



# Change



## Labour Manifesto - Analysis

One recent YouGov poll found nearly nine in ten people thought crime was one of the most important issues facing the UK. Crime and justice has returned as a key general election battleground, after taking a back seat as a policy issue during previous campaigns dominated by other issues.

With all major parties making headline pledges on law and order, we've asked our in-house think tank Crest Insights to take a closer look by measuring how well they match up overall against the stark challenges facing the criminal justice system, as detailed by our Director of Research Sophie Davis. We've also suggested what other policies may be needed to complement or support what's on offer and what we think is missing.

In this document, we examine the crime and justice commitments of the Labour Party set out in its manifesto published on 13 June. Labour has often prioritised the NHS and the economy ahead of law and order as campaign issues. However, before the election was called it made the ambitious pledge to halve violence against women and girls as part of its five 'missions for Britain'.

The analysis we've done follows the independent and non-party approach which Crest Insights and the rest of Crest Advisory applies to all its work. It draws on independent reports published directly from our Insights research and includes learning from the consultancy support we've given to police forces, Mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners and the wider criminal justice system in recent years.

We hope you find our contribution to an evidence-led and informed election debate on crime and justice helpful and look forward to any feedback or views you may wish to share with us.

Best wishes

Gavin Lockhart-Mirams, Executive Chair



## The state of the criminal justice system

The criminal justice system is at a breaking point.

The police are facing a crisis of confidence. A recent poll found that only four in ten people trust their police force and a poll conducted for Crest and the Tony Blair Institute (TBI) found that the police are now trusted less than social services and the courts. Baroness Casey's review of standards and culture within the Metropolitan Police revealed multiple and severe organisational failings, and concluded that the force was institutionally homophobic, racist and misogynistic. All 43 police forces need substantial reform to renew public confidence in policing. In addition, the police are now facing an operating landscape that is shifting, with a rise in tech-enabled crimes and increasing severity of overall crime. In their current capacity, our forces lack the resources, expertise and experience to tackle these issues.

As a result, despite more crimes being reported and recorded, the response is limited. In the last year, the proportion of crimes resulting in a charge and/or summons was just under 6%. Investigations are also taking much longer than they did a decade ago, with the average time taken to bring a case to charge or summons rising from just over two weeks in 2016 to six weeks in 2024. This has likely increased the public's concern about crime levels and a poll run for Crest and TBI found that nationally 45% of the public think that crime is a problem in their area. The poll also found that 41% of people who experienced a crime did not report it to the relevant authorities.

If reporting levels and the charge rate were to improve, it would only further exacerbate the backlogs facing the courts. In total, the Crown Court backlog reached 67,573 cases at the end of last year and, in March 2024, the Magistrates Court backlog reached 370,731. This leaves both victims and suspects facing long waits for justice: the average time taken to bring an offender to justice has increased by 46% since 2010.

Prisons are full to capacity. There are now 16,000 people in cells waiting for a trial or to be sentenced after being found guilty - a 50-year record. In March 2024, the prison population in England and Wales reached 87,699 individuals, 10,000 higher than official capacity, and the Ministry of Justice anticipates the overall prison population will reach 106,300 by March 2027, pushing the prison system to the brink of collapse. Due to the overcrowding levels, prisons are less safe and less rehabilitative, which then only exacerbates reoffending levels, repeatedly facilitating the ongoing cycle straining the justice system. The prisons crisis also makes it more difficult for the backlog to be resolved.

In response to the wide array of challenges, government has taken a series of measures to begin to address the problem. Early release schemes in prisons have been introduced, police numbers have been uplifted by 20,000 and in October 2021, ministers set a target to reduce the backlog to 53,000 by March 2025. The MOJ had also tried to ease the pressure on courts by expanding courtroom capacity and increasing the mandatory retirement age for judges from 70 to 75. Nevertheless, these issues persist and are only increasing. Any future government will face a complex range of interconnected problems that cannot easily be fixed.

Director of Research, Crest Insights, Sophie Davis



The Labour Party Manifesto has one section addressing the criminal justice system and focuses on nine specific issues:

1. Visible neighbourhood policing
2. Cracking down on antisocial behaviour
3. Knife crime action plan
4. Tackling violence against women and girls
5. Better policing
6. Solving crime
7. A justice system that puts victims first
8. Getting a grip of our prisons and reducing reoffending
9. Historical injustices

Crest Insights' Manifesto Review adds context to the policy pledges detailed throughout the manifesto and for each section offers tailored, evidence-based analysis drawn from our understanding of the criminal justice system.

