

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24



**Police & Crime
Commissioner**
FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

Jonathan Ash-Edwards
POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR HERTFORDSHIRE

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FOREWORD

By Jonathan Ash-Edwards

Welcome to our Annual Report for 2023-24. This document is intended to provide a summary of the key work undertaken by the former Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and his office during the final year of 2021-2024 term.

I was elected as the new PCC on 4 May 2024 and formally took office on 9 May 2024.

This report covers the last year of David Lloyd's service as the PCC for Hertfordshire. I am grateful for all he has done over the last 12 years to keep our communities safe.

This report reviews the progress made between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 as against the delivery of the Police and Crime Plan.

Looking forward, work is now underway to develop and launch my new Police and Crime Plan before the end of my first year in office. I am confident that the priorities in that Plan will make Hertfordshire an even safer place to live and work in.

I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my thanks to the officers, staff and volunteers of Hertfordshire Police and the Hertfordshire OPCC for their work during this past year. I look forward to working with you and all our partners.

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A YEAR IN FOCUS:

PROGRESS MADE AGAINST THE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE PLAN PRIORITIES

2a

A YEAR IN FOCUS:

Prevention First and Criminal Justice

- Fewer crimes as Prevention First embedded
- Number of officers continues to exceed previous record
- Extra resources to tackle fraud and cybercrime as £4m recovered for victims

Embedding of Prevention First strategy and hotspot policing to reduce number of victims (Priorities 1, 5 & 6)

In 2020, together with the Chief Constable, the PCC and his office developed 'Prevention First', a transformative approach to crime prevention. In subsequent years this had been embedded into all areas of policing and community safety. The aim is to go beyond a focus on crime volume and harm, to an approach that sits across all organisational and operational areas of the business to prevent duplication, waste and inefficiency. By fundamentally understanding why organisational and operational issues occur, and by applying evidence-based policing, we've achieved a reduction in incoming demand, and an improving picture in productivity, and public confidence.

Hertfordshire already had the lowest level of crime in our Most Similar Force group, and since the introduction of Prevention First the gap has widened. It is estimated that the initiative has resulted in 104,000 fewer crimes.

PLAN on a PAGE



Our VISION is to...			Our MISSION	Our VALUES	
 PREVENT HARM	 PREVENT CRIME	 PREVENT OFFENDING	We will transform policing by putting prevention at the heart of everything we do and hold ourselves to the highest professional standards.	We are honest, trustworthy and fair. We use the Code of Ethics to guide our decision making.	
Our foundations for success		The STRATEGIC PRIORITIES to deliver our Vision and Mission			
 WORK TOGETHER	 BE LEGITIMATE	 PEOPLE	 COLLABORATION	 DELIVERY	 ENABLERS

Record number of officers (Priority 2)

A record high number of officers are now serving the people of Hertfordshire after continued investment from local residents and the government.

In April 2023 Hertfordshire Constabulary announced that the uplift programme had resulted in an extra 338 officers. By 31

Police and Crime Commissioner's Annual Report 2023/24

March 2024 this had increased by another 50, resulting in 2,461 total police officers serving the county.

These new officers have boosted the Constabulary's representation, with higher proportions of women and people from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds joining. This work is continuing to ensure the police truly reflect the communities they serve and has focused on Positive Action, mentoring and retention of officers.

Of those recruited during the Police Uplift Programme in the county out of the total of 719 new officers recruited 313, or 43.5 per cent, were women. While 61 student officers, or 8.48 per cent, were from ethnic minority backgrounds.



Text a defendant scheme wins national award (Priority 13)

A project which sends a text message to defendants to remind them about upcoming court dates won a national award.

The pilot scheme was started by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) for Hertfordshire several years ago to save police and courts time and money. Around a fifth of first appearance court cases were delayed as the accused failed to show up in court.

The project changed the system so a reminder text message was sent to the defendant the day before the court case, which led to a significant improvement in attendance. Earlier this year the scheme won the Effective Court Hearings award at the National Police Chiefs Council conference.



Fairness in the Criminal Justice System project (Priority 104)

During the year the Hertfordshire OPCC awarded £200,000 to launch the Fairness in the Criminal Justice System project.

Commissioned by the Hertfordshire Criminal Justice Board, this research is currently investigating disproportionality across the system and identifying areas for improvement. The project is supported by a dedicated researcher with oversight from an Independent Chair.



Keeping residential burglary rates low (Priorities 72 & 73)

In 2012 there were an average of eight residential burglaries a day across the county, this has now reduced to even fewer.

Despite these low levels, burglary remains a top priority for Hertfordshire's residents and one which rightly requires a continued focus.

During the year the Strategic Crime and Insight Analyst team at the OPCC made extensive use of geographical information and associated technology to support the implementation of a hotspot policing model. This included identifying areas suitable for hotspot policing to prevent and reduce crime, such as burglary.

