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# **Resources and the justice system**

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# Executive summary

The justice system in England and Wales is a significant area of public spending (£11.8 billion in day-to-day spending in 2025–26) and touches on almost every aspect of economic and social life. It has also seen many important changes and reforms in recent decades. Despite the scale of change and the central importance of justice in underpinning economic and social relations as well as trust in the state, economists have paid relatively little attention to these developments.

In this report, we bring together insights developed through the IFS Transforming Justice programme, established in 2024 and funded by the Nuffield Foundation, to respond to this relative lack of quantitative economic analysis. These insights emerge from a range of studies undertaken to date that examine different parts of the justice system. The programme is interested in all areas of the justice system, but the examples we draw on reflect the areas in which our analysis under the programme is most developed. We organise the evidence presented in this report around one connecting theme: the importance of understanding the role of resources for the functioning of the justice system, where resources refer not only to financial spending, but to a fuller set of inputs that shape the justice system's capacity and performance, including infrastructure and management. The studies presented demonstrate why it matters to understand how resources are deployed within the justice system, whether the system is allocating and using resources efficiently, and how resources shape justice outcomes and outcomes outside the justice system itself. While the important role of resources forms the backdrop of much existing legal and social science research on justice systems, our studies show how economics research can advance understanding of how justice systems work and how they may work better.

## Key insights

1. **The Ministry of Justice (MoJ)'s day-to-day budget – £11.8 billion in day-to-day spending in 2025–26 – is a key input into the financial resources of the justice system.** It saw large reductions in the early 2010s, followed by a partial recovery in recent years. Between 2007–08 and 2016–17, this budget was reduced by 33% in real terms, compared with a 3% reduction in total day-to-day departmental spending. MoJ spending began to recover from 2016–17, and by 2025–26 the day-to-day budget stood 2.4% below its 2002–03 level in real terms. Current plans imply real-terms growth in day-to-day justice funding of around 1.8% per year between 2025–26 and 2028–29, faster than the 1.2% per year average for overall departmental spending. **Recent increases are expected to undo, in aggregate, the spending reductions of the early 2010s, but spending per person in 2025–26 remains 17% lower than its 2002–03 level.**
2. **Pressures on justice system resources are shaped by demand on the system. For example, the number of open cases in party-to-state tribunals reached a record 330,000 in early 2026, driven largely by rapid growth in the number of appeals.** As a result, average waiting times have risen substantially: asylum and immigration appeals were taking 61 weeks to resolve in early 2026, compared with 23 weeks in 2013, while social security appeals (predominantly for disability benefit applications) were taking 35 weeks, compared with 18 weeks in 2013. These delays – in part a result of increasingly stretched resources – appear to reflect rising demand more than a recent deterioration in the productivity of tribunals.
3. **Productivity, management and organisation can, however, have large effects on outcomes in the justice system,** helping to determine how effectively justice institutions convert existing resources into results. We provide three examples. **In the Crown Court, sitting days increased by 32% between 2019 and 2024, but case disposals rose by only 20%, which helps explain why backlogs continued to grow despite increased court capacity.** In policing, differences in the characteristics and operational practices of Borough Commanders explain around one-quarter of the variation in crimes solved per officer across London police divisions. Finally, in prisons, independent inspections reduced violence by around 12 incidents per 1,000 prisoners per month in the 15 months following an inspection, without requiring an increase in staffing or expenditure. Instead, inspections appear to work by changing how existing resources and practices are managed.

4. **The geographic allocation of justice resources can affect access to justice and outcomes.** Since the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, volumes of civil legal aid cases have fallen by around 57%, and **the number of providers has fallen from roughly 3,000 in 2010 to 1,400 by 2024, leaving 38 local authorities with no observed civil legal aid provider activity in 2023.** In London, police station closures increased the average distance for households to the nearest station from around 1.3 kilometres to 3 kilometres and were associated with a 9% increase in violent crime in affected neighbourhoods. **Court closures have similarly increased travel distances, with the average distance for households to their nearest magistrates' court more than doubling, from 5.7 kilometres to 12.1 kilometres.**
5. The justice system can be affected by decisions made about resource allocation outside the system. For example, following a 71% real-terms reduction in youth service spending between 2011 and 2019, around 40% of youth clubs closed, and young people in London who lost access to nearby clubs became 14% more likely to commit an offence. Evidence from Sure Start similarly suggests that early years interventions can reduce more serious offending later in life. These examples show that **spending on services for children and families can generate substantial downstream effects on crime and reduce pressures on justice institutions**, meaning the returns to such spending may be larger than conventional assessments imply.
6. **How we measure the benefits of justice interventions can substantially affect assessments of value for money.** We illustrate this with an example using the fact that conventional estimates of the social costs of crime primarily focus on victims. However, evidence presented in this report suggests that crime also imposes high costs on witnesses. Accounting for these wider effects increases estimated social costs of individual crimes by around 25% on average and by around 28% for violent crime. **Over time, victimisation rates fell by 25% between 2003–04 and 2014–15, yet once the costs borne by witnesses are included, the aggregate social costs of crime are estimated to have remained largely unchanged.** These findings suggest that the returns to policies that prevent crime – from being witnesses to reducing victimisation – may be substantially larger than conventional measures imply.
7. **Together, these findings point to a broader conclusion. Budget levels alone do not capture all the constraints facing the justice system.** How resources are used and how different parts of the system interact matter as much as how much is spent, and decisions about resource allocation made outside the justice system can shape its outcomes too.

# 1. Introduction

The justice system is important to social and economic well-being and represents a significant area of public spending. The justice system includes criminal justice, which ranges from community policing to hearings in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court determining whether people are guilty of criminal offences, from more minor offences to the most serious crimes, as well as the prison system, which manages those given custodial sentences. It also includes many other areas which often receive less attention. The family justice system manages disputes between family members, as well as cases where the state intervenes in family life, such as care proceedings or domestic abuse injunctions. The civil justice system handles cases between private actors, ranging from High Court litigation between large corporations to County Court disputes that can include contractual disagreements between small businesses or individuals, debt claims, and housing possession and eviction proceedings. The tribunals system handles hundreds of thousands of matters each year relating to administrative justice, where individuals have disputes with the state over issues such as benefits and immigration decisions. Other parts of the tribunals system handle large numbers of employment law cases, as well as issues related to disagreements between landlords and tenants. Some of this involves judges hearing cases and making decisions, but it also encompasses a much broader range of systems and practices, including alternative forms of dispute resolution and settlement, as well as the institutions that enforce decisions once they are made. All of this is part of a complex web of the contemporary justice system in England and Wales, and it touches on almost every aspect of social and economic life.

In recent decades, the justice system has undergone many reforms. These have included changes to spending, notably long-term reductions in public spending allocated to the system, and especially reductions in legal aid eligibility. They have also included a sizeable reduction in the physical courts estate, with many courts and tribunal buildings closing. In parallel, many justice processes have been digitalised, with large numbers of hearings now taking place entirely online or in some hybrid format. There are growing debates about possible use cases for artificial intelligence (AI) in the justice system and the effects of litigants and legal practitioners, including adjudicators, using AI during cases (Sargeant, 2026). The justice system we have now differs in many ways from the one we had two decades ago, and it is unlikely the pace of change will slow.

Despite the scale of change and the central importance of justice to everyday social and economic life, economists have, to date, paid relatively little attention to these developments. This was the primary motivation of the Institute for Fiscal Studies in establishing its

Transforming Justice programme, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, to understand and scrutinise this area of government in ways similar to those it has traditionally done in areas such as the tax, benefits and education systems.

In this report, we bring together and update the findings we have been developing through the IFS Transforming Justice programme, which was established in 2024 and runs until 2028. These are emerging from a range of economic studies of different parts of the justice system. The studies drawn on in this report are at different stages of publication, from working papers to published articles, and most are available on the Transforming Justice programme webpage (<https://ifs.org.uk/transforming-justice-interplay-social-change-and-policy-reforms>). However, in this report, we point to a connecting theme: the importance of developing greater understanding of the role of resources in the justice system. Throughout, the term ‘resources’ refers not only to financial spending but to the full set of inputs that shape the justice system’s capacity and performance, including infrastructure, time and management.

