

Liberal  
Democrats



 Green Party

## Wider parties Manifesto Review

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 smaller parties fielding candidates across the UK - the Liberal Democrats, Reform UK and the Green Party. While none of are expected to enter government, the polls suggest these parties could collectively pick up around one third of all votes cast. The Liberal Democrats and the Greens traditionally prioritise issues other than law and order, and this campaign is Reform UK's first. However, each party has included a number of contrasting commitments on policing and the justice system.

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 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.



**Sophie Davis, Director of Research, Crest Insights**

Across this document we will analyse three manifestos produced by The Liberal Democrats, Reform UK and The Green Party.

These manifestos all address the criminal justice system but make highly contrasting policy pledges that we will individually analyse.

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

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# Liberal Democrat Manifesto

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their own homes and communities. But for too many people in the UK, that's simply not the reality today.

The Conservatives have talked tough on crime, but failed even to get the basics right. Their **unnecessary cuts** and ineffective use of resources have contributed to the rise in unsolved crimes as **police forces are left overstretched and under-resourced**.

Serious violence is destroying too many young lives. Our communities are plagued by burglaries, fraud and anti-social behaviour, and far too many criminals are getting away with it. Violence against women and girls remains horrifically high.

**Huge backlogs in the courts are denying victims the justice they deserve**. Prisons are in crisis: overcrowded, understaffed and failing to rehabilitate offenders. Liberal Democrats will prevent crime and build communities where people can truly feel safe, including by:

- Restoring proper community policing, where officers are visible, trusted and focused on preventing and solving crimes – especially rape and other violent crime.
- Creating a **new statutory guarantee** that all burglaries will be attended by the police and properly investigated.
- Investing in the criminal justice system to **tackle the backlog** of court cases and ensure swift justice.
- Breaking the cycle of reoffending by **improving rehabilitation in prisons and on release**, and strengthening the supervision of offenders in the community.
- Ensuring survivors of violence against women and girls are properly supported in the criminal justice process, including through mandatory training for police and prosecutors in **understanding the impact of trauma on survivors**.



Public funding for justice in England and Wales has declined by 22% in real per person terms between 2009/10 and 2022/23. Following a decline between 2011 and 2015 - during which time the Liberal Democrats were part of the coalition government - police spending has grown in real terms for the last 9 consecutive years, but only by 1.5% between March 2011 and March 2024.



Between 2010 and 2018 police officer numbers dropped by about 15%. 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". It isn't clear here what the Liberal Democrats mean by "restoring" and whether this pledge comes with any additional funding.



Over a quarter of all Crown Court cases (27%) are now outstanding for over a year. The average rape case now takes 393 days to complete once it reaches the Crown Court. Crest research into victims' experiences of the criminal justice system identified delays as particularly difficult for victims.



It isn't clear how legislating for the police to attend every burglary would work. In addition, creating guarantees of this kind without additional funding risks police activity being diverted away from other crimes, possibly worsening outcomes elsewhere.



Though multiple factors have contributed to the backlog, courts have suffered from long-term under-investment. Crest research found reducing the backlog would require significant investment - without a specific sum it is unclear what impact this pledge would have.

Many of our prisons are overcrowded, unsafe and, as result, failing to rehabilitate offenders. The Justice Select Committee found that 84% of band 3-5 staff believe staff shortages prevent prisoners engaging in purposeful activities. Starts of accredited programmes in 2021/22 were 60% below 2019/20 levels, and 88% below 2009/10 levels.

A Crest evaluation into victims' needs found victims would welcome a more trauma-informed criminal justice system. Another Crest research project - with youth justice practitioners - found poor understanding of the impacts of trauma among other agencies hampered their work.

In addition, we will:

**Free up local officers' time to focus on their communities by:**

- Creating a new **Online Crime Agency to effectively tackle illegal content and activity** online, such as personal fraud, revenge porn and threats and incitement to violence on social media.
- Properly **resourcing the National Crime Agency** to combat serious and organised crime.

