ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

Internal Audit Progress Report

26 January 2026

THE POWER OF BEING UNDERSTOOD
AUDIT | TAX | CONSULTING

RSM

CONTENTS

Appendices

KEY MESSAGES

The internal audit plan for 2025/26 was approved by the Audit and Governance Committee at the March 2025 meeting. This report provides an update on progress against the plan and summarises the results of our work to date.

We have issued three final reports as part of the internal audit plan since the Audit and Governance Committee meeting in October 2025:

- Service (Non-Corporate Risks) Risk Management and Governance of Service Plans (**Reasonable Assurance** (Risk Management) and **Partial Assurance** (Service Plans)

- Payroll Provider – IRIS (**Reasonable Assurance**)

- Equality Impact Assessments (**Reasonable Assurance**)

A summary of the outcome of these reviews is provided in Section 1. **[To discuss and note]**

We have also issued one draft report since the last meeting for Firefighter Pensions Administration (WYPF), and we are in the process of agreeing management actions with management ahead of finalising the report.

The fieldwork for Contaminants has now been completed. The report is currently in our quality assurance process for review, a draft report is expected w/c 19 January 2026. **[To note]**

Details of the progress made against the internal audit plan are included at Appendix A. **[To note]**

Final Reports

01
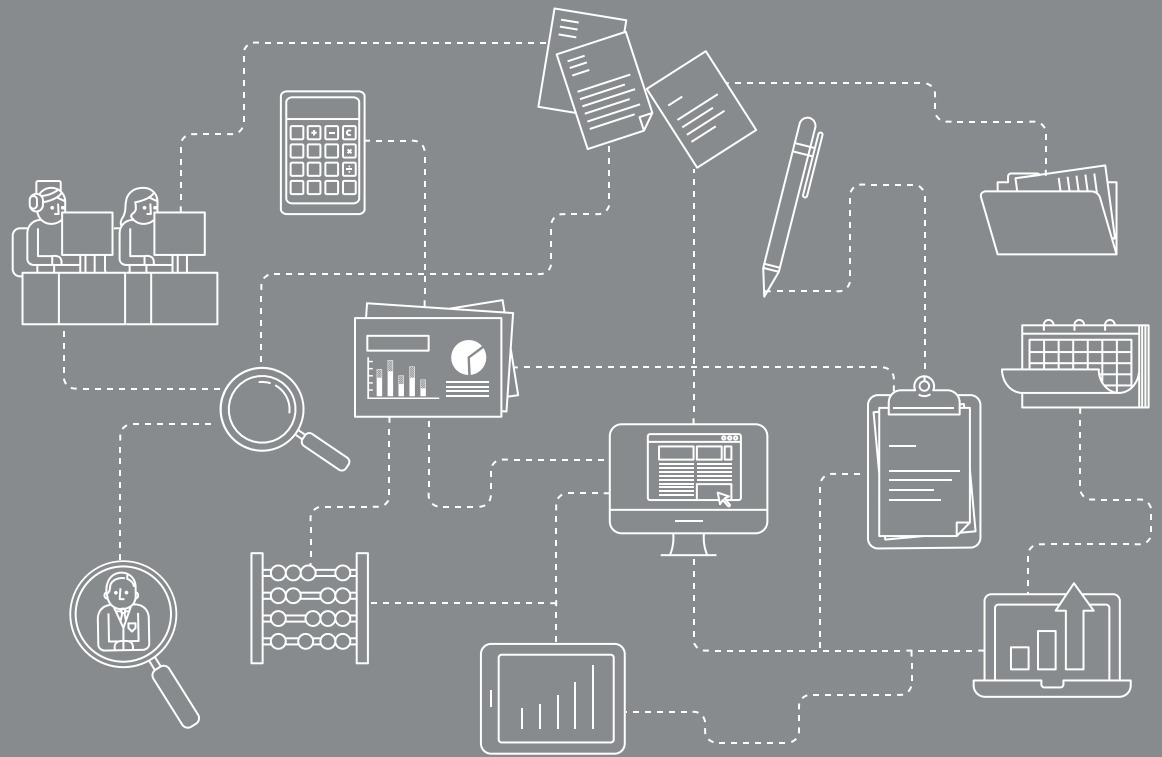
1   FINAL REPORTS

1.1   Summary of final reports being presented to this Committee

This section summarises the reports that have been finalised since the last meeting.

Assignment	Opinion issued	Actions agreed			
		A	L	M	H
Service (Non-Corporate Risks) Risk Management and Governance of Service Plans (1.25/26)					
Service (non-corporate risks) Risk Management The governance structure for risk management was clearly documented, with reporting lines and responsibilities detailed across 30 groups, and Terms of Reference for the sampled forums included defined roles and responsibilities. Risk escalations and de-escalations from the Corporate Risk Register were recorded in the SLT executive summary, which included the number of risks, new and closed risks, score changes, and outdated risks. However, we identified several areas of improvement including that the non-Corporate Risk Register did not include fields to record the cause and effect of risks or the actions required for mitigations. We found that risks with a residual score below 17 were not consistently subject to periodic review, and one sampled risk was recorded incorrectly. We noted that there was no formal review process in place for risks scored below 17 that are not included in corporate risk reporting, and overall a lack of consistency between corporate level risks and service risks. Despite these areas for improvement, we also observed a number of strengths within the governance and risk management framework.	**Reasonable Assurance**	-	4	2	-
Governance of Service Plans We also identified gaps in control for risk management processes within service planning including not consistently demonstrating how tasks mitigated identified risks, and a lack of periodic oversight of plan delivery between Heads of Service and directors. In addition, several work programs were not formally assigned to governance forums. Service Plans did not consistently align with strategic commitments, with instances of inconsistent or blank fields, and one task within the Response Service Plan was missing the required prioritisation as per criteria.	**Partial Assurance**	-	1	3	-

Payroll Provider – IRIS (2.25/26)

We identified several controls that were well designed and operating effectively. Processes for managing new starters, leavers, and payroll amendments were consistently accurate and completed in a timely manner. Pension contributions were correctly set up on an annual basis, with automatic deductions aligned to the published pension bandings. BACS reports were appropriately processed and approved prior to submission. Additionally, all tax code changes, and year-end documentation were accurate and made available as required.

However, we did identify some weaknesses in the current control framework. Most notably, the contract between West Yorkshire Pension Fund (acting on behalf of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service) and IRIS was signed solely by RBFRS, without countersignature from IRIS. In addition, the agreement lacked service level provisions specific to RBFRS, resulting in ambiguity around roles and responsibilities. This has led to discrepancies in key payroll processes, such as the logging and tracking of overpayments, where accountability remains unclear. We also found that within Pay Check Reports, a recurring issue where an employee's missing proof of age persisted for over two months, with no evidence that this had been flagged for review.

Reasonable Assurance	-	4	3	-	

Equality Impact Assessments (3.25/26)

We identified several controls that were well designed and operating effectively. EIA guidance is comprehensive, up to date, and accessible via the EDI intranet section, supported by detailed instructions and templates that guide staff through each stage of completion. A dedicated EDI intranet section provides resources on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) objectives, accessibility, and learning materials, promoting awareness across the organisation. Our sample testing confirmed that EIAs are consistently included within policies and projects, and staff survey results showed strong understanding of EIA requirements, confidence in applying them, and recognition of their impact on decision-making.

However, we did identify some weaknesses in the current control framework. Of the 90 policy and project owners requiring EIA training, 51 had not completed the training, which increases the risk of incomplete or low-quality assessments. Testing of 15 EIAs found that five lacked sufficient detail, and in each case, the individual responsible had not completed training. While still predominantly positive, responses to our survey relating to the adequacy of training suggest gaps in understanding how to complete EIAs (42% neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree). This aligns with findings highlighted elsewhere in this report, including lower training completion rates and instances where submitted EIAs lacked sufficient detail. In addition, our review of 224 policies found that 101 were not recorded on either the EIA Tracker or Policy EIA Tracker, and the Policy Tracker listed six policies without an associated EIA.

Reasonable Assurance	-	4	3	-	

Appendices

02

APPENDIX A: PROGRESS AGAINST THE INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2025/26

Assignment	Status / Start Date / Opinion issued	Actions agreed				Target Committee meeting per IA plan (or revised Committee)	Actual Committee meeting
		A	L	M	H		
Service (Non-Corporate Risks) Risk Management and Governance of Service Plans	**Final – Reasonable Assurance (RM) / Partial Assurance (Gov)**	-	**5**	**5**	-	**October 2025 (July 2026)**	**January 2026**
Payroll Provider – Dataplan (now IRIS)	**Final – Reasonable Assurance**	-	**4**	**3**	-	**January 2026 (March 2026)**	**January 2026**
Equality Impact Assessments	**Scheduled – November 2025**	-	**4**	**3**	-	**March 2026**	**January 2026**
Firefighter Pensions Administration (WYPF)	Draft issued 12 December 2025					March 2026	
Health and Safety – Contaminants	Fieldwork complete – draft report expected w/c 19 January 2026					March 2026	
Cyber	Scheduled – January 2026					July 2026	
Procurement	Scheduled – January 2026					March 2026	
Key Financial Controls	Scheduled – January 2026					March 2026	
Follow Up	Scheduled – February 2026					July 2026	
Business Continuity	Scheduled – March 2026					July 2026	

* The timing of these audits have been changed to accommodate staff availabilities (we have not noted any issues with these timing changes).

