



Home Office

User guide to 'Police use of firearms, England and Wales' statistics

Last updated: July 2017

Contents

1	Introduction	3
2	Glossary.....	5
3	Quality and methodology.....	7
4	Use of force data review	10
5	Additional information	11

1 Introduction

Statistics covered

'Police use of firearms, England and Wales' contains a times series of official statistics on police use of firearms by the 43 Home Office funded police forces since the year ending 31 March 2009. It details trends on the total number of:

1. Police firearms operations, including operations involving Armed Response Vehicles (ARVs)
2. Incidents in which police firearms were discharged¹
3. Armed officers²
4. Armed officers compared with the total number of all police officers

See the glossary section for a more detailed explanation of these terms.

Previous publications covered the number of "authorised firearms officers" (AFOs). Following feedback from the [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\)](#), [College of Policing](#), and various police forces, data from 2016-17 is being collected on the number of "armed officers". See the quality and methodology section for a detailed explanation of this change.

The following are excluded from the figures:

- Police firearms operations where officers were stood down before being deployed (e.g. the operation was cancelled before arrival or officers did not move from a rendezvous point into actual deployment).
- Armed officers deployed for VIP protection, armed prisoner escorts, airport patrols, other guarding duties, and routine patrols.
- Firearms incidents involving accidental discharges, discharges for animal destruction, during police training or for the purpose of deflating tyres.

Uses of the statistics

Uses made of the statistics on police use of firearms are listed below using the standard categorisation for official statistics (as shown in the UK Statistics Authority monitoring brief 6/2010, [The Use Made of Official Statistics](#)).

¹ An incident where a conventional firearm was discharged by the police.

² An armed officer is a police officer who is authorised to use firearms. It incorporates all operationally deployable armed officers, including those currently being utilised as trainers.

a) Informing the general public's choices:

- about the state of the economy, society and the environment. Figures on police use of firearms are used by the media in articles on police use of force.
- about the performance of government and public bodies. Figures on levels and trends in police use of firearms are requested via Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information cases to gauge performance in general or specific areas.

b) Government policy making and monitoring:

Police use of firearms statistics are used to monitor the performance and effectiveness of police forces, government policy, and to inform policy and operational decisions by ministers.

c) Resource allocation – typically by central and local government:

Policing statistics, including statistics on police use of firearms, demonstrate the range, extent and quality of police activities, and contribute to overall cases for police funding.

2 Glossary

Armed Response Vehicle (ARVs)

ARVs are police vehicles carrying armed officers who have been trained to the ARV standard. These vehicles are crewed by uniformed officers who have been selected and trained to respond to a range of armed incidents involving subjects on foot, in moving vehicles and in buildings.

Armed officer

An armed officer is a police officer who has been selected, trained, accredited and authorised by their chief officer to carry a firearm operationally. The statistics on armed officers incorporate all operationally deployable armed officers, including those currently being utilised as trainers. There is a range of specialist roles for which armed officers receive specific tactical training and accreditation³.

An armed officer can enhance his or her skills and training to meet the requirements to fulfil the range of roles in this area. The training progresses from 'lower end' of specialisms such as dynamic intervention (DI), up to the more highly trained counter terrorist specialist trained role. For example, an officer will have to be trained and qualified in DI before they can progress to be a specialist firearms officer (SFO). Any such officer who has progressed through the incremental stages of training enhances their skills and therefore can fulfil a number of roles as required.

Armed officers can also "self-authorise". This is when armed officers encounter situations where they believe that the criteria for armed officer deployment have been met, and delay in seeking authority to deploy would be detrimental to public or officer safety. As a result, armed officers deploy themselves and take the necessary and proportionate action in accordance with their training.

It is for Chief Officers to determine the number of armed officers in their areas based on a thorough assessment of threat and risk.

The National Armed Policing Lead and the National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC) continually review capability against the National Firearms Mobilisation Plan.

Changes in numbers of armed officers may reflect the fact that forces in England and Wales have moved to more collaborative arrangements with armed officers working regionally rather than in individual forces.

³<http://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/armed-policing/issue-and-carriage-of-firearms/#authorised-firearms-officer>.

Conventional firearm

This includes any kind of firearm that is not a 'less-lethal weapon'. Examples of 'less-lethal weapons' are an Attenuating Energy Projectile (AEP) or Conducted Energy Device (CED, e.g. TASER ® X26).

Police firearms operations

These are operations for which the issue of firearms was authorised.

