



Neil Garratt AM
Chairman of the Budget and Performance Committee

Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(Sent by email)

7 July 2026

Dear Sir Sadiq,

Police funding and officer levels

I am writing to you on behalf of the Budget and Performance Committee, following our meeting on 1 June 2026. The Committee set out to assess the changes in police officer and Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) numbers alongside trends in Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) funding, as well as hearing from experts on how the MPS can function more effectively within its funding envelope.

We heard from two panels: first, the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime, Kaya Comer-Schwartz, the Interim Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the MPS, Adrian Wight, and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) CFO, Amana Humayun; and second, three independent experts in policing and public policy: Ian Wiggett, Associate Director, World Policing Advisory, Blair Gibbs, Director of the Police Foundation, and Professor Tom Kirchmaier, Director of the Policing and Crime Research Group at the London School of Economics. This letter sets out what the Committee heard.

Alongside evidence from these experts and key decision-makers, the Committee has produced visualisations of some of the data trends in this area. Please find this attached.

Relationship between funding and officers

The Committee's central line of enquiry was the relationship between overall MPS funding and officer numbers. Despite rising real terms funding, combined officer and PCSO numbers fell by 3,161 between April 2023 and March 2026, from a peak of 35,731 to 32,570.¹

The Deputy Mayor explained the recent decline in officer numbers by highlighting that *"between 2010 and 2025, the [MPS] funding increased only by two per cent in cash terms. That is a real-term reduction of £1.2 billion, or 34 per cent."*²

This is consistent with the trend shown in the data,³ where officer numbers decline steadily between around 2015-16 and 2018-19 despite relatively stable real terms funding. This suggests that even flat budgets can exert downward pressure on workforce levels over time. The recovery in officer numbers after 2019-20 broadly aligns with increased funding.

Despite increased real terms funding in 2024-25 and 2025-26, combined officer and PCSO numbers have not increased. We heard from the Deputy Mayor that *"things do not stay static in the economy, things like inflation go up, things like costs go up, things for equipment costs go up. You are right that primarily the MPS budget is made from revenue, but it does not stay static in terms of any of the things that we all live through in terms of wages increases, and the like."*⁴ In this context, even with higher funding settlements, the MPS is unable to grow officer numbers.

The depletion of reserves

The Committee heard that the MPS has drawn on its reserve balances over a number of years to manage budget pressures, and that those reserves are now largely depleted. MOPAC's CFO told the Committee:

*"The MPS has been relying on its reserves, as you will have seen. If you look at its reserves balance over the past ten years and how, across both earmarked reserves and the general reserves, the overall balance has reduced substantially, and that is because the reserves did allow an element of buffer and it allowed any areas of particular pressure to be met by the available reserves. However, that is one-off funding. It is not replenished. Once it is gone, it is gone. We are now in a position where we have extremely limited reserves."*⁵

The depletion of the reserve buffer removes a financial cushion that previously absorbed in-year pressures, making the future financial position more exposed. This is not unique to the MPS, as the National Audit Office's (NAO) report into police productivity noted:

*"Police forces [in England and Wales] are managing increasing financial pressures but, to-date, the Home Office has not fully understood the implications. In 2024-25, police forces responded to financial pressures by reducing their reserves by £276 million and borrowing £632 million to help fund capital programmes. These are short-term measures, which may affect their financial resilience in the future. To live within budgets, police forces have also run high levels of staff vacancies, used more officers in civilian roles and reprioritised the services they provide."*⁶

¹ GLA, Police Force Strength – London Datastore, accessed May 2026

² Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel One](#), 1 June 2026

³ See slide 2 of the accompanying data pack

⁴ Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel One](#), 1 June 2026

⁵ Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel One](#), 1 June 2026

⁶ NAO, www.nao.org.uk, 3 November 2025

These conclusions appear applicable to the MPS. In December 2025, this Committee also heard from the former MPS CFO, Dan Worsley, that *“The MPS across the 2010s drew down on its reserves to balance the books and we got to a position for 1 April [2025] where we could not do that anymore. We are at two per cent; it cannot go any lower.”*⁷

Neighbourhood policing

The MPS interim CFO confirmed that ringfenced government funding for neighbourhood policing has grown from £45.6 million in 2025–26 to £81 million in 2026–27, and the MPS has seen growth in neighbourhood officer numbers.⁸ However, Ian Wiggett, Associate Director, World Policing Advisory, highlighted that this uplift reflects a reprioritisation within existing resources rather than a sustained increase in overall funding, noting that *“money is taken out of the general pot of policing and being given back to forces on condition that it is spent on extra neighbourhood officers, but the pot overall is gradually shrinking.”*⁹

The MPS interim CFO further confirmed that there is *“an inherent risk that the targets do not match the funding going forward.”*¹⁰, given the absence of any confirmed allocation beyond the current year.