APPENDIX B: OTHER MATTERS

Changes to the plan

There have not been any changes to the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan.

Added value work

We have issued the following client briefings since the last Audit and Governance Committee meeting:

- Emergency Services News Briefing – November 2025
- Employment Rights Bill Timeline

Annual Opinion 2025/26

The Committee should note that the assurances given in our audit assignments are included within our Annual Assurance report. In particular, the Committee should note that any negative assurance opinions and how these may impact both our Head of Internal Audit Opinion, and your annual report. We have issued three final reports to date, one of which was a split opinion, with part of the review receiving a negative opinion. This will impact but will not in isolation quality our year end opinion, and we will provide regular updates to management in quarter four as more reviews are finalised.

Our work for the remainder of the year remains on track to be completed by the end of the financial year, and we will provide updates to the next meeting and to management in our regular meetings.

Quality assurance and continual improvement

To ensure that RSM remains compliant with the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector we have a dedicated internal Quality Assurance Team who undertake a programme of reviews to ensure the quality of our audit assignments. This is applicable to all Heads of Internal Audit, where a sample of their clients will be reviewed. Any findings from these reviews are used to inform the training needs of our audit teams.

From the results of the reviews undertaken across our client base, there are no areas which we believe warrant flagging to your attention as impacting on the quality of the service we provide to you.

In addition to this, any feedback we receive from our post assignment surveys, client feedback, appraisal processes and training needs assessments is also taken into consideration to continually improve the service we provide and inform any training requirements.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

Dan Harris, Partner and Head of Internal Audit

Email: Daniel.Harris@rsmuk.com

Telephone: 07792 948767

Zoe Walker, Managing Consultant

Email: Zoe.Walker@rsmuk.com

Telephone: 01245 454106

AUDIT OUTCOME OVERVIEW – SERVICE RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE WITH SERVICE PLANS

Background: A review of Risk Management (non-corporate risks) and Governance (service plans) was undertaken as part of the 2025/26 approved Internal Audit Plan. The purpose of the review was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Service's current risk management and governance arrangements. Whereas the previous review, completed in 2024/25 focused on corporate-level risks, this audit examined risks below the corporate reporting threshold, specifically those with a risk 'score' of below 17.

Risks within this range are considered through the governance structure at the point of escalation or de-escalation, with the Senior Management Team receiving periodic updates on changes to the Corporate Risk Register. The Service's risk management processes are based on ISO 31000:2018, the international standard which establishes widely recognised principles, a structured process, and a governance framework for effective risk management.

The review also considered how risk management is embedded within service plans, with a focus on how effectively risks are being used to inform decision-making and prioritise service-specific activities. Service plans are departmental documents outlining annual BAU activities, projects, and work packages. Within the Service, they are designed to set clear priorities, align departmental objectives with strategic goals, and support effective resource planning. Service plans for each department are documented in spreadsheet.

For this review, we sampled tasks from the service plans of three departments:

- Corporate Services
- Finance and Procurement
- Response.

The Risk Management Training Module was under review due to the findings raised as part of the 2024/25 Risk Management review, as such, we have not reviewed the training arrangements in place as part of this audit. In line with our review in 2024/25, the risk registers are retained in a spreadsheet format.

Conclusion: **Service (non-corporate risks) Risk Management** - The governance structure for risk management was clearly documented, with reporting lines and responsibilities detailed across 30 groups, and Terms of Reference for the sampled forums included defined roles and responsibilities. Risk escalations and de-escalations from the Corporate Risk Register were recorded in the SLT executive summary, which included the number of risks, new and closed risks, score changes, and outdated risks. However, we identified several areas of improvement including that the non-Corporate Risk Register did not include fields to record the cause and effect of risks or the actions required for mitigations. We found that risks with a residual score below 17 were not consistently subject to periodic review, and one sampled risk was recorded incorrectly. We noted that there was no formal review process in place for risks scored below 17 that are not included in corporate risk reporting, and overall a lack of consistency between corporate level risks and service risks.

Despite these areas for improvement, we also observed a number of strengths within the governance and risk management framework.

Governance of Service Plans - We also identified gaps in control for risk management processes within service planning including not consistently demonstrating how tasks mitigated identified risks, and a lack of periodic oversight of plan delivery between Heads of Service and directors. In addition, several work programs were not formally assigned to governance forums. Service Plans did not consistently align with strategic commitments, with instances of inconsistent or blank fields, and one task within the Response Service Plan was missing the required prioritisation as per the MoSCoW criteria.

3

Internal audit opinion (Service (non-corporate risks) Risk Management):	Minimal Assurance · Partial Assurance · **Reasonable Assurance** · Substantial Assurance Taking account of the issues identified, the Authority can take reasonable assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage this risk are suitably designed, consistently applied and effective. However, we have identified issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the control framework is effective in managing the identified risk(s).
Internal audit opinion (Governance of Service Plans):	Minimal Assurance · **Partial Assurance** · Reasonable Assurance · Substantial Assurance Taking account of the issues identified, the Authority can take partial assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage this risk are suitably designed, consistently applied or effective. Action is needed to strengthen the control framework to manage the identified risk(s).

Audit Themes:

We identified the following exceptions, resulting in the agreement of five medium priority management actions:

Service Level Risk Register and Review (Risk Management) - Risks with a residual score below 17 were not subject to periodic review, with one sampled risk recorded incorrectly (inherent score of 25 but residual score of 16), meaning it should have been escalated for corporate-level scrutiny. **(Medium x2)**

Linkage to Risks (Service Plans) - Service plans reviewed did not consistently demonstrate a clear link between tasks and the risks/and or strategic commitments they were intended to address. While this connection was evident in projects supported by a Project Initiation Document (PID), it was not explicit for other activities, such as Business-As-Usual (BAU) tasks and work packages. As a result, it was not always clear how planned activities contributed to addressing key organisational priorities. **(Medium)**

Oversight and Governance (Service Plans) - Evidence did not confirm consistent oversight of service plan delivery, nor were all tasks formally assigned to governance forums. While some projects and BAU activities reported to Boards and Committees, several work packages relied on informal working groups or lacked documented responsibilities during delivery, limiting assurance that activities were monitored, properly governed, and aligned with objectives. **(Medium x2)**

4

We noted the following controls to be well designed and operating effectively:

Escalation and De-escalation of Risks (Risk Management) - For the April to June 2025 SLT meetings, we confirmed that risk escalations and de-escalations from the Corporate Risk Register were documented in the SLT Executive Summary. The summary included the number of risks, new and closed risks, score changes, and any outdated risks.

Governance Structure & Forum Oversight (Risk Management) - The governance structure is clearly documented, with arrows showing interactions and reporting across 30 colour-coded groups, including Working Groups, Programme Boards, Collaborative Governance, Decision Governance Board, Decision-Making Groups, and the Fire Authority. Through review of a sample of five forums, we confirmed that all Terms of Reference included the forums' roles and responsibilities.

Work Prioritisation Criteria (Service Plans) - The MoSCoW document defines prioritisation for Service Plan tasks as Must (non-negotiable), Should (highly desirable, offering significant value, efficiency, or risk reduction), and Could (beneficial additions that enhance quality, effectiveness, or stakeholder experience but are not essential).

We also agreed five **low** priority management actions, details of which can be found within the detailed findings and actions section of this report.

SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

The action priorities are defined as*:

High	Medium	Low
Immediate management attention is necessary.	Timely management attention is necessary.	There is scope for enhancing control or improving efficiency.