# Take back our streets



## How Labour will take back our streets:

- Crack down on antisocial behaviour with more neighbourhood police
- Tough new penalties for offenders
- A plan to get knives off our streets
- A specialist rape unit in every police force
- A new network of Young Futures hubs

Labour has a straightforward vision for policing and criminal justice.

When you call the police, they should come. When you report a crime, it should be properly investigated no matter who you are, or where you live. Police should have the trust of communities. Victims must have faith that justice will be delivered, and criminals will be punished. Prisons should not be academies of crime. These are not outlandish expectations. They are the basics of a safe, secure, law-abiding society.

Sadly, this vision is a world away from Britain today. Our sense of security has been badly eroded. Serious violence is too high. Growing numbers of young people are drawn into gangs, drug dealing and violence at ever earlier ages. Antisocial behaviour blights our town and city centres. Fewer criminals are being caught and punished. More victims are being let down.

This is not an accident, but the result of Conservative choices over the last 14 years. Community policing has been downgraded, with neighbourhood officers pulled off the beat to plug shortages elsewhere, weakening connections with communities they serve. Trust in the police has been undermined by failures in vetting and appalling misconduct of some officers. Powers to combat antisocial behaviour and shoplifting have been weakened, leaving our town centres exposed. Our justice system has been allowed to grind to a halt.

This must change. Labour will restore neighbourhood policing with thousands of extra officers, and we will equip officers with the powers they need. We will tackle the epidemic of serious violence, with a greater focus on prevention, including by holding those companies and executives cashing in on knife crime personally to account. We will no longer tolerate the violence against women and girls that stains our society. And we will reform the justice system to put the needs of victims first, tackle the prisons crisis and cut reoffending.

In short, Labour will stop the Conservative chaos and return law and order to our streets.

A poll carried out by the Tony Blair Institute (TBI) compared public reflections on what tasks were important for police to carry out with how well they thought these tasks were being performed. For example, 94% of those polled thought that answering 999 calls rapidly was important but 19% thought this was done poorly. 91% thought victims should be informed about progress on their case but 27% thought this was not happening sufficiently.

While it is true that serious violence is too high (and arguably any level of violence is too high), Crime Survey for England and Wales data reports that to the year ending June 2023 violence offences were 28% lower compared with the pre-pandemic year ending March 2020. This decrease is linked to a 36% fall in violence with injury offences over the pandemic. Overall, violence offences continue to follow the downward trend since the peak in 1995.

Successive polling shows that trust in policing is falling. A Crest poll found that only 62% of the public trust the police, dropping even lower for Black adults. Implementing the recommendations of the Casey review (which Crest worked on), should be prioritised.

50% of those polled by TBI believe police do not have enough foot patrols and lack visible presence on the streets. An increase in dedicated neighbourhood police officers could address these concerns.

Findings from the same poll suggests that the public favour expanding police powers but have misgivings about the way they are applied. Considering current confidence in the police, how policing powers are expanded should be carefully considered.

**Crest Insights:** Funding cuts across the criminal justice system over the last 14 years are likely to have exacerbated key pressures. Between 2010-11 and 2014-15, HMPPS' budget reduced by 20%. Despite recent increase its resource budget remains 11% lower in real terms than in 2010-11. In the same time period, central government grants to police and crime commissioners were reduced by £2.2 billion in real terms. However, some pressures facing the criminal justice system today have been decades in the making and represent the failure of successive governments. Taking the prison crisis as an example, between 1993 and 2010, the prison population in England and Wales nearly doubled from around 44,500 to 85,000 – thanks in part to the Labour government creating over 3000 new offences during its time in office.

Between 2010 and 2018 police officer numbers dropped from 143,000 to 122,000 (-15 per cent). While the recent uplift may have brought numbers back up, the NPCC's Police Productivity review found that "neighbourhood policing was the area which suffered most from the decline in officer numbers".