**Help rebuild public trust in policing by:**

- Scrapping Police and Crime Commissioners and replacing them with local Police Boards made up of councillors and representatives from relevant local groups, while investing the savings in frontline policing.
- Requiring the Home Secretary, the Mayor of London and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to draw up an urgent plan to implement the recommendations of the Baroness Casey Review and tackle sexism, racism and homophobia, while encouraging other police forces to do so where appropriate.
- Ending the **disproportionate use of Stop and Search.**
- **Requiring all police forces to adopt ambitious targets** for improving the diversity of their workforce and make regular progress reports to Parliament.
- Improving access to **restorative justice services.**
- Introducing the Hillsborough Law: a statutory duty of candour on police officers and all public officials, as set out in chapter 20.

**Address staffing shortages in police forces by:**

- Urgently drawing up a national recruitment, training and retention strategy to tackle the shortage of detectives.
- Ensuring fair pay rises for police officers by reforming the Police Remuneration Review Body to make it properly independent of government.

An increasing amount of crime takes place online, something that our existing law enforcement structures are ill-suited to respond to. While it is important that the Liberal Democrats are addressing this, it is not clear what a new agency's role would be and how it would work with existing law enforcement structures - in particular the NCA - and other sectors.

Adjusting the latest available analysis for inflation, Crest estimate that serious and organised crime (SOC) costs the UK £47 billion every year. While we spend more than £3 billion a year on terrorism, the SOC response receives around £860 million. Alongside additional investment, there is a need to assess whether the current SOC response, including structures, is suitable for the modern threat.

In the year ending March 2023, people identifying as black or black British were searched at a rate 4.1 times higher than those from a white ethnic group in England and Wales. Those identifying as Asian or Asian British were searched at a rate 1.4 times higher. Crest has published a comprehensive set of recommendations to improve the use of stop and search.

The Casey Review suggested that if recruitment continued on its current trajectory, the demographic characteristics of Metropolitan police officers would not reflect the general population in London until 2053 for gender and 2061 for ethnicity. Increasing the diversity of the workforce is important - a lack of diversity means that forces miss out on key talent and damages community confidence - but it must be met with meaningful organisational change.

There is evidence that restorative justice - where offenders and victims come together to address the harm caused by crime - can reduce reoffending. An All Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry into restorative justice found that inadequate funding for commissioned restorative justice services has led to a 'postcode lottery'. They also identified an inconsistent application of restorative justice, poor data-sharing and contractual issues with providers.

From 2019 to 2023, the government recruited an additional 20,000 officers, bringing officer numbers up to roughly where they were in 2010. However, the total number of all police personnel is still lower now than in 2010 and a large proportion of the workforce lacks experience. In March 2023, 36% of officers had less than five years' experience. In addition, last year saw the highest number of police officers leaving the police in a financial year since comparable records began. Focusing on training and retention as well as recruitment of officers is crucial to boost numbers of specialised staff and improve outcomes.

**Ensure that survivors of domestic abuse are properly supported throughout the criminal justice system by:**

- Embedding domestic abuse specialists in every police force and 999 operator assistance centre to ensure that reports from survivors are handled effectively and sensitively.
- Addressing the delays in domestic abuse referrals from the police to the CPS and subsequent decision making by the CPS, acknowledging the unique risk these delays can pose to women's safety.

**Improve the police response to mental ill-health by:**

- Introducing a target of one hour for handover of people suffering from mental health crisis from police to mental health services.
- Ensuring that all forces have a mental health professional in the control room at all times.
- Supporting the police to achieve adequate levels of training in mental health response.

**Tackle the backlogs in the criminal courts and reduce the number of people in prison on remand by:**

- Setting a clear target of halving the time from offence to sentencing for all criminals, and implementing a properly funded strategy across the criminal justice system to achieve it.
- Implementing a new data strategy across the criminal justice system to ensure that capacity meets demand, and to understand the needs of all users, especially victims, vulnerable people and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- Developing a workforce strategy to ensure there are enough criminal barristers, judges and court staff.



A very small proportion of recorded domestic abuse (DA) crimes get referred to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS): less than 8% (69,314) of all DA related crimes (889,918) recorded in 2022/23 resulted in suspects being referred to the CPS. This is partly due to victims withdrawing support from investigations: 51% of DA-related violent crimes in the year 2022/23 were closed due to 'evidential difficulties' where the victim did not support further action compared to 26% for non-DA violent crime. This suggests DA survivors require more support.

