# Private police surge in London as community security gaps widen after police declines



On a sunny summer morning in August 2024, Leicester Square witnessed a harrowing incident when an 11-year-old girl was grabbed and repeatedly stabbed by a knife-wielding attacker. The suspect, Romanian national Ioan Pintaru, was subdued not by the Metropolitan Police but by two men in uniform from a private police force, My Local Bobby. This attack underscored an unexpected but growing trend in the capital and beyond—the rise of private policing as a response to diminishing public confidence in traditional law enforcement.

My Local Bobby, founded in 2016 by David McKelvey, a former Metropolitan Police detective chief inspector with a background in organised crime, has pioneered this private policing model. Initially operating in affluent London districts including Belgravia and Kensington, the company now covers numerous residential and commercial areas across London and parts of Essex, Suffolk, and Hertfordshire. The firm employs around 150 uniformed officers and 24 plain-clothes detectives, many of whom are ex-police or military personnel, identifiable by their distinctive red livery. Their remit extends beyond typical security duties to encompass community care tasks such as monitoring street cleanliness and ensuring local infrastructure is maintained. The service is subscription-based, with households paying between £30 and £125 a month for tailored policing coverage that includes rapid response to local concerns and direct communication channels via dedicated mobile numbers and WhatsApp groups.

The premise behind My Local Bobby stems from what McKelvey describes as "the thing missing from policing was police officers." Over the last decade, Britain has seen a significant decline in visible police presence, driven by budget cuts and officer reductions—the Metropolitan Police alone lost approximately 1,000 officers in the past year. This has coincided with a surge in shoplifting and other low-level crimes that traditional forces struggle to manage. In 2023, shoplifting incidents in the UK rose by 20% to over half a million offences, with losses to retailers estimated at £2.2 billion annually. Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows public confidence in the police has fallen to historic lows, with only 49% rating their local force positively—a drop of 13 percentage points over the past ten years. Coupled with the lowest crime clearance rates in decades—only 5.7% of reported crimes were solved in 2022 compared to 29% in 2010—many communities feel abandoned by official law enforcement.

Against this backdrop, private forces like My Local Bobby have stepped in to fill the void. They undertake proactive measures to apprehend offenders, including citizens' arrests under the Criminal Law Act, and handle incidents ranging from violent crime to antisocial behaviour and retail theft. In some cases, they have initiated private prosecutions where police have been unable or unwilling to pursue charges, notably in shoplifting and drug-related offences. For example, as early as 2020, My Local Bobby pursued private prosecutions after police advised releasing suspects. Similarly, in 2023, a private police outfit managed a 100% conviction rate for 300 shoplifting cases in London, a feat that further illustrates the challenges faced by traditional police resources.

Their operational success is notable. In Brentwood's Hutton Mount suburb, since My Local Bobby's introduction, incidents have plummeted dramatically compared to surrounding areas. This success is mirrored in business districts too; The Junction BID in Clapham Junction recently engaged the firm to counteract rising retail theft and the dwindling visibility of official policing. Jonny Dyson from the BID highlighted the shift in policing visibility, lamenting the closure of police stations and describing the presence of private bobbies as a small but crucial step toward regaining control over neglected public spaces.

However, private policing is not without critics. Some residents worry such services may inadvertently signal to criminals that affluent neighbourhoods have valuable targets, potentially attracting more crime. Furthermore, the legal powers of private officers remain limited compared to sworn police, primarily restricted to citizen’s arrests and acting within the bounds of reasonable force. Community debate continues over whether private policing represents a necessary innovation or a dangerous commodification of what many consider a public service.

Despite these concerns, the growth of private policing firms mirrors a broader societal response to gaps in public policing. Other companies following My Local Bobby’s model include Blueline Security, Safeguard Force, and Birmingham-based The Shield, each deploying personnel with specialist training and promoting collaboration with official police forces. These firms emphasise intelligence-led patrols and community engagement as key strategies to combat crime and disorder.

David McKelvey remains clear about his mission: “There is a gap in policing and all we’ve done is come along and fill that gap.” With public confidence in traditional policing under strain and serious crime rates rising, the private policing sector’s emergence signals a significant shift in how communities approach safety and security in 21st-century Britain.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15095169/police-officer-street-communities-private-forces.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/24/private-investigators-prosecute-shoplifters-london/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15095169/police-officer-street-communities-private-forces.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-65788756), [[6]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5346699/First-private-police-force-caught-400-criminals.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15095169/police-officer-street-communities-private-forces.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/26/met-has-lowest-rate-for-solving-shoplifting-cases/), [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-65788756)
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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15095169/police-officer-street-communities-private-forces.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/01/02/private-security-firm-mounts-uks-first-private-prosecutions/> - In January 2020, a private security firm initiated the UK's first private prosecutions for theft and other minor crimes, citing police reluctance to pursue such cases. The firm, My Local Bobby, established by former Metropolitan Police officers, began prosecuting shoplifters and drug dealers after being told by police to release apprehended suspects. This move highlights the challenges in addressing low-level crimes due to resource constraints within traditional law enforcement agencies.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-65788756> - A BBC report from June 2023 discusses the rise of private policing in London amid increasing retail crime. My Local Bobby, co-founded by former Met Detective Chief Superintendent David McKelvey in 2016, provides public realm security services across Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the capital. Their officers, known as Bobbies, are accredited by the Security Industry Authority and undergo extensive training, including trauma response and the use of handcuffs. They collaborate with businesses to tackle issues like anti-social behaviour and shoplifting.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/24/private-investigators-prosecute-shoplifters-london/> - In October 2023, The Telegraph reported that a private police force, TM Eye, prosecuted 300 shoplifters with a 100% conviction rate after police failed to address the thefts. The firm, led by former Scotland Yard detective chief inspector David McKelvey, expanded to cover 19 retail and business districts in London. They deploy plainclothes officers to apprehend shoplifters and prosecute them, highlighting the challenges faced by traditional law enforcement in tackling retail theft.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/26/met-has-lowest-rate-for-solving-shoplifting-cases/> - An April 2024 analysis by The Telegraph revealed that the Metropolitan Police had the lowest rate for solving shoplifting offences, despite recording the highest numbers of shop thefts. In 2023, only 7.6% of the 57,000 shoplifting offences reported to the Met resulted in a charge or an out-of-court resolution. This contrasts with Norfolk Constabulary, which solved over a third of its shoplifting cases, underscoring disparities in crime resolution rates across different police forces.
6. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5346699/First-private-police-force-caught-400-criminals.html> - A Daily Mail article from March 2018 highlights the achievements of the UK's first private police force, My Local Bobby, which apprehended 400 criminals. The firm operates in affluent areas like Belgravia, Mayfair, and Kensington, offering services such as patrolling streets, making citizens' arrests, and providing a direct line to local officers. Clients pay up to £200 a month for these services, aiming to fill the policing gap left by traditional law enforcement agencies.
7. <https://easyreader.org/article/page/telegraph/news/2022/10/16/supermarkets-using-detectives-police-fail-stop-shoplifting/> - In October 2022, Easy Reader reported that supermarkets in Ealing, west London, employed private detectives from My Local Bobby to tackle shoplifting, as police response was deemed inadequate. Over eight weeks, the detectives arrested more than 70 shoplifters, often arriving within two minutes of a theft. This initiative underscores the challenges retailers face with rising thefts and the perceived shortcomings of police responses to such crimes.