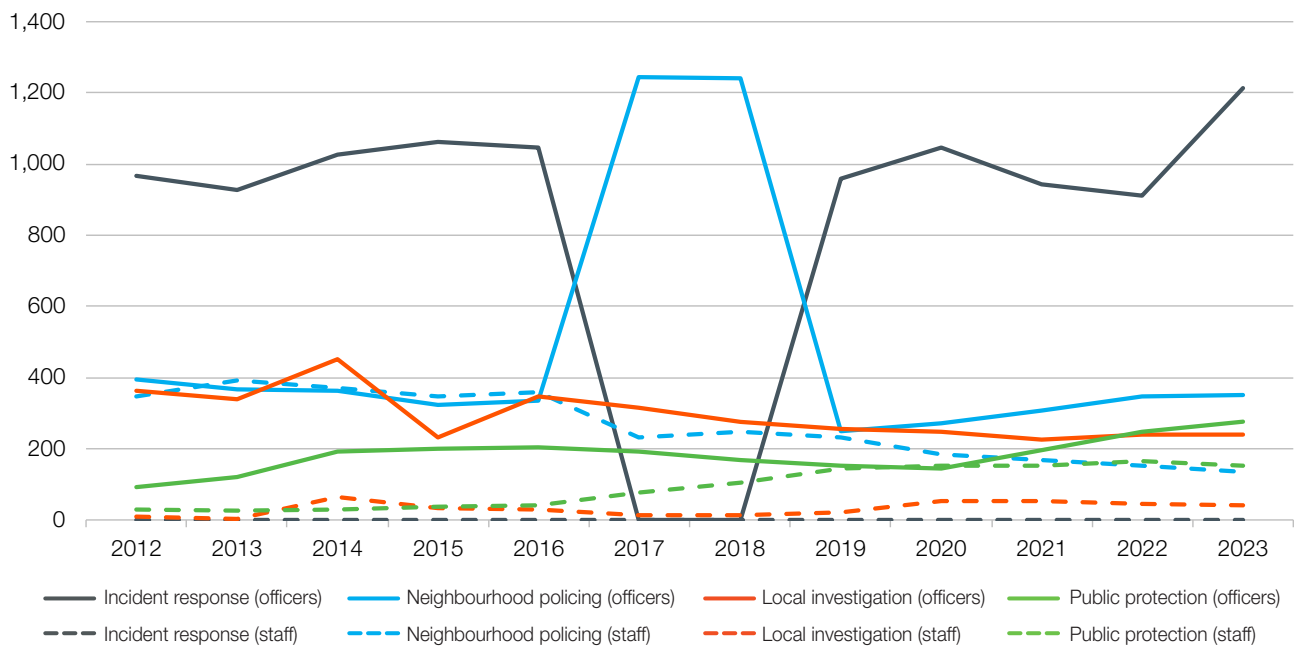


In addition, we found 24 cases where a remodelling decision appears to have been reversed within three years (as in Thames Valley in 2019/20 (Figure 4), or Bedfordshire between 2016/17 and 2019/20 (Figure 7)). In fact, Derbyshire and Leicestershire seem to have had a strikingly similar experience to Thames Valley during the same time frame<sup>13</sup> (did they know this at the time?).

South Yorkshire, rather like Bedfordshire, reversed its amalgamation of response and neighbourhood

functions two years after it was introduced (see Figure 10), while at different times Cambridgeshire, Wiltshire, Gwent and Essex (twice?)<sup>14</sup> appear to have gone through similar cycles. One wonders why Kent's iteration of the approach has endured while others were abandoned, and whether North Yorkshire or Avon and Somerset (who adopted a similar approach in 2021) took any learning from the previous experiences of other forces when developing their own programmes for change.

**Figure 10:** Officers and staff in local policing functions 2012-2023: South Yorkshire Police



13. Not charted here but see accompanying slide pack.

14. See slide pack.



# 7. NEXT STEPS

In the next phase of the project, we want to collate and explore the local narratives behind these data – and also find out what it does not reveal. We would like to hear from police forces about their histories of change and continuity, the rationales and imperatives behind various phases of redesign; about what has been learned, the legacies these phases have left behind, and about what is coming next. We want to see whether it is possible to shape the working schematic (presented in Figure 2) into a useful typology that helps to classify and clarify the various ‘forms’ of local policing being provided across the country (the force-level slide pack accompanying this paper should provide a useful way in). We will also investigate whether it is possible to develop testable hypothesis about the relationship between service design and outcomes: simply put, are different way of doing things ‘better’ or ‘worse’ for achieving different ends?

In later phases, we want to explore how different ways of working impact on practitioners. How does the experience of a response officer who also carries crime investigations and is allocated to a force sub-division, differ from one who responds across a wider area and quickly hands over investigative follow-up work? What is it like for a generalist investigator to handle a rape investigation, compared to one working in a specialist public protection unit? Can a neighbourhood cop who also routinely responds to calls for service give sufficient emphasis to problem solving or maintain strong community relationships? What, overall, are the frustrations and benefits, satisfactions and stresses of working within different local policing systems, and how do they relate to delivery and development? We also want to look further afield, to see if there are

lessons to be learned from approaches taken outside of England and Wales.

Finally, we want to look to the future. In our *2022 Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales* we identified three challenges – of capacity, capability and organisation – confronting policing in the middle part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We also outlined the strategic capabilities the service will need to meet them, working as part of a preventive public safety system: a functioning working relationship with the public rooted in legitimacy, fit-for-purpose skills and technology, a culture of learning and development, and a healthy, motivated and well-led workforce. In the final section of the Review, we looked at the national structures needed to support these capabilities, made recommendations for the national and regional reallocation of some functions, and for new or expanded central agencies to deal with crime prevention and police improvement.

But we were also clear that a great deal of policing – including the functions we have focused on here – needs to remain locally owned, locally delivered and locally accountable. At this local level too, however, structures and systems play an important role in supporting or undermining capability building. We start from the premise that local policing models not only need to deal with demand, achieve value for money and maximise policing outcomes today, but can also help incubate a police service equipped to serve the communities of tomorrow. We hope the findings of this project can provide a platform for thinking about how that might be achieved, and that this paper is a useful way to begin that conversation.

We welcome input and comments at [lpmodels@police-foundation.org.uk](mailto:lpmodels@police-foundation.org.uk)

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15. All links accessed 29 January 2024

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