Domestic homicide reviews conducted in 2019-20 identified issues in the risk assessment processes carried out by police and other statutory services, due to a lack of experience and training amongst first responders.

Operation Soteria's Year 1 report found that many police officers lacked specialist knowledge about sexual offending and specialist investigative practices. They also flagged that there are no national standards for training officers to investigate VAWG crimes. This has consequences for victims as well as investigations - a very high proportion of VAWG cases are closed due to victims withdrawing support and a lack of evidence.

In London, on average, it takes 14.2 hours in A&E and 8.5 hours at a health-based place of safety\* from the police arriving with a patient to medical staff taking over their care. This impacts public productivity. The British Medical Association has highlighted that funding for mental health services has not been sufficient to meet rising demand; increasing resourcing of mental health services would likely improve police productivity

In 2021/22, 45% of incidents involving mental ill-health which received a police response involved no threat of serious injury or any crime. The 'Right Person, Right Care' approach aims to equip police with the tools to decide when to involve other appropriate agencies such as mental health professionals in the response to support the individual suffering from a mental health crisis.

The remand prison population, on 31 December 2023, was 16,005 - the highest level for at least 50 years. The average time from offence to sentencing in the Crown courts is 366 days. Significant investment in the criminal justice system, as well as genuine reform to improve current inefficiencies, is required to improve sentencing timeframes and, in turn, reduce the remand population.

\*A health-based place of safety is a space where young people detained and transported under the Mental Health Act can be managed safely while an appropriate assessment is undertaken (by a psychiatrist and an approved mental health professional (AMHP)).

- Improve transparency throughout the criminal justice process by enabling all victims to request a transcript of court proceedings free of charge.

#### **Address youth violence and combat knife crime by:**

- Adopting a **public health approach to the epidemic of youth violence** which identifies and treats risk factors, rather than just focusing on the symptoms. This means police, teachers, health professionals, youth workers and social services all working closely together to **prevent young people falling prey to gangs and violence.**
- Investing in youth services that are genuinely engaging and reach more young people.
- Making youth diversion a statutory duty so that every part of the country has a pre-charge diversion scheme for young people up to the age of 25, ensuring better outcomes for young people and less strain on police resources.

#### **Combat the rise of fraud and scams by:**

- Naming and shaming the banks with the worst records on preventing fraud and reimbursing victims.
- Requiring banks to reimburse victims of **automated push payment scams unless there is clear evidence that they are at fault.**
- Launching a **high-profile public awareness campaign** to help people spot, avoid and report frauds and scams.

Adopting a public health approach to violence is already the aim of the Serious Violence Duty and the Violence Reduction Units (VRUs). The Public Health Approach (PHA) to youth violence has seen some positive outcomes in reducing the risk of violence for children and young people (e.g. areas with VRUs experienced a statistically significant reduction in hospital admissions for any violent injury in 2023 evaluation). To build on the Serious Violence Duty, a future Government needs to continue to devolve investment to local areas to commission evidence-based services and there needs to be wider cross-government commitment to the public health approach.

Youth diversion schemes address low-level criminal behaviour without putting children and young people through the criminal justice system. There is increasing evidence that, by preventing labelling and limiting children's exposure to the CJS, these schemes lead to greater reduction in offending and better outcomes for young people. Expanding the use of diversion schemes will require ensuring that a range appropriate services are available locally to support young people away from crime.

Fraud has risen substantially over the last decade and now accounts for over 40% of all crime. The value of reported UK fraud increased to £2.3bn in 2023, more than double the £1.1bn recorded in 2022 and the second largest annual fraud value recorded in the UK in 20 years. While banks have an important role to play in tackling fraud, they are to a large extent already incentivised to do so. Arguably more action is needed to ensure that tech companies - particularly social media companies on whose platforms a large proportion of fraud originates - play their part.

The Payments Systems Regulator has recently introduced a new requirement for banks to reimburse victims of automated push payment (APP) scams. While the previous Contingent Reimbursement Model (CRM) Code offered protection to victims of APP fraud, not all banks and lenders signed up to the code. The new requirement will offer further protection to victims of APP fraud.