Ref	Action	Priority	Responsible Owner	Date
1	Management will review and update the Organisational Risk Policy to include reminders for Risk Owners to describe the cause and effect of risks in the risk description. We will ensure that the strategic commitments field is correctly applied to all risks and that this reflects current organisational priorities.	Medium	Annie Pratt	31 March 2026
5	Oversight and escalation mechanisms will be introduced for all overdue risks and treatments, including those with risk scores below 17. This will include periodic monitoring, clear ownership of overdue items and defined escalation points where repeated non-action occurs.	Medium	Annie Pratt	30 June 2026
7	Work packages and projects within service plans will be linked to strategic commitments, and as appropriate, they will also link to the specific risks they are intended to mitigate. Where existing works are not effectively addressing those risks, they will be amended, supplemented, or replaced with new works to ensure adequate mitigation, in line with the organisation's risk appetite.	Medium	Angela Smith	31 March 2026
9	The Service will ensure oversight of service plans occurs on a regular basis. This oversight will be documented cover planned versus actual delivery. Where shortfalls in delivery are identified, these will be addressed through agreed corrective actions, with progress monitored until completion.	Medium	Angela Smith	31 March 2026
10	The Service will ensure that required work packages have appropriate mechanisms of oversight during work delivery, with this documented on the Service Plan. Where this is not required, this will be agreed prior to works commencing and will be documented on the Service Plan.	Medium	Angela Smith	31 March 2026

7

AUDIT OUTCOME OVERVIEW – PAYROLL PROVIDER - IRIS

Background

A review of Payroll – IRIS was undertaken as part of the approved internal audit plan for 2025/26. The objective of this review was to allow management to take assurance that IRIS have adequate processes and controls in place to adequately process the payroll and deliver the payroll contract.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service has outsourced the processing of their payroll to West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) who have in turn subcontracted the payroll element to IRIS. IRIS have provided the payroll service under their new name since September 2025 and the interim contract in place is coming to an end in March 2026 with RBFRS in the process of exploring their options at the time of our review. The contract was previously provided by the same provider under their previous name 'DataPlan'. The monthly payroll is valued at circa £1.7m per month.

IRIS utilises Flexipay Payroll Software to manage the payroll. RBFRS and IRIS utilise ePaysafe, an online payroll portal to share payroll related documentation including the payroll report, payslips and analysis of pay. Employees have access to their payslips online using ePayslip.

As part of this review, we followed-up on three medium priority management actions that were agreed as part of the 2024/25 Payroll review, the results of this are included in Appendix A of this report.

Conclusion:

We identified several controls that were well designed and operating effectively. Processes for managing new starters, leavers, and payroll amendments were consistently accurate and completed in a timely manner. Pension contributions were correctly set up on an annual basis, with automatic deductions aligned to the published pension bandings. BACS reports were appropriately processed and approved prior to submission. Additionally, all tax code changes, and year-end documentation were accurate and made available as required.

However, we did identify some weaknesses in the current control framework. Most notably, the contract between West Yorkshire Pension Fund (acting on behalf of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service) and IRIS was signed solely by RBFRS, without countersignature from IRIS. In addition, the agreement lacked service level provisions specific to RBFRS, resulting in ambiguity around roles and responsibilities. This has led to discrepancies in key payroll processes, such as the logging and tracking of overpayments, where accountability remains unclear. We also found that within Pay Check Reports, a recurring issue where an employee's missing proof of age persisted for over two months, with no evidence that this had been flagged for review.

Internal audit opinion:

Minimal Assurance	Partial Assurance	Reasonable Assurance	Substantial Assurance

Taking account of the issues identified, the Authority can take reasonable assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage this risk are suitably designed, consistently applied and effective.

However, we have identified issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the control framework is effective in managing the identified risk(s).

3

Audit themes: **We identified the following exceptions, resulting in the agreement of three medium priority management actions:**

Contract - We reviewed the contract between West Yorkshire Pension Fund (on behalf of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service) and IRIS, and found that while it was signed by RBFRS, it lacked a defined service level agreement specific to RBFRS. Additionally, the contract was not signed by the service provider. **(Medium)**

Overpayments - Our review of 10 entries from the RBFRS overpayments log found that five related to interest not applied to Cycle to Work agreements, which should be tracked separately from salary overpayments. Several exceptions were noted, including repayments made without formal approval and one case where the debtor was informed only after deductions began. Additionally, gaps in logging and accountability were identified, including a missed entry and the absence of a designated owner for monitoring overpayments. **(Medium)**

Pay Check Reports - We reviewed Pay Check Reports for July, August, and September 2025 and confirmed that each was generated and reviewed monthly by IRIS. While most exceptions were followed up, one unresolved issue relating to an employee lacking proof of age, persisted across two reports and we were unable to evidence that this had been flagged as needing review. **(Medium)**

We noted the following controls to be well designed and operating effectively:

Operational Guide - We reviewed the Operational Guide to Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Payroll, effective November 2024 and found it to be comprehensive. It clearly outlined the payroll processing procedures, including verification and sign-off steps, reporting, and the actions to be taken following payroll approval. We also confirmed through review that IRIS had a separate FAQ document containing information regarding the disengagement process.

New Starters and Leavers - We reviewed samples of 10 new starters and 10 leavers at RBFRS between April and September 2025, confirming that all required documentation was completed and uploaded with segregation of duties applied, and that payments were processed accurately in all cases. While some delays in completing leaver forms were noted, these were explained and did not result in overpayments.

Amendments - We reviewed a sample of 10 static-data amendments (such as names and addresses) made between April and September 2025. We also reviewed a sample of 10 in-month amendments made between April and September 2025, five of which related to changes in pension contributions.

In all cases, we confirmed that a change sheet had been uploaded to ePaysafe, ensuring IRIS was informed of the amendments. The changes were accurately reflected in Flexipay and applied in the subsequent pay runs. Each amendment had been appropriately approved by RBFRS, and had subsequently been processed and authorised by IRIS.

Pension Contributions - We reviewed the Flexipay system and confirmed that annual pension contribution updates are manually applied based on published scheme bandings, with automatic deduction calculations performed by the system. The bandings and contribution rates used align with the official requirements for both the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) and the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

BACS Reports - We reviewed the BACS pay reports, pay approval records, and submission reports for July, August, and September 2025. In each of the three months, we confirmed that the net pay detailed in the BACS pay report was formally approved by RBFRS prior to submission and the BACS submission reports reflected the same net pay figures as those approved.

Tax Code Changes - We reviewed a sample of five instances between April and September 2025 where an employee had a tax code change and confirmed that in all cases, the correct tax code had been applied on Flexipay, and the change was visible on the following payslip.

4

Year-end Documentation - We confirmed that key year-end payroll processes, including the March BACS and RTI submissions, P60 distribution, and a sample tax code uplift, were completed accurately and in line with HMRC requirements.

We also agreed four **low** priority management actions, details of which can be found within the detailed findings and actions section of this report.

5

SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

The action priorities are defined as*:

High	Medium	Low
Immediate management attention is necessary.	Timely management attention is necessary.	There is scope for enhancing control or improving efficiency.

Ref	Action	Priority	Responsible Owner	Date
1	In future contracts, RBFRS will ensure that Service Level Agreements are formally defined for all parties involved in the contract and will be signed by each party to ensure mutual accountability and clarity of expectations.	Medium		Complete
3	IRIS will ensure that overpayments are recorded centrally, supported by a structured system for tracking repayment plans.	Medium	IRIS	31 December 2025
7	All exceptions identified within Pay Check Reports will be investigated by IRIS and escalated to RBFRS where applicable, and evidence of this investigation will be retained.	Medium	IRIS	31 December 2025

7

APPENDIX A: FOLLOW-UP OF 2024/25 PAYROLL ACTIONS

Original action	Priority	Finding
Dataplan and RBFRS will review the current contract arrangements and ensure formal documentation exists for any continued service.	Medium	We confirmed that an interim contract is in place between IRIS and RBFRS until March 2026. Following this, the Service are looking to use a new provider for their payroll services. **This action has been implemented.**
Dataplan will ensure there is a segregation of duties between who will action payroll requests and who will review the changes being made.	Medium	We confirmed that there is appropriate segregation of duties between the individual processing leaver requests within IRIS and the individual responsible for checking them. However, we noted that the second-checking function is not formally included in IRIS's responsibilities as outlined in the Service Requirement Agreements (SRAs). Without clearly defined roles and responsibilities within contractual agreements, there is a risk that critical checks may be overlooked, potentially leading to errors in payroll processing and reduced assurance over control effectiveness. **The original action has been superseded, however a revised action has been agreed in this report under management action 1.**
Dataplan will remind all staff involved in the actioning of payroll requests, that all supporting documentation for changes must be retained and stored centrally.	Medium	Finally, we confirmed that action sheets are retained by IRIS in a shared file and within ePaysafe. **This action has been implemented.**

AUDIT OUTCOME OVERVIEW – EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Background: We undertook a review of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) as part of the approved 2025/26 internal audit plan. The objective was to evaluate how the Service applies EIAs to support policy development and decision-making in line with public authority duties such as eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity.EIAs are a structured process used to assess whether a policy, project or decision could affect people differently based on protected characteristics. They help organisations identify potential risks of discrimination and take steps to advance equality and foster inclusion.

The Service have embedded EIAs within its policy template and each policy is expected to include a completed EIA. The template includes mandatory fields to identify any potential impact on specific groups. If a negative impact is identified, a full EIA must be completed. Full EIAs provide detailed analysis, include consultation with affected groups and summarise findings. Projects also use full EIAs, which are reviewed at key stages during the project.

