

NPCC and College of Policing pledge to improve officer and staff safety

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Officer safety training to be overhauled and every police chief to review equipment available to the front line, following findings of a review and safety survey

News 15 mins read

A full-scale review of officer and staff safety has been completed, informed by the views of more than 40,000 officers and staff in a national safety survey conducted by the College of Policing. The review was commissioned in response to concerns about rising assaults and increased violence against officers.

In September 2019, the NPCC chair, Martin Hewitt, commissioned a team of police officers and staff to work with us to gather professional expertise, review available evidence and make recommendations to improve officer and staff safety. All 28 recommendations were unanimously agreed by the Chief Constables' Council in January.

Publication of this report was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has also highlighted issues of safety for frontline officers and staff. Work has been underway since then to begin implementing the recommendations of this review and to improve safety of officers and staff.

The review found that the demeanour of a suspect appeared to be most consistently associated with assaults occurring, rather than characteristics of the officer, suspect or situation. Assaults against officers were most likely when suspects were hostile, resisting arrest or intoxicated.

The College of Policing estimate there were 328 recorded assaults per 1,000 constables in 2018/19 – roughly one offence for every three constables. A quarter (26%) of those surveyed by the College of Policing said that not enough time was spent training essential verbal communication, and only half (52%) said their training had taught them how to defuse confrontation.

Provisional figures released by the NPCC throughout the coronavirus pandemic show a continuing trend of increased assaults against emergency service workers. In the most recent figures released, taking a snapshot of crime for the four weeks to 2 August 2020, and comparing it with the

same four-week period in 2019, forces reported a 31% increase in assaults against emergency workers. It is thought the rise may be driven by increases in common assaults on police constables, including suspects spitting on officers while claiming to be infected with COVID-19.

The package of agreed measures includes:

- **The College of Policing overhauling current safety training and replacing it with a new national curriculum, including recommended contact time with trainers, which all chief constables in England and Wales have committed to ensuring is met.** Current provision of personal safety training was found to be inconsistent with officers in some forces receiving 16 hours of annual training compared with four in others.
- **Introducing an improved process for decision-making about deployment, equipment and other operational issues.** A national framework for conducting a strategic threat and risk assessment will be created to ensure consistency of approach across police forces, even if local circumstances mean different decisions about equipment and deployment.
- **Every chief constable reviewing whether their frontline officers and staff have the equipment they need and increasing the availability of Taser, body armour, spit and bite guards, protective gloves and high-visibility clothing to proportionate levels if supported by their strategic threat and risk assessments.** The Review has maintained the position that these decisions must be taken by chief constables based on local circumstances.
- **Research to examine racial disparities in the police use of Taser.** In England and Wales, national use-of-force data has shown that people perceived to be black or black British were involved in a higher proportion of incidents where less lethal weapons (principally Tasers) were drawn compared with people perceived to be white. Research has been commissioned to address the current evidence gap in understanding the causes of the disparity and to make recommendations to minimise it
- **Expediting trials of new technology or equipment that could enhance safety** such as changes to prevent assaults in police vehicles and remotely operated vehicle immobilisation devices.
- **A hard-line approach to investigations into officer assaults with arrest of an offender the default position.** This will be supported by work to set out the standards police victims of assault should expect at each stage of the criminal justice process and a review of impact of the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 on the outcomes for those assaulted.

In this Review, we have followed the evidence, listened to the concerns of those within the service, and heard the views of the public.

The Review and the breadth of its recommendations show that there is no one piece of equipment that is the answer to all violent and threatening situations. Instead, chief constables have agreed a broad package of measures that will significantly enhance the safety of our brave and hardworking front line.

We're overhauling safety training, trialling new technology and tactics, reviewing the availability of equipment and taking a hard line on the standard of response after an assault. Chiefs have also agreed to take suggestions for legislative change to government to further protect officers and staff.

The primary purpose of the police service is to keep the public safe. Having well trained and equipped officers and staff allows us to fulfil that purpose as well as our responsibility to do all we can to protect our people.

Policing is a career with huge rewards but front line police officers and staff join knowing they face some risks and will sometimes have to run towards danger. Those risks can never be eliminated completely but, as these changes are implemented, we do expect to see a reduction in the number of assaults and greater satisfaction in the response after an assault.