The improved use of research-based hotspot methodology helped secure Home Office grant funding for the county from the Safer Streets programme.



Tackling fraud and cybercrime (Priorities 66, & 86)

There has been further investment in preventing fraud and cybercrime across the county.

The OPCC agreed 12 months funding for three additional fraud investigators to enable Hertfordshire Constabulary's Serious Cybercrime and Fraud Unit (SCFU) to adopt a greater number of investigations.

The Beacon Fraud Hub continued to deliver for the public attracting national publicity for its work helping those deal with the consequences of being scammed and stopping them becoming repeat victims. It has now recovered over £4m for victims.

Awards of £5,000 and £4,744 were given from the Commissioner's Action Fund to Citizens Advice East Herts and Citizens Advice Broxbourne respectively. They used the money to offer scam advice and prevention programmes to help stop hundreds of their clients losing money to fraudsters.

In addition, many free cybercrime advice sessions were held at libraries across Hertfordshire. Officers from the SCFU and Beacon gave practical crime prevention advice to help avoid common scams and recognise new ones.

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) (Priority 47)



In the autumn £1.27m of Safer Street funding was secured by the OPCC to tackle crime and make the county safer, with an emphasis on women and girls.

Building on previous rounds of funding from the scheme, the latest award marked a total of £2.6m of additional investment in Hertfordshire.

Last year's award provided £781,274 from the Home Office plus £492,952 in matched funding contributions from local partners. The spending is being focused in three areas.

In the Bedwell area of Stevenage measures have been introduced to reduce the incidents of anti-social behaviour, vagrancy, drug dealing and violence. They include upgrading CCTV and door security systems in three tower blocks as well as employing neighbourhood wardens for nighttime patrols.

In Hertford town centre concerns over crimes associated with the weekend nighttime economy such as drug use, violence and those against women and girls are being addressed. The funding is providing new mobile CCTV cameras, brighter street lighting, police patrols and ANPR monitoring of cars using the Gascoyne Way car park. Extra training will be given to door staff, taxi marshals and CCTV operators to help women making their way home.

A final investment is focused on South Hatfield to reduce reports of vehicle crime, county line drug dealing, criminal damage and associated anti-social behaviour. The theft of motorbikes, which are then ridden dangerously around the area is a particular concern and measures will be introduced to stop this behaviour.

Other action taken through the year to prevent VAWG included the OPCC providing funding for free female personal safety classes, delivered by UK Puma Defence.

The Walk With A Cop scheme launched at the end of 2023 with events held in Rickmansworth, Oxhey and Abbots Langley. The public – particularly women and girls – and professional

partners joined police to walk areas to highlight where they feel vulnerable.



Last year police in Watford piloted a national safety initiative that targets perpetrators of sexual predatory behaviour in the town's night-time economy. Project Vigilant aims to identify and intercept those displaying concerning behaviour and prevent sexual offences from occurring.

Specially trained plain-clothed and uniformed police officers patrol public areas outside nightclubs and pubs looking out for those acting suspiciously.



Tackling the root causes of Domestic Abuse perpetration (Priorities 35 & 36)

In 2023 the new Chrysalis Centre was created as an innovative and pioneering solution to tackling individual behaviours that cause abuse within relationships. It followed a successful bid to the Home Office Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Prevention fund to get £3.2m enterprise set up.

In the first year the Chrysalis Centre received over 360 referrals across a range of authorities and partners. Self-referrals by perpetrators have also been encouraging and validates the approach for a service that sits outside specific criminal justice sanctions and is non-judgemental in its approach.

The Home Office have now confirmed the allocation of funding in year two.



Increasing the availability of IDVA and ISVAs

The OPCC secured additional government funding to support more victims of sexual and domestic abuse. With 24 specialist advisors Hertfordshire now has its highest ever number of Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) and Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs).

Some are based in hospitals, and all support victims from initial report, through investigation and to court. In February 2024, Ministry of Justice Victims Minister Laura Farris visited the service and commended the exceptional work being delivered by the team.

Enhanced support for Victims of Stalking (Priority 39)

National research found that stalking behaviours were present in 94 per cent of cases of criminal homicide and that surveillance activity which included covert watching was recorded in 63 per cent.

The OPCC continues to fund an enhanced countywide Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworker (ISAC) support provision for victims of stalking delivered by Safer Places. The service receives on average 36 referrals per month and provides advice and independent safety planning for all those request help.

Preventing serious violence in young people (Priority 79)

The Commissioner awarded over £200,000 in grant funding towards numerous projects to tackle youth serious violence. This included No More Youth and Herts Youth Justice which provides intensive one-to-one support to young people at risk of gang involvement, serious violence and exploitation.

Eight awards were also made for County-wide delivery of education and prevention awareness in primary and secondary schools and colleges. Over 10,000 young people benefited from the projects involving more than 30 places of education.