Full EIAs are tracked using an EIA Tracker on the intranet. The tracker records past review dates, next review dates and any overdue actions. RBFRS offers non-mandatory training for policy and project owners. At the time of review, the compliance rate was at 40%. As part of this review, we issued a survey to 100 RBFRS staff with EIA responsibilities. The survey assessed awareness of EIA requirements, accessibility of guidance and the availability of training and support. The findings for this survey are found in Appendix A.

Conclusion: We identified several controls that were well designed and operating effectively. EIA guidance is comprehensive, up to date, and accessible via the EDI intranet section, supported by detailed instructions and templates that guide staff through each stage of completion. A dedicated EDI intranet section provides resources on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) objectives, accessibility, and learning materials, promoting awareness across the organisation. Our sample testing confirmed that EIAs are consistently included within policies and projects, and staff survey results showed strong understanding of EIA requirements, confidence in applying them, and recognition of their impact on decision-making.

However, we did identify some weaknesses in the current control framework. Of the 90 policy and project owners requiring EIA training, 51 had not completed the training, which increases the risk of incomplete or low-quality assessments. Testing of 15 EIAs found that five lacked sufficient detail, and in each case, the individual responsible had not completed training. While still predominantly positive, responses to our survey relating to the adequacy of training suggest gaps in understanding how to complete EIAs (42% neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree). This aligns with findings highlighted elsewhere in this report, including lower training completion rates and instances where submitted EIAs lacked sufficient detail. In addition, our review of 224 policies found that 101 were not recorded on either the EIA Tracker or Policy EIA Tracker, and the Policy Tracker listed six policies without an associated EIA.

Internal audit opinion:

Minimal Assurance	Partial Assurance	Reasonable Assurance	Substantial Assurance

Taking account of the issues identified, the Authority can take reasonable assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage this risk are suitably designed, consistently applied and effective.

However, we have identified issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the control framework is effective in managing the identified risk(s).

1

Audit themes: **We identified the following exceptions, resulting in the agreement of four medium priority management actions:**

Staff Training - We noted over 56% of individuals that were required to complete EIA training had not completed it at the time of our review. Additionally, through our testing of individual EIAs, we found that three of the individuals who completed five of the insufficiently completed EIAs we reviewed had not completed appropriate training. We noted that this was a known issue and an action plan was in place to address training weaknesses. **(Medium)**

EIA Tracking - We compared a list of all RBFRS policies against those recorded in the EIA Tracker and Policy EIA Tracker. Our review found that 101/224 listed policies were not on either the EIA Tracker or Policy EIA Tracker. This indicates that a significant number of Service Policies are not accounted for within either tracker. As a result, we cannot confirm whether all policies have an EIA completed or planned. We were informed that unless a policy has a full EIA, it will not be tracked on the EIA Register.

Additionally, we reviewed a sample of five policies from the central RBFRS policy list and confirmed that each included a completed EIA within its template. However, we noted that the Policy Tracker listed six policies without an associated EIA. **(Medium)**

Insufficient detail within embedded EIAs - Within our sample of 15 EIAs, we found that four assessments created within the policy EIA template lacked sufficient detail to demonstrate meaningful consideration of the three aims of the public sector equality duty. In 11 EIAs, there was documented evidence of consultation with affected groups. The remaining four EIAs were part of a policy, and as per the template, there was no section to record consultations with groups. **(Medium)**

EIA Review - We were informed that there is no formal sign-off process for Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs). While some project EIAs are reviewed through Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and Portfolio Board meetings, this is not consistent across all projects. Additionally, EIAs embedded within policies are not approved separately from the policy itself. **(Medium)**

We noted the following controls to be well designed and operating effectively:

EIA Guidance - We confirmed that the EIA Guidance is up to date, with the next review scheduled for 2026, and accessible via the EDI section on the intranet. We confirmed that it provided detailed instructions on EIA responsibilities, completion steps. We also noted the accompanying template offered a section-by-section guide for documenting aims, impacts, and affected groups. Additionally, we also found through review of the EDI Policy that it outlined where completed EIAs are stored and how staff can access further support.

Accessibility and awareness of EIA procedures - There is a dedicated EDI section of the staff intranet, where staff members can find information on EDI Objectives, EIAs, Neurodiversity, Positive Action, Resources and Learning, and Accessibility.

EIA Inclusion - We reviewed a sample of 10 policies and five projects listed in the EIA Register. In all cases, an EIA was in place. For the 10 policies, seven included an EIA within the policy template, with three also having a separate full EIA. In total there were six full EIAs, including the three that were also embedded in the template.

We additionally selected a sample of five policies that were not listed in the EIA Register and confirmed that all had a completed EIA embedded within its template.

Staff Survey - We conducted a staff survey of personnel responsible for completing EIAs to assess awareness of EIA requirements, accessibility of guidance, training and support, integration into policy and project development, quality and completeness, review and updates, and impact on decision-making.

Overall, the 48 responses we received were generally positive with key findings including:

2

- Awareness and Understanding: Over 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they understand what an EIA is, why it is required, and are aware of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Access to Guidance: More than 85% agreed that EIA guidance is clear and easy to follow, and they know where to find procedures and guidance (e.g., intranet).
- Confidence and Support: Around 80% felt confident applying EIA requirements to their work, and support is available when needed.
- Training: While positive overall, training scored slightly lower, with approximately 70% agreeing they have received adequate training on completing EIAs.
- Integration and Impact: Over 75% agreed that EIAs are meaningfully considered during policy and project development, and many have seen examples where EIA findings shaped decisions.
- Reminders and Reviews: Most respondents confirmed they receive reminders for EIA reviews and understand the process for updating them.

EIA Action Log - We reviewed the EIA Action Log which we noted outlined actions such as staff training and removing the EIA from the policy template to ensure full assessments are completed. This demonstrates that those involved in the EIA process were already aware of the need for improvements in these areas and had put in place actions to address such weaknesses prior to the completion of our review.

Quality and Completeness of EIAs - We reviewed the EIAs within our sample of 15 and confirmed that all assessments included relevant protected characteristics within its standard template. For each of these characteristics, there was analysis of potential impacts and proposed mitigating actions or alternatives, where applicable.

In five cases, actions were identified and were specific, practical and linked to identified risks. In the remaining 10 cases, there were no actions documented as there were no negative impacts identified for the characteristics in the assessment.

Governance - We reviewed agendas and action logs from the Senior Leadership Team and Porfolio Board meetings, and confirmed that EIAs were included in meeting discussions for both forums.

We also agreed three **low** priority management actions, details of which can be found within the detailed findings and actions section of this report.

SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

The action priorities are defined as*:

High	Medium	Low
Immediate management attention is necessary.	Timely management attention is necessary.	There is scope for enhancing control or improving efficiency.

Ref	Action	Priority	Responsible Owner	Date
1	We will implement measures to improve completion rates of EIA training among Policy and Project Owners. We will undertake a training needs analysis to identify where training is required for specific role holders, considering the feedback received from the survey as part of this	Medium	Claudia Trott	31 March 2026
2	All fields within the EIA Tracker will be populated. This includes: • Last Review Date • Outstanding Actions If any fields are not applicable, this will be noted within the tracker. We will ensure that all policies are recorded on the EIA Tracker, providing management with clear oversight of their completion. As part of this, we will consider whether all policies truly benefit from having an EIA in place.	Medium		Complete
5	We will introduce a requirement for full EIAs at the policy development stage in order to would strengthen alignment with the Public Sector Equality Duty, streamline automated review processes, and incorporate documented consultation with affected groups.	Medium	Claudia Trott	31 March 2026
6	We will establish a formal sign-off process for EIAs, ensuring that reviews involve individuals with relevant subject knowledge and that approval is documented. This review will also check that no sections of the assessment have been left blank.	Medium	Claudia Trott	31 March 2026

APPENDIX A: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT SURVEY

The graph below presents the responses from 48 participants who completed the EIA Survey. Overall, feedback was largely positive, particularly regarding the accessibility of EIA procedures and guidance, as well as understanding what an EIA is and why it is required (both 94% Strongly Agree or Agree). However, while still predominantly positive, responses relating to the adequacy of training suggest gaps in understanding how to complete EIAs (42% neutral, Disagree or Strongly Disagree). This aligns with findings highlighted elsewhere in this report, including lower training completion rates and instances where submitted EIAs lacked sufficient detail.

Equality Impact Assessment Survey - November 2025

Chart categories (top to bottom):
- I have seen examples where EIA findings changed or shaped decisions.
- I receive reminders or notifications when EIAs are due for review.
- I am aware of the process for reviewing and updating EIAs over time.
- The EIA process ensures meaningful consideration of equality impacts.
- Support is available when needed.
- I feel confident in applying EIA requirements to my work.
- I have received adequate training on completing EIAs.
- The EIA guidance provided is clear and easy to follow.
- I know where to find EIA procedures and guidance (eg, intranet).
- I know when an EIA should be completed during policy or project development.
- I am aware of the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- I understand what an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is and why it is required.