The studies we present demonstrate why it matters to understand how such resources are deployed within the justice system, whether the system is allocating and using resources efficiently, and how resources shape outcomes, not just for the justice system directly but across a diverse range of possible externalities, including (though not something we measure directly) the level and quality of access to justice for the public. While the important role of resources forms the backdrop of much existing legal and social science research on justice systems, these studies show how contributions from economics can foreground this issue and advance understanding of how justice systems work and how they might work better. As the programme develops, our analyses have so far concentrated primarily on criminal justice, with civil and family justice becoming an increasing area of focus.

The report is organised as follows. Chapter 2 considers how the level and composition of public spending on the justice system have changed over time. Chapter 3 documents increasing demand pressures on various parts of the tribunals system. Chapter 4 presents evidence on the efficiency with which resources are used across different parts of the criminal justice system, focusing on issues such as productivity, management and organisation. Chapter 5 considers how the geographic distribution of resources shapes the justice system’s performance. Chapter 6 provides evidence on how policy decisions outside the justice system shape demands on the justice system. Chapter 7 looks at measuring the returns to crime prevention, which underpins cost–benefit analysis of interventions in the criminal justice system. Chapter 8 briefly concludes.

## 2. Public spending on the justice system

We start with how much public spending is allocated to the justice system; the justice system cannot be understood without looking at the financial resources available to it. Courts, prisons, probation and legal aid all depend on public spending decisions, most of which are captured in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ)’s day-to-day budget. As highlighted throughout the report, funding does not automatically translate into good performance – other resource inputs, such as infrastructure and management, also matter. However, persistently lower levels of funding relative to demand can leave services with little capacity to respond to demand, cover routine building upkeep, recruit staff, pay providers, or implement reforms to improve underperforming parts of the system. In this chapter, we update previous analysis (Domínguez and Zaranko, 2025), examining how the MoJ’s day-to-day funding has changed over more than two decades, how it compares with other departments and how spending pressures are distributed within the justice system.

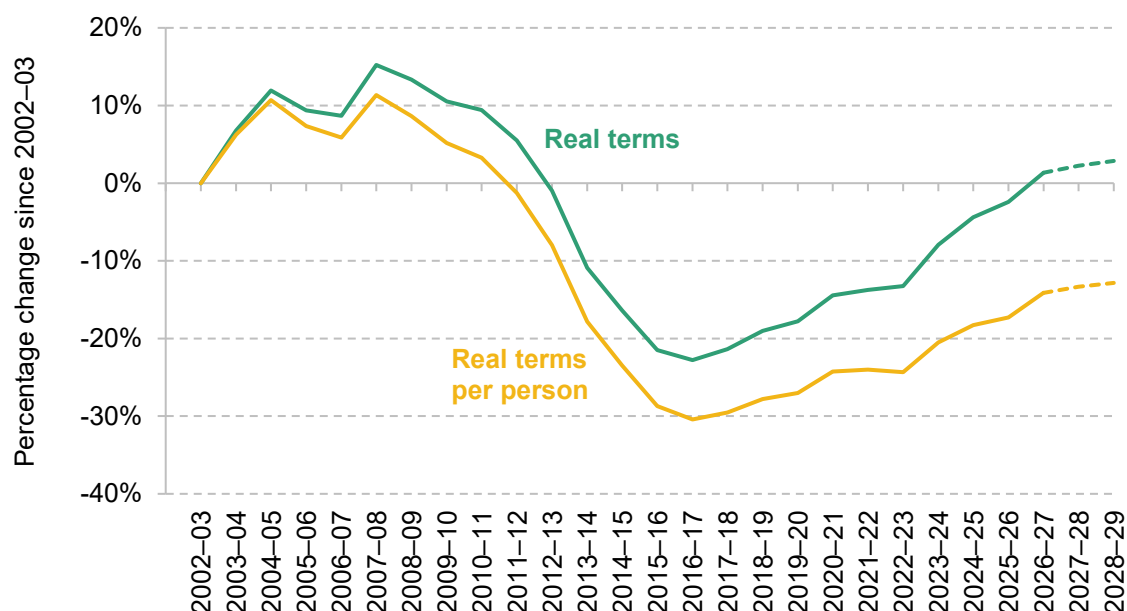
In this chapter, ‘justice spending’ refers primarily to day-to-day spending by the MoJ, the department responsible for funding and overseeing most functions of the justice system in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> Justice is largely a devolved matter, with the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive responsible for their own justice systems, so the analysis here relates only to England and Wales. This day-to-day spending covers courts, prisons, probation, legal aid and the wider department. In 2025–26, MoJ resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) was £11.8 billion, alongside capital DEL of £2.2 billion (HM Treasury, 2026). The MoJ’s spending does not capture all public spending that affects the justice system. For instance, police funding sits largely outside the MoJ, funded through Home Office budgets supplemented by a precept on council tax set by Police and Crime Commissioners, with small additional flows through local government finance arrangements. Total funding for policing in England and Wales was £19.9 billion in 2025–26 (Home Office, 2025). Police resources and activity are nevertheless central to the functioning of the justice system, because they influence the flow of cases into courts and the pressures subsequently faced by prisons, probation and other services. The analysis below should therefore be read as a focused account of MoJ funding, rather than a

<sup>1</sup> Day-to-day (resource) spending makes up the large majority of the MoJ budget, around 85% of the total in 2025–26.

complete measure of spending across the full breadth of the justice system. Private expenditure, such as court fees and privately funded legal advice, also falls outside this picture.

As Figure 2.1 shows, the broad story is one of significant spending reductions in the early 2010s, followed by a partial recovery in recent years. Between 2007–08 and 2016–17, the MoJ day-to-day budget was cut by 33% in real terms, compared with a 3% reduction to total day-to-day departmental spending (Domínguez and Zaranko, 2025). Justice therefore fared worse than the average government department, some of which were protected from budget cuts in the early 2000s (Domínguez, Zaranko and Tomlinson, 2026). Spending began to increase from its low point in 2016–17, and by 2025–26 the day-to-day budget stood 2.4% below its 2002–03 level in real terms (see below for how the evolution of justice spending compares with other departments).

**Figure 2.1. Real-terms Ministry of Justice day-to-day spending: percentage change since 2002–03**



Note: Values denote the change in resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) excluding depreciation, estimated based on the methodology outlined in the appendix of Domínguez and Zaranko (2025). Dashed lines indicate plans as of 2025 Spending Review and OBR GDP deflator.

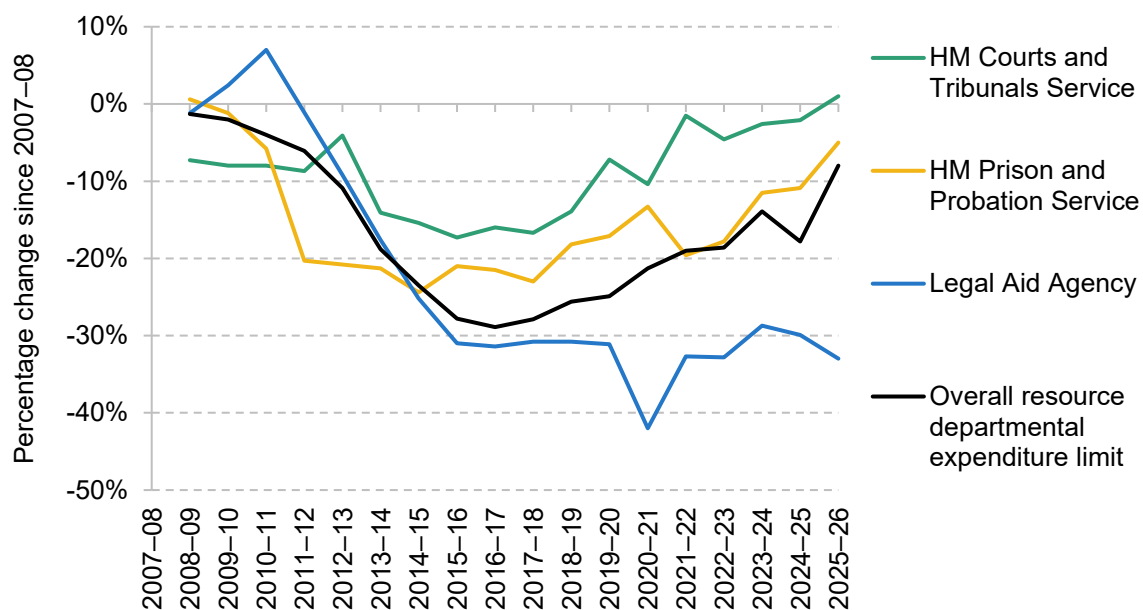
Source: Authors' calculations using HM Treasury Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (various), Spending Review 2025, Office for Budget Responsibility Public Finances Databank, Office for Budget Responsibility Economic and Fiscal Outlook March 2026, and Office for National Statistics UK population mid-year estimates.

