# Police chiefs warn Starmer over ‘impossible choices’ from austerity-level cuts to crime funding



Sir Keir Starmer is now feeling the heat as police chiefs raise alarms over the dire consequences of his government's significant spending cuts on crime investigation capabilities. Leading figures in UK policing, including Sir Mark Rowley, the head of the Metropolitan Police, have sternly warned the Prime Minister that inadequate funding could force police forces to make impossible choices about which crimes to prioritize. This unsettling warning coincides with an upcoming spending review that has already generated unrest within Starmer’s cabinet regarding fiscal strategies that threaten public safety.

In recent communications, police chiefs have lamented that negotiations between the Home Office and the Treasury have been anything but smooth, further jeopardizing frontline services if budget allocations reflect the ongoing financial neglect. Their letter emphatically stated, “We understand that the Treasury is seeking to finalise departmental budget allocations this week… We are deeply concerned that the settlement for policing and the [National Crime Agency] risks a retrenchment to the austerity levels we endured in the past.” This lack of investment would inevitably force police forces into a position where they must deprioritize serious crimes, endangering communities.

This mayhem underscores a broader, troubling narrative within the UK's justice system, which is facing a staggering £1.3 billion funding shortfall over the next two years. The austerity measures of previous administrations have already slashed police numbers and resulted in dismal conditions across courts and prisons. The Institute for Fiscal Studies warns of annual cuts averaging 3.4%, which only intensifies fears around public safety and the effectiveness of the justice system. Critics point to these reductions as a ‘false economy’ that may lead to consequences far costlier than the perceived savings.

Moreover, the alarming financial state of the Metropolitan Police is evident, with its reserve fund plummeting by nearly £443 million since 2022 and a shocking capital expenditure of £1 billion from property sales over the past decade. These fiscal constraints raise serious questions about the sustainability of police operations under this new government. While Home Secretary Yvette Cooper may announce additional funding, issues around officer morale and retention remain critical, highlighting systemic failures that this administration has yet to tackle.

Adding further complexity to this crisis, police leaders from regions like Essex have indicated they may be forced to drastically reduce officer numbers without proper financial intervention. Sir Mark Rowley has not shied away from describing the anticipated budget settlement as “challenging,” signaling the crushing pressures on police resources and the diminishing commitment levels of officers when asked to perform under such strained conditions.

As Starmer and Chancellor Rachel Reeves attempt to navigate this treacherous landscape, they are confronted by a revolt within their own party regarding the ramifications of proposed departmental cuts. With some ministers proposing higher taxes on the wealthy as a remedy for the budget crisis, it’s clear that the fallout of this political struggle holds ominous implications for public safety and the overall integrity of policing in the UK.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/starmer-reeves-spending-review-police-b2763125.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/d8551dd7-8e89-4908-81bb-3e6f025b86e2> - Leaders across the UK justice system, including the Law Society, Police Federation, and Prison Officers' Association, have warned against further austerity measures, describing them as 'disastrous'. Austerity has already led to deteriorating courtrooms, understaffed prisons, and reduced police numbers, which are now slowly recovering. Chancellor Jeremy Hunt faces pressure to deliver tax cuts to boost Conservative Party prospects, but protecting other key areas (defence, education, NHS) might result in real-term cuts for justice and the Home Office. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates these cuts could be 3.4% annually. Critics argue that ongoing cuts perpetuate a 'false economy', with long-term costs elsewhere and significant impacts on public safety, legal aid availability, and the overall integrity of the justice system. Meanwhile, Hunt and the government claim to continue investing in justice and police, seeking efficiency improvements. However, stakeholders insist more funding is essential for proper functionality and to address current disparities, including the backlog of court cases and the conditions in prisons.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/0df907f5-8d6c-4389-a59b-2fdd7cfc22f0> - London's Metropolitan Police is under financial strain after depleting nearly three-quarters of its £443 million reserve fund since 2022 and spending £1 billion in capital from property sales since 2010. This has caused significant concerns about the sustainability of their current financial operations and the potential for cuts to frontline services. The Met's budget, which is £3.5 billion for this year, primarily funded by the central government and local taxes, is challenged by historical budget cuts and recent payroll reductions. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper is expected to announce an additional £500 million funding, which, although welcomed, may not fully address the force's financial needs. There are rising concerns over officer morale and retention, signalling broader systemic issues within police funding and government relations. London's Mayor Sadiq Khan has invested extra funds into policing but further financial sustainability measures are awaited in the upcoming draft budget and Home Office settlements.
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/london/2024-12-10/police-chiefs-warn-of-possible-cuts-to-officer-numbers-amid-budget-shortfalls> - Two police chiefs have warned that they face having to cut the number of officers in their forces if shortfalls in their budgets are not addressed. The Metropolitan Police faces a £450 million budget shortfall next year, meaning that 2,300 officers and 400 staff could have to be cut, while Essex Police faces a £34 million shortfall, which could mean a reduction of 200 officers. Speaking to the London Policing Board, Sir Mark Rowley said the force faces a 'difficult leadership challenge' and will ask the public for more. He said: 'Next year we want to continue to strengthen performance, we want to continue to reform but we’re going to have to do it in the context almost certainly of a very, very challenging budget settlement. This is going to be really difficult for our people because we’re asking more of them. We’re expecting policing to improve. They’re massively committed and particularly the people in the areas that are going to bear the brunt of these tough choices.'
5. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/mark-rowley-diana-johnson-investment-police-merseyside-police-b2665885.html> - Police forces are facing 'inevitable' cuts with a £1.3 billion shortfall in funding over the next two years, chief constables have warned. Ministers have set out a provisional 3.5% real-terms increase in funding for forces, with a third of the total £986.9 million package depending on council taxes increasing by £14 for the average Band D house. But senior officers say the settlement means forces will have to make cuts. National Police Chiefs’ Council lead for finance, Chief Constable Paul Sanford, said: 'The funding settlement announced today presents real challenges for policing, with forces facing an estimated £1.3 billion gap in finances over the next two years.'
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/mark-rowley-diana-johnson-investment-police-merseyside-police-b1200568.html> - Police chiefs have claimed there is a £1.3 billion funding gap for forces in England and Wales over the next two years. Ministers have set out a provisional 3.5% real-terms increase in funding for forces, with a third of the total £986.9 million package depending on council taxes increasing by £14 for the average Band D house. But senior officers say the settlement means forces will have to make cuts. National Police Chiefs’ Council lead for finance, Chief Constable Paul Sanford, said: 'The funding settlement announced today presents real challenges for policing, with forces facing an estimated £1.3 billion gap in finances over the next two years.'
7. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/homenews/23071992.public-safety-concern-scots-police-chiefs-warn-thousands-jobs-risk-budget-cuts/> - Police chiefs have warned up to 4,500 jobs could be lost in Scotland to deal with tough budget 'cuts'. Force chiefs claim they could be forced to make savings of up to £300 million if ministers forge ahead with plans to fund policing with a flat-cash settlement over the next four to five years. And a new analysis made by Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority suggests without additional cash from the Scottish Government, the force could have to cut officer numbers by 4,500. It comes as new figures showed police numbers in Scotland have hit their lowest level in almost 14 years. There were 16,610 full-time equivalent (FTE) officers in Scotland on June 30, 2022, marking a 679 decline of officers, or -3.9%, in the last year from 30 June 2021.