Legend: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree of Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Emergency Services News Briefing

November 2025

Contents

Introduction

In this edition of our news briefing, we draw attention to some of the key developments and publications in the sector, including policing reforms and accountability, workforce wellbeing and updated statistics.

Police

State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2024–25

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Andy Cooke, has published his third annual assessment, highlighting both progress and persistent challenges in policing. While reforms such as the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee and proposals for a National Centre of Policing show promise, their success depends on sufficient funding and sustained commitment.

Key concerns include outdated technology, poor data management, and the lack of multi-year funding and capital grants, which hinder long-term planning. The police allocation formula remains unchanged since 2013, contributing to unfair funding distribution. Rising demand and cost pressures continue to strain forces, despite increased funding.

Sir Andy noted signs of stabilising public confidence but emphasised the need for visible leadership, innovation, and better workforce morale. No new recommendations were made this year to allow forces time to implement existing reforms.

However, the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) has responded critically to the State of Policing report, warning that reforms risk failure without proper funding and meaningful implementation. The PFEW expressed concern that the report underrepresents the daily pressures faced by frontline officers.

Key issues highlighted include:

- Unmanageable investigative workloads.

- Rising violence against officers.

- 90% of funding for police treatment centres is paid directly by officers.

- New data also reveals a troubling link between misconduct investigations and officer suicides, prompting calls for welfare and accountability to be addressed jointly.

Questions for committee's consideration

- How is the Audit Committee ensuring oversight of the implementation of the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee and other reform initiatives?

"

Chief Constable Gavin Stephens, Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), has responded to the State of Policing 2024–25 report, acknowledging positive strides in service delivery while stressing the urgent need for reform.

Stephens highlighted that a decade of underinvestment has left police forces under-resourced and unable to consistently meet public expectations amid increasingly complex criminal threats. He warned that the current policing model is unsustainable and called for bold reform to ensure a modern, cost-effective service. He commented:

"That is why urgent reform is absolutely essential if UK policing is to be able to deliver a modern, fit-for-purpose and cost-effective service to the public. We look forward to the government White Paper on Police Reform setting out a bold and ambitious vision for policing, so we can be more effective in responding to rapidly changing threats to community safety".

"Forces across England and Wales have made good progress in delivering better neighbourhood policing. Including increasing visibility of police on the streets, giving communities and businesses a greater voice and influence over local policing priorities."

"

Police service progress in its response to group-based child sexual exploitation

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary of Fire and Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) latest report highlights progress in police handling of group-based child sexual exploitation (CSE), with improved investigations and increased use of specially trained officers. Most forces now use a common definition of organised networks, though inconsistent understanding and lack of national guidance hinder data reliability.

Cultural change programmes are underway to reduce victim-blaming, and multi-agency efforts, such as Operation Makesafe, are helping frontline workers identify exploitation. However, national systems for flagging CSE cases remain inadequate, and forces are urged to develop better intelligence profiles using partner data.

Six new recommendations have been issued alongside four outstanding ones from the original 2023 inspection report.

The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system

A joint inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation and HMICFRS has found that while youth out-of-court disposals (OoCDs) are increasingly used to divert children from formal prosecution, the system remains fragmented and inconsistent across England and Wales. Key findings include:

- In 2024, 13,868 children were cautioned or sentenced, down 67% from 2014. First-time entrants to the justice system fell by 65% since 2013, totalling 8,278 in 2023.

- Youth cautions and conditional cautions had a 21.7% reoffending rate, compared to 58.5% for youth rehabilitation orders.

- Safeguarding referrals were made in fewer than half of relevant cases for the victims, raising concerns about child and victim protection.

- Police often issued OoCDs without the Youth Justice Service (YJS) involvement, and guidance such as the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) child gravity matrix was inconsistently applied.

- Many children had complex needs, including neurodiversity and care experience, yet support was often delayed or insufficient. Only 38% of children had effective exit plans.

The report calls for stronger national frameworks, improved data systems, and more consistent multi-agency collaboration to ensure children receive timely, tailored support and to uphold public confidence in youth justice.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to leave role.

Sir Andy Cooke has announced that he will be leaving his role as His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services in March 2026. Sir Andy has led the inspectorate since 2022 and has a nearly 40-year long career in UK policing and law enforcement. Sir Andy Cooke said:

"It has been a great honour to serve in this important role and the pinnacle of my 40-year career. I am immensely proud of the work undertaken by the inspectorate and together with our dedicated staff, we have supported innumerable improvements across both policing and fire and rescue. Both forces and services are in a better position than in which I found them. However, there remains much more to do, both for individual forces and services to get a grip on performance, and systemic changes which need to be led by the government and other central bodies."

Change in compensation guidance for injured officers

Following advocacy by the PFEW and the National Police Wellbeing Service (NPWS), the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) has revised its guidance to ensure fairer treatment of emergency workers injured in the line of duty. The updated guidance, published in October 2025, now instructs decision-makers to fully consider whether violent or reckless resistance during arrest constitutes a crime of violence. This change strengthens the basis for compensation claims and acknowledges the operational risks faced by emergency personnel.

Police pay award announcement

In August 2025, the government announced a 4.2% pay increase for police officers, aligning with the recommendation of the independent pay review body. While this exceeds inflation, it only partially addresses the long-term erosion of police pay. The NPCC welcomed the award, recognising the demanding nature of policing and the need to retain skilled personnel amid rising threats and operational complexity.

An additional £120 million in funding has been allocated to support the pay increase. With over 85% of police budgets spent on salaries, the NPCC stressed that full funding is essential to sustain frontline services and continue investment in neighbourhood policing and technology.

Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) assessment of how well police forces record reports of crime.

HMICFRS's latest PEEL spotlight report highlights significant progress in crime recording across England and Wales. In the year ending 31 March 2025, over 5.3 million crimes were recorded, with accuracy rising from 80.5% in 2014 to 94.8%.

All recommendations from the 2014 inspection have now been implemented, contributing to better resource allocation and victim support. However, an estimated 285,000 crimes still went unrecorded last year, with violent crimes, particularly harassment, stalking, and coercive behaviour, being the least well recorded. These account for 37.9% of unrecorded violent offences and disproportionately affect women and girls.

Only 78.1% of crimes are recorded within 24 hours, and inconsistencies remain in recording domestic abuse, vulnerable victims, and antisocial behaviour. HMICFRS has issued three new recommendations focused on accuracy, timeliness, and scrutiny, alongside four existing areas for improvement.

Police Federation press for urgent reforms

The PFEW has intensified its engagement with Parliament, calling for urgent reforms to address the growing crisis in police pay, retention, and officer wellbeing. At recent party conferences, the PFEW highlighted that officers have suffered a real-terms pay cut of over 20% since 2010, with the latest 4.2% pay award failing to match inflation. A police constable now earns at least £10,000 less than a nurse or teacher with similar experience.

Resignations have surged by 140% over five years, with projections indicating over 10,000 officers could leave annually by 2027. Assaults on officers have risen nearly 40% since 2015, with more than 41,000 incidents recorded last year.

PFEW is advocating for:

- Closure of the 21% pay gap since 2010.
- Reform of the Police Remuneration Review Body to allow binding arbitration.
- Mandatory reporting of officer suicides and trauma.
- Fully funded mental health and rehabilitation centres.
- Stronger legal powers under the Road Traffic Act to improve officer safety.

Questions for committee's consideration

- What assurance does the Audit Committee have that controls are in place to ensure accurate and timely crime recording, especially for violent and domestic abuse offences?

Police funding for England and Wales

The Home Office has published a consolidated report detailing police funding in England and Wales from the financial year ending March 2016 through to March 2026. The funding for the year ended 31 March 2026:

- Up to £19,892m in funding has been agreed for policing in England and Wales.
- There is an overall funding increase of up to £1,230m compared to the previous financial year in nominal terms, which equates to up to £736m in real terms (adjusted for inflation).
- Total funding for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) will increase in nominal terms by up to 6.8% (£1,121m) compared to the previous year.

Mandatory recording of suicides

The PFEW is urging legislative reform to mandate the recording of suicides and attempted suicides among police personnel. At least 100 officers and staff have taken their own lives between January 2022 and May 2025, according to Freedom of Information data. Over half of those who died were under investigation at the time, highlighting a critical link between misconduct proceedings and mental health deterioration.

PFEW is proposing amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill and advocating for inclusion of suicide data under Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) regulations. The Federation also calls for minimum mandatory wellbeing standards across all 43 forces, including psychological risk assessments, improved line manager training, and consistent mental health support.

Questions for committee's consideration

- How is the force responding to calls for mandatory suicide recording and wellbeing standards?

Multi-agency operation on organised immigration crime

In September 2025, UK law enforcement launched Operation Lockstream, the first multi-agency crackdown led by the Organised Immigration Crime Domestic Taskforce, targeting organised immigration crime across England and Wales.