Watford based West Herts Amateur Boxing Club & Educational Support will use money from the OPCC for their Knives Down

Gloves Up scheme which uses boxing as a constructive alternative to gang affiliation, knife crime and extremism.



Hate Crime Awareness Week

More than 90 people attended a conference organised by the Hate Crime Partnership Board, which include the OPCC, in October to tackle local hate crime incidents.

The conference explored what a hate crime is, how people can report incidents and how we as a county can support victims. During the day, there was an opportunity to watch a film which looked at a hate crime case study and saw the case progress from when it was first reported all the way through to trial.

Support for victims of organised immigration crime. (Priority 88)

Following the introduction of National Policing Standards for Organised Immigration Crime, an enhanced package of victim care was jointly designed between Beacon and the Constabulary.

The Beacon Safeguarding Hub works closely with the Hertfordshire Modern Day Slavery Partnership and National Referral Mechanism.

Beacon also has access to a specialist trafficking and exploitation ISVA, provided through the OPCC's commissioned ISVA service, who supported 24 victims of trafficking and exploitation.

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A YEAR IN FOCUS:

Fairness, Equality and Confidence in Policing

New Legitimacy Plan to enhance public confidence

A new [Legitimacy Plan](#) to enhance public confidence and increase scrutiny around police behaviour was published by the OPCC.

The Legitimacy Plan built on the themes set out in the Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan to detail how the PCC was working with the Chief Constable to improve and

embed further a culture of transparency, accountability and ethical behaviour within the Constabulary.

Enhanced complaint handling and scrutiny (Priorities 90 & 91)

PCCs have a pivotal role in deciding how the police complaints system operates at an individual force level. Hertfordshire used the complaint handling model introduced by The Policing and Crime Act 2017. Hertfordshire's OPCC Complaint Resolution Team (CRT) continues to offer excellent customer service to the public.

Their focus is not only to have greater oversight of complaints, but to understand the issues affecting the public and the Constabulary.

CRT analyse the complaint themes and trends arising and share the data with the Constabulary. The data and information gathered enhances the PCCs ability to hold the Chief Constable to account. CRT have a bespoke database that can collate extensive information providing opportunities to grasp key elements of a person's dissatisfaction, understanding where failings have occurred and identifying individual and organisational learning.

Statistics from the year showed that CRT service recovered 73 per cent of all complaints received (998 out of 1,372) with an average time to close of five days.



In March 2024, CRT was awarded a Customer Service Excellence Award for their complaint handling. Awarded by the Centre for Public Excellence, who independently validate organisations' performance against the Customer Service Excellence standard, it assessed staff against a framework of 57 standards.

CRT also contributed to developing a Complaint Handling Toolkit by working with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners. The Hertfordshire CRT is proactive in identifying and sharing learnings locally and nationally and have also shared how organisational learning can be used to effect changes.

Complaint reviews conducted by OPCC

The OPCC is responsible for conducting independent complaint reviews in place of the Constabulary. The system is designed to achieve a more efficient and proportionate process and enhance local accountability through changes to the role of the Commissioner to provide greater reassurance to the public by increasing independence and transparency.

During the year, 54 complaint reviews were conducted with eight oversight issues highlighted to the Constabulary. The feedback and insight gained within the OPCC by completing these reviews also contributes to the Commissioner's holding to account function.

FAIRNESS

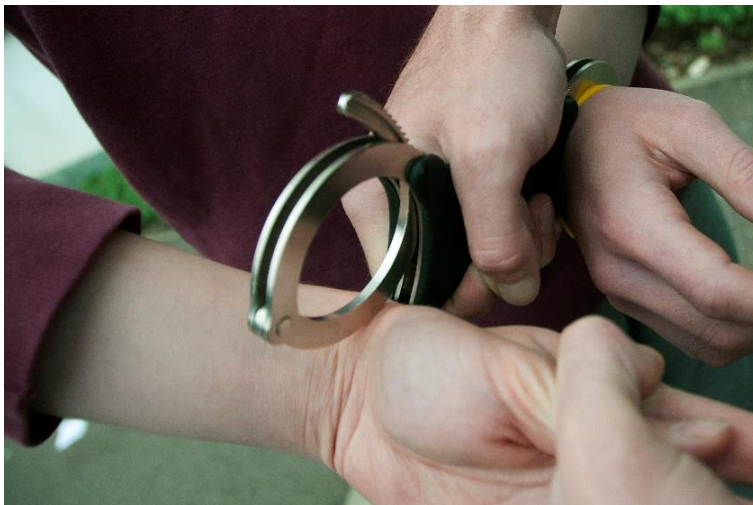
Monitor improvements in officer Use of Force records to gather accurate picture of all force deployed (Priority 101)

The OPCC's Independent Use of Force Scrutiny Panel continued to go from strength to strength. It supported the PCC to scrutinise the application of force by the Constabulary.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has described Hertfordshire as "an example of innovative practice of a partnership approach to the independent community scrutiny of stop and search."