The June 2025 Spending Review continued to increase spending on justice. First, justice was a 'relative winner' (Johnson, 2025), with day-to-day spending growing faster than the average department. Current plans imply real-terms growth in day-to-day justice funding of around 1.8% per year between 2025–26 and 2028–29, faster than the 1.2% per year average for overall departmental spending. By 2026–27, real-terms MoJ resource spending is set to be around 1.3%

above its 2002–03 level. In that narrow sense, recent increases are expected to undo the cuts of the early 2010s in aggregate. However, spending per person in 2025–26 remains 17.3% lower than its 2002–03 level, meaning that a justice system serving a larger population with similar aggregate funding has less resource per potential user.

Second, looking back to 2007–08, before the major reductions in spending, the MoJ’s current budget is still set to be around 12.0% lower in real terms by 2026–27. Over the same period, total departmental spending is set to be 15.7% higher, health and social care 62.2% higher, education 11.4% higher and defence 1.0% lower.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, spending on justice has followed a path of resource squeezing compared with other parts of state spending. This relative position matters because MoJ-funded services are interdependent both across departments and within the MoJ’s own remit. Police activity, funded largely through the Home Office and local government, affects the flow of cases into courts, as does Border Force activity, which shapes the flow of immigration and asylum cases into the tribunals system. Within the MoJ, court delays affect victims, defendants, witnesses and prisons. Prison capacity affects sentencing, remand and rehabilitation. Legal aid affects whether people can resolve problems early or navigate proceedings fairly.

**Figure 2.2. Real-terms Ministry of Justice day-to-day spending by category: percentage change since 2007–08**



Note: HM Courts and Tribunals series is adjusted for fee income for years prior to 2016–17, as explained in Domínguez and Zaranko (2025).

Source: Ministry of Justice and HM Courts and Tribunals annual report and accounts, various years.

<sup>2</sup> Authors’ calculations, updating Domínguez and Zaranko (2025); see note to Figure 2.1 for full sources.

Third, in addition to total spending, the composition of spending is also important: as Figure 2.2 shows, spending has not evolved evenly across the different responsibilities of the MoJ. HM Courts and Tribunals Service, which accounts for around a fifth of day-to-day spending, experienced smaller reductions in the early 2010s than some other parts of the department. HM Prison and Probation Service, which accounts for nearly half of day-to-day spending, and the Legal Aid Agency, which accounts for around a fifth, experienced much larger reductions. In recent years, prison and probation spending has clearly been prioritised, while legal aid has remained relatively deprioritised. See Figure A.1 in the appendix for a breakdown of MoJ spending by area.

The spending picture therefore helps explain why different parts of the justice system are under different forms of strain. Prisons and probation have absorbed large numbers under their management and are now being prioritised in recent budgets, but still face capacity challenges (Ministry of Justice, 2026). Courts have received additional resources in terms of sitting days, but backlogs remain at record highs (Domínguez and Zaranko, 2025). Legal aid has experienced sustained reductions, raising concerns about access to justice via this service (Burrows and Domínguez, 2026).

Lastly, it is worth highlighting a tension between spending plans and current policy ambition. The 2024 Labour manifesto set out an ambitious agenda: tackling the court backlog, delivering major justice system reforms, expanding prison capacity and improving core services. Current plans provide real-terms increases of 1.8% per year up to 2028–29, slightly faster than forecast GDP growth over the same period (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2026). Relative to the scale of the cuts seen in the early 2010s, however, this recovery remains modest: current plans are not enough to restore spending per person to its 2002–03 level. Unless plans are revised upwards at the next Spending Review, there is uncertainty about whether available funding will be sufficient to deliver all commitments and, if not, which ones will be prioritised.

The history of justice spending over the past two decades highlights an important theme that runs through the rest of this report. Resources matter, and sustained reductions in funding can place pressure on the justice system. But spending alone does not determine outcomes. Similar levels of funding can produce very different results depending on how resources are managed, allocated and used, how demand evolves and how different parts of the justice system interact with one another. The remainder of the report explores these issues, examining how resources translate into outcomes across courts, tribunals, policing, prisons and wider justice-related services.

### 3. Demand pressures on the justice system

Even well-managed justice institutions can come under strain if the number of cases they are asked to handle grows faster than the resources available to process them. Therefore, understanding pressures on the justice system requires looking not only at the supply of resources but also at the forces that generate demand – namely, the number and nature of legal disputes or problems requiring resolution through the formal justice system. The current situation in the tribunals system provides a useful illustration.

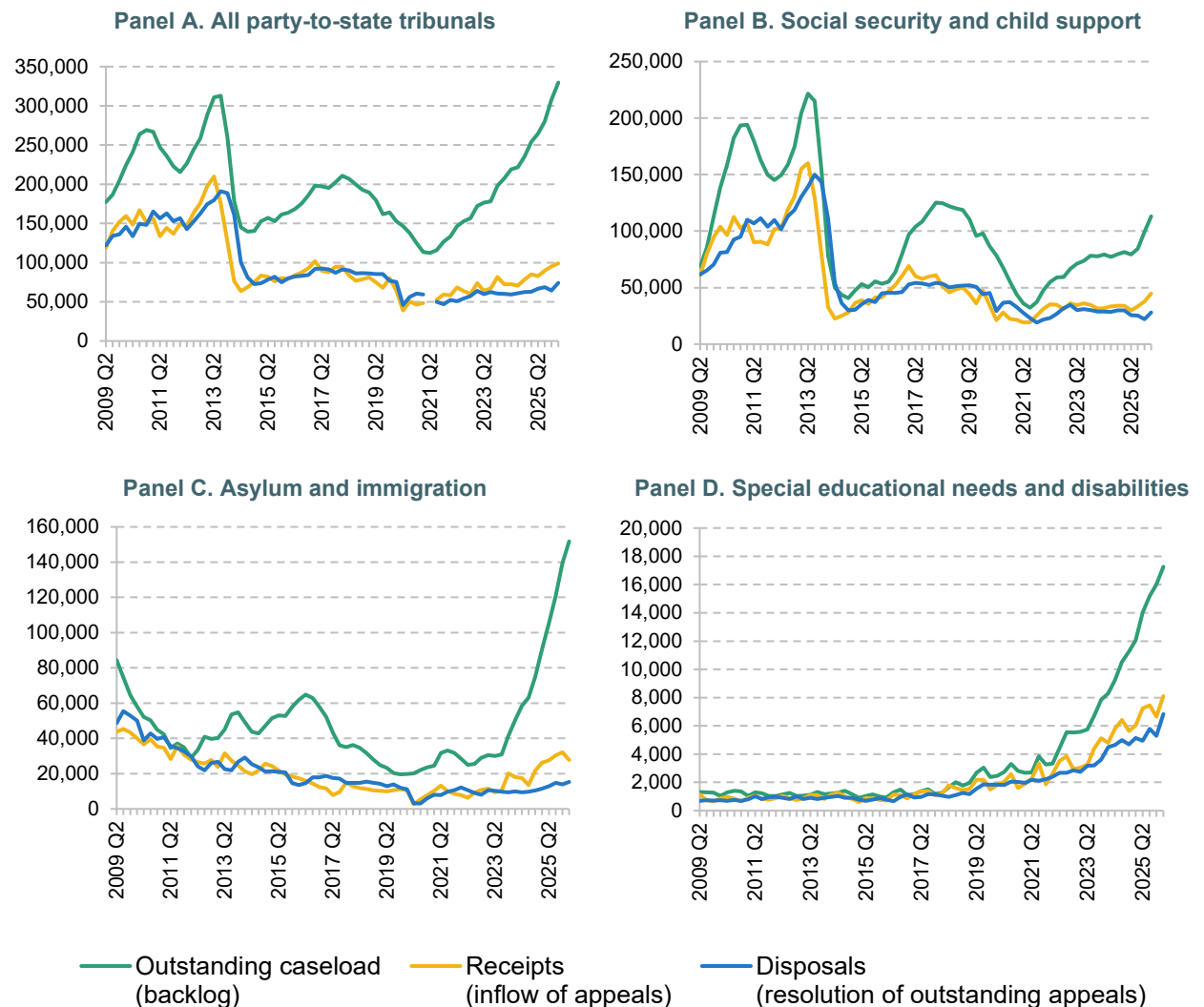
Tribunals are a central part of the justice system. They provide a route for individuals to appeal against decisions (known as ‘administrative appeals’) taken by public bodies in a wide range of areas, including social security benefits, immigration and asylum, and special educational needs and disability (SEND) provision. Tribunals are intended to be more accessible, less formal and less costly than traditional courts, often combining legal expertise with specialist knowledge of issues such as education, disability or medicine. In recent years, however, the system has come under growing strain, as backlogs and waiting times have increased.