The operation involved coordinated efforts from police forces, Border Force, Immigration Enforcement, HMRC, the National Crime Agency, and others. Activities included roadside stops, coastal patrols, airport checks, and inspections of cash-intensive businesses suspected of illegal employment and money laundering.

Key outcomes:

- 5,516 individuals questioned.
- 68 arrests, including 51 for immigration offences.
- 34 people refused entry to the UK.
- 36 false documents seized.
- 1,204 vehicles, vessels and flights stopped and searched.
- £216,000 recovered through cash seizures, penalties, and fines.

Organised immigration crime is often linked to drug trafficking, modern slavery, and human trafficking. The Taskforce aims to disrupt criminal networks exploiting migrants and to create a hostile environment for offenders.

County Lines Strategic Threat Assessment

The NPCC and National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) have published the latest County Lines Strategic Threat Assessment, covering April 2024 to March 2025. Over 6,500 county lines are currently active across England, Scotland, and Wales. While the overall threat remains stable, the business model continues to evolve, with increased use of social media and encrypted apps to distribute drugs, particularly cannabis and party drugs, via postal networks.

Key findings include:

- 73.5% of county lines offenders are linked to violence or weapons offences.

- 2,659 children were recorded as exploited, though actual figures are likely higher.

- An estimated 11,600 children are going missing and at risk of exploitation.

- 44% of cuckooing victims are women, many with mental health or substance misuse issues.

- Enforcement efforts led to 6,000+ arrests and 2,300 lines closed since July 2024.

- During the latest Intensification Week, 96 firearms and 466 bladed weapons were seized.

- Hospital admissions for sharp object assaults among under-25s in exporter areas fell by 38%.

The report also notes a decline in child charges, reflecting a shift toward recognising exploited youth as victims. New legislation on child criminal exploitation, cuckooing, and coerced concealment is expected in 2026 to strengthen the policing response.

NPCC launches partnership with techUK

A strategic partnership between the NPCC and techUK has been launched to support the aims of the National Policing Digital Strategy 2025–2030. This collaboration will strengthen ties between policing and the technology sector, promoting ethical, transparent, and proportionate use of digital tools to enhance public safety and modernise police services.

With over 1,100 techUK member organisations, the partnership will facilitate expert-led innovation through working groups, forums, and joint initiatives. Lead officers from the NPCC emphasised the importance of cyber resilience, evidence-based solutions, and practical applications of science and technology to address persistent challenges in policing and improve outcomes for communities.

Change of the use of force test for misconduct cases

The government has announced a change to the legal test used in police misconduct cases involving use of force, reverting from the civil law test to the criminal law test. This means officers will be judged based on whether they honestly believed force was necessary at the time, rather than being assessed with hindsight. The move follows an independent review by Sir Adrian Fulford and Tim Godwin, which found the current system undermines officer confidence and morale, particularly among firearms officers. The change aims to restore clarity and fairness while maintaining accountability.

The reform will apply to all use-of-force scenarios, including self-defence, and will be legislated following consultation with the Police Advisory Board. Additional measures include anonymity for firearms officers until conviction, faster charging decisions, and strengthened victim rights. Police chiefs have also been granted greater powers to dismiss unfit officers. A public consultation on the standard of proof in unlawful killing inquests and a broader review of accountability timeliness are planned.

Taser 10 guidance and training

The College of Policing has introduced new guidance and training for the Taser 10, an advanced model approved for frontline use. The upgraded taser aims to improve officer safety and public protection while ensuring minimal use of force.

To support implementation, a 'Train the Trainer' programme will be delivered to up to 140 instructors over the next year. The training incorporates virtual reality simulations and emphasises de-escalation techniques. Updated authorised professional practice (APP) sets clear standards for safe and accountable use, reinforcing public trust and ensuring officers are prepared to the highest professional standards.

Questions for committee's consideration

- What assurance does the Audit Committee have that cyber resilience is being embedded into operational planning?

- What assurance is provided that systems are secure and fit for purpose?

Questions for committee's consideration

- What steps are being taken to prepare for the shift of police and fire governance/powers in your locality, and is the Audit Committee sighted on these arrangements?

- Have you agreed what scrutiny and governance arrangements will be in place under the new arrangements?

Questions for committee's consideration

- What steps are being taken to prepare for the implementation of the Hillsborough Law and the duty of candour?

Mayors Poised to Take on Policing Powers in England's Devolution Drive

England's evolving devolution agenda is reshaping local governance, with plans to establish powerful Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) across the country. These new bodies will hold wide-ranging responsibilities over public services, including a significant shift: transferring Police and Crime, and Police, (Fire) and Crime Commissioners (P(F)CCs) functions to elected mayors. Five priority areas are set to elect mayors and potentially transfer Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner (P(F)CC) functions by May 2026.

The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) has published the "English devolution and the transfer of police and crime powers" document to help manage the transfer of powers and provided guidance.

Hillsborough Law will support better police standards and accountability

Police and Crime Commissioners and deputy mayors have long called for stronger legal safeguards around transparency in policing—especially the introduction of a duty of candour. While the College of Policing's Code of Practice already requires chief officers to promote openness, new legislation will extend this duty to all officers and staff, with potential criminal consequences for breaches. This marks a vital step toward changing policing culture and ensuring that, when things go wrong, the truth is not hidden. From Hillsborough to the Post Office and infected blood scandals, we've seen how institutions can fail the public by protecting reputations over honesty. The Public Office (Accountability) Bill, known as the Hillsborough Law, will bring clarity and accountability, setting clear expectations for transparency across policing.

Big changes are on the horizon for policing in England and Wales, with the government set to unveil reform proposals, in an upcoming White Paper, to provide:

- A rare opportunity to transform policing for the next generation.

- Driven by evidence of what truly works in practice.

- Empowered by using the best technology.

- Focused on preventing crime and solving it effectively.

The APCC, representing PCCs and deputy mayors, is actively working with government and policing bodies to ensure these reforms deliver real impact. Accountability must remain at the heart of this transformation, serving the public interest every step of the way.

Annual Victims Survey 2024

A landmark survey by the Victims' Commissioner reveals significant dissatisfaction among victims regarding their treatment and confidence in the criminal justice system.

- Only 42% of victims believe they can achieve justice.
- Just 46% express confidence in the system's effectiveness.
- Only 51% believe the system is fair.

Many victims report being denied a voice at key stages with some refused the opportunity to read their Victim Personal Statement in court and only 14% were aware of their right to challenge decisions to drop their case.

Delays, poor communication, and lack of support are contributing to victim disengagement, and a growing number of victims are withdrawing from the justice process to protect their wellbeing.

The APCC Joint Leads for Victims Clare Moody and Matthew Scott said:

"These findings are extremely concerning but, sadly, unsurprising. We know victims feel failed by the criminal justice system, trust and confidence is still too low and many victims who do report a crime feel they have to step away from the process because of the time – too often now several years – it is taking to get cases to trial. Such delays resulting from court backlogs compound the trauma of being a victim in the first place which understandably makes victims feel their needs are anything but central to the criminal justice process.

"Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and Deputy Mayors are responsible for putting in place appropriate support for victims and we are committed to ensuring that support is available. Funding pressures and increased demand are making this increasingly challenging, so we reiterate that long term, stable funding is needed to help victims cope and recover and support them in navigating their way through the criminal justice process."

Questions for committee's consideration

- How is the Audit Committee provided with assurance that the force is responding to the findings of the Annual Victims Survey, particularly around delays, communication, and support?

New powers for police forces to put conditions on repeat protests

The Home Office has announced new police powers to manage repeat protest activity, allowing forces to consider the cumulative impact of previous demonstrations when imposing conditions. Amendments to sections 12 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 will enable officers to restrict protests that repeatedly disrupt communities, including relocating events or banning them outright. Breaches of these conditions may result in arrest and prosecution. The move follows concerns about public safety, particularly within the Jewish community, and aims to balance the right to protest with the need for community protection.

During recent protests, nearly 500 individuals were arrested, primarily for supporting the proscribed group Palestine Action. The government is also advancing measures in the Crime and Policing Bill, including bans on fireworks, flares, face coverings, and climbing war memorials during protests. Police forces are working with the Community Security Trust to support 538 Jewish community sites, and ministers are encouraging local authorities to use existing powers to limit protest activity and safeguard vulnerable groups.

Hate crime statistics in England and Wales for the year ending March 2025

The latest data on police-recorded hate crimes has been published by the Home Office. The total hate crimes recorded by police in England and Wales (excluding the Metropolitan Police Service) for the year ending March 2025 was 115,990, a 2% increase on the previous year. This included:

- Race-based hate crimes increased by 6% and religious hate crimes increased by 3% over the past year.
- Offences against Muslims rose by 19%, with a notable spike following the Southport murders and related disorder.
- There were falls in the other strands of hate crimes reported in the past year including sexual orientation (2% decrease), disability (8% decrease) and transgender (11% decrease).

The estimated hate crime incidents, from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), combined year ending March 2023 to year ending March 2025 surveys, showed that there were an estimated 176,000 incidents of hate crime a year.