In alignment with the Children's Commissioner for England's report, all strip searches of children in Hertfordshire are now reviewed through the Stop and Search Scrutiny Panel.

These foundations continue to be built on through ongoing implementation of the recommendations made by the PCC-commissioned independent health check of the panels.



EQUALITY

Insights from stop and search disproportionality report (Priority 103)

A [research project to explore disproportionality of police use of stop and search powers](#) was published in March 2024.

The OPCC commissioned research from the University of Hertfordshire to find a better way to understand and measure disproportionality in order to analyse whether discriminatory behaviour is taking place.

The research found although there was some disproportionality around the stopping of young black men, the levels of disparity were the lowest when compared to Hertfordshire Constabulary's most similar forces.

Researchers concluded that the majority of perceived disproportionality was explained by the geographical location of where the stop and search took place. Those areas with higher crime rates and a corresponding higher police presence match with those areas with a lower social economic profile. In Hertfordshire those areas also tend to have more ethnically diverse populations.

Monitoring of the Equality Duty and delivery of Constabulary's Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) Strategy (Priority 98)

In October 2023 the OPCC identified a series of actions to develop our on-going responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty – these actions emerged from a self-assessment based on the framework published by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC).

The OPCC is supporting the progression of activity and adjustments have been made to the OPCC's internal

working practices, alongside the significant investment in the Legitimacy Strategy which is a key strand in improving diverse representation.

Monitoring whether Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic officers were being treated disproportionately in misconduct allegations, dismissals and voluntary exits (Priority 108)

The Professional Standards Department (PSD) governance board changed its terms of reference during the year and became the strategic scrutiny board.

OPCC representatives continue to attend and its work includes monitoring discrimination and disproportionality in complaints, as well as conduct and investigations and outcomes. It provides a wide ranging and helpful tool for holding to account on this aspect of work.

Vetting is also included in this monitoring work. The monitoring work leads to further work to investigate reasons for disproportionality if required. Hot spots are reported to the forces for further action. PSD routinely collect data and report it into the PSD Governance Board for oversight of this issue.

CONFIDENCE

Set up an independent Use of Police Powers external scrutiny panel to view samples of BWV (Priority 102)

Following a successful pilot, the OPCC's Body Worn Video (BWV) Scrutiny Panel was made permanent in October 2023.

BWV has become an integral tool for modern policing, providing critical evidence, promoting officer safety, and improving trust between the police and the community.

The Panel expands the OPCC's range of external scrutiny by examining BWV encounters to shine a light on officer conduct, attitude, and level of compliance.



Hertfordshire wins national award for custody visiting

The Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner's Office (OPCC) has been recognised nationally for the high quality of its independent custody visiting scheme.

Trained volunteers from the community (Independent Custody Visitors or ICVs) make regular unannounced visits to police custody suites to check on the rights, entitlements, wellbeing and dignity of the detainees.

The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) presented the Hertfordshire scheme with a Silver quality assurance award in November at a ceremony in Birmingham.

Increasing the use of Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Notices (Priority 38 & 40)

Following the PCC raising concerns regarding the low level of Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) and Orders (DVPOs), work has taken place to significantly increase their use. In 2022/23 just 27 DVPOs were applied for, amongst the lowest in the country. In 2023/24, 197 DVPOs were secured to better protect victims of domestic abuse.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

Improving non-emergency contact with police

The OPCC ran a survey in September 2023 to ask residents how they contact the police in non-emergency situations and what changes they would like to see and why.

They were also asked how they rated their contact with the Constabulary in terms of visibility and accessibility.

Among the current channels of contact are: the Herts Police website, webchat or police social media platforms, calling 101, emailing the police Safer Neighbourhood Team, or making an appointment to see an officer or PCSO at your home or at a police station.

Respondents were asked whether the method of contact they used was their preferred method and to rate their experience.

Results from the survey showed that the majority of the public showed a strong preference for a local police station front counter service. Further work is now underway with the Constabulary to explore future options.

Strategic Policing Requirements

The Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR) sets out those threats which, in the Home Secretary's view, are the biggest threat to public safety and must be given due regard by PCCs when issuing or varying Police and Crime Plans.

It supports PCCs as well as Chief Constables to plan, prepare and respond to these threats by clearly linking the local response to the national, highlighting the capabilities and partnerships that policing needs to ensure it can fulfil its national responsibilities.

A revised version of the SPR was published in February 2023 which provided strengthened detail around the action required from policing at the local and regional level to the critical national threats.