The picture differs across tribunal areas, but they share a common pattern: the number of new cases reaching tribunals has risen faster than the system’s ability to resolve them. Tribunal backlogs were high in the early 2010s, before falling substantially later in that decade following reforms that reduced the number of cases reaching the tribunals, as shown in Panel A of Figure 3.1. Recently, however, backlogs in administrative appeals have risen steeply and persistently. As of the first quarter of 2026, a record 330,000 cases were open and awaiting resolution in party-to-state tribunals. This chapter reports findings produced by the IFS Transforming Justice programme in Rizzotti and Tomlinson (2026).

The rise in backlogs reflects a simple imbalance: more appeals are being received than are being resolved. This is especially clear in asylum and immigration (Panel C) and SEND (Panel D), which have experienced the sharpest increases in backlogs. In both areas, open caseloads are now more than six times higher than they were five years earlier. Appeal receipts have also risen sharply: by the first quarter of 2026, they were around 2.7 times higher in asylum and immigration and 4.3 times higher in SEND than five years earlier. Disposals have increased in both these jurisdictions, but not enough to offset the growth in incoming cases. Social security appeal receipts have remained relatively flat, as have disposals, but the Social Security and Child

Support Tribunal (Panel B) is still gradually accumulating a backlog because receipts continue to exceed disposals.

**Figure 3.1. Receipts (inflows), disposals (outflows) and outstanding caseloads (backlogs) in tribunals**



Note: Data on receipts and disposals in the employment tribunals are missing for the second quarter of 2021 because of the migration to a new case management system. Since receipts and disposals for party-to-state tribunals excluding employment tribunals (Panel A) are computed by subtracting employment tribunal receipts and disposals from the total, these series are also missing for the second quarter of 2021.

Source: HM Courts and Tribunals Service tribunals quarterly data.

Rising backlogs matter because they lead to longer wait times for decisions that can have major consequences for people's lives. The available data indicate pressure along this dimension. By early 2026, asylum and immigration appeals were taking an average of 61 weeks from receipt to disposal, compared with 23 weeks at the beginning of 2013. Social security appeals were taking on average 35 weeks, compared with 18 weeks in early 2013. These figures reflect cases that

have already been resolved, so they may not fully capture the wait times experienced by those currently in the backlog.

The recent growth in tribunal backlogs appears to have been triggered mainly by rising demand rather than by a deterioration in tribunal productivity. There are three broad ways demand can increase.

First, there may be more underlying applications for public services or entitlements, such as applications for education, health and care (EHC) plans, asylum claims or disability benefits. Second, first-instance decision-makers, including local authorities, the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions, can affect the number of cases reaching tribunals through the decisions they make and the speed at which they make them. Third, applicants may become more or less likely to appeal after receiving an adverse decision, because of changes in awareness, access to advice, expectations about success, or the costs and difficulty of appealing.

**Table 3.1. SEND requests, refusal rate, appeal rate and success rate at appeal**

| Stage                     | Financial year 2016–17 | Financial year 2025–26 |
|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>At local authority</b> |                        |                        |
| Total receipts            | 55,235                 | 162,702                |
| Refusal rate              | 29.8%                  | 31.0%                  |
| <b>At SEND tribunal</b>   |                        |                        |
| Total appeals             | 4,277                  | 29,446                 |
| Appeal rate               | 7.7%                   | 18.1%                  |
| Success rate              | 93.9%                  | 99.2% <sup>a</sup>     |

<sup>a</sup> This success rate refers to financial year 2024–25, rather than 2025–26 like the other figures in the column, because it is the latest available one.

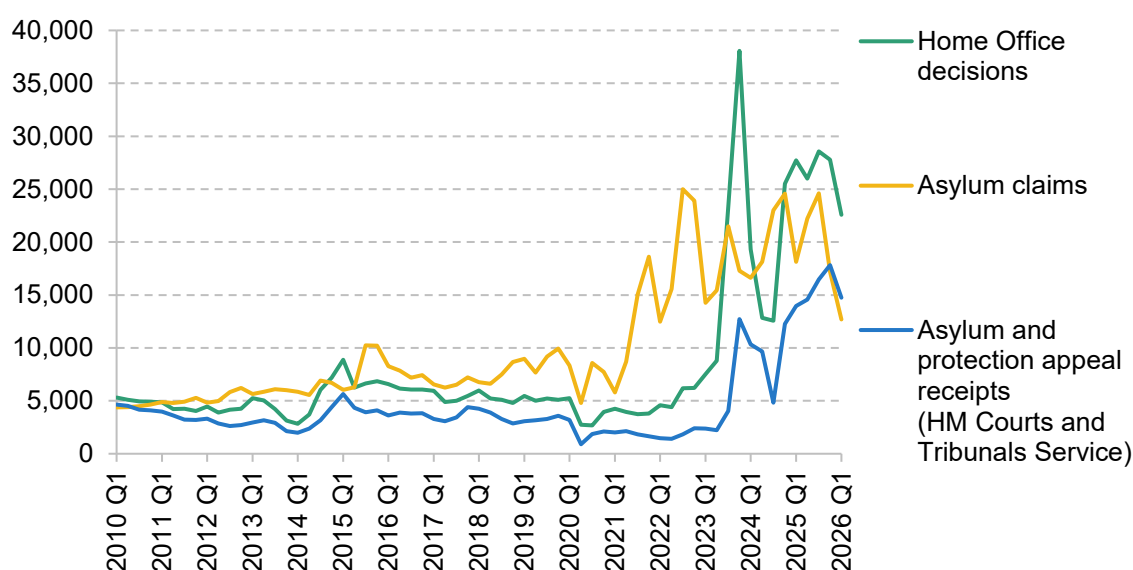
Note: Tribunals data for SEND are available at the financial year level, while the numbers of SEND requests and initial refusals from the local authorities are available at the calendar year level. We match the information on SEND for calendar year 2016 with the tribunals data for financial year 2016–17, and so on. Success rate is only available at the academic year level. We assign the success rate observed in academic year 2016–17 to the appeals lodged in financial year 2016–17. We index everything at the financial year level.

Source: HM Courts and Tribunals Service tribunals quarterly data and Department for Education's Explore Education Statistics.

