# Calls for radical overhaul as Britain's outdated police system hampers modern crime fighting



The antiquated structure of policing in England and Wales, largely inherited unchanged since the mid-20th century, is a glaring example of bureaucratic inertia in the face of urgent modern challenges. Since the last major overhaul in the 1960s, the system has persisted with its unwieldy 43 separate forces—each led by its own chief constable and accountable to fragmented bodies—making it desperately ill-suited for today’s complex crime landscape. The result is a bloated, inefficient setup that wastes billions and hampers effective law enforcement.

With police budgets nearing £20 billion annually, the strain on frontline services is palpable. Since the austerity measures implemented post-2010, countless half-hearted mergers of support services have failed to address the fundamental inefficiencies of a patchwork system. Instead, the overgrown bureaucratic maze drives up administrative costs and prevents the strategic cooperation necessary to combat cybercrime, organized crime, and fraud—threats that evolve faster than police structures can adapt. As policing expert Graham Bartlett has lamented, the current entrenched system stifles potential savings and leaves officers stretched to breaking point.

Leading voices within law enforcement, including the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, openly acknowledge the need for radical change. Sir Mark Rowley’s call to consolidate the 43 forces into around a dozen regional “mega” units underscores the urgency of restructuring. Such a move would not only streamline command but also harness the latest technology, making policing more agile and resilient. The current disjointed model wears its inefficiencies on its sleeve—costly, ineffective, and increasingly unable to meet modern threats head-on.

Policing leaders agree that the status quo is unsustainable. Gavin Stephens, Chairman of the National Police Chiefs’ Council, has called for a comprehensive review, emphasizing that only larger, more capable forces can leverage emerging technologies and address threats more effectively. Yet, despite these warnings, reforms are repeatedly thwarted by political and bureaucratic barriers. The governance landscape—particularly in metropolitan regions where accountability is divided among mayors—further entrenches the fragmentation. These local leaders often lack the authority or willingness to pursue meaningful mergers, and proposals for regional consolidation are routinely dismissed despite clear operational benefits.

Financial pressures add a layer of urgency. The Metropolitan Police, for instance, has burned through nearly three-quarters of its £443 million reserve fund since 2022, with over £1 billion spent on property sales since 2010 to make ends meet. Relying on underfunded, overstretched forces handling rising demands—fuelled by population growth and increasingly complex crimes—only deepens the crisis. The over-reliance on short-term tactical fixes ignores the systemic issues lurking beneath the surface.

Yet, attempts at reform are hamstrung by bureaucratic complexity and political hesitation. The current governance arrangements—where mayors or local authorities have oversight—do little to challenge the entrenched divisions. Proposals for voluntary mergers are often dismissed outright, as exemplified by decisions to keep neighbouring forces separate, despite obvious efficiencies. Without a bold, independent review—perhaps a Royal Commission—real change remains a distant dream. Such a comprehensive inquiry could cut through political logjams and recommend primary legislation to overhaul the system entirely, ensuring policing is fit to meet the demands of the 21st century.

In essence, the case for wholesale reform is glaring. The framework established in the 1960s has served its purpose, but it now hampers the ability to confront modern crime effectively. Worryingly, the current government’s failure or unwillingness to act risks perpetuating a broken system that sacrifices frontline policing and public safety for bureaucratic convenience. Real, lasting change demands courage and leadership—something sorely missing from the current political landscape. Until decisive action is taken, public safety will remain vulnerable, and the police will continue to operate under a broken, outdated model that cannot ensure the security of the nation.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25411822.time-time-royal-commission-policing/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/mark-rowley-national-police-chiefs-wales-england-government-b1230192.html> - In May 2025, police chiefs in England and Wales advocated for a significant restructuring of the UK's policing framework, proposing fewer, larger forces to enhance efficiency and adaptability. This call for reform was driven by financial constraints and challenges in addressing complex crimes like fraud and technological advancements. Gavin Stephens, Chairman of the National Police Chiefs’ Council, emphasized the need for robust forces capable of leveraging technology and responding effectively to emerging threats. The current system, established in the 1960s, was deemed fragmented and uncoordinated, necessitating a comprehensive overhaul to meet modern policing demands. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/mark-rowley-national-police-chiefs-wales-england-government-b1230192.html?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://news.sky.com/story/met-police-chief-calls-for-mega-forces-in-push-for-major-policing-shake-up-13393111> - In July 2025, Sir Mark Rowley, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, highlighted the inadequacy of the existing 43-county force system, stating it had been unfit for purpose for at least two decades. He advocated for the creation of 12 to 15 larger, more efficient 'mega' forces capable of utilizing modern technology and reducing operational costs. This proposal aimed to address the challenges posed by the current fragmented structure and to enhance the effectiveness of policing in England and Wales. ([news.sky.com](https://news.sky.com/story/met-police-chief-calls-for-mega-forces-in-push-for-major-policing-shake-up-13393111?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/07/18/met-police-is-shrinking-organisation-sir-mark-rowley-says/> - In July 2024, Sir Mark Rowley, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, acknowledged the force's financial difficulties, revealing that nearly three-quarters of its £443 million reserve fund had been depleted since 2022. This financial strain raised concerns about the sustainability of current operations and the potential impact on frontline services. The Met's annual budget of £3.5 billion, primarily funded by the central government and local taxes, faced challenges due to historical budget cuts and increasing demands, including population growth and evolving threats like cybercrime. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/0df907f5-8d6c-4389-a59b-2fdd7cfc22f0?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/0df907f5-8d6c-4389-a59b-2fdd7cfc22f0> - In November 2024, London's Metropolitan Police faced significant financial challenges, having depleted nearly three-quarters of its £443 million reserve fund since 2022. This depletion, coupled with £1 billion spent from property sales since 2010, raised concerns about the sustainability of current financial operations and the potential for cuts to frontline services. The Met's £3.5 billion annual budget, primarily funded by the central government and local taxes, was under strain due to historical budget cuts and rising demands, including population growth and evolving threats like cybercrime. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/0df907f5-8d6c-4389-a59b-2fdd7cfc22f0?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/921e7964-9c6d-4677-8393-4c96e564f373> - In November 2024, an analysis of policing reforms in England and Wales highlighted that, despite the introduction of measures like the College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct, there was no significant improvement in policing outcomes. Factors such as an ageing population and fewer young people contributing to crime were noted as influential in the broader decline of crime rates. The analysis emphasized the need for more direct involvement from politicians and the central government in driving police reforms to address these challenges effectively. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/921e7964-9c6d-4677-8393-4c96e564f373?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police_Act_1964> - The Police Act 1964 was a significant piece of legislation in the United Kingdom that updated the governing framework for police forces in England and Wales. It introduced new police authorities, granted the Home Secretary enhanced supervisory powers over local constabularies, and permitted the amalgamation of existing forces into more efficient units. This act marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of policing structures, laying the groundwork for future reforms and restructuring efforts aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of law enforcement agencies. ([en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Police_Act_1964?utm_source=openai))