The 2023 SPR set out seven identified national threats. These are as follows: Serious and Organised Crime (SOC); Terrorism; Cyber; Child Sexual Abuse; Public Disorder and

Civil Emergencies. These remain from the 2015 version with the addition in 2023 of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

The PCC has given due regard to each of these seven threat areas, and these are reflected in the priorities set for the force in the Community Safety and Criminal Justice Plan and themes discussed in the PCCs holding to account meetings with the Chief Constable. These are noted within this report.

2c

A YEAR IN FOCUS:

Representing Public Concerns

Positive results for Viacam pilot locations in Barley and Hertford Heath (Priority 120)

Results from the two automated DriveSafe speed camera pilot projects have shown a positive effect for residents.

The two villages Hertford Heath and Barley had chronic speeding issues and got digital speed camera systems to monitor the 30mph limits. They were funded by the OPCC's Road Safety Fund. Analysis of the sites during the year revealed the monitored over 3m vehicle speeds, resulting in 5,500 advisory letters being sent.

Additional help for victims of Anti-Social Behaviour (Priority 122)

Following a successful trial of an initial Beacon ASB Case Manager, funding was agreed for the piloting of an additional ASB Case Manager to focus on supporting victims who invoked the Community Trigger (now known as ASB Case Review).

The role of the ASB Case Review Support Manager is to advocate on behalf of a victim either wishing to request a case review, or for those currently undergoing a review.

ASB can be complex to investigate with sometimes behaviour deemed unacceptable to one party not meeting a criminal threshold for further police involvement. Therefore, as is often the case, a number of agencies can be involved in determining whether ASB meets the criteria to impose local sanctions, including breaching of tenancy agreements

The impact of the service has been very well received with some victims stating they “would have given up” without the support of the case worker.

Rural Crime

A refreshed Rural Crime Policing Strategy was published following a reorganisation of the Rural Operational Support Team (ROST) to support local policing command.

The strategy asked members of the rural community what their main concerns were. The top three issues they reported were fly tipping, poaching and hare coursing, then theft of farm machinery, plant and vehicles.

This information is now being used for the police resources to be targeted appropriately.

Fly tips cleaned up with help of OPCC funding (Priority 127)

Farmers and landowners in Hertfordshire had fly tipped rubbish cleared up for free using money from a fund operated by the OPCC.

The fund awarded £19,620 during 2023/24 to clear up tips, including five which were part of a suspected organised crime tipping operation.

Awards included match funding contributions to install target hardening measures to prevent future tips.

2d

A YEAR IN FOCUS:

Digital and Commerciality

- Building of new police Headquarters gets underway
- New Watford police station opens
- Working with businesses to reduce crime

Building gets underway for new Constabulary Headquarters (Priority 141)

Construction work began on the major redevelopment of Hertfordshire Constabulary's headquarters site.

The £70m investment in new buildings at Stanborough, in Welwyn Garden City, will improve the delivery of critical operational police services for the people of Hertfordshire.

The decision was made by the PCC as demolishing the building was a cheaper option than trying to extend the life of out of date facilities which were not fit for purpose.

The development will enable the police to deliver a better service to the public while reducing the estate long-term revenue costs, as well as meeting commitments on sustainability and the decarbonisation strategy.

Essential services and departments based at the site include the Major Crime Unit, the Force Control Room, victim services, the dog unit, forensic services, the senior leadership team and operational support staff. The fixed-price project is due to be completed in 2026.



New police station in Watford brings improved response times

The new police station in Watford town centre opened in George Street after officers and staff moved from Shady Lane which had been their base since 1940.

The new building is a stone's throw from the town centre, and closer to the High Street. It was acquired after the old station site had reached the end of its economic life and was beginning to require costly maintenance.

The new building underwent a full internal and external refit to meet the demands of modern-day policing, and importantly for the public, it has retained a front counter service.

Police response times have also improved since officers moved to the new Watford station.



Preventing business crime (Priority 144)

Quarterly meetings have been held by the Independent Business Advisory Group (IBAG), set up by the OPCC to work with Hertfordshire's business community to prevent business crime and understand the issues that most affect businesses.

IBAG has a crucial dual purpose, enabling businesses to play their part in keeping Hertfordshire safe and providing the Constabulary and OPCC with a barometer across the business community around crime and community safety.

IBAG has hosted in-depth discussions and analysis over the last year on key issues that impact Hertfordshire businesses, ranging from Fraud and Cyber Crime to Retail Crime and Technology and Crime Prevention.

Investment in geographical mapping software to provide transformative spatial insights around the distribution of crime. (Priority 50)

Over the last 12 months staff at the OPCC have made extensive use of geographical information and associated technology to support the implementation of a hotspot policing model.

This includes identifying areas suitable for hotspot policing to prevent and reduce crime. The improved use of research based hotspot methodology has helped us secure Home Office grant funding from the Safer Streets programme.