Blair Gibbs, Director of the Police Foundation, drew the Committee’s attention to Home Office Police Activity Survey data showing that within participating forces, neighbourhood officers spend on average 18 per cent of their time on patrol.¹¹ He concluded that this level of active patrol would not deliver the visibility and community connection intended by Government unless barriers keeping officers from patrol are addressed. It is important to note, however, that this data does not include the MPS and that, *“given MPS’s scale, operational complexity, and diverse demographic coverage, the results could differ with its inclusion.”*¹²**The Committee encourages the MPS to take part in the next iteration of the Home Office Police Activity Survey and/or to develop an in-house method to track neighbourhood policing productivity.**

One of the barriers keeping officers from patrol is neighbourhood police abstractions and the impact that has on them. Abstractions refer to where local officers are taken away from regular duties to support public order operations elsewhere. Blair Gibbs noted:

*“What are those things stopping officers from doing those things that they are expected to do? That might also be things like the public order demands in London, which are very high and so there is a very high rate of cancelled rest days. For example, the latest data from the [Metropolitan Police] Federation in London shows that there were something like 215,000 cancelled rest days. These are officers, response officers, neighbourhood officers, sergeants who are having repeatedly having rest days every month, month on month, cancelled for central London protests. Those sorts of things just by definition impact on the service the public can receive.”*¹³

Without addressing abstractions, increased prioritisation of neighbourhood policing is unlikely to translate proportionately into increased visible presence.

⁷ Budget and Performance Committee, [Budget and Performance Committee](#), 10 December 2025

⁸ Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel One](#), 1 June 2026

⁹ Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel Two](#), 1 June 2026

¹⁰ Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel One](#), 1 June 2026

¹¹ Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel Two](#), 1 June 2026

¹² Home Office, [Police Activity Survey \(second edition\) - GOV.UK](#), 15 April 2026

¹³ Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel Two](#), 1 June 2026

Improving productivity

The Committee's expert panel was clear that officer headcount is not, on its own, an adequate measure of policing capacity. Professor Tom Kirchmaier, Director of the Policing and Crime Research Group at the London School of Economics, told the Committee: *"We are focusing far too much on officer numbers and we focus far too little on how we organise them. In my private opinion, there is huge potential to improve the productivity of police officers if we employ them better, in better ways, at the right time, at the right place."*¹⁴

Concerns about police productivity are not new. The NAO's November 2025 report on police productivity found that the Home Office does not have an agreed definition of police productivity, nor a standard methodology for measuring it. Before that, the independent Policing Productivity Review, commissioned by the previous Government and published in November 2023, identified 26 recommendations that the review's authors said could free up approximately 38 million hours of police time each year within five years, if implemented in full — equivalent in operational terms to around 20,000 additional officers.¹⁵ The then Government's response, published in April 2024, committed £234 million over four years and established a Centre for Police Productivity, based at the College of Policing from autumn 2024.¹⁶

Progress has, however, been limited. The NAO found that HM Treasury withdrew the investment funding originally provided to implement the Review from 2025-26, and the Home Office's technology budget to support productivity was cut from £105 million in 2024-25 to £50 million in 2025-26.¹⁷ **The Committee encourages the Mayor to lobby the Government to seek the restoration of funding and secure sustained investment to support the delivery of productivity improvements across policing.**

The College of Policing has introduced a new productivity methodology that is currently being rolled out across forces. This new framework is intended to provide forces with standardised tools, including a productivity index, to track efficiency and model how operational changes impact frontline policing outcomes.¹⁸ **The Committee encourages MOPAC and the MPS to engage with this framework and consider how new productivity measures could inform future resourcing decisions.**

Technology: opportunity and risk

The Committee heard evidence on the potential for technology to improve policing productivity. However, the expert panel cautioned against treating technology as a straightforward substitute for workforce capacity. Ian Wiggett told the Committee that technology tools such as live facial recognition and automated risk assessment can generate additional demand as well as efficiency, as leads and alerts produced by these systems require human follow-up.¹⁹ Technology investment, without a corresponding investment in capacity to act on its outputs, may add to officer workload rather than reduce it.

There is also a risk that technology costs may rise at a faster pace than wages in future years. This escalation could be further compounded by reliance on a single provider, whose potential pricing increases may heighten long-term financial exposure.²⁰ **The Committee is interested to understand how the MPS considers these risks when using technology to improve productivity, and how any vision of a longer-term change to policing is fed into any technology planning.**

¹⁴ Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel One](#), 1 June 2026

¹⁵ Home Office, [Policing Productivity Review, 20 November 2023](#)

¹⁶ Home Office, [Improving police productivity: a response to the recommendations of the Policing Productivity Review](#), April 2024

¹⁷ Committee of Public Accounts, [Increasing police productivity](#), January 2026

¹⁸ The Public Accounts Committee, [Policing Productivity – Follow up from the College of Policing](#), December 2025

¹⁹ Budget and Performance Committee, [MPS Funding and Officer Numbers – Panel Two](#), 1 June 2026

²⁰ Institute of Government and Public Policy, [The UK Public Sector IT Cost Challenge & What Can Be Done About It](#), 27 March 2025

The MPS has piloted the use of static live facial recognition (LFR) technology in Croydon, where it reported making an arrest approximately every 35 minutes during deployments.²¹ The MPS also noted that 61 per cent of the offences linked to arrests were committed in Croydon, highlighting the pilot's ability to keep hotspot areas safe. Cameras are only activated during deployments, when neighbourhood policing teams and specialist LFR officers are present on the ground. This illustrates the potential for technology to enhance operational effectiveness by identifying wanted individuals in real time. It also reinforces the point made by guests that such tools may generate additional demand with each alert requiring officer engagement, verification and, where appropriate, arrest and processing.

The Committee will continue to monitor this area and may revisit some of these issues as part of its annual budget scrutiny process. We appreciate the attendance of officers and guests and their engagement with the Budget and Performance Committee. I look forward to your response to this letter by **4 September 2026**.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Garratt', is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Neil Garratt AM
Chairman of the Budget and Performance Committee

²¹ MPS, [Met makes one arrest every 35 minutes during live facial recognition pilot](#), 13 May 2026