The strength of these drivers of demand differs across tribunal areas. In SEND, the number of initial requests submitted to local authorities has risen strongly, from around 55,000 in 2016–17 to around 160,000 in 2025–26 (Table 3.1). However, the share of requests rejected by local authorities has remained broadly stable at around 30%. On the other hand, families have become

more likely to appeal when they do not receive the support they sought. The appeal rate after refusal rose from around 7.7% in 2016–17 to around 18.1% in 2025–26. A decomposition analysis suggests that around 60% of the increase in SEND appeals over this period was due to more requests for SEND assessments, while around 40% was due to a higher propensity to appeal after an unsatisfactory local authority decision. Changes in refusal rates by local authorities played little to no role. SEND appeal success rates have also remained exceptionally high, going from 94% in 2016–17 to 99% in 2024–25, which may help explain why families are becoming more likely to appeal.<sup>3,4</sup>

**Figure 3.2. Asylum claims, Home Office decisions and appeals received**



Source: HM Courts and Tribunals Service tribunals quarterly data and Home Office immigration system statistics.

In asylum and immigration, recent pressure has been concentrated in asylum and protection appeals.<sup>5</sup> These appeals have been uniquely affected by the pace at which the public body responsible for the initial decision, the Home Office, processes claims. When fewer asylum claims are processed, fewer appealable decisions are produced; when claims are processed faster, more cases can potentially reach the tribunal. Recent asylum trends show this mechanism clearly (Figure 3.2). As asylum claims rose sharply from 2021, Home Office decision-making initially slowed, limiting the immediate flow of appeals. From 2023, the Home Office began

<sup>3</sup> The success rate for 2025–26 is not yet available.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Success’ here means the tribunal decided in favour of the appellant rather than upholding the local authority’s original decision. This is a binary measure and does not indicate whether the appellant received everything they had requested or a part of it, only that some change to the original decision was granted.

<sup>5</sup> Protection differs from asylum because, although humanitarian protection is also a form of leave considered by the Home Office in asylum claims, it applies to people who may not qualify for refugee status under the Refugee Convention but would still face a real risk of serious harm if returned.

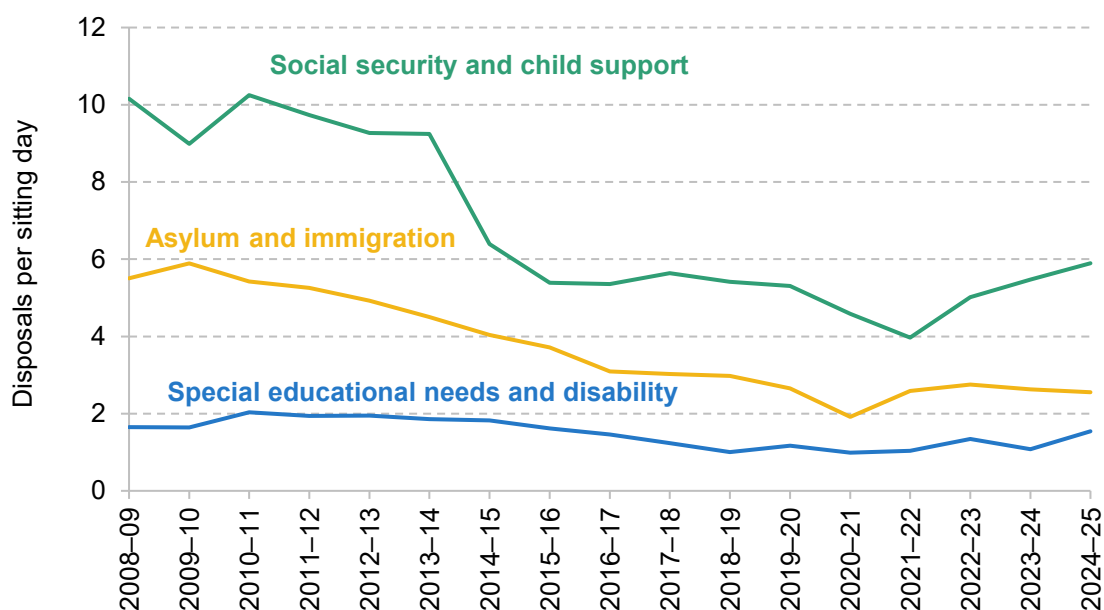
processing claims at an unprecedented pace, which increased pressure on tribunals by generating more decisions that could be, and in some cases were, appealed.

The spike in asylum and protection appeals since 2023 therefore appears to have been driven mainly by higher asylum claims and faster Home Office decision-making. A decomposition exercise suggests that, between 2017 and 2025, the factors pushing appeals upwards were the increase in asylum claims and the higher Home Office decision rate, with the appeal rate playing a much smaller role. The first two factors account for almost all the upward pressure on appeals: the volume of asylum claims explains roughly two-thirds of it, while the Home Office decision rate explains nearly all the remaining third. By contrast, the Home Office refusal rate decreased over the period, and partially offset the increase in the other factors: had it remained constant, with everything else moving as it did, growth in appeals would have been around 10.7% larger over this period. Asylum appeal success rates have been relatively stable since 2019 at between 45% and 50%, though it dipped to 40% in 2025.

Social security appeals, most of which relate to personal independence payment (PIP, a disability benefit), have followed a different pattern. Although PIP applications to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) increased substantially, from around 854,000 in 2019–20 to around 930,000 in 2025–26, PIP appeals decreased. This contrasts with SEND and asylum, where both initial applications and downstream appeals have increased over time. A key reason is Mandatory Reconsideration, an additional review stage within the DWP that applicants must normally complete before they can appeal to the tribunal. Mandatory Reconsideration affects tribunal demand by acting as a filter. It can resolve disputes before they reach the tribunal, but it can also reduce appeals because some applicants do not request reconsideration, or because they are refused at reconsideration and do not continue to the tribunal. This means the number of PIP appeals depends on potential attrition at several points: how many applicants are refused initially, how many request reconsideration, how many are refused at reconsideration and, finally, how many then go on to appeal.

The initial PIP refusal rate has stayed relatively stable at around 50%, but the share of initially refused applicants requesting Mandatory Reconsideration fell from slightly more than 40% in 2019–20 to slightly more than 30% in 2025–26. Among those who did request reconsideration, the refusal rate rose from around 66% to around 74%. Among those refused at reconsideration, the share who went on to appeal fell from around 52% to around 44%. Therefore, even though a larger share of applicants are now refused at Mandatory Reconsideration, which increases the number of people who could potentially appeal, fewer initially refused applicants are requesting reconsideration and fewer of those refused at reconsideration are going on to appeal. This has helped keep the tribunal caseload down.

Figure 3.3. Disposals per sitting day by jurisdiction



Note: Disposals per sitting day is calculated as the number of case disposals divided by the number of sitting days in each quarter, by jurisdiction.

Source: HM Courts and Tribunals Service tribunals quarterly data.

As an illustrative upper-bound scenario, if everyone who requested Mandatory Reconsideration had instead been appealed directly after an initial refusal, the social security tribunal's workload would have been roughly three times as high each year. Mandatory Reconsideration therefore appears to have eased pressure on tribunals, although the precise size of that effect is uncertain. It is also unclear how individuals who drop out of the process before lodging an appeal would have fared at tribunal. Some may have had weak cases, but others may have been entitled to benefits if accurately assessed. Mandatory Reconsideration may therefore, in part, reduce tribunal caseloads by discouraging some people from pursuing claims that might otherwise have succeeded.

Having examined why more appeals are reaching tribunals, we turn to the other side of the backlog equation and ask whether tribunals have become less productive in resolving cases. One simple measure of productivity is the number of cases disposed of per sitting day. According to this metric, tribunal productivity fell across all jurisdictions during much of the 2010s (Figure 3.3).<sup>6</sup> Since the end of the 2010s, however, it has been relatively stable, with some signs of modest improvement. The recent spike in backlogs therefore did not coincide with a clear fall in this measure of productivity, although productivity remains near historic lows. This suggests that the sharp increase in backlogs was not primarily caused by a sudden deterioration in tribunal productivity.

<sup>6</sup> This part of the analysis stops at financial year 2024-25 because the data used to measure productivity have not yet been released for 2025-26.

Additional capacity could still have helped tribunals absorb the increase in the number of cases received. To get a sense of how adding capacity might have helped, we estimate the additional capacity needed to prevent backlogs from rising after 2020–21. Mechanically, this equals the number of additional disposals required between 2021–22 and 2024–25 to keep the open caseload constant. We then translate those additional disposals into two equivalent measures: the number of extra sitting days that would have been needed, assuming unchanged disposals per sitting day; and the increase in disposals per sitting day that would have been needed, assuming unchanged sitting days.