Labour doesn't specify how many new officers it intends to recruit, although it has mentioned elsewhere 13,000 new neighbourhood officers and PCSOs. Crest analysis suggests that to return to the 2009/10 ratio of 4.42 police personnel for every 1,000 people in England and Wales, an additional 32,000 police personnel are required. If we account for the increase in recorded crime then we would need around 320,000 police personnel (compared to the 234,000 we have).

The changing nature of crime increasingly requires the police to be able to access specialist capabilities, many of which require significant investment and training. There is potential for savings but previous attempts through the National Policing Improvement Agency and Specialist Capabilities Programme have under performed. There is no detail on how a Labour government would overcome reluctance from some forces and police and crime commissioners to give up their own capabilities.

Antisocial behaviour is a key issue of concern for the public. 48% reported that crime and antisocial behaviour was the issue they were most concerned about in the area they live in.

The 'weakened enforcement powers' likely refers to the replacement of Antisocial Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) with civil injunctions. While it is true that the latter are weaker in that a breach does not constitute a criminal offence, it could be argued that, in other ways, the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 enhanced powers available to local authorities to deal with ASB.

'Effective immunity' is likely to refer to the introduction of "low-value shoplifting" (that is theft from a shop of goods valued at under £200) as a summary-only offence which does not require the defendant to attend court (they can plead guilty by post).

## Visible neighbourhood policing

Visible neighbourhood policing was the cornerstone of the British consent-based model. In too many areas it has been eroded, leaving the police a reactive service focused on crisis response, rather than preventing crime.

Labour will introduce a new Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee, restoring patrols to our town centres by recruiting thousands of new police officers, police and community support officers, and special constables. Communities and residents will have a named officer to turn to when things go wrong.

These new recruits will be paid for by tackling waste through a new Police Efficiency and Collaboration programme for England and Wales. The programme will set nationwide standards for procurement and establish shared services and specialist functions to drive down costs.

**Crest Insights:** While more "bobbies on the beat" would be welcome, the last decade has also seen an important de-civilianisation, arguably resulting in a less productive workforce. Increasing productivity and improving outcomes will involve getting the right mix of officers to staff and specialists to generalists.

## Cracking down on antisocial behaviour

Antisocial behaviour is not merely a 'low-level' nuisance. It hits the poorest communities hardest and, if left unchecked, leads to more serious offending. Yet, the Conservatives weakened enforcement powers. Labour will fix this by introducing new Respect Orders – powers to ban persistent adult offenders from town centres, which will stamp out issues such as public drinking and drug use. Fly-tippers and vandals will also be forced to clean up the mess they have created.

With shoplifting soaring, retail workers increasingly find themselves in harm's way. Labour will scrap the effective immunity for some shoplifting introduced by the Conservatives and create a new specific offence for assaults on shopworkers that will protect them from threats and violence.

**Crest Insights:** Antisocial behaviour and shoplifting are high volume crimes. Creating new offences and removing thresholds for prosecution will place additional pressure on the police, courts and prisons. The criminology literature is clear that the swiftness and certainty of the punishment are more important than its severity - new offences will only be effective if offenders know they will be applied.

## Knife crime action plan

Knife crime has been rising for a decade, claiming far too many young lives. It is a national crisis, requiring urgent action. Yet, under the Conservatives, too often when a teenager is found with a knife, nothing happens, and carrying a knife becomes normalised. There are virtually no services for vulnerable teenagers at risk of being drawn into a life of violence. The next Labour government will change this. We aim to halve knife crime in a decade.

Labour will end the practice of empty warnings by ensuring knife carrying triggers rapid intervention and tough consequences. Every young person caught in possession of a knife will be referred to a Youth Offending Team and will receive a mandatory plan to prevent reoffending, with penalties including curfews, tagging, and custody for the most serious cases.

To get knives off our streets Labour will ban ninja swords, lethal zombie-style blades and machetes, and strengthen rules to prevent online sales. Executives of online companies that flout these rules will be personally held to account through tough sanctions.

Labour will intervene earlier to stop young people being drawn into crime, creating a new Young Futures programme with a network of hubs reaching every community. These hubs will have youth workers, mental health support workers, and careers advisers on hand to support young people's mental health and avoid them being drawn into crime.