The government has recently launched a large public awareness campaign - Stop! Think Fraud campaign - but its aims are not clear and it has already received criticism from banks who are worried it will further confuse the public given the prominence of existing campaigns. Any new campaign should bring together partners under one umbrella, and leverage the successes of previous initiatives, as recommended by Crest's recent research on fraud prevention.



**Improve cooperation with our European neighbours on tackling cross-border crime, such as human trafficking, the illegal drug trade, cybercrime and terrorism, including by:**

- Working with Europol and Eurojust to develop and implement a joint strategy for dealing with cross-border threats, with the closest possible cooperation on shared priorities.
- Restoring direct, real-time access for UK police to EU-wide data sharing systems to identify and arrest traffickers, terrorists and other international criminals.

**Tackle modern slavery and human trafficking by:**

- Reversing the Conservatives' rollbacks of modern slavery protections.
- Establishing a powerful new Worker Protection Enforcement Authority to protect people in precarious work, with proactive intelligence-led enforcement of labour market standards and a firewall with immigration enforcement.
- Transferring responsibility for identifying modern slavery victims from the Home Office to local safeguarding agencies.
- Creating a financial deterrent by establishing a civil remedy for survivors seeking redress from their traffickers.
- Introduce new laws to crack down on puppy and kitten smuggling.

**Cut reoffending by:**

- Ending prison overcrowding.
- Recruiting and retaining more prison officers.
- Improving the provision of training, education and work opportunities in prisons.
- Establishing a Women's Justice Board and providing specialist training for all staff in contact with women in the criminal justice system.
- Replacing Young Offender Institutions with Secure Schools and Secure Children's Homes.
- Ensuring that every prison has a 'through the gate' mentorship programme.
- Introducing a National Resettlement Plan to improve the rehabilitation of people leaving prison and cut reoffending.
- Improving and properly funding the supervision of offenders in the community, with far greater coordination between the prison service, probation service providers, the voluntary and private sectors and local authorities, achieving savings in the high costs of reoffending.

The international dimension of serious organised crime is increasing, exacerbated by global instability. Technology has lowered the barrier to entry for criminals and opened the door to international organised crime groups, enabling criminals to operate remotely and across borders, reducing the number of people required to conduct their activities and giving them access to new markets. Increased international - and not just European - cooperation must facilitate effective data and information sharing, tackle the enablers of crime such as illicit finance, and be underpinned by robust international governance.

This is likely to refer to measures under the Nationality and Borders Act and the Illegal Migration Act, which a number of anti-slavery and human rights organisations have argued are incompatible with the UK's obligations under the European Convention Against Trafficking (ECAT).

The prison population is projected to increase to between 94,600 and 114,800 by March 2028, with a central estimate of 105,800. Current capacity stands at around 89,000 which requires a combination of building additional prison places (an additional 5,600 prison places would be required to meet minimum capacity requirements in 2028) and introducing measures to reduce the prison population.

The leaving rate of prison staff has been increasing since 2009. In 2022/23 15% of the operational workforce left the prison service. Insufficient support, poor vetting processes and unsafe conditions for staff in prisons have been highlighted as factors related to poor staff retention.

There is extensive research to show that women in the CJS have specific needs. Women are much more likely than men to self-harm whilst in prison (in 2022, women made up 29% of all self-harm incidents and only 4% of the prison population). Over half the women in prison report having suffered domestic violence. And as Crest research highlighted, many women in prison have dependent children who are severely impacted by their imprisonment. Yet despite successive reviews - including Baroness Corston's landmark report published over 17 years ago - much progress remains to be made.

The 2016 Taylor Review of the youth justice system recommended that young offenders should serve sentences in secure schools rather than young offender institutions to improve rehabilitation. Despite government agreement, the first secure school opened only in May 2024. The Public Accounts Committee recently concluded that "current youth custody provision is inadequate for many vulnerable children's needs".

# Reform UK Manifesto

Critical reforms needed in the first 100 days

## Commence Increase in Police Numbers

- Recruitment to increase UK per capita police numbers to 300 per 100k population. That is 40,000 new front-line officers, over a 5-year parliament.

## Commence Zero Tolerance Policing

- Clampdown on all crime and antisocial behaviour. Increase Stop and Search substantially. Prison for violent crimes and possessing a knife. Drug dealing and trafficking will get mandatory life imprisonment. A new offence of Substantial Possession of Drugs will meet heavy fines.

