

# Failing police ‘rumbled’ by weary public

**Everyday crime going unsolved, says watchdog**

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Officers with little experience are having to deal with serious offences, a police watchdog said

ALAMY

Police have been “rumbled” by the public for their failure to investigate everyday crimes such as car theft and burglary, a watchdog has said.

Forces’ inability to pursue some of the most common offences has eroded the relationship between police and the people they serve, according to a senior figure in the inspectorate.

Matt Parr questioned how long society could tolerate a situation where, for some types of crime, a suspect was charged in less than 4 per cent of cases.

He was speaking as a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary said that the public was losing faith in the justice system's ability to tackle offending.

Overall, a suspect was charged in 7.8 per cent of crimes recorded by police in England and Wales in the year to March 2019, down from 13.8 per cent in 2015-16. The proportion of victims unwilling to support a prosecution rose to 22.6 per cent from 13.2 per cent over the same period.

MPs and academics have warned about a crisis in confidence but this is the first time that the inspectorate of constabulary, which monitors forces, has spoken so starkly about the issue.

Mr Parr said that there was a shortage of detectives and warned of cases where officers with little experience were dealing with serious offences. Police were also struggling to investigate more complex crimes involving the [gathering of digital material](#), he said.

“If you are the subject of a minor burglary or minor assault or car crime, I think people have now got to the stage where their expectations are low and the police live down to those expectations because they simply don't have the capacity to deal with it.”

He added that particularly in the “volume crime area”, which includes burglary and vehicle thefts, “the public has rumbled that the police capacity to deal with this is extremely limited”.

“There are some strikingly low figures about car crime resolution, meaning most of the public simply give up reporting it because the chances of anything positive happening are so slim,” he said.

# Charge rates

## Charges for assault without injury

2015-16	11.8%
2018-19	6.1%

## Domestic burglary

2015-16	7.6%
2018-19	4.2%

## Theft of motor vehicle

2015-16	7.6%
2018-19	3.5%

## Overall

2015-16	13.1%
2018-19	7.8%

Source: [Home Office](#)

He added that he remembered thinking “what planet are we on?” after a briefing in which a force highlighted that it had solved nearly 11 per cent of car crime.

Mr Parr also pointed to “worrying trends” showing that victims of more serious offences, including domestic abuse and sexual assault, were becoming less likely to support prosecutions.

“Our judgment is that forces are doing all they can reasonably be expected to do,” he said. “There is a separate, bigger, question about whether we are as a society prepared to tolerate a situation in which so much volume crime is not effectively investigated. That is a complex, difficult question, but continuing performance figures like that chip away at public confidence in the police and may well be part of the reason for the abandonment of victim support [for prosecutions] that we have referred to.”

He added: “I think these levels of volume crime resolution rates are corrosive for the long-term relationship between police and public.”

Police officer numbers fell from 141,000 in 2010 to 124,000 last September and recorded crime in England and Wales rose from 4.3 million offences to 5.7 million offences in the same period.

Boris Johnson has promised to increase police officer numbers by 20,000 over three years as part of an effort to restore the Tory reputation on law and order. However, the watchdog’s report warned that the policy would not solve all of the problems facing forces and that increasing the number of officers may only mask poor performance in forces that were failing to solve long-term problems.

It highlighted poor IT and variations in the length of time police keep mobile phones while investigating crime. Some victims in Northamptonshire have had to wait 18 months before their device was returned to them.

Yvette Cooper, chairwoman of the Commons’ home affairs select committee, said: “The inspectorate is right to be worried. The public need to have confidence that the criminal justice system can catch and deal with criminals. So the plummeting charging and conviction rates are really serious. When so few crimes are solved, people are bound to lose confidence but that’s really corrosive.

“There are too few police, the CPS is overstretched and there has also been too little leadership by the Home Office on how to respond to ever more complex and changing patterns of crime.”

John Apter, chairman of the Police Federation, said: “The harsh reality is that policing can no longer do all the things it once could, with some local forces struggling to respond to 999 calls in timely manner. The postcode lottery of funding for local forces is something we have warned about and is likely to get

worse as the government pushes more responsibility for raising funds on to local taxpayers through council tax.”

He added: “The police service is faced with tough decisions about to how to allocate limited resources resulting in some crime types becoming less of a priority. No police officer is happy with this situation; and some of those crimes which are defined as ‘minor’ are the ones which can be the most impactful on the victim.”

The Home Office said: “[The inspectorate] has found that many forces are performing well and we welcome the improvements in support for vulnerable people and victims. In areas where services are not up to scratch, we expect police to take action and implement the inspectorate’s recommendations at pace.”