We will not wait for those at risk to come forward. Local prevention partnerships will identify young people who could be drawn into violence and intervene. And to offer young people a pathway out of violence, we will place youth workers and mentors in A&E units and Pupil Referral Units, funded by full recovery of the cost of firearm licensing.

Labour will also introduce a new offence of criminal exploitation of children, to go after the gangs who are luring young people into violence and crime.

Young people are disproportionately impacted by knife crime. Homicides of teenagers were almost twice as likely to involve a knife or sharp object (81%), compared to victims of all ages (41%).

A recent Youth Endowment Fund survey found that young victims of any violence were almost four times more likely to carry weapons than the average young person. Nearly 70% of those who had skipped school due to feeling unsafe had carried a weapon. It is clear young people carry knives for a variety of reasons – an effective response should address these causes holistically and not focus only on tough consequences.

The Young Futures Programme is based on proposals put forward by the Longfield Commission, which recommended the creation of a network of 1000 community hubs to support young people vulnerable to exploitation. The Commission proposed that these hubs would be sited in or around schools and would bring together local services to coordinate support for vulnerable teenagers and their families.

Crest has previously estimated that there could be as many as 200,000 children in England aged 11 to 17 who are vulnerable to serious violence due to levels of crime and/or income deprivation in their community.

More than new legislation is needed to tackle child criminal exploitation (CCE). Crest research identified significant gaps in officers' understanding of CCE; this is backed up by a recent HMICFRS report highlighting the Metropolitan Police Service's lack of understanding of CCE. Crest has previously recommended enhanced training for officers to ensure they can spot the signs of CCE.

**Crest Insights:** While there have been signs of success in reducing youth offending over the last decade (there are far fewer “first time entrants” to the CJS), evidence suggests young people may come to services' attention too late, with services now dealing with a smaller but more complex cohort. Local prevention partnerships and youth hubs to identify and support young people at risk of being drawn into crime have potential. Although questions remain about how they will they build on existing measures such as the Serious Violence Duty, how they will measure success and who will be accountable.

## Tackling violence against women and girls

Domestic abuse-related crimes have doubled over ten years (to nearly 100,000 a year) and the number of reported rape cases have increased fourfold. But the number of officers investigating them has not increased at the same rate.

Ensuring every force has a specialist rape and sexual offences team has previously been recommended by both the Home Affairs Select Committee and the Casey review. There is evidence that police forces that have specialist police rape teams tend to perform better in certain aspects of investigation.

The independent inspector of the Crown Prosecution Service and the Justice Select Committee have recommended the use of specialist courts to fast track rape cases. Earlier this year, the Government announced three Specialist Sexual Violence Court pilots similar to models in South Africa and Australia. There is evidence that this approach can increase conviction rates and speed up court proceedings, though evidence of the experience of victims and survivors is mixed.

This pledge to place a legal advocate in each police force area builds on a pilot scheme developed by Dame Vera Baird in Northumbria providing independent legal advocates to sexual violence and abuse victims. Crest research had found that many domestic abuse victims find the CJS overwhelming and value having someone who can guide them through the process.

There is evidence to suggest that stalking can be a precursor to even more serious offending against women. 32.4% of all stalking and harassment offences are domestic abuse related. In a study of female homicides resulting from male violence, stalking behaviours were present in 94% of cases.

For too long, violence against women and girls has been ignored. Our landmark mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade will require a national effort. We will use every government tool available to target perpetrators and address the root causes of abuse and violence.

That starts with tougher enforcement and protection. With Labour, there will be specialist rape and sexual offences teams in every police force. The most prolific and harmful perpetrators will be relentlessly targeted, using tactics normally reserved for terrorists and organised crime.

Prosecution rates for rape are shamefully low with many victims dropping out of the justice system when faced with years of delays. Labour will fast-track rape cases, with specialist courts at every Crown Court location in England and Wales.

Victims deserve better support. Building on the success of the approach adopted by Labour Police and Crime Commissioners, we will introduce domestic abuse experts in 999 control rooms so that victims can talk directly to a specialist, and ensure there is a legal advocate in every police force area to advise victims from the moment of report to trial.

Violence and abuse against women and girls does not come from nowhere. Misogyny is one root cause, and therefore Labour will ensure schools address misogyny and teach young people about healthy relationships and consent. We will ensure police forces have the powers they need to track and tackle the problem.

