Report to the Joint Independent Audit Committee

National Police Reform Programme: Strategic Overview

Friday 25 September 2026

This paper provides Joint Independent Audit Committee (JIAC) members with a high-level overview of the national Police Reform Programme and its current position. It summarises the background to the reforms, the key proposals currently under development, and the potential implications for police forces, including Cleveland Police.

Summary

The Government published its Police Reform White Paper, From Local to National: A New Model for Policing, in January 2026. The White Paper proposes significant changes to how policing is organised, governed and supported nationally. The stated aim is to create a policing system that is more effective, more consistent and better equipped to meet current and future demand.

The programme is being delivered jointly by the Home Office, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) and the Joint Police Reform Team (JPRT). Engagement with police forces, PCCs, staff associations and other stakeholders has continued throughout 2026 as detailed design work progresses.

While the overall direction of travel has been established, many elements of the programme remain under development. Final decisions regarding organisational structures, governance arrangements, implementation timelines and funding models are still subject to ongoing review and, in some cases, future legislation.

Why Police Reform is Being Proposed

The White Paper identifies several long-term challenges facing policing nationally.

These include:

- Increasingly complex and technology-enabled crime.
- Growing demand on specialist services.
- Significant variation in capability and capacity across forces.
- Fragmented national arrangements for certain policing functions.
- Financial pressures and duplication across the policing system.
- The need for improved technology, data sharing and workforce planning.

The Government's position is that policing structures have not evolved at the same pace as the demands now being placed upon the service, and that reform is therefore required to improve efficiency, effectiveness and consistency for the public. This reflects the view that the current policing landscape has developed incrementally over many decades, with the last significant structural reorganisation of policing in England and Wales implemented in 1974, following recommendations and reviews undertaken during the 1960s.

Key Reform Proposals

National Police Service

The first proposal is the creation of a National Police Service (NPS).

The NPS would bring together a number of existing national and specialist capabilities into a single organisation to provide enhanced coordination of serious, organised and cross-border crime. The Government's stated intention is to strengthen national capability while allowing local forces to focus on neighbourhood policing and local crime.

Detailed implementation arrangements remain under development, with further information on delivery timescales expected over the next few years.

Review of Police Force Structures

The White Paper committed to an independent review of police force structures across England and Wales. The review is examining whether existing organisational arrangements remain the most effective model for delivering modern policing. There is an assumption that there will be fewer forces in England and Wales following this review.

At the time of writing, no final decisions regarding force mergers or structural changes have been announced.

Local Policing Areas

Alongside stronger national capabilities, and larger police forces, the reforms propose the creation of Local Policing Areas (LPAs).

LPAs would continue to deliver the policing services most visible to communities, including neighbourhood policing, emergency response, crime investigation and safeguarding. The White Paper states that local policing should remain rooted in communities whilst operating within a more consistent national framework.

National Performance Framework

The reform programme includes a new national policing performance framework, intended to provide more consistent performance information across forces and support improvement activity. National updates indicate this is expected to be one of the earliest reform components to be implemented.

Workforce, Technology and Data

The White Paper places significant emphasis on workforce development, leadership, digital capability and data.

National reform updates highlight the importance of modern technology, improved interoperability, data sharing and workforce capability as essential foundations for future policing arrangements.

Specialist Capability Reform

A number of specialist functions are progressing reform activity alongside the wider programme. Forensic services have been identified as a priority area, with national programme boards established to consider future delivery models and national coordination arrangements.

Current Position

Nationally, the programme remains in the development and design phase.

Throughout 2026 there has been extensive engagement with chief officers, PCCs, police staff associations, professional bodies and sector leaders. Work is ongoing to develop the detailed design of future arrangements and prepare for implementation.

Several workstreams are progressing simultaneously, including policing performance, force structures, workforce reform, data and technology, local policing and specialist capabilities.

Legislation is expected to play an important role in delivering aspects of the programme, with national planning assumptions linked to the progression of the proposed Police Reform Bill through Parliament.

Potential Implications for Cleveland Police

At present, there are no published proposals that specifically set out future arrangements for Cleveland Police. Many details remain subject to national review and consultation. However, based on the published direction of travel, the following areas may be relevant as reforms develop:

Governance and Accountability

Changes to national governance arrangements may influence how policing performance is measured, reported and monitored nationally.

Organisational Structures

Any future recommendations arising from the independent review of force structures could potentially affect how policing services are organised across England and Wales. No decisions have yet been announced.

Performance Reporting

The introduction of a national performance framework may result in greater consistency of performance measures and comparison across forces.

Technology and Data

Future national expectations regarding technology, digital systems and data standards may influence local investment priorities and programme planning.

Specialist Services

National reforms affecting specialist capabilities, including forensic services, may result in changes to how some specialist functions are coordinated and delivered.

At this stage, the precise impact on individual forces cannot be determined because key elements of the programme remain under development.

Conclusion

The Police Reform Programme represents a significant national programme of change intended to modernise policing in England and Wales and improve the ability of the service to meet future demand. The programme encompasses organisational structures, performance, technology, workforce development and specialist capabilities.

While the strategic direction has been established through the White Paper and associated reform activity, much of the detailed design work remains ongoing. As a result, the long-term implications for individual forces, including Cleveland Police, will become clearer as national decisions are made and implementation plans are developed.

This paper is therefore intended to provide members with an overview of the national position and current direction of travel, rather than a definitive assessment of future local impacts.

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