Police firearms operations involve the authorised deployment of armed officers where they may have to protect themselves or others from a person who (a) is in possession of a firearm, (b) has immediate access to a firearm or (c) is otherwise so dangerous that the officer's use of a firearm may be necessary. These also include incidents where armed officers "self-authorise" (see definition on armed officers above).

Police firearms operations include those that are pre-planned, i.e. intelligence led, and incidents of a more spontaneous nature that require a reactive response. The duration of an operation can vary in length, with some operations running over the course of a few months.

Each incident is classed as only one operation regardless of the number of personnel (or deployments) or tactics employed to deal with the incident.

Police firearms operations involving ARVs

Police firearms operations in which the initial or sole response was by an ARV are counted in this category.

3 Quality and methodology

Data collection and preparatory work

The statistics in the [‘Police use of firearms statistics, England and Wales, April 2016 to March 2017’](#) release are based on aggregated figures for the year ending 31 March 2017 submitted by the 43 Home Office police forces as part of the [Annual Data Requirement \(ADR\)](#). The ADR is a list of all mandatory data requests made to police forces in England and Wales under the Home Secretary’s statutory powers.

As with the three previous releases, a data confirmation exercise was carried out by Home Office statisticians. Validation and variance checks were carried out on the data as part of the quality assurance process. For example, any anomalous or large differences were queried with forces including sense checking data to ensure that the number of operations involving ARVs did not exceed the total number of firearms operations.

Police forces were asked to verify their data for the current and previous reporting year, and where necessary to submit revised data including a reason for the change or revision. This reduces the risk of incorrect figures being published, and supports the Home Office in any disagreement with a police force over the figures published for that force.

Changes to the ‘Police use of firearms’ publication

Previous publications covered the number of “authorised firearms officers” (AFOs), which was defined as "a police officer who has been selected, trained, accredited and authorised by their chief officer to carry and use a firearm". Following feedback from the [National Police Chiefs’ Council \(NPCC\)](#), [College of Policing](#), and various police forces, the publication for the year ending March 2017 covers the number of “armed officers”. This refers to officers who have been authorised to use firearms, which should incorporate all operationally deployable armed officers, including those currently being utilised as trainers. This change was implemented to increase clarity, as the term “AFO” can be used to refer specifically to an armed officer trained at the basic level as well as to an armed officer in general. All 43 forces were contacted to ascertain how this change in definition affected the figures submitted for this year. Of the 42 forces that responded, only 2 forces reported that the change in definition affected their figures. The change accounted for less than 0.5% of the total number of armed officers as at 31 March 2017. As such, the figures for 31 March 2017 are perceived as comparable to figures from previous publications

Comparability with figures prior to the year ending March 2009

The figures in the [‘Police use of firearms statistics, England and Wales: April 2016 to March 2017’](#) release cover the period between the years ending 31 March 2009 and 31 March 2017. These figures have been subjected to data confirmation exercises with police forces (as described in Section 3, ‘Data collection and preparatory work’). The [‘Police use of firearms, financial year ending 31 March 2014’](#) release detailed some of the quality assurance work that took place for previous years, including data confirmation by Chief Constables for all data covering the period between 2009-10 and 2013-14.

While data from the year ending March 2002 onwards is available, any comparisons between data before and after the year ending March 2009 should be exercised with caution. This is because while figures prior to the year ending 31 March 2009 were subjected to a data confirmation exercise before they were initially published, they were not subjected to the same rigorous data validation or variance checks which have been applied to the data covering 31 March 2009 onwards. Therefore, the quality of these figures may not be of the same standard.

With this in mind, figures for the year ending March 2002 to the year ending March 2008, which include force level breakdowns, can be accessed [here](#).

Revisions to previously published data

A small number of forces submitted revisions in light of the data confirmation exercise that was carried out.

As shown in Table 1, forces submitted revisions which resulted in a slight decrease in the total number of police firearms operations, and a slight increase in operations involving ARVs for the year ending March 2016.

Table 1: Revisions to figures published in the 2015-16 release: total number of police firearms operations and operations involving Armed Response Vehicles (ARVs) for the year ending 31 March 2016

Year ending 31 March 2016	Previously published figures (2015-16 release)	Revised figures (2016-17 release)	Numerical change	% change	Number of forces that made revisions
Police firearms operations	14,753	14,649	-104	-0.7%	3
Police firearms operations involving ARVs	12,471	12,500	29	0.2%	4

This is the second year that information from the ADR relating to the number of incidents in which police firearms were discharged has been confirmed and

published. Previously, the data on discharges were supplied by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) who collected the information from forces. The data submitted to NPCC were not a mandatory requirement. The discharge data provided by NPCC was not confirmed with forces and had not been quality assured in the same way that the discharge data collected via the ADR has been quality assured. Therefore, any firearms discharge data prior to 2012 should be treated with caution.