## New Police Leadership and Recruitment Regime

- Strong preference for ex-military officers and personnel. High standards of fitness and presentation for front line officers. Sack Chief Constables that allow two-tier policing.

## More Bobbies on the Beat

- Ensure that police return to the beat and use better technology and stop wasting time on paperwork. Allow PCSOs to become police officers before the role is phased out.

## Common Sense Policing not 'Woke' Policing

- Scrap all Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DE&I) roles and regulations to stop two-tier policing. Overhaul the Independent Office of Police Conduct (IOPC) so that the police complaints system becomes more accountable and works for the law-abiding public.

Thereafter:

## De-politicise the College of Policing

- Prioritise crime prevention, discipline, public service and high standards of strength and fitness among trainees. Replace degree-standard entry with an entrance exam. Require officers to complete a 2-year probationary period. Stricter entry requirements.

Crest analysis suggests that we would need an additional 32,000 officers to maintain the same ratio of officers we had in 2010. Reforms' pledge is ambitious - recruiting 40,000 officers over the course of 5 years will be challenging (considering how challenging it was to deliver the uplift) as well as costly. Alongside recruitment, there needs to be a greater focus on retention. In the last year alone, roughly 9,000 police officers left forces in England and Wales compared to 16,000 joiners. Over a third of officers have been with the police for less than five years. There is a risk that a focus on recruitment alone will lead to an inexperienced workforce.

Evidence suggests that Zero Tolerance Policing - a strategy that aims to reduce crime through aggressive enforcement of minor offences - does not reduce crime and is not an effective crime reduction strategy.

Sentencing changes of this scale would undoubtedly put the prison capacity crisis into overdrive - violence offences represent roughly one third of all crime and in the last 9 months, there were over 1.5 million of these offences. We are currently at 98% of prison capacity.

It is already possible for possession of drug offences of any class to receive an unlimited fine.

Retention of experience is as important as recruitment to successfully boost the numbers of police officers - allowing PCSOs to become police officers is one way of doing this successfully. However, even if all of the remaining PCSOs (of which there are fewer than 8,000) could be convinced to do so there leaves a big gap to realise the ambition of 40,000 more officers in the next five years.

The Strategic Review of Policing found that technology is 'woefully inadequate', recommending among things more investment in police IT.

In 2023, only 34.7% of police officers across all 43 forces were female. In 2022, 1.3% of police officers were Black, compared with 4% of the overall population, and 3.7% were Asian, compared with 9.3% of the population. 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.

Critical reforms needed in the first 100 days

**Urgent Sentencing Review with Automatic Life Imprisonment for Violent Repeat Offenders:**

- Those committing second violent or serious offences will receive mandatory life sentences.

**Increase the Criminal Justice Budget:**

- The budget is almost the same as it was 10 years ago. Increase it from £10 billion to £12 billion to ensure more high calibre staff to cut delays. Reopen local magistrates' courts to clear the case backlog.

**Change the Definition of Hate Crime:**

- The CPS and police definition of a hate crime has led to systemic bias. Members of the British public must not be investigated because 'any' person 'perceives' that a hate crime has been committed.

**Start Building of 10,000 New Detention Places**

- Start expansion in capacity of state built and managed prisons so that life means life for those who endanger the public. Commission disused military bases if needed.

Thereafter:

**Reform the Child Maintenance Service**

- We will launch a special division of the Family Court for maintenance and defaults.
- Share parental care 50/50 where appropriate.
- Rights of access for grandparents.

**Stop Child Grooming Gangs**

- Deport offenders holding dual citizenship.
- Make child grooming an aggravating offence.
- Improve safeguarding of victims and vulnerable.
- No bail for grooming gang offenders.

**Tackle Youth Crime**

- Reopen High Intensity Training Camps for young offenders to teach basic education, teamwork and values.

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. The Institute for Government forecasts real-terms spending cuts of 3.2% for police, 3.5% for courts, and 5.6% for prisons based on the current government's 2024 Spring Budget.