Stalking has not been treated with the seriousness it deserves. Labour will strengthen the use of Stalking Protection Orders and give women the right to know the identity of online stalkers. Spiking is a devastating crime for victims, leaving many women feeling vulnerable when they go out. Labour will introduce a new criminal offence for spiking to help police better respond to this crime.

We will strengthen the rights and protections available to women in co-habiting couples, as well as for whistleblowers in the workplace, including on sexual harassment.

**Crest Insights:** Survivors of sexual violence face complex barriers at every stage of the criminal justice system. Labour is right to call for tougher protection and enforcement, but this requires new money, and little appears committed currently. A stronger focus on prevention and the role of other agencies (beyond schools) in a whole systems approach would have been welcome. VAWG is unique in being both a high volume and high severity crime, with pervasive impacts on society. Labour's commitment to halve VAWG is very ambitious and delivering on it will depend on defining priorities and success measures early.

## Better policing

Under the Conservatives, poor policing performance has been tolerated, with forces spending years in special measures. Trust in the police has been undermined by the appalling acts of some officers. Labour will turn the page and raise standards by reforming the police.

Labour will give His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire & Rescue Services new powers to intervene with failing forces. We will introduce mandatory professional standards on vetting, checks and misconduct for individual officers; and stronger training on racism and violence against women and girls. Anyone with a history of violence against women and girls will be barred from the service and we will introduce automatic suspensions if officers are investigated for domestic abuse and sexual offences. Particular care is required when investigating children. Labour will introduce new legal safeguards around strip-searching children and young people.

Fraud accounts for almost two in five crimes, but the Conservatives have failed to respond to the scale of the challenge. Labour will introduce a new expanded fraud strategy to tackle the full range of threats, including online, public sector and serious fraud. We will work with technology companies to stop their platforms being exploited by fraudsters.

Criminals never stop looking for new ways to target victims. Police must change the way they operate too, with technology and investigative techniques keeping pace with modern threats. We will work with national policing bodies and police staff to standardise approaches to procurement, IT, professional standards and training. And we will ensure the service is organised so as to enable investment in specialist capabilities, such as digital forensics, and to more effectively tackle cross-border issues such as serious organised crime.

At a national level, there are few levers for the government to address underperformance within policing. In contrast to schools, for example, the judgements of HMICFRS are purely advisory: forces deemed to be failing are not subject to “special measures” and do not need to act on the Inspectorate’s recommendations.

Crest research into county lines found that strip searches could cause considerable trauma to young people. The Metropolitan Police changed its policy to ensure future strip searches of children reflect the safeguarding review conducted into Child Q - a 15 year old strip-searched without an appropriate adult present in December 2020. While new legal safeguards around strip-searching children and young people are vital, more should be done to improve standards of practice across each police force in England and Wales.

Fraud has risen substantially over the last decade and now accounts for over 40% of all crime. The Government introduced a new fraud strategy in December 2023, promising to reduce fraud by 10% by the end of 2024. Crest research suggests that three key barriers to tackling fraud have been the lack of drive from the centre, the lack of effective data sharing between agencies; and poor coordination between the multiplicity of agencies that deal with fraud.

Two Crest research projects – into county lines drug dealing and violence against women and girls - found the ability of police forces to process digital information and evidence quickly was lacking. Both projects concluded that police forces must improve their ability to work with technology.

**Crest Insights:** Crime, and the demands on policing, are changing. Many crimes now take place online or extend beyond policing boundaries and the complexity of crime increasingly requires the police to be able to access certain specialist capabilities, many of which require significant investment and training. While it is true that the current policing model – based around 43 individual forces and a “job for life” – is ill-suited to the current context, successive governments have attempted – and struggled – to meaningfully reform policing and cut inefficiencies. What will Labour do differently?



## Solving crime

The charge rate now stands at less than 6%. Despite charging being a responsibility shared between the police and the CPS, Crest research has identified significant failings in how they work together; neither agency is incentivised enough to cooperate in the most effective and efficient ways.

Early findings from the Operation Soteria pilot suggest it has improved collaboration between the police and the Crown Prosecution Service, enabling cases to be investigated effectively and perpetrators charged in a timely manner.

Under the Conservatives, plummeting charge and prosecution rates have emboldened criminals. Rather than working together, police and prosecutors often engage in a blame game, which lets down victims.