National Police Chiefs' Council chair, Martin Hewitt

Further measures include:

- **Action to address the hidden risks officers face on the roads, both on and off duty, regardless of where the risk comes from.** Of the officers and staff killed on duty between 2008 and 2019, 53 % were killed in a road traffic collision and the majority of those were commuting to or from work. All forces will now adopt common minimum safety standards and consider peer-to-peer support from roads policing specialists. A new learning package will be developed and research commissioned into the links between shift work and road accidents.
- **Calls on the Government to fill legislative gaps so more forms of attack on officers are treated as crimes.** Police chiefs are discussing with Government:

- a new offence for deliberately using, threatening or attempting to use a vehicle to target a police employee
 - an amendment to the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 so that spitting and hate offences against emergency workers are treated as aggravated offences, with further work on what can be done around sexual assaults
- **A commitment to officers and staff of the minimum standard of support and communication should expect if they suffer an assault.** More than half of officers and PCSOs (police community support officers) were satisfied with support they received from supervisors following a recent assault. So chief constables will ensure welfare responsibilities are properly understood and supervisors are supported in their important roles.

It is never acceptable for anyone to be assaulted or harmed just for turning up to do their job. We're concerned by the rising numbers of assaults against officers and staff and have worked to make sure this review can quickly deliver improvements for them.

Sadly, we have found many of the respondents to our surveys have had to deal with the threat of assault on a near daily basis in their roles. Even assaults that end with no physical injury can result in significant mental impact on our staff. The review has also found a high proportion of deaths on duty while driving or commuting to work – these have been addressed head on.

Work to implement the recommendations of the review has begun at pace, even throughout the current pandemic. With the support of government, chiefs and staff associations, we have the commitments in place to make a positive difference for everyone within policing.

The views and experiences of over 40,000 officers and staff have helped shape this review and its recommendations. We will seek to repeat the national safety survey and test the views of officers and staff again as recommendations are implemented. We will also look to engage with officers and staff directly, involving them within regional practitioner groups which can inform chiefs of lived experiences.

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Officer Safety, Chief Constable Alan Pughsley

National police safety survey findings

Facts from the Officer and staff safety review and National police safety survey.

Figures from 2008 to 2019

- **92** police officers lost their lives on duty, **15** as a direct result of a criminal act
- **88%** of officers who responded to the survey said they had been assaulted at some point during their careers
- **39%** reported that they had been assaulted in the last **12 months**
Man pointing with police officer

Figures from 2018/19

- There were **30,885** recorded assaults on police officers
- Assaults without injury increased by 13% on the previous year to 20,476, and assaults with injury increased by **26% to 10,409**
- In this period, the College of Policing estimates that the total number of assaults, including unrecorded assaults, will have **exceeded 45,000**
- The College of Policing has estimated that **71,308 days** were taken as sick leave in 2018/19 as a result of assaults against police officers, at a total estimated salary cost of **£4.7 million**
- In 2018/19, there were **328 assaults per 1,000 constables** – roughly one offence for every three constables – up from 284 per 1,000 in the previous year

The review team were tasked with:

- assessing current safety arrangements and their impact on police legitimacy and public confidence
- assessing the suitability and distribution of the equipment issued to officers and staff
- understanding the breadth of training currently offered to officers and staff for their safety
- understanding the suitability of the existing welfare support provision in place for officers and staff
- understanding the reality around the criminal justice outcomes that follow an assault

The College of Policing survey was sent out to every member of the police service registered for online learning, and more than 40,000 responses concerning safety and wellbeing were received. It is believed to be the largest ever survey to have been carried out in policing, in England and Wales with 20% of all police officers and more than 25% of all PCSOs submitting responses.

The College also commissioned University College London (UCL) to survey 1,500 members of the public to explore their perceptions of the police's use of force, and reviewed the available national data and social research evidence.

Key findings from the survey and use of force data

Repeat victimisation – The survey found this was relatively common. Of those who had been assaulted in the previous 12 months, 50% of custody officers and 46% of response officers have been assaulted at least three times during their career. Some high-risk police staff roles were also identified, particularly custody and detention roles. The College of Policing estimates that officers needed to take a total of 71,308 days as sick leave in 2018/19 as a direct result of assaults on duty.

Personal safety training – Most, but not all, police officers, special constables and PCSOs who responded to the survey had received PST in the past 12 months (81% overall). A notable proportion were not satisfied with the training they had received, with one-third of respondents (34%) saying they were 'very dissatisfied', 'fairly dissatisfied' or 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'.

Use of force – The College and [University of Exeter](#) analysed use of force data for 2017/18 from 16 forces and identified a number of factors associated with officers being assaulted or injured. The odds of assault and injury were both increased when officers:

- were single-crewed
- drew, but did not use, irritant spray
- physically used a baton, irritant spray, limb restraints or unarmed force, or discharged Taser
- used force to protect themselves or others

Taser – The police officers and staff who responded were strongly of the opinion that more frontline officers should deploy with Taser (85%), and that all frontline officers should have the option to

deploy with Taser (87%). A lower proportion were of the opinion that all frontline police officers needed a Taser (61%). Three-quarters of police officers and more than four in five special constables said that they personally wanted to deploy with Taser.