New police leadership commission launched

The College of Policing, with Home Office support, has launched a new Police Leadership Commission to conduct a six-month review into leadership across all levels of policing. Chaired by Lord Blunkett and Lord Herbert of South Downs, the commission will assess current capabilities, identify gaps, and make recommendations to strengthen leadership in response to evolving threats such as digital crime, violence against women and girls, and declining public confidence. The initiative aligns with the government's Plan for Change, which includes goals to recruit 13,000 additional officers and halve knife crime within a decade.

The commission will examine entry routes, training programmes, investment in leadership development, and the balance between national and local initiatives. It will engage experts from policing, the military, private sector, and academia to shape a culture of continuous learning and development. Reporting in May 2026, the commission aims to deliver a blueprint for trusted, effective police leadership that meets future demands and restores public confidence.

New professional development review guidance launched

New guidance for professional development reviews (PDRs) has been launched by the College of Policing, shifting from annual appraisals to a year-round, supportive approach focused on wellbeing, career growth, and performance. The guidance encourages regular, two-way conversations between managers and staff, tailored to shift patterns and flexible schedules. Key elements include goal setting, recognition of achievements, and continuous learning, with senior leaders expected to model the approach and line managers supported to lead meaningful discussions.

This refreshed model supports the National Talent Development Strategy by embedding continuous development and recognising potential across all roles. It aims to improve staff retention, motivation, and job satisfaction, ultimately enhancing public service delivery and community safety. The guidance positions PDRs as a strategic tool to nurture talent, strengthen leadership, and build a more capable and resilient policing workforce.

Knife crime named the leading policing issue for young people

A national survey commissioned by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) Youth Panel highlights growing concerns among young people about policing and public safety. Key figures included:

- 26% of respondents cited knife crime as their top concern.

- 20% identified drug dealing as a priority issue.

- 59% expressed confidence in local policing, down from 66% last year.

- 70% said they would report a crime to the police.

The Youth Panel's 2030 Manifesto for Change calls for reforms including a community-led complaints system, mandatory body-worn video use, and enhanced officer training in trauma-informed practices, neurodiversity, and mental health. The IOPC has committed to supporting these youth-led initiatives to improve trust and accountability.

Annual report on deaths during or following police contact in 2024/25

The annual report on deaths during or following police contact in 2024/25 has been published by the IOPC. The report records 17 deaths in or following police custody, down from 25 the previous year and slightly below the 10-year average of 18. There were two fatal police shootings, 26 deaths from 25 police-related road traffic incidents, and 60 apparent suicides following custody, eight fewer than in 2023/24. The IOPC also investigated 50 other deaths following police contact, a decrease of 12 year-on-year.

Key figures:

- Nine of the 17 custody deaths involved individuals with known mental health concerns and 15 had links to drugs or alcohol.

- Five custody deaths involved police use of force, and seven of the 50 other deaths involved restraint or force.

- 63% of suicides involved individuals arrested for alleged sexual offences, with 45% related to offences against children.

- 18 of 26 road traffic deaths were pursuit-related, with the average age of the deceased being 25 years.

- 44 deaths followed police contact after welfare concerns were raised and 13 of 16 domestic-related deaths involved female victims.

IOPC strengthens investigations units

The IOPC is undertaking a major transformation project to strengthen its investigative capacity and improve the quality and timeliness of police complaint investigations. A total of 40 new trainee investigators will join in two waves, October 2025 and early 2026, bringing the number of new recruits over the past 18 months to nearly 100, all trained to the national Professionalising Investigations Programme (PIP1) standard. An additional 36 investigators have joined via the Direct Entry programme, and 450 applications were received for just 11 senior Decision Maker roles, reflecting strong interest in the organisation.

The IOPC is shifting from a regional to a national operating model to better align resources with national priorities, while retaining regional hubs for local knowledge. A new team of Complex Decision Makers will focus exclusively on high-profile cases, and an Operational Policy Group will oversee decision-making standards and consistency. With 1,300 applications received in one week for the new investigator scheme, the IOPC aims to become a more agile, diverse, and productive organisation, enhancing public trust in the police complaints system.

Evaluation of three police interventions to tackle violence against women and girls

The College of Policing has published evaluations on three police interventions to reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG), funded by the Cabinet Office Evaluation Accelerator Fund. The studies assessed forensic marking, police-led classroom education, and video responses to domestic abuse, offering evidence-based insights into prevention and victim support.

Key findings:

- 22% reduction in repeat domestic abuse incidents through forensic marking.

- £83 economic benefit for every £1 spent on forensic marking.

- Pupils taught by police officers showed greater understanding of sexual consent and were more likely to report concerns.

- Video responses enabled faster victim engagement and improved risk assessments, with most victims preferring video or in-person follow-up.

Fire

National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) urges overhaul of building safety system

The NFCC has issued a warning that systemic flaws in the UK's building safety regime are obstructing remediation efforts. In its newly launched Remediation Position Statement, the NFCC calls for a centrally coordinated programme to address compliance, funding, accountability, and workforce shortages. It argues that relying on fire and rescue services to enforce a broken system is unsustainable and risks leaving critical safety gaps unaddressed.

While NFCC supports the government's Remediation Acceleration Plan, with targets to remediate all high-rise buildings by 2029 and medium-rise buildings by 2031, progress is hampered by fragmented funding, data inconsistencies, and workforce constraints.

The NFCC has estimated that it would cost fire and rescue services between £29.86m and £61.77m to inspect all buildings that require remedial works, coming at a time when services are facing real-terms budget cuts. The NFCC reported that there are less than 30 fully competent fire engineers in English fire and rescue services, roles which take years to train, and staff had left to join the private sector.

Questions for committee's consideration

- What arrangements are being put in place within your Fire service to address the skills shortage in this area?

Wildfire incidents in 2025 sets new record

Fire and rescue services in England and Wales have responded to 996 wildfires so far in 2025 (as of 4 September), surpassing the previous record of 994 incidents in 2022. This increase follows a dry spring and multiple summer heatwaves, placing significant strain on resources. The NFCC warned that these blazes can last for days or weeks and put a strain on fire and rescue services.

In August 2025, major incidents were declared in Dorset, Wiltshire, North Yorkshire, and Edinburgh, requiring reinforcements from across the UK. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has called for urgent and sustained investment in personnel, equipment, and infrastructure to meet rising demand.

NFCC Chair Phil Garrigan warned that fire and rescue services are meeting these challenges at a time of reduced numbers of firefighters (11,000 less than a decade ago) and a 20% increase in the number of incidents responded to. He stated that fire and rescue services are "the foundation of national resilience" and must not become the "forgotten emergency service" in regard to investment amid climate-driven challenges such as wildfires and floods.

Fire prevention and protection statistics

Annual statistics on fire prevention and protection activities undertaken by Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) in England, for the year ending March 2025, has been released by the MHCLG. The data provides critical insights into operational trends, compliance levels, and resource allocation. Key statistics include:

- Home fire safety visits (HFSVS): A total of 588,855 HFSVS were completed, up 2.9% from the previous year. 85% were targeted at vulnerable households, the highest proportion since records began.

- Fire safety audits: FRSs conducted 51,020 audits, a 2.4% increase year-on-year. Only 58% were deemed satisfactory, indicating a strategic focus on higher-risk premises. Shops, care homes, and sleeping accommodations accounted for 43% of all audits.

- Enforcement activity: 2,972 formal notifications were issued (up 5.3%), including 1,728 enforcement notices. Breaches of Article 14 (Emergency exits) remained the most common, though down 12% from the previous year.

- Other fire safety work: FRSs completed 47,665 building regulation consultations (up 4.8%) and 119,610 non-statutory fire safety activities (up 13%), with shops being the most frequent premises type across all categories.

Questions for committee's consideration

- Are the Audit Committee briefed on how the service is adapting to the record number of wildfire incidents and increasing operational demand?

Fire and rescue incidents for the year ending June 2025

The fire and rescue incident statistics have been updated for the year ending June 2025. Key figures include:

- FRSs attended 628,764 incidents, a 5.7% rise from the previous year. This includes 165,697 fires (up 28%), 250,341 false alarms (down 2.1%), and 212,726 non-fire incidents (up 1.6%).

- There were 279 fire-related fatalities (up 21%) and 6,650 non-fatal casualties (up 6.1%), with 208 fatalities occurring in dwellings. No fatalities were reported in high-rise flats.

- Primary fires rose by 7.0% to 65,116, while secondary fires surged by 48% to 98,687. Outdoor primary fires saw a 52% increase, largely due to seasonal factors.

- Collaborating incidents (eg assisting other agencies) reached a record 73,962, up 5.6%. Medical incidents dropped by 16%, while road traffic collisions rose slightly by 1.3%.

- Average response time to primary fires was 9 minutes 14 seconds, up 12 seconds from the previous year. Secondary fire response times increased to 9 minutes 38 seconds, reflecting higher incident volumes.

