

Fit for Purpose? Redesigning police uniforms

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Policy Context

Previous research has documented the need for appropriate police uniform that caters for the physical and emotional requirements of police officers and staff. Up until recently, efforts to extend this knowledge base were small-scale and localised.

The National Uniform & Equipment Survey was the first survey of its kind to explore a national perspective on the experience of wearing police uniform. Designed in collaboration with the Police Federation of England and Wales, the 2024 survey captured responses from over 20,000 uniform wearing police officers and staff.

Key research findings

Uniform wearers experience a 'postcode lottery', with some vulnerable to injury and susceptible to a variety of physical health conditions attributed to wearing a uniform that is 'not fit for purpose', restrictive and unsuitable for their roles.

- **Wide dissatisfaction and inconsistency across forces.** 56% report negative experiences of the uniform (compared to just 20% positive). Dissatisfaction is as high as 75% in some forces.
- **Female uniform wearers suffer disproportionately.** 85% of female respondents report at least one physical health condition, but often experience many conditions attributed to the uniform
- **Uniform is ill-fitting, restrictive and causes discomfort.** 51% of respondents report that the uniform is unfit for purpose; 61% report poor fit; 74% it fails to regulate temperature; 64% it restricts movement.
- **Uniform is contributing to physical health conditions.** 57% of respondents report at least one physical health condition they believe is related to their uniform. Musculoskeletal issues, crushed testicles, crushed breasts, and bloating the most reported conditions.
- **Systemic issues with the most worn items of uniform.** Over 60% of wearers said daily-use items like body armour and cargo trousers were unfit.
- **Cost is prioritised over function and quality.** 76% believe uniform decisions are solely on cost, not quality and safety.
- **Uniform complaints are common but often ignored.** 36% of respondents have complained to management but 69% of these complaints resulted in no action.
- **Support for uniform standardisation.** 48% are in favour of a national uniform, compared to 18% that are opposed.

Policy recommendations

- **National minimum standards should be developed for provision and procurement of police uniforms** to ensure consistency, equity, and operational effectiveness across forces.
- **Mandatory technical and operational specifications must be established for each item of uniform and equipment** before uniformity in supply can be achieved. Different male and female forms must be accommodated.
- **A Strategic Uniform Board (SUB) should be established** as a single point of accountability with authority over procurement and uniform design. The SUB must implement changes to uniform in partnership with police forces, and a variety of stakeholders.
- **Improve user experience around the logistics of uniform.** The SUB should help create and mandate uniform services across forces.
- **Create a framework to allow better procurement and design of uniform.** Achieving better uniform and value for money requires closer collaboration with innovative suppliers and designers who apply a 'fit for form' approach.
- **Standardise uniform to incentivise suppliers to engage fully across all production stages.** Standardising costs across all forces and increasing buying power could yield significant savings
- **Continuous review, feedback and iteration of uniform.** Police forces must implement clear, transparent procedures for handling uniform-related complaints, ensuring that issues around fit, comfort, safety, and inclusivity are formally acknowledged and addressed. Failing to act risks legal liability.

Work with us

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