A decision to prosecute a hate crime is not based on the perception of any person but on the evidence that an individual has demonstrated, or been motivated by, hostility based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity. An investigation will not proceed to a charge if there is not enough evidence to support a prosecution.

The current Government set out to build 20,000 new prison places, half of which would be delivered through new prisons - this is not expected to be completed until 2030. It is unclear if the 10,000 places set out here are in addition to those already committed to. New prison places take time to deliver and, on their own, are unlikely to address the short to medium term issues presented by the prison capacity crisis - current trends suggest the number of prisoners growing around three times faster than prison places.

Tackling Child Sexual Abuse is a key priority of the Government's Serious and Organised Crime strategy published in 2023 and was the subject of the Home Office's Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy in 2019. The government introduced new child sexual exploitation offences through the Serious Crime Act 2015.

Crest research found that police officers were often unable to identify signs of child exploitation. This means they were unable to safeguard the children they came into contact with from exploitation. Improved safeguarding of victims and vulnerable requires better training for all police officers.

Interventions with children and young people should follow the evidence of what works to reduce violence and its causes. Military-style boot camps have been evidenced as not likely to reduce violence and may even cause further harm.

# Green Party Manifesto

## Trust and Confidence in the police

We believe in policing by consent, but this can only work if the police can rebuild trust with the communities they serve. Police Services need to acknowledge the institutional racism, misogyny, homophobia and disablism that have dominated policing for so long. They must root out any officers who hold views incompatible with serving as a police officer. Many communities, especially Black communities, are disillusioned with the police after experiencing decades of disproportionate policing and traumatising tactics like stop and search and the use of force. Rebuilding trust and confidence and earning the consent of communities to being policed is critical for the future of policing. Police Services should be accountable to elected local government and to the communities where they work.

Elected Greens will push for:

- An end to the routine use of stop and search and to the use of facial recognition software
- Police Services to deliver ongoing fitness to practice assessments on diversity for all police officers and relevant civilian staff.
- Police and Crime Commissioners, and local councillors on police and crime panels, to have open access to the data needed to enable effective scrutiny of operational policing.
- Restorative justice and a practical approach to prosecution.

The Green approach to crime is grounded in a restorative approach and a belief that rehabilitation is the best way to reduce future offending. Prison is a demonstrably ineffective way of reducing reoffending: evidence shows that short prison sentences are especially ineffective and lead to higher rates of recidivism.

There are some people who need to be imprisoned for reasons of public safety or the seriousness of their offence. For others a restorative approach, forcing criminals to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions, is better for the offender, the victim and society at large.

Elected Greens will seek to break the cycle of reoffending through legislating for a presumption against custodial sentences under two years.

The Green Party welcomes the greater emphasis on diversion in the criminal justice system. Green MPs will ensure that diversion programmes are in place for:

- All low-level drug and alcohol related offences.
- Young offenders arrested for low-level offences.

Trust in the police varies considerably by ethnicity, with only 46% of Black adults trusting the police compared to 64% of White adults. Crest's own polling found that only 62% of our nationally representative sample said they trusted the police.

Crest research into the use of stop and search found through nationally representative polling that the majority of adults across all ethnic backgrounds support the use of stop and search in principle and on specific grounds. Black adults had lower levels of support for stop and search, but the overwhelming majority still supported its use in principle. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of those who experience a stop and search - particularly Black communities - do not experience stop and search to be well communicated, explained or respectfully and fairly carried out.

Despite (often justified) controversies around their use, stop and search and facial recognition software remain operationally important tools for the Police. Proposals to improve their use, and reduce the likelihood for errors, would likely be more effective - and realistic - than outright bans.

Crest has previously published a plan to improve the use of stop and search. One of our recommendations involved strengthening community scrutiny panels, including by setting minimum standards for their training and development, size, and composition.

In 2022/23, over two-thirds of those imprisoned for less than 12 months reoffended. Crest and other research - including by the Prison Reform Trust - has found that community sentences can be more effective at reducing reoffending, particularly for low level offending. Yet their use has declined substantially over the last decade, in part due to a lack of confidence from judges and the public. Crest has previously recommended toughening up community sentencing, alongside introducing a presumption against short prison sentences.