Analysis of non-fire incidents attended by fire and rescue services

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has published its annual analysis of non-fire incidents attended by FRSs in England for the year ending March 2025. The data highlights significant operational trends and emerging pressures across the sector.

- Record high in non-fire incidents: FRSs attended 211,222 non-fire incidents, marking the highest volume since records began. This represents a 1.8% increase year-on-year, 23% rise over five years, and a 69% increase compared to a decade ago.

- Sharp rise in fatalities: There were 5,242 fatalities in non-fire incidents, up 17% from the previous year and more than double the figure from five years ago. The fatality rate rose to 26.0 per 1,000 incidents, up from 22.7 the previous year.

- Collaborating incidents surge: Incidents involving collaboration with other agencies (eg entry/exit, suicide attempts, and assistance) rose to 73,332, a 247% increase over ten years. These now account for 35% of all non-fire incidents, up from 17% a decade ago.

- Road traffic collisions (RTCs): FRSs attended 32,078 RTCs, the highest on record, with peak attendance during evening rush hours. Fatalities in RTCs declined to 18.3 per 1,000 incidents, the lowest rate recorded.

- Medical incident decline: Medical-related incidents fell by 11% to 13,606, continuing a downward trend since the end of co-responding trials. However, the fatality rate in medical incidents rose sharply to 47.6 per 1,000, up from 36.2 the previous year.

- Flooding and water rescues: These incidents decreased by 8.3% to 18,540, though they remain 40% higher than a decade ago. Water rescues alone dropped by 19%, despite a long-term upward trend.

- False alarms and hazardous materials: Non-fire false alarms increased by 1.9% to 9,991, while hazardous materials incidents rose by 3.9% to a record 4,310.

Detailed analysis of fires attended by fire and rescue services in England

The MHCLG has released detailed statistics on fire incidents and response times across England for the year ended March 2025. The data highlights operational pressures, risk patterns, and performance metrics relevant to fire and rescue services. Some key statistics from the document include:

- FRSs attended 142,494 fires, a 2.5% increase on the previous year. Outdoor fires rose by 5.3%, while primary fires declined slightly by 0.5%.

- There were 271 fire-related fatalities, up 8.0% year-on-year, with 77% occurring in dwellings. Non-fatal casualties totalled 6,410, with 73% linked to dwelling fires.

- 24% of dwelling fires occurred in homes without a smoke alarm, accounting for 31% of dwelling fire fatalities. Alarms functioned correctly in only 48% of dwelling fires.

- The average response time to primary fires was 9 minutes 6 seconds, up 3 seconds from the previous year. Drive time accounted for 68% of total response time.

- FRSs rescued 2,958 people from fires (up 3.9%) and responded to 4,112 incidents involving evacuations (down 1.3%).

Questions for committee's consideration

- What assurance do you have that fire services are adequately resourced and trained to respond to the rising number of non-fire incidents and fatalities?

References

Improvements made across policing, and planned reforms, if sufficiently funded, present opportunity to secure lasting change - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
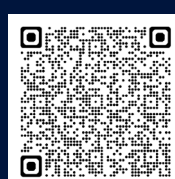
Police Federation steps up engagement with Parliament to press for urgent reforms
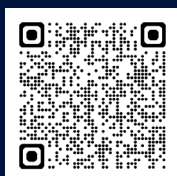
PFEW responds to State of Policing report
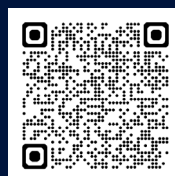
Police funding for England and Wales 2015 to 2026 - GOV.UK
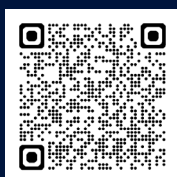
NPCC Chair statement: HMICFRS State of Policing report

PFEW presses for mandatory recording of suicides

Police response to group-based child sexual exploitation has improved, but more needs to be done to protect vulnerable children - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

Police crackdown on organised immigration crime first in multi-agency operation of its kind

The effectiveness of diverting children from the criminal justice system: meeting needs, ensuring safety, and preventing reoffending – HM Inspectorate of Probation

Annual County Lines report: Threat remains stable but business model used by perpetrators continues to evolve

Sir Andy Cooke has confirmed he will leave office next year - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
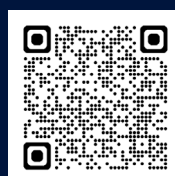
NPCC launches partnership with techUK
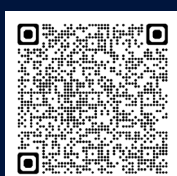
Fairer treatment secured for injured officers after change in compensation guidance
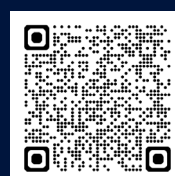
Rule change to support police facing dangerous situations - GOV.UK
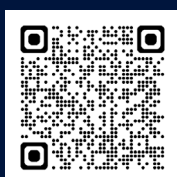
Government announcement on police pay award
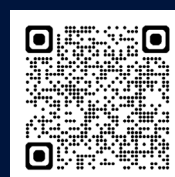
New Taser 10 guidance and training | College of Policing
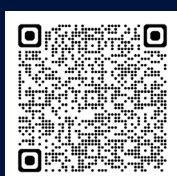
Improvements made in how forces are recording crime, but too many left unrecorded - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
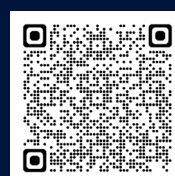
English devolution and the transfer of police and crime powers - The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners

References

APCC Joint Transparency and Accountability Lead: How the Hillsborough Law will support better police standards and accountability - The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners

Fewer than half of victims believe they can get justice, finds Victims' Commissioner - Victims Commissioner

APCC Victims' leads express concern about Victims' Commissioner's annual survey findings - The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners

New police powers to protect communities from disruption caused by protests - GOV.UK

Hate crime, England and Wales, year ending March 2025 - GOV.UK
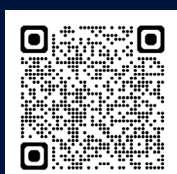
New police leadership commission launched | College of Policing
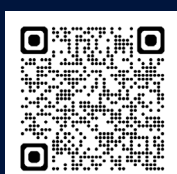
New professional development review guidance launched | College of Policing

Knife crime named the leading policing issue for young people in new survey from the IOPC Youth Panel | Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)
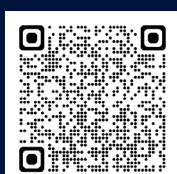
Annual deaths during or following police contact report - 2024/25 | Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)
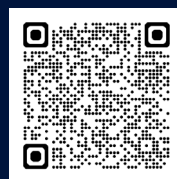
IOPC bolsters investigations ranks in major transformation project | Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC)
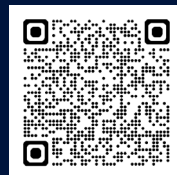
Violence against women and girls research reports published | College of Policing
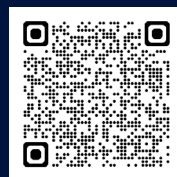
We cannot enforce our way out of the building safety crisis, warn Fire Chiefs - NFCC

New wildfire record sparks urgent call for fire service investment - NFCC

Fire prevention and protection statistics, England, April 2024 to March 2025 - GOV.UK
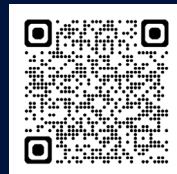
Fire and rescue incident statistics - GOV.UK

Detailed analysis of non-fire incidents: England, April 2024 to March 2025 - GOV.UK

Detailed analysis of fires and response times to fires attended by fire and rescue services, England, April 2024 to March 2025 - GOV.UK

Daniel Harris

National Head of Emergency Services and Local Government

T +44 (0)7792 948 767

daniel.harris@rsmuk.com

Risk and Governance Technical team

Research and author

technical.consulting@rsmuk.com

Employment Rights Bill 2025 Implementation Timeline (October 2025)

Autumn 2025 (Post-Royal Assent)
- Repeal of Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023
- Simplification of industrial action notices
- Unfair dismissal protection for employees involved in industrial action

April 2026
- Day-one rights for:
  - Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) (removal of lower earnings limit and waiting days)
  - Paternity leave and unpaid parental leave
- Launch of the Fair Work Agency (enforcement of labour standards)
- Doubling of collective redundancy protective award (from 90 to 180 days)
- Enhanced whistleblowing protections (sexual harassment counts as qualifying disclosure)

October 2026
- Fire-and-rehire restrictions
- New duties to prevent sexual harassment
- Extended employment tribunal claim time limits
- Boost to trade union access rights

During 2027
- Day-one unfair dismissal rights (with statutory probation period rules)
- Restrictions on zero-hours contracts
- Right to reasonable notice of shifts and shift changes
- Mandatory gender pay gap and menopause action plans
- Expanded flexible working rights
- Bereavement leave
- Change to collective redundancy consultation thresholds
- Regulation of umbrella companies