

Professionalism and performance – police leadership for the future

Executive summary of the police leadership commission report.

First published 6 July 2026

Executive summary

The police leadership commission has undertaken the most comprehensive examination of police leadership in England and Wales in a generation. The independent commission was set up by the College of Policing with the support of the Home Office in October 2025.

Bringing together expertise from across policing, the private sector, academia, the military and politics, we have heard from thousands of officers, staff and members of the public through our force visits, call for evidence, survey work, roundtables and focus groups. Our work has covered the entirety of the policing workforce, including officers, staff and volunteers working at all levels.

We have seen outstanding examples of leadership and delivery across policing, often in the most challenging circumstances.

We have also identified systemic causes for concern about the consistency, capability and culture of leadership across the service. Put simply, leadership in policing is not consistently of a high enough standard to provide confidence and trust in the attainment of the service which the public deserves.

As we set out in our case for change, today's officers and staff are frequently hampered by resource scarcity, disempowered by excessive paperwork and conduct processes and insufficiently focused on delivering outcomes for the public.

These two facts reflect a service that continues to deliver remarkable work every day to protect the public, but which is not consistently equipped, developed or supported to deliver excellent leadership across the sector.

As the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) has highlighted, 15 years after leaving Sandhurst, a colonel in charge of 1,500 people will have undertaken 72 weeks of?

leadership development. By comparison, chief superintendents in the MPS who have had comparable progression are likely to have had two or three weeks.

We are proposing a fundamental overhaul of how policing attracts, recruits, develops, appoints and supports its leaders at all levels, in all ranks, grades and roles to:

- reset police leadership culture towards high performance, cutting crime and keeping people safe
- prepare for the challenges of the future as rapid changes to society fundamentally alter the nature of crime and crime fighting
- address inadequate and inconsistent approaches to the leadership development of everyone in policing

This overhaul is anchored in the government's police reform white paper '[From local to national: a new model for policing](#)' which sets out the government's ambition to boost neighbourhood policing, create a stronger policing system, drive higher standards and deliver modern capabilities.

Our recommendations (which are set out in our [list of recommendations](#)) sit firmly within those ambitions to deliver greater grip, consistency and policy solutions to meet the challenges of the future.

Our proposals are summarised as follows.

Defining police leadership

We offer a working definition of leadership to provide a shared understanding of what is meant by good police leadership. This lays a foundation for further detailed work by the proposed National Academy of Police Leadership (set out in [chapter 12 of the report](#)) in creating a clear and agreed approach to leadership for the future.

Workforce strategy, data and evaluation

We agree with the government's commitment to design a national workforce strategy for policing. There is an urgent need for a workforce strategy which provides a clear plan to address existing critical and future leadership skills gaps. We also make the case for the proposed National Police Service (NPS) to deliver strategic workforce planning in the long term so that policing can take ownership of its own workforce planning.

Representation and ethics

Radical change to the way we train, develop, promote and support all leaders is required to ensure talented leaders in policing are recognised and rewarded, irrespective of background or characteristics, and foster a culture where fairness is experienced and not just advocated. Taken together, our recommendations should help to address representation within the police workforce and support better policing of all communities and groups.

We also propose the NPS should take a lead role in promoting ethical and inclusive policing and be responsible for building a community of practice across the country. The NPS should lay out a clearer national landscape for ethics forums. This may require the establishment of a national ethics capability within the NPS itself.

Police constable recruitment and training

We call for forces to offer a range of police constable training programmes to cater for people with different skills, experiences and learning preferences. Bespoke advice should support successful applicants to choose the best programme for them. Advice on training and development should continue to be available as part of the support framework for leaders at all ranks.

Almost two thirds of new police constables were trained through the unaccredited police constable entry programme (PCEP) in 2025/26 (National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Management Information, accessed June 2026, unpublished. This figure includes PCEP, DCEP, and Police Now entrants, who undertake PCEP training). Forces should have a formal arrangement which supports recruits trained through PCEP to gain accreditation of the learning they completed during their initial training. Recruits trained through PCEP should also have the option to top up their accreditation and gain an equivalent qualification to the police constable degree apprenticeship. There should be a robust approach to ensuring that all PCEP recruits have reached the necessary standard.

Career long learning

Through the annual performance review process, professionals and line managers should be able to set continuing professional development goals, understand their leadership competency and map their career path. Records of each review should eventually be included in a complete professional digital passport that gives every police professional a central record of their

development, training, qualifications, conduct and performance. The NPS should hold a national database of these digital passports and this database should support the delivery of a licence to practise for police officers.

Police leadership fast stream

The introduction of a new police leadership fast stream would support the development of all those with talent and ambition to be senior police officers. The fast stream would provide structured development for up to ten years to ensure participants achieve rapid promotion. The most talented and experienced participants should aim to hold the rank of superintendent when they graduate. The police leadership fast stream would be the largest talent scheme ever introduced into policing.