This exercise reveals that, to keep backlogs at their 2020–21 level, capacity would have needed to be around 13% higher in social security, around 21% higher in SEND, and around 35% higher in asylum and immigration. Practically, assuming unchanged productivity in terms of case disposals per day, it would have required around 2,500 additional sitting days per year in both social security and SEND, and around 5,000 per year in asylum and immigration. Alternatively, with sitting days unchanged, average disposals per sitting day would have needed to rise by around 0.6 cases in social security, 0.3 cases in SEND and 0.9 cases in asylum and immigration. It is important to acknowledge that these counterfactual changes in productivity may not have been feasible in practice.

We also look at case management, using adjournments and postponements as indicators of whether cases are moving smoothly through the system. An adjournment occurs when proceedings begin but cannot be completed on the day, while a postponement occurs when a hearing is moved to a later date before it starts. In 2024–25, around one-in-five social security hearings and one-in-four asylum and immigration hearings were adjourned, higher shares than in the past. SEND has lower adjournment rates but very high postponement rates, with around 70% of hearings postponed in 2023–24. It is important to acknowledge that these trends may reflect a range of factors, including weaker case management, lower compliance among users or public bodies, and increased case complexity.

Overall, the recent rise in tribunal backlogs appears to have been triggered by a sharp increase in demand that the system was not well equipped to absorb. The sources of this demand differ across jurisdictions, reflecting changes in underlying applications, first-instance decision-making, and applicants' behaviour after receiving an adverse decision. This evidence illustrates a broader lesson about pressures on the justice system. Growing backlogs are not necessarily evidence of declining performance or insufficient effort within justice institutions themselves. They can also arise when demand, sometimes generated by dynamics elsewhere, grows faster than existing capacity.

## 4. The efficient use of resources in the justice system

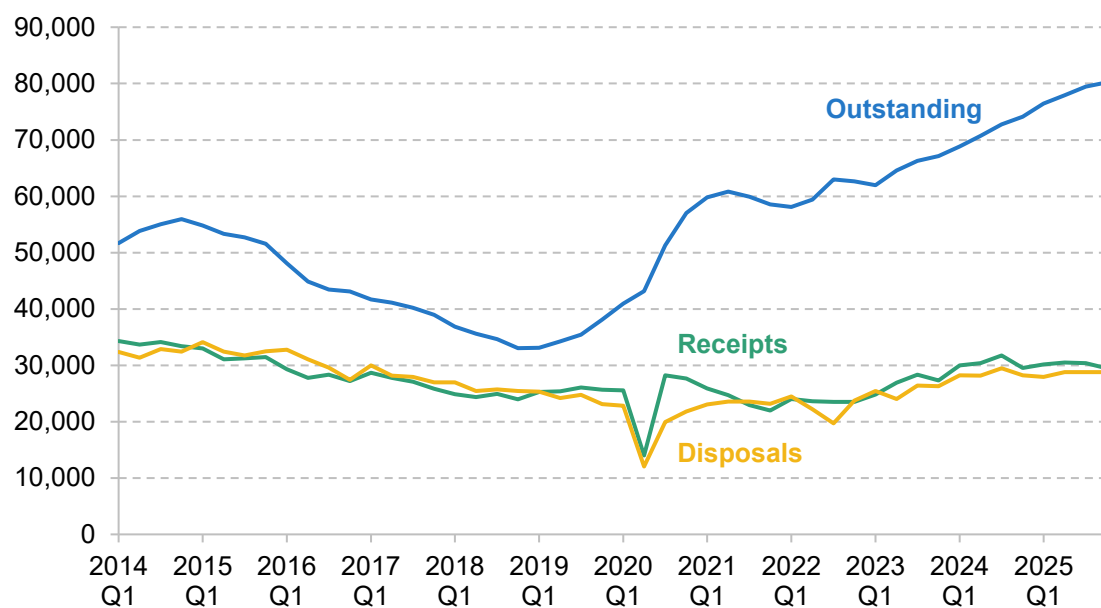
The resources allocated to justice institutions and the level of demand they face matter, but so too does how efficiently funding and other resources are used. This chapter explores how efficiently resources are being used across different parts of the criminal justice system, focusing on issues such as productivity, management and organisation, and on why additional resources do not always translate into better performance. The discussion begins with the Crown Court, where backlogs have continued to grow despite increased capacity, and then draws on evidence from policing and prisons to show how management practices, rather than financial resources, can shape results in the justice system.

### 4.1 Crown Court productivity

The Crown Court is one of the most visible and consequential parts of the justice system in England and Wales. It deals with the most serious criminal cases, including offences such as murder, rape and robbery, as well as some appeals and cases sent from magistrates' courts. This section updates and extends the analysis in Domínguez, Tomlinson and Zaranko (2025). As shown in Figure 4.1, in the fourth quarter of 2025, the Crown Court had approximately 29,000 new cases, 29,000 disposed cases and 80,000 outstanding cases. The number of outstanding cases was around 8% higher than a year earlier, exceeding the MoJ's previous projection of 64,000 for early 2025 (National Audit Office, 2024), and more than double the roughly 38,000 outstanding cases recorded in quarter 4 of 2019. The COVID-19 lockdowns caused a sharp initial increase, but the backlog continued to grow after the pandemic's most acute phase.

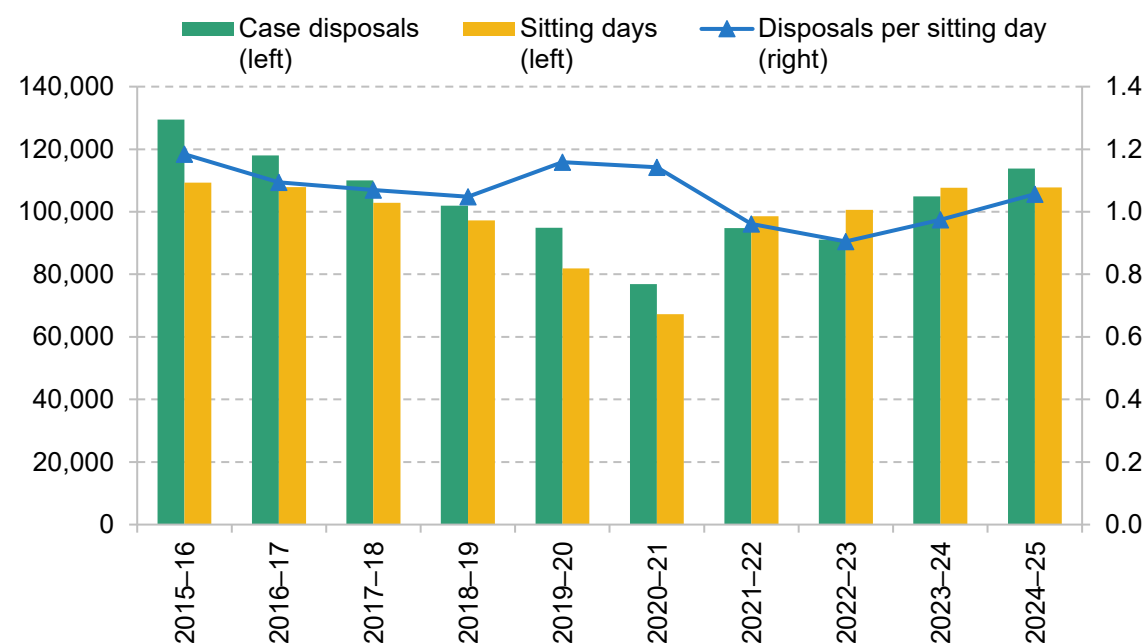
A central puzzle facing policymakers is that the Crown Court backlog has continued to grow despite a substantial increase in sitting days. Sitting days are the main metric used to plan and fund Crown Court capacity. They measure the number of days judges sit in court to hear cases. They are not a complete measure of all inputs, but they are the clearest measure of the court time available to process cases. Figure 4.2 shows that between 2019–20 and 2024–25, the number of Crown Court sitting days increased by 32%.