Prior to 2016, restorative justice received ring fenced funding from the Ministry of Justice via PCCs. Since then, it has been up to each PCC to decide how much to spend on restorative justice. A 2017 report found that PCC support for restorative justice has decreased significantly since 2016. This inconsistent funding between local areas has led to a 'postcode lottery' in access to restorative justice. Cuts to restorative justice services and diversionary programmes mean that many new services would need to be established to cope with this new demand.

## Tackling the court backlog

The court system is in chaos and it's letting down victims and the accused, whilst large numbers of prisoners on remand and endless court cancellations create knock-on effects for the prison and probation services too.

The Green Party will invest £11bn in restoring the Ministry of Justice budget over the course of the next parliament. This would be used to **restore legal aid budgets**, to ensure that the Criminal Bar is sufficiently well funded and to repair court buildings. Elected Greens will push to recruit more judges and to **ensure that they are representative of wider society**

## End domestic abuse and violence against women and girls

It is a Green Party priority to end domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.

Elected Greens will push to:

- **Make misogyny a hate crime** across the UK and increase the police's capacity to deal with domestic violence.
- Develop and implement a new UK-wide strategy to tackle gender-based violence, including domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and trafficking.
- Ensure that domestic abuse and gender-based violence is a key measurable priority for all police forces and that all police officers are trained to recognise and tackle domestic violence.
- **Fund local authorities so that domestic violence, rape crisis and other provision can meet local needs.**
- Decriminalise sex work



The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) removed many areas of law from the scope of legal aid. The Law Society found that, between 2009/10 and 2021/22: the number of legal aid cases to help people get early advice dropped from almost a million to 130,000; the number of people having to go to court without representation trebled; and the number of advice agencies and law centres doing this work fell by 59%.

While there has been some improvement to diversity in the judiciary, the profession remains undiverse. A recent Law Society report found that there has been little progress for women and ethnic minority candidates. While there has been a slight increase in the proportion of ethnic minority judges overall, there has been negligible progress in improving the representation of Black judges; there are just 67 Black judges across courts and tribunals, making up 1.27% of the judiciary (up 0.01% in 2022).

There have been calls for a few years - including by organisations like the Fawcett Society - to make 'sex or gender' a protected characteristic in hate crime laws, in order to improve the way that crimes against women are recorded and responded to, and lead to increased recognition of women's experiences. However, others - including Women's Aid and Rape Crisis, as well as by the Law Commission - have expressed concerns that making misogyny a hate crime would not be an effective response to misogynistic offending, and may cause harm to victims of violence against women and girls. In 2022, MPs rejected an amendment to do so.

Women's Aid stated in February 2024 that specialist women's domestic abuse services in England have been facing a funding crisis for over a decade. This is due in part to local government budget cuts, but is also compounded by the rising cost of living and increased complexity of cases. A Local Government Association survey conducted in 2023 found that half of council leaders and chief executives were not confident that they would have enough funding to fulfil their statutory duties in the 2024/25 year - which includes the provision of services such as refuges and safe accommodation. In 2023 it was reported that rape crisis centres across the UK were having to close their waiting lists, due to a lack of funding. In some cases, the waiting time exceeded 18 months.

## A public health approach to tackling violence

- Violence is experienced by communities across the country. **The evidence supporting a public health approach to reducing violence is compelling.** The Green Party supports the use of violence reduction units and the need for them to be a focus on multi-agency working.
- In Scotland, the introduction of violence reduction units, coordinated with the Scottish Government's control over public services, has delivered a welcome decrease in violence. Elected Greens will push for more local control over public services and more effective joined up working across public services to deliver violence reduction strategies.
- Communities all over the country experience youth violence in particular. Many of the Green Party's proposals will, over time, reduce the level of violence affecting young people



A key purpose of the Serious Violence Duty is to ensure that multiple agencies work together to share data, knowledge and prevent and stop serious violence: it came into law in 2023/24 and most areas are working to improve partnership working. 'Over time' is the crucial point here - time is needed to see the effect of the current government's action. The public health approach to tackling violence requires a robust multi-agency approach sustained over the long-term. The PHA is unlikely to result in significant short-term visible benefits (as has been witnessed for VRUs), but should prove beneficial in the long term. The Greens' proposal to continue the current government's work to deliver a public health approach through funding VRUs and introducing the Serious Violence Duty is welcome.