The fast stream should be open to existing police officers up to the rank of inspector, allied police professionals and volunteers as well as those joining policing externally. The scheme would be designed and managed from the centre but delivered in partnership with forces. All forces should participate in the fast stream to guarantee sustained investment and ensure large annual cohorts.

Policing should aim to recruit at least 400 people a year onto the police leadership fast stream, the equivalent of around 5 per cent of annual police constable joiners and more than twice the average number of annual promotions to superintendent.

Data on police constable joiners is taken from [Police workforce England and Wales statistics – GOV.UK](#). Data on annual number of promotions is in [Police workforce open data tables – GOV.UK](#).

Frontline leadership

Given that around three quarters of all warranted officers are constables, we recommend that the rank of senior constable should be created to recognise experience and effective leadership on the front line.

Senior constable should be a formal rank (with a level of seniority), but it should not be necessary to have been a senior constable to gain promotion to sergeant. Expectations for this role should include mentoring and coaching responsibilities, role-modelling professional standards, and supporting frontline supervision.

Over three quarters of the sergeants responding to our survey reported acting up before substantive promotion and over half had done so for 13 months or longer. Promotion processes to sergeant and inspector are broken (police leadership commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished). They rely on an out-of-date exam that only half of prospective sergeants and just over a third of prospective inspectors pass. The entire process should also be reformed to equip these ranks with the knowledge and confidence to lead teams and serve the public, use frontline leadership talent to the full, and support the talent pipeline. The reforms should build on the new sergeant and inspector promotion process currently being tested and the new process should be rolled out nationally as soon as possible.

An open profession

The creation of the NPS presents an opportunity for increasingly varied development experiences. Secondments to the NPS should be a key feature of development for those seeking to reach the very top of policing.

The service should continue to bring in experienced professionals at the level where their skills are most needed, while holding them to the same standards as anyone else. A targeted direct entry scheme should bring proven leaders from professions that are adjacent to policing into senior and executive police officer roles. This programme should recruit people who have proven operational experience keeping the public safe and working with victims and offenders.

The new targeted direct entry scheme should be supported by the National Academy of Police Leadership and its senior workforce planning function (described in [recommendations 24](#) and [22](#)).

Police staff make up over a third of the police workforce and yet still do not have the recognition they deserve as important police leaders. Police staff structures should also be aligned to officer ranks and police staff should have equal access to all leadership development opportunities.

Quality leadership development

More than a fifth of new sergeants and inspectors responding to our survey said they received no formal leadership training more than two years into their role (police leadership commission sergeants and inspectors survey, 2026, unpublished). Leadership programmes should be delivered nationally and regionally and be established at all levels to build national capability by enabling

police leaders to learn with counterparts in other forces and to create consistency and economies of scale.

Leadership development networks should be established at every level of policing connected to public sector partners. Officers and allied professionals should be given protected time to participate in network activities.

All chief officers, including chief constables, should be expected to complete an annual performance review to provide supportive professional development and an up-to-date assessment of performance. The government should identify the best mechanisms to conduct annual performance reviews for chief constables through its work reforming force structures and accountability arrangements.

Senior promotions and appointments

A new standardised approach to promotion to chief inspector, superintendent and chief superintendent should be introduced. These processes should include the same features as reformed processes at sergeant and inspector level so there is a consistent approach to promotion at every rank. The senior workforce planning function promised in the [government's police reform white paper](#) should be established as a matter of urgency.

The central appointments panel for chief constable appointments should be established to ensure that candidates shortlisted for chief constable roles meet required standards. The panel should ensure candidates shortlisted for chief constable positions have varied experience, including experience of policing in different types of places and/or working in more than one organisation.

There were fewer than three applicants on average per chief constable role and many posts are eventually filled by an internal candidate. The National Academy of Police Leadership should host the senior workforce planning function and the central appointments panel (described in [recommendation 22 and 23](#)) so that these entities can work effectively together.

Delivering a new approach to police leadership

Our radical blueprint should be delivered through the creation of a National Academy of Police Leadership, the restoration of central funding, and the establishment of an implementation group.

A National Academy of Police Leadership should be created with the necessary governance and funding to become a clear system owner for police leadership, delivering at the centre and influencing at, and learning from, the local level. The academy should have its own dedicated building that provides an inspirational learning environment for all police leaders.

Spending on leadership development at the centre is only about 0.02 per cent of total police funding (£4m a year is the equivalent of around 0.02 per cent of [total police funding in 2026/27](#)). The government and the Home Office should restore funding to the centre so it can better prioritise national leadership development spend.

The Home Office should establish an implementation group to take forward our recommendations. The group should ensure that the recommendations and detailed analysis in this report are not delayed and it should be connected to the police reform programme to use the synergies and opportunities this presents. The group should be led by the Home Office and the new NPS.

There is much to do to produce the improvements we all want to see. Our proposals are an important step to deliver real change and their quick implementation will be vital to achieving that.

This executive summary is from the police leadership commission report, 'Professionalism and performance – police leadership for the future'. It is accompanied by a list of recommendations.

- [Go to the full report](#)
- [Go to the list of recommendations](#)

Tags

Leadership development