**Figure 4.1. Receipts (inflow), disposals (outflow) and outstanding caseload (backlog) in the Crown Court in England and Wales**



Source: Ministry of Justice criminal court statistics quarterly.

**Figure 4.2. Case disposals and sitting days (left) and disposals per sitting day (right) in the Crown Court, by financial year**



Source: Authors' calculations using Ministry of Justice criminal court statistics quarterly and HM Courts and Tribunals Service management information.

While the increase in sitting days should have enabled the system to process many more cases, it did not result in an equivalent increase in case disposals. Disposals – cases completed or otherwise concluded – were only 20% higher in 2024–25 than in 2019–20. In other words, the Crown Court was using more sitting days, but each sitting day was producing fewer completed cases than before. This gap between inputs and outputs is central to understanding why the backlog has continued to rise. This section examines why additional sitting days have not yet reduced the case backlog.

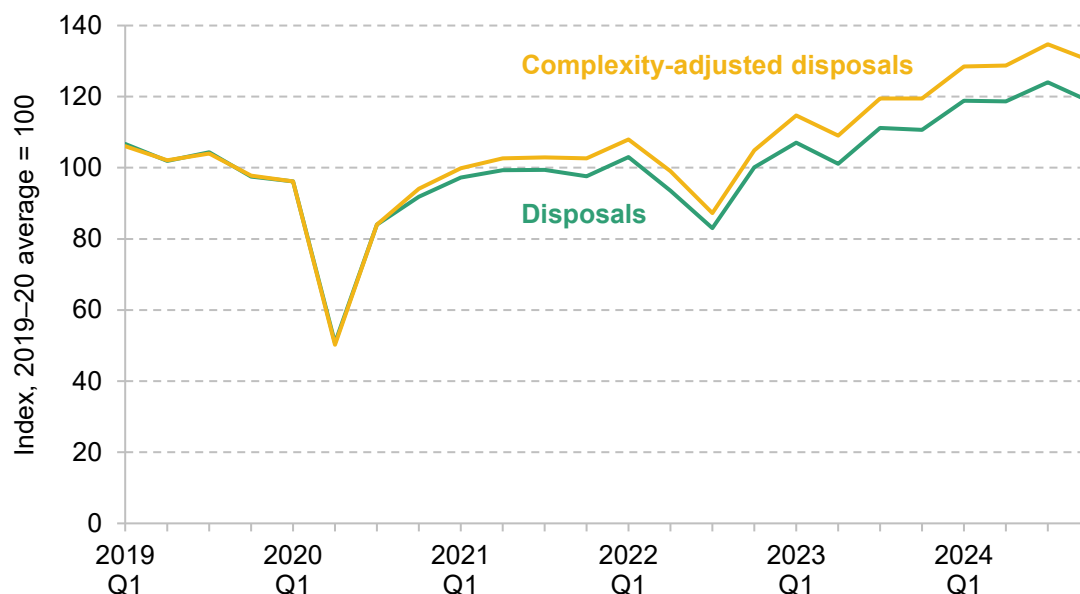
A useful way to see this is to look at disposals per sitting day, which we take as a proxy for productivity. As shown in Figure 4.2, before the pandemic, the Crown Court typically disposed of at least one case per sitting day. In 2019–20, the rate was 1.16. It then fell to 0.96 in 2021–22 and 0.91 in 2022–23, before recovering to 0.97 in 2023–24 and 1.06 in 2024–25. While there has been a recent improvement, productivity remained below the 2019–20 level.

The scale of the effect is large. If the 2019–20 disposal rate had been maintained between 2021 Q1 and 2024 Q4, the Crown Court could have disposed of almost the entire backlog by the end of 2024. That alternative scenario should not be interpreted literally: the optimal backlog is not necessarily zero, and the system would likely have behaved differently if outstanding cases had fallen rapidly – but it illustrates the importance of productivity. The backlog is not the result of only too few sitting days; it also reflects the rate at which sitting days are converted into completed cases.

Part of the explanation is that the cases reaching the Crown Court have become more complex. This means that a simple count of disposals can understate the work being done, as more complex cases require more court time. On a complexity-adjusted basis, as Figure 4.3 shows, disposals in 2024 were 27% higher than in 2019, compared with 17% higher on an unadjusted basis.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that the Crown Court was processing a more time-intensive set of cases than the raw disposal numbers imply. Even so, complexity explains only part of the productivity problem. Rising case complexity accounts for around one-third of the cumulative shortfall of disposals between 2021 and 2024. Complexity-adjusted productivity fell sharply in the middle of 2020 and remained well below pre-pandemic levels until the second half of 2024. By the end of 2024, however, complexity-adjusted productivity had recovered to roughly its pre-pandemic level. This suggests that the system has recently become better at converting sitting days into completed work, once the changing nature of cases is taken into account.

<sup>7</sup> See Domínguez, Tomlinson and Zaranko (2025) for a full explanation of the complexity adjustment.

**Figure 4.3. Change in Crown Court disposals, with adjustment for estimated case complexity (indexed to 100 for 2019–20 average)**



Source: Authors' calculations using Ministry of Justice criminal court statistics quarterly.

This analysis of the Crown Court backlogs therefore points to a broader lesson for the state of the justice system: that different resources interact to complete cases and that increasing one input alone is unlikely to have major effects. In this specific case, increasing sitting days helps only if the system has enough judges, barristers, solicitors, court staff, usable courtrooms, prison transport and prepared cases to use those days effectively.

There are also important caveats. The productivity measure used here is simple. It does not capture every input, such as court staff time, legal professional capacity, building constraints, IT systems or quality of service. The complexity adjustment is based on average hearing times by offence type and cannot capture all changes within categories. Nor is speed of trials the only important outcome. A justice system is also required to provide due process, careful decision-making and respect for all participants. However, delays can also be significant for victims, witnesses and defendants, shaping their trust in the institution itself.

Recent recovery in complexity-adjusted productivity is encouraging as it shows that performance can improve. However, it has not yet been enough to put the backlog on a downward path. Given practical constraints on how quickly court capacity can be expanded, progress towards clearing the Crown Court backlog is likely to require not just more sitting days, but sustained improvements in productivity and how quickly cases move through the system.

## 4.2 Management of police

Even where funding, staffing and equipment are similar, different organisations can achieve very different results. One explanation is how those organisations are managed. Across the economy – in public and private sectors – there is growing evidence that managerial quality helps explain why some organisations perform better than others. For example, a long-standing literature has shown that managerial quality matters for productivity in the private sector (Bertrand and Schoar, 2003), and more recent work has extended these insights to the public sector, looking at headteachers (Bloom et al., 2015) and hospital managers (Janke, Propper and Sadun, 2019).

Within law enforcement, the policy debate on police accountability has largely focused on external inputs, such as police numbers, deployment strategies and technology adoption (Owens and Ba, 2021). The role played by the internal organisation of police forces, and in particular by Borough Commanders who run local police divisions on a day-to-day basis, has received much less attention. Yet Borough Commanders translate budgets and priorities into operational decisions on the ground. We start to address this gap in a project under the Transforming Justice agenda, using data from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in London (Facchetti, Ornaghi and Zou, 2026).

Each of the 32 territorial divisions in the MPS is led by a Borough Commander, who is a senior officer holding the rank of Chief Superintendent and supervises operations, resource deployment and personnel decisions within centrally set budgets and priorities. Borough Commanders are a natural ‘middle layer’ of the hierarchy: they sit between the MPS’s senior leadership and the front line, and they are the level at which the bulk of operational discretion is exercised. We estimate how much of the variation in police performance across divisions can be attributed to which Borough Commander is in charge, and what they actually do to improve performance.

Our analysis combines two novel data sources. First, we assemble data on all Borough Commanders in the MPS between 2005 and 2019, using Freedom of Information requests and archival web pages from the MPS website. Over this period, the MPS employed 164 Borough Commanders across its 32 territorial divisions. For each Commander, we record start and end dates in post, division assignments, demographics, length of service, and previous and subsequent roles. Second, we link these data to the universe of recorded criminal incidents and investigation outcomes in London between 2012 and 2019 – roughly 8 million incidents – as well as to division-level workforce data. Our main outcome measure is ‘clearances per worker’, a value-added-type measure of police performance that captures the division’s ability to solve recorded crimes given the resources available to it.