## Elected Greens will also campaign to ensure that

- Local authorities are **properly funded to deliver youth services** including the youth workers who play a key role in keeping young people safe.
- Safeguarding is the priority in encounters between young people and the police.
- The use of traumatising tactics like stop and search becomes an exception, not routine.
- Children and young people are never **strip searched** without an appropriate adult present, and only in very exceptional circumstances.
- Youth workers rather than **police officers work with pupils in schools.**



During the period 2011 to 2021, funding of youth provision has declined in real terms from £1058.2m in 2011 to £408.5m in 2021, and the number of youth clubs operating in local authorities (according to available data) have nearly halved in number between 2011/12 and 2018/19 ([here](#))



Crest research into county lines found that strip searches could cause considerable trauma to young people. The Metropolitan Police changed their policy to ensure future strip searches of children take into account the safeguarding review conducted into Child Q - a 15 year old who was strip-searched, with no appropriate adult present, in December 2020. While new legal safeguards around strip-searching children and young people are welcome, more should be done to improve standards of practice across forces.



FOI requests reveal that there were 979 police officers (Safer Schools Officers) operating in UK schools in spring 2022. SSOs are designed to develop positive relationships between young people and the police and work alongside the school and local partners to prevent young people from becoming involved in crime. Research conducted by the Runnymede Trust found that SSOs are more likely to be based in schools in areas with higher numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals, and higher numbers of BAME students. Runnymede suggest that the presence of SSOs in schools and escalation of minor disciplinary issues to police matters can "facilitate the school-to-prison pipeline for young people".

## Reforming drug laws

- Elected Greens will push for the establishment of a National Commission to agree an evidence-based approach to reform of the UK's counterproductive drug laws.
- Neither prohibition nor the policing of low-level drug offences, especially cannabis possession, have reduced use and consequently have had no impact on the size of the criminal market or the profits made by organised crime.
- Elected Greens will therefore push to decriminalise personal possession of drugs, diverting people from the criminal justice system towards **support with addiction, housing and employment, from health workers focused on drug harm reduction.** This would free up hundreds of thousands of hours of police time, which could instead be invested in tackling other priorities which benefit wider society.



Current resourcing for drug treatment services is insufficient to meet demand and will need considerable investment. Dame Carol Black's review of drugs concluded that an additional £550 million is needed from the Dept for Health and Social Care by year 5 of the proposed plan, on top of baseline expenditure. An additional £15 million is needed from the Dept. for Work and Pensions for employment support. Additional investment is also recommended by NHS England for physical and mental health care for drug users.



## Liberal Democrats

- The Liberal Democrat manifesto is comprehensive in that it covers a large range of issues pertaining to crime, justice and policing. It also touches on issues of increasing importance but which were largely absent from the Conservative and Labour manifestos - such as online crime, and serious organised crime.
- Yet the manifesto is sometimes light on detail - for example talking about “restoring community policing” with little indication of what that would look like.
- Many of the pledges rely on additional funding and the manifesto is often vague on how much investment would be required (for example pledging they will “properly resource the NCA”), and where that would come from. There are also a lot of assumptions made about the ability of non CJS agencies (e.g. health) to support the CJS.



## Reform UK

- We note that the Reform Manifesto was amended between when it was published and the following week. Our commentary is based on the latest version.
- Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Reform manifesto has a heavy focus on enforcement - for example imposing mandatory life sentences for drug dealing and trafficking. These would require significant additional capacity throughout the system.
- While Reform does include ambitious new targets - increasing the “criminal justice budget” by £2billion, 40k new officers and 10k new detention places - the funding plans to pay for these lack detail and rely on a number of significant assumptions.
- Ambitions (e.g. “tackle youth crime”) can be light on detail and rely on tactics that are not based on the evidence of what works (e.g. military-style camps for young people involved in crime).



## Green Party

- The Green party manifesto contains the most ambitious funding pledges, including an additional £1.1 billion for the MoJ. As with the other parties, it is light on the detail of how this would be paid for.
- Interestingly, the Greens are the only party to mention legal aid in their manifesto. This is despite the fact that many areas of law remain out of scope for legal aid, with significant consequences for access to justice.