Labour will reverse this, driving up the proportion of crimes solved by reducing barriers to bringing charges, cutting bureaucracy, and improving collaboration. We will make it easier for high-performing police forces to charge domestic abuse suspects to speed up the process.

Labour recognises recruitment challenges, particularly for detectives, so we will roll out a direct entry scheme for detectives to boost investigation skills.

## A justice system that puts victims first

The Crown Court hit a backlog of 64,709 in June 2023 - the highest figure ever recorded. This is a 58% increase on the backlog of 40,826 cases in March 2020.

£1.2 billion was spent on court staff in 2020. Despite this, Crest research found that a lack of judges and court staff continues to be as important a concern as a lack of prosecutors. This is set to remain as a key issue: spending on judiciary and staff fell by 3.4% in 2022/23. Commitments around court staff are equally required.

Crest research found that staying informed on the progress of their case was very important to victims. The Victims' Code currently sets out the services (and a minimum standard for these services) that must be provided to victims of crime by organisations (referred to as service providers) in England and Wales.

After 14 years of neglect, the criminal justice system is broken. Victims wait months, sometimes years, for their case to come to trial, unable to move on with their lives. As an initial step to address the courts backlog, Labour will ensure more prosecutors are available by allowing Associate Prosecutors to work on appropriate cases.

We will introduce new protections for victims of crime and persistent antisocial behaviour, by increasing the powers of the Victims' Commissioner, and ensuring victims can access the information and support they need.

Even when criminals are found guilty, the sentences they receive often do not make sense either to victims or the wider public. This is particularly worrying for offences against women and girls. Labour will carry out a review of sentencing to ensure it is brought up to date.

**Crest Insights:** Crest has worked to improve the experience of victims across the criminal justice system, including with the Crown Prosecution Service and HMICFRS. Our research highlights that, from a lack of timely communication to a victim-blaming culture and ineffective referral pathways, much of the CJS is currently not working for victims. Tackling the courts backlog is key to improving victims' experiences but it should go further than the measures proposed here: our courts need adequate investment as well as genuine reform to improve current inefficiencies.

## Getting a grip of our prisons and reducing reoffending

Prisons in England and Wales are in crisis. The Conservatives' failure to build sufficient places has led to overcrowding and chaos. Judges are being advised to delay sentencing. Prisoners are being released early. And fewer dangerous criminals are locked up because of a lack of space.

The Conservatives have failed to get prisons built. Labour recognises that prisons are of national importance and therefore will use all relevant powers to build the prisons so badly needed.

As a result of overcrowding, our prisons are increasingly dangerous, plagued by drug use and violent disorder – putting prison officers in a dangerous position. Far from being places where offenders are punished and rehabilitated, prisons are a breeding ground for more crime. Prison leavers are more likely to reoffend if they do not have the tools to move away from crime, if they have nowhere to live and if they do not have a job on release.

Labour will act to reduce reoffending. We will work with prisons to improve offenders' access to purposeful activity, such as learning, and ensure they create pre-release plans for those leaving custody. We will support prisons to link up with local employers and the voluntary sector to get ex-offenders into work. The children of those who are imprisoned are at far greater risk of being drawn into crime than their peers. We will ensure that those young people are identified and offered support to break the cycle.

After 14 years of chaotic reorganisations, the national probation service is struggling to keep the public safe. A lack of co-ordination between prisons, probation and other local services also means prison-leavers are not getting the right support, raising the risk that they go straight back to crime.

In some areas of the country, we have seen Labour Mayors pioneering a more joined-up approach to reduce reoffending. In Greater Manchester, probation is linked up with housing and health services to ensure offenders leaving custody receive the support they need. Labour will conduct a strategic review of probation governance, including considering the benefits of devolved models.

Between April 2021 and December 2022, the prison population increased at an average rate of 220 people per month. Between December 2022 and mid-October 2023, this increased to 605 per month, with the total prison population reaching 88,225 – the highest level since at least January 2011.

Data shows that prisons are increasingly dangerous. Over the last 10 years, rates of self-harm per 1,000 prison population have increased. In the 12 months to December 2023, there was a 31% increase in self-harm incidents in male institutions and a 19% rise in female establishments.