To isolate the contribution of individual Borough Commanders, we apply methods to split division-level performance into a component that comes from the division, a time component,

and a Commander component, identified from Commanders moving across divisions over the sample period (Abowd, Kramarz and Margolis, 1999). The setting is well suited to this design: the MPS Posting Panel allocates Commanders to divisions primarily on operational grounds (e.g. filling vacancies in high-priority areas), with individual preferences explicitly subordinated to organisational needs. This means Commanders have limited discretion over where they are posted, which mitigates the concern that high-quality managers choose to work in high-performing divisions.

We find that Borough Commanders explain a substantial share of police performance. Differences between Commanders account for about one-quarter of the overall variation in crimes solved per officer. The magnitude of the Commander component is at the upper end among public sector organisations, exceeding estimates for headteachers, hospital managers or social security office heads in comparable studies. One possible explanation is the scope for operational discretion in policing. Although budgets and broad strategic priorities are set centrally, Borough Commanders retain substantial discretion over how resources are deployed, which local problems receive attention and how personnel are allocated across functions. We cannot establish whether this discretion is greater than in schools or hospitals, but policing may also have a relatively direct production function, so that managerial choices over deployment and priorities translate relatively quickly into measurable outcomes such as clearances. We also find evidence that higher-quality Commanders are allocated to lower-performing, or more challenging, divisions, consistent with the institutional design of the Posting Panel.

The mechanisms we uncover are consistent with this interpretation. Looking around the time of changes of Commander provides more direct evidence of what these differences mean in practice. In an analysis of 63 managerial transitions, a one-standard-deviation improvement in estimated manager effectiveness raises clearances by around 7%, while total workforce changes very little. The improvement is not simply the result of recording more low-quality outcomes: both police-determined sanctions and subsequent court convictions increase. Clearances also rise for both property and violent offences. At the same time, drug detections increase, indicating greater police-initiated or proactive enforcement, since these offences are relatively unlikely to be reported by victims. This finding should not be read as evidence for or against any particular tactic; nor does it imply that more drug enforcement is necessarily socially desirable; rather, it shows that managerial differences affect the intensity and priorities of discretionary police activity.

The latest evidence also provides some indication of how this operational discretion is exercised within divisions. For property and violent crime, the increase in clearances associated with more effective Commanders is larger in wards that already have relatively high crime rates. This suggests that effective managers do not simply raise activity uniformly across their division, but are better able to direct investigative effort towards areas facing greater demand. Moreover,

effective Borough Commanders achieve these improvements without additional front-line resources. Front-line officer numbers remain essentially unchanged, while the small reduction in total workforce is driven by fewer back-office staff.

Managerial quality also appears to shape how divisions respond to externally imposed changes. Police station closures provide one example. Following the substantial reduction in London's police station estate (as described further in Section 5.3), violent crime rose by around 24.3% in affected areas within divisions led by Commanders with below-median estimated effectiveness, compared with around 5.5% in those led by above-median Commanders. This suggests that more effective local management helped divisions absorb a substantial negative infrastructure shock.

A second example is the staggered introduction of body-worn cameras across MPS divisions in 2016 and 2017. The effects of the same technology differed substantially according to managerial effectiveness. In divisions led by below-median Commanders, the roll-out was associated with a 0.32 log-point increase in response times. This response time effect was 0.44 log points smaller in divisions led by above-median Commanders, implying no comparable slowdown in those divisions.

Two implications follow. First, management is itself an important resource within policing. Effective Borough Commanders appear to reorganise and redirect existing resources rather than simply expanding them, moving divisions closer to what they can achieve within a given staffing envelope. Second, identifying and developing effective managers is not straightforward. This makes it especially important to understand which managerial practices are transferable. Better management should therefore be viewed not as an alternative to oversight, technology or additional resources, but as one determinant of how effectively those external inputs are ultimately converted into police performance.

## 4.3 Management of prisons

Prisons are one of the most resource-intensive parts of the justice system. Great Britain has the highest imprisonment rate in Western Europe (World Prison Brief, 2024). The prison population has nearly doubled since 1971, reaching around 87,000 individuals in 2024, a historical high. Each prisoner costs the public purse approximately £57,000 per year (Ministry of Justice, 2026), and the prison and probation service accounts for nearly half of the entire Ministry of Justice budget (Ministry of Justice, 2025). Despite a growth in spending per prisoner since 2016, in-prison violence – an accurately measured marker of broader prison conditions – rose markedly between 2012 and the onset of the pandemic, and has since returned to its pre-pandemic trend.

Conditions inside prisons matter on instrumental and normative grounds: on instrumental grounds, a growing body of evidence suggests that better prison conditions improve post-release outcomes (Drago, Galbiati and Vertova, 2011; Mastrobuoni and Terlizzese, 2022; Tobón, 2022). On normative grounds, prison conditions arguably reflect a society's commitment to human dignity and humane treatment, with a commitment codified internationally in the UN Nelson Mandela Rules (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015). Moreover, in-prison violence imposes costs not only on inmates but also on prison staff, who face elevated risks of physical assault and psychological harm (BBC News, 2025). Yet we still know relatively little about what drives in-prison violence, and even less about what can be done to reduce it. Supported by the Transforming Justice agenda, we studied one promising lever: independent inspections by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (d'Este, Macchiavello and Pesenti, 2026).

In an average prison, annually there are around 77 assaults on staff, 226 assaults among prisoners and more than 500 incidents of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners. The clinical and criminological literature has identified three recurring emotional responses to confinement: anger associated with deprivation and enforced dependence, fear associated with interpersonal insecurity and distrust, and despair associated with isolation, trauma and deteriorating mental health (Sykes, 1958; Goffman, 1961; O'Donnell and Edgar, 1999; Useem and Reisig, 1999; Haney, 2001; Toch, 2007; Crewe, 2011; Liebling, 2011; Favril et al., 2020; van Ginneken and Wooldredge, 2024). Assaults on staff, assaults among prisoners and self-harm, consistently recorded across establishments, respectively capture these three dimensions of the incarceration experience that are otherwise difficult to measure systematically. This mapping is consistent with HM Inspectorate of Prisons prisoner survey evidence: prisons where more prisoners report being treated with respect by staff have fewer assaults on staff; prisons where more prisoners report feeling safe have fewer assaults among prisoners; and prisons where fewer prisoners report mental health problems have lower rates of self-harm.

What is particularly striking is the variation in the incidence of violence across prisons. The gap between a prison at the 75th percentile of the distribution of violent incidents and one at the 25th percentile amounts to roughly 80 additional staff assaults, 224 additional prisoner assaults, and 389 additional self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners per year. This raises an obvious question: why do some prisons experience so much more violence than others?

Prison-level administrative data cover prisoner composition and behaviour, overcrowding, staffing levels and expenditure, and enable examination of why in-prison violence differs across prisons. Some of the variation in violence is predictable. Prisons housing more remand prisoners or those serving sentences for violent offences, and prisons with higher overcrowding, tend to have more violence, patterns consistent with the 'importation' theory of prison violence, which links in-prison behaviour to the characteristics prisoners bring with them (van Ginneken, forthcoming). Resources available to the prison, proxied by expenditure per prisoner, and

staffing levels also correlate with in-prison violence. However, these factors explain only part of the difference between prisons. Even after accounting for observable differences in prisoner composition, overcrowding, expenditure per prisoner and staffing, substantial variation remains unexplained across prisons. Observable structural characteristics – meaning prison function, ownership, sex and Victorian-era design all together, and excluding prisoner composition, overcrowding, expenditure and staffing – account for only 11% of the cross-prison variation in staff assaults, 46% of it in prisoner-on-prisoner violence and 32% of it in self-harm. This suggests that differences in prison outcomes cannot be understood only by looking at prisoner characteristics or measured inputs.<sup>8</sup>

In a system where the vast majority (85%) of prisons are run by a single public authority – HM Prison and Probation Service, an