The published figure on the number of incidents in which police firearms were discharged for the 2015-16 release (and for previous years) was not revised by any force.

The published figure on the number of authorised firearms officers for the 2015-16 release (and for previous years) was not revised by any force.

The data for the latest year (and for previous years) may be revised in due course. It is standard practice across all Home Office statistical releases to incorporate revisions for previous years' data in the latest release. Corrections and revisions follow the [Home Office corporate revisions policy](#).

Rounding

Data are provided unrounded in the data tables accompanying the '[Police use of firearms, England and Wales](#)' publication. This is to promote transparency and allow users to exploit the data further. However, please note that the figures are not necessarily accurate to the last digit and therefore caution should be exercised when comparing small differences between time periods.

Percentages in the release are rounded to the nearest per cent using the round-half-away-from-zero method. For example, 23.5 per cent will be rounded to 24 per cent, and -23.5 per cent will be rounded to -24 per cent.

However, percentages in table 3 of section 5.2 of the 2016-17 release are rounded to the nearest 0.1%. This is to show the small changes in percentages between 31 March 2009 and 31 March 2017 when comparing armed officers as a proportion of all police officers which would not be obvious to the user if the percentages were rounded to the nearest per cent.

Where data are rounded, they may not sum to the totals shown, or, in the case of percentages, to 100 per cent, because they have been rounded independently.

4 Use of force data review

The Government is committed to improving transparency and accountability on the police use of force, which is why in 2014, the then Home Secretary asked former CC David Shaw (Chief Constable for West Mercia until July 2016) to lead a review into what data should be recorded and published.

The [Review](#) recommended that a range of core data should be recorded every time the police deploy a tactic categorised as a use of force. These tactics include the use of restraint techniques, batons, CS spray, attenuating energy projectiles and conductive energy devices. The core data includes information on the gender, ethnicity and age of the individual, the location of the incident, the reason force was used, and the outcome of the incident.

All police forces will publish the full record-level data locally on a quarterly basis. A subset of the key information collected will be provided to the Home Office as part of the Annual Data Requirement (ADR).

The use of force data collection is intended to hold police forces to account and to provide the public with greater information on the different types of force used, in what context and whether it was proportionate. The collection of data through the ADR ensures greater consistency between police forces together with an expectation of higher quality as it should be signed off by individual Chief Constables. Furthermore, collecting the use of force data through the ADR underlines the importance of the data to Ministers and the Home Office.

The use of force ADR collection will bring together data on all uses of force in one collection. However, although the use of force collection will include police use of firearms, the collection will not replace the existing 'Police use of firearms' collection, which also covers information such as the number of armed officers and operations (including Armed Response Vehicles).

5 Additional information

Where are the latest published figures?

Forthcoming publications are pre-announced on the GOV.UK website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>

Police use of firearms, England and Wales statistical releases from 2007-08 onwards are available from the Home Office pages of the GOV.UK website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-use-of-firearms-statistics>

Figures for 2001-02 to 2007-08 can be found on the following webpage:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/98275/police-firearms-use-2007-2008.pdf

Police use of TASER ® X26

The Home Office publishes annual figures for each police force in England and Wales on TASER ® X26 use including the seven types of TASER ® X26 use.

These statistics are Official Statistics and can be found on the [Police use of Taser](#) pages of GOV.UK.

From the 2017/18 financial year onwards, the existing collection on TASER ® X26 conducted energy devices will be replaced by a collection covering police use of force (including use of TASER ® X26 and TASER ® X2; see section 4 “Use of force data review” for more details).

Feedback and enquiries

If you would like to make an enquiry about this release or have any general feedback about this release, please email the Fire, Licensing and Public Order Analysis Unit at: PublicOrderStatistics@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk or write to: Fire, Licensing and Public Order Analysis Unit, 14th Floor, Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road, Croydon, CR9 2BY.

The ‘Police use of firearms’ release is an Official Statistics output produced to the highest professional standards and free from political interference. It has been produced by statisticians working in the Home Office Analysis and Insight Directorate in accordance with the Home Office’s [‘Statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics’](#) which covers our policy on revisions and other matters. The Chief Statistician, as Head of Profession, reports to the National Statistician with respect to all professional statistical matters and oversees all Home Office National Statistics products with respect to the [Code](#), being responsible for their timing, content and methodology.