The number of prison staff off sick for mental health reasons almost doubled between 2016/17 and 2021/22. While figures have fallen over the last year, they remain high. Significant prison staff sickness was a factor linked to Daniel Khalife's escape from Wandsworth Prison last year.

Research has shown that overcrowded prisons struggle to successfully deliver rehabilitative and educational activities. Overcrowding must be addressed before improving offenders' access to purposeful activity is possible.

Crest conducted research into devolved models of justice and found it enabled a focused understanding of - and ability to meet - local justice needs. The research also identified examples of innovative programmes and co-commissioning between local areas and government departments in devolved areas, suggesting devolved models may be beneficial in linking probation with key services.

**Crest Insights:** Overcrowded and unsafe prisons struggle to rehabilitate offenders, as well as increasing pressures on other parts of the CJS. Any plans to reduce reoffending and increase purposeful activity must involve tackling capacity issues, including via the increased use of alternatives to custody. The probation service is operating beyond capacity: in 2023, national average caseload was at 111.7% capacity. Any strategic review of probation must also involve assessing whether the service has adequate resources to deliver an effective service.

## Historical injustices

Under the Conservatives, too many victims of historical injustices have had insult added to injury by years of legal delays. Without justice and the truth, victims and their families cannot move forward. Labour will right this wrong, act on the findings of the Infected Blood Inquiry, and respond to the findings of the Grenfell Inquiry and the Covid-19 Inquiry, to ensure swift resolution.

Labour will introduce a 'Hillsborough Law' which will place a legal duty of candour on public servants and authorities, and provide legal aid for victims of disasters or state-related deaths. We will ensure the victims of the appalling Windrush scandal have their voices heard and the compensation scheme is run effectively, with a new Windrush Commissioner. Labour will also ensure, through an investigation or inquiry, that the truth about the events at Orgrave comes to light.

Labour will stop the chaos that lets too many criminals act with impunity, turn the page with stronger policing, and rebuild our criminal justice system.

While Labour is promising to act on Inquiry findings, it makes no commitment to implement the actual recommendations of these inquiries, a step which victims and survivors frequently state is just as important to them as establishing the facts.

Crest polling found that only 29% of people believed it was possible for a public inquiry examining events which took place more than 20 years ago to get to the truth, and only 34% thought it would be worthwhile.

**Crest Inquiries:** Crest has worked for eight statutory public inquiries since 2015. Our annual polling shows the public values the work of inquiries generally and has confidence in their independence and effectiveness. Government should take this public support as a mandate to listen to what inquiries recommended and act promptly.



## Outstanding issues

While it wouldn't be possible for manifestos to address every single issue pertaining to policing and justice, we feel that the following gaps in the Labour Manifesto are worth highlighting:

1. Reforming our courts and prison systems is fundamental to the functioning of the wider criminal justice system. Ambitions to increase arrests and improve charge rates will only be effective if cases can then go through the courts efficiently and offenders receive appropriate punishment. Labour's manifesto is light on how it would achieve this, mentioning only the use of associate prosecutors to reduce the backlog, for example. Without serious, structural reform of our criminal justice system, the party's promises risk being harder to deliver.
2. As with the Conservative manifesto, serious and organised crime (SOC) is noticeably absent, even though it is assessed by the government as affecting more people, more often, than any other national-security threat and is growing and changing in nature.
3. Also absent is Labour's proposed response to extremism and terrorism. The last counter-extremism strategy was published in 2015. Since then, the landscape of extremism in the UK has undergone significant shifts: the use of online spaces for radicalisation, the shift towards a younger and more vulnerable cohort, the rise in lone actors and a changing international landscape require new strategies to deal with them. There is an urgent need for an up-to-date comprehensive strategy to address the current threat.
4. The criminal justice system has suffered the brunt of cuts over the last decade and is stretched to breaking point. While money is not a guarantee of better outcomes, it is clear that significant investment is needed to meaningfully improve these services. Yet, while Labour has set out a series of reforms, few appear to have any new funding attached to it. This raises questions about the CJS's ability to deliver on Labour's ambitious proposals.

If you have views or questions about this analysis or would like to hear more about Crest Insights, please email [Sophie.davis@crestadvisory.com](mailto:Sophie.davis@crestadvisory.com).