

# ‘Irrelevant’ police forces struggle with rising crime, say MPs

**Richard Ford**, Home Correspondent

October 25 2018, 12:01am, The Times



Outdated technology and falling numbers have left forces “badly overstretched”  
JACK TAYLOR/GETTY IMAGES

Police face becoming irrelevant to the public because there are so few officers on the beat and so many crimes are no longer investigated or solved, MPs have said.

Forces in England and Wales are “struggling to cope” as a result of their outdated technology, falling numbers and “fragmented” leadership, the home affairs select committee says in a report published today.

The number of crimes recorded by the police is growing, but arrests, charges and summonses have fallen to “shockingly low” levels for some offences. Some forces are so “badly overstretched” that they are unable even to investigate many crimes, the report says. The MPs say it is unsurprising that so few people bother to report fraud, now the most commonly experienced crime, because so few perpetrators are caught.

The surge in online fraud and a huge rise in sexual offences against children are cited as examples of problems that the police are failing to confront.

An outdated funding formula, a “culture of blame” and structures that have barely changed since the 1960s are all said to have contributed to forces’ failure to deal with the demands of the 21st century.

The report accuses the Home Office of a “complete failure of leadership” in driving forward the effort to tackle new patterns of crime and provide police technology on a national basis. The MPs have now called on the home secretary, Sajid Javid, to hold a root- and-branch review of policing.

He should bring forward proposals by February for much greater pooling of resources at national and regional level to tackle online crimes and organised crime, county lines and modern slavery, the MPs say. Calling for a fundamental overhaul of the way police deal with online fraud, the report also says global tech giants must do more to help police to deal with the crime as well as online sexual offending.

“We conclude that forces are badly overstretched: the number of traditional-volume crimes is rising but the number of arrests and charges brought by the police is falling,” the report says. “Without significant reform and investment, communities will be increasingly let down.”

The report comes amid growing concern over crime rates, which rose by almost 32 per cent in England and Wales between 2015 and 2018.

Despite steep rises in robbery, theft and vehicle crime the number of charges and summonses fell by 26 per cent in the same period, meaning 153,000 fewer criminals were brought to justice. Only about 9 per cent of 22,000 crimes involving indecent images of children recorded in 2017-18 led to a charge, a 48 per cent fall on the previous year, although a precise proportion cannot be made on available evidence, the report says.

It adds that as little as 3 per cent of the roughly 260,000 alleged frauds reported to Action Fraud in 2016-17 resulted in a charge or summons. The proportion of fraud cases investigated is “shockingly low”, the report says, adding that it appears highly unlikely more than one in 200 victims sees the perpetrator convicted.

A fall in officer numbers from 143,000 to 122,000 between 2010 and March this year and the closure of more than 600 police stations has led to claims that officers are retreating from the front line. Police are instead encouraging people to report crime online.

The report said that without more officers being engaged with local communities, “policing is at risk of becoming irrelevant to most people”.

Yvette Cooper, Labour chairwoman of the committee, said: “Crime is up, charges and arrests are down, and the police service is struggling to respond effectively to emerging and growing challenges, such as online fraud and online child abuse. Policing urgently needs more money.”

A Home Office spokesman said: “The home secretary has already been clear that he will prioritise funding for the police.”

- Police in England and Wales are “woefully under resourced” to investigate the near-epidemic levels of online child sexual abuse, the home affairs committee says. Some forces use officers without specialist training to investigate alleged offences and have insufficient resources to manage the risk from registered sex offenders. The MPs say that information sharing between agencies is poor and rehabilitation of offenders virtually non-existent.

## **CRIME BY NUMBERS**

- **32%** rise in recorded crime in England and Wales between 2015-2018
- **26%** fall in the number of charges and summons in same period
- **153,000** fewer criminals brought to justice
- **75%** of theft offences closed without a suspect being identified
- **9%** of the 22,000 offences involving indecent images of children recorded in 2017/18 led to a charge
- **385** people convicted of possession of indecent images of children in 2017
- **3%** of alleged frauds resulted in a charge or summons