The use of force analysis found that the odds of officers being assaulted were lowered when Taser was drawn, but increased when it was discharged. While strong conclusions are not possible, these findings might suggest that drawing Taser can act as a deterrent, while discharging it may reflect its use in higher-risk situations. The analysis suggested that assaults and injury were no more or less likely when officers carried Taser.

Almost all officers who responded thought Taser was 'very effective' or 'fairly effective' (99%). Handcuffs and limb restraints were seen as the next most effective with 91% and 87% respectively thinking they were 'very effective' or 'fairly effective'.

Equipment – More than two-thirds of PCSOs who responded (69%) did not think that the standard equipment they were provided with was adequate (for example, body armour and radio).

Police officers and staff in England and Wales are paying a heavy price for keeping people safe, with many reporting that their health is suffering as a result. The number of assaults on police officers has risen over the past five years, with more than 30,000 assaults on police officers recorded in 2018/19.

It is essential that we reduce the risk of officers and staff getting injured or suffering harm when at work and police leaders across the service are collectively taking a stand today. The College of Policing undertook a national safety survey, likely to be the largest ever carried out in the police service, to hear directly from those on the front line. More than 40,000 officers and staff responded to us and the stark findings include 71,308 sickness absence days as a result of assaults in one 12-month period. A conservative estimate of the direct cost to the public of days lost to assault is £4.7 million. The full social and economic costs, including the criminal justice processes and health costs will be far higher.

We are taking action to make sure officers and staff who come to work each day to protect the public are better protected themselves.

College of Policing CEO, Chief Constable Mike Cunningham

The College of Policing has also published new guidance for forces and officers on approaches that can be taken to attempt to resolve confrontations with the public without the need to use force.

The guidelines help to address a key finding in the National police safety survey. Officers were asked which tactics they used regularly that may have been taught during personal safety training (PST). A total of 91% said they were most likely to use non-physical conflict management skills on a regular basis rather than physical skills.

However, a quarter (26%) said that not enough time was spent training essential communication and only half (52%) said their training had taught them how to defuse confrontation.

The updated guidelines, developed using evidence from frontline officers including techniques developed for hostage negotiation, address this issue and provide support for officers in practicing de-escalation, communication and negotiation skills in order to avoid the use of force wherever possible.

It is without doubt that our brave police do one of the most difficult jobs out there, putting their lives on the line and confronting violent situations every day to keep the public safe.

The increase in assaults on these brave men and women is simply unacceptable, which is why the Government is consulting on doubling the maximum sentence for this crime.

I welcome this vital work from the NPCC which shows it is essential that police are equipped with the right protection, training and tools to protect the public and themselves.

Home Secretary, Priti Patel

Police Federation of England and Wales, National Vice-Chair Ché Donald, said: 'The safety and well-being of police officers is absolutely paramount. Policing is unpredictable and often dangerous, so it is only right that officers have the very best equipment, training and support for the extraordinary job they do, and we made this crystal clear in our feedback during the review.'

'There are many good points raised in this review and chief officers must now take action to implement them so that they make a tangible difference and are felt on the ground by our hard-working officers.'

Police Superintendents' Association President, Chief Superintendent Paul Griffiths, said:

'This review has given our Service a greater understanding of the challenges facing our workforce, and the systems we have in place to support and protect our people. It's extremely positive to see so many proactive recommendations coming through, which when implemented, will make lasting improvements on their working lives.'

'We have a duty and a responsibility to equip our officers and staff with a range of tools to help them protect themselves and the public, enabling them to manage incidents with confidence. They need access to equipment and technology, but we must also look at how we provide training in skills such as tactical verbal communication to help them resolve situations without the need for force.'

'This comprehensive, holistic approach to protecting our people must be consistent. Every officer and every member of staff, at every rank, should have access to the same high standard of training and equipment, wherever they are based, and a standardised, national approach will ensure this happens.'

'Alongside this, we need to continue to protect and build our relationship with the public to ensure it remains at the heart of our policing values. We need to understand why tension exists, how we can better respond to community issues and how we can ensure that people view us with the respect and trust we strive for.'

Ben Priestley, UNISON National Officer (Police and Justice Service Group), said: 'UNISON is happy to contribute and promote initiatives that improve the safety of police staff.'

Reports, guidelines and survey results

- [Conflict management guidelines](#)
- [Officer and staff safety review \(pdf\) 3.27 MB](#)

- [Conflict management guidelines \(pdf\) 389.45 KB](#)
- [National police safety survey – final results \(pdf\) 2.95 MB](#)
- [Police use of force: Tactics, assaults and safety \(pdf\) 1.02 MB](#)

Tags

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