Automated redaction tool saves hours of officer time preparing court files

In October 2023, Hertfordshire Constabulary went live with use of the DocDefender tool.

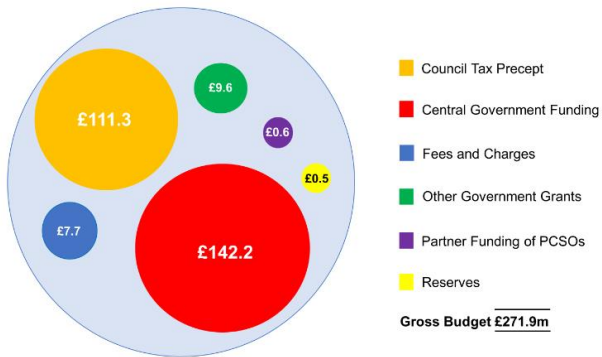
This automated redaction tool saves a substantial amount of officer hours by automatically redacting case file documents, including statements and phone records, that would otherwise require manual redaction.

The process is quicker, more accurate, and more secure than manual redaction. The Hertfordshire Criminal Justice Board Digital Innovations Subgroup is now assessing further opportunities to improve efficiency through automation.

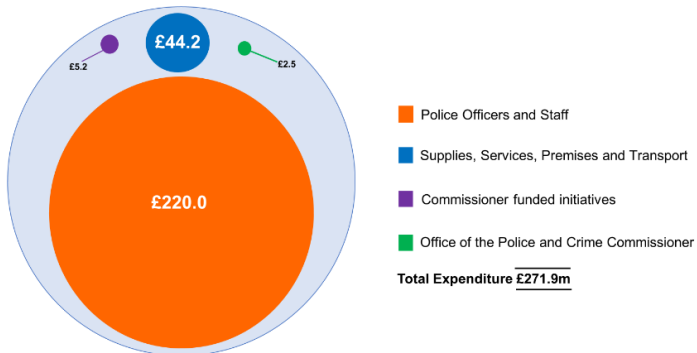
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SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL CONTEXT 2023/24

Where does the money come from?



How is the money spent?



The precept was increased by £15 (6.73 per cent), which contributed an extra £7.0m of funding which, together with efficiency savings of £7.2m, enabled £6.2m of investment.

At the end of 2023/24, there was a draft overspend of £2.9m (1.1 percent) on the net revenue budget of £253.5m. The primary contributing factors to this overspend were as follows:

- £4.7m (1.9 per cent) overspend on the police budget delegated to the Chief Constable, predominantly on police officer pay, owing to higher than budgeted police officer numbers, and police staff overtime costs due to vacancies.
- £1.8m (35.2%) underspend on the budgets which are the responsibility of the OPCC, predominantly due to an underspend in the Commissioner's grant budget and staff vacancies throughout the year.

In addition, a total of £19.8m was spent on the capital programme during the year. This included investment in estates (£13.5m), ICT (£3.2m) and Fleet (£2.5m). However, £13.0m of the resources have been carried over into 24/25 to complete schemes that were delayed in 2023/24.

General reserves were maintained at £12.6m. This was 4.6 per cent of the gross revenue budget of £271.9m.

The draft Statement of Accounts includes further details of the financial performance of 23/24 and will be available to be viewed here: [Finances \(hertscommissioner.org\)](https://www.hertscommissioner.org)

CHIEF CONSTABLE'S REPORT



It has been a great privilege, once again, to lead Hertfordshire Constabulary over the last year. It is a police force that is full of good, committed people who do great things for the people of the county day in and day out. Whilst the national media headlines tend to focus upon the negative stories connected with policing, justifiable in many instances, what is frequently missed is all the outstanding work that goes beneath the media radar. I hear accounts of life saving, heroism, investigation excellence, protection of vulnerable victims, positive partnership working, preventative work, meaningful innovation and real care for people daily. I wish the public could see the positive difference that I observe from police officers and police staff each day more readily than the negative headlines permit. Admittedly we do not get everything right, and some officers and staff in Hertfordshire have badly let us down, but

overwhelmingly I have great pride in this organisation, its people and their commitment to deliver excellent policing services throughout Hertfordshire.

Our delivery

Prevention First remains the cornerstone of our approach to policing. I remain convinced that this is right for both the public and the organisation alike. The only thing that victims of crime have in common is that they would rather never have been a victim in the first place. One of Sir Robert Peel's nine founding principles for policing in 1829 was that the role of the police is to prevent crime, which is as true today as ever. Over the past year our focus has been on getting the Prevention First approach firmly embedded, not only in preventing crime, but also harm and offending. It is well understood across the Constabulary and we know that as well as being good for the public, prevention also works for policing as it will reduce the overall demand on our services. Key to this is our commitment to neighbourhood policing, maintaining a model of local officers being ringfenced to focus on crime and antisocial behaviour issues in their local communities. We have a higher ratio of Police Community Support Officers than most forces and have been able to commit to keep this number in the year ahead. Our Prevention First teams have been able to develop and share good practice, making us more effective at problem solving real issues in the community, for example the positive work with housing authorities to address problematic addresses. The teams have also delivered on hotspot policing, increasing patrol activity in areas subject to crime and anti-social behaviour with demonstrable reductions. This work will continue and expand in the year as the Safer Streets initiative broadens and additional funding enables these hotspot patrols to be delivered in every district within the county. We

have also commenced delivery of the Clear, Hold, Build initiative, enforcing against serious criminality in a locality and then working closely with the community and other statutory agencies to ensure that it cannot return. This year, Hertfordshire has recorded a total of 74,650 crimes, down 1.8 per cent compared to 2022/23 but 12.7 per cent lower when compared with the pre pandemic policing year of 2018/19. Hertfordshire continues to experience the lowest crime levels per head of population within our group of most similar forces and the eastern region as a whole. Criminal Justice Outcomes (CJOs) have risen by 1.5 per cent to 13.2 per cent. Violence Against Women and Girls has seen a decrease in sexual offences recorded and also an increase in CJOs. Levels of Domestic Abuse have reduced by 8 per cent and outcomes increased by 0.7 per cent. Neighbourhood Crime has seen some increases but overall remains well below pre-pandemic levels. Residential burglary for example has risen by 5.2 per cent this year. Recorded hate crime has seen an increase of 4 per cent and anti-social behaviour reports have also increased by 2.2 per cent. There has been considerable focus this year on improving our response to the public. We have invested resources into our control room leading to substantial improvements in our call answering times, both on 999 calls and 101 calls. Our performance against the standard of answering 999s within 10 seconds and 101 calls within 90 seconds is now published monthly on our website. At the same time we have seen sharp improvements in our attendance times to our most urgent incidents, now reaching over 90% of such calls within 15 minutes, and over 80% of those requiring prompt attendance within one hour. Our Echo system continues to work very effectively for us, capturing views from the public that we use to adjust our policing priorities and to provide

feedback to our officers and staff on their interactions. Tackling violence against women and girls has continued to be a major force priority as we know that women and girls are still disproportionately affected by violent and sexual offences. The Constabulary has a well resourced dedicated Domestic Abuse, Investigation and Safeguarding Unit and a similar team for Rape and Serious Sexual Offences. This is evident in the strong outcomes that we obtain for victims in such cases, which compare very favourably with other forces. In the last year we have fully embraced the Operation Soteria national guidance to further strengthen our work in tackling rape and sexual offences. Our strategic approach to these issues has as its primary focus tackling offenders, in order to protect individuals, families and communities from harm. We have delivered additional training for our officers, in their legal powers and also in the identification of vulnerability in others and how to take action accordingly. Our specialist Domestic Abuse Investigation and Safeguarding Unit have dealt with thousands of cases of domestic abuse over the last year. Their work has included greatly increasing the number of preventative orders that police apply for in support of victims, to protect them, give them some respite from their abusive relationship and space to make decisions about the future. The team has been well supported by the Specialist Safeguarding Unit and 'Beacon', our victims services team, who focus upon helping victims recover from the crimes committed against them. Our work on domestic abuse has been considerably enhanced by new services provided by the Chrysalis Centre, a ground-breaking programme of interventions to break the cycle of domestic abuse that focuses on achieving behavioural change in perpetrators. The scheme, funded through the Police and Crime Commissioner, is working with

a number of individuals across the county to positively change their problematic behaviour.

Our collaboration with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire as well as the Eastern Region Specialist Operations Unit remains strong, and we continue to work well together to provide specialist capabilities across our respective force areas in order to reduce harm and target the most dangerous criminals who do not recognise force boundaries. The work in tackling serious and organised criminality is impressive and making Hertfordshire safer, from dismantling county lines drug dealers, tackling online abuse of children and the vulnerable, intervening in the trade in criminal firearms, and now increasingly countering the threat from cyber crime.

Our Workforce

As I write, we have more police officers serving in Hertfordshire than at any other time in our history due to our success in delivering and maintaining our police officer Uplift numbers indeed exceeding those targets over the last year. It's heartening and encouraging to see that we continue to be an employer and career of choice for many new recruits and also experienced colleagues transferring in from other forces. We have increased the recruitment of female officers by 10% over the last year as we strive to have a more representative workforce and now need to achieve similar progress for officers from ethnic minority backgrounds. Our attrition has also reduced over the last year as our efforts around retention have started to bear fruit, with our team managing to retain the majority of colleagues who are referred into them at a time when they are considering leaving.

Whilst I am encouraged by our recruitment efforts and ability to maintain Uplift, I do acknowledge the challenges that this

brings. Like many forces across the country, we have a number of inexperienced officers on our front line and we continue to meet the challenge of training and upskilling head on so that our new officers feel supported in a system that enables and encourages them to become the best officers they can be for our local communities.

Wellbeing has also scaled up at pace across the force over the last year with the number of wellbeing champions increasing nearly fivefold. Our focus has very much shifted to proactive work, especially across our high harm units. This approach will ensure we provide colleagues with the tools and mechanisms to stay well, despite the challenges and trauma that their roles can inevitably bring. Family evenings also broaden out our wellbeing offer so that we engage officer and staff families so they too can be helped to support loved ones working in the Constabulary. We have also revitalised our 'keeping in touch' days for those officers and staff out of the workforce temporarily due to maternity and other extended absence, thereby smoothing their return into policing when they are ready.

We have also invested time and energy into progressing the Police Race Action Plan and we have appointed an officer full time to focus on this. Over the last year we have engaged closely with our Race Inclusion Board members who continue to provide hugely meaningful support and challenge as we progress the plan. Action in the coming year will include increasing our engagement with underrepresented communities, trialling innovative new approaches and encouraging the Race Inclusion Board to properly hold us to account. Some of our work has been highlighted as good practice by the national Police Race Action Plan team, but there is more we need to do.

Considerable focus has been applied to rebuilding confidence

in policing within communities that has been so badly damaged by the dreadful cases nationally, and some local cases, of police officers and staff abusing their position. Every member of the workforce has been subject to further checks in the last year to ensure we know who we have working for us, with in over 99% of cases there being no issues highlighted. Of the small number of individuals that were identified this has enabled discussions to take place, closer supervision where necessary and in a handful of cases vetting clearance has been withdrawn. Our 'Call it Out' campaign for the workforce is also now firmly embedded and this has given confidence for issues to be raised about colleagues behaviour. It is a healthy sign that this reporting has increased, showing poor behaviour will not be tolerated and enabling these to be investigated. Some of these reports have led to disciplinary action being taken and individuals leaving the organisation.

Our Funding and Infrastructure

Over the last twelve months a fundamental review of the structure and financial resilience of the Constabulary has taken place. The detailed work of the dedicated team has confirmed that our current operating model remains largely effective and efficient, with a few adjustments proposed. We are now making decisions based on the recommendations from the team to ensure all our functions and operating systems within the force are as efficient and effective as they can be. The comprehensive work, delivered jointly with the OPCC, is the first review of the entire force for over a decade and will be invaluable to assist the early discussions from May 2024 with the incoming Police and Crime Commissioner. Whilst we celebrate our performance and progression over the last year, we have also had to deal with strong financial

headwinds. Inflation has been high for all of us and has had a significant impact upon Constabulary costs as well. A much needed 7% pay rise was awarded to officers and staff last September but this created a substantial pressure upon the budget. The third major impact has been the welcome increase in police officer numbers, however this came with some strict funding criteria from government that has meant maintaining these numbers above the required level to avoid significant financial penalty. These three factors, alongside central government grants not fully keeping pace with the cost increases, led to a budget overspend in 2023/24 of approximately £4m. This is not a sustainable position so a great deal of effort has gone into agreeing a balanced budget for 2024-25 with the Police and Crime Commissioner. This has involved baselining these increased costs whilst also making some savings as we seek to protect the policing services we provide to local communities.

While the coming year will be challenging, it is also exciting and brings many opportunities. Our old headquarters buildings have now been demolished and the structure for the new building will start being erected in the summer. This will modernise and transform our headquarters site over the coming months, delivering fit for the future facilities that will serve the Constabulary well for many years to come. Last Autumn we relocated to our new police station in Watford, with a formal opening ceremony in February. These facilities are a vast improvement on the old station, have been received positively by the workforce and the location has already had the impact of improving police response times to incidents in the Watford area.

Our ICT infrastructure has been improving as well, with the introduction a new digital asset management store and investigative tools to improve the collation of digital evidence

and speed the preparation of files for court. Services to the public have been enhanced with automated messaging systems to callers and victims of crime, and just recently we have gone live with our new Herts Connected website for neighbourhood engagement. Further exciting opportunities are being developed as robotic process automation and AI has become within reach and promises to revolutionise working practices. The additional investment in these areas should increase our productivity and give both the public and our workforce a better experience.

Finally I take this opportunity to wish David Lloyd all the very best as he steps away from the role of Police and Crime Commissioner after three terms in office. He is the only PCC that Hertfordshire has known to date and should rightly take much credit for what we have collectively achieved. He has both supported and challenged the Constabulary, in equal measure, to be the best it can be during his time in office. I welcome the new Police and Crime Commissioner Mr Ash-Edwards following his success in the election in May, and I look forward to developing our new working relationship over the coming weeks and months.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlie Hall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charlie Hall QPM M.A. (Cantab), M.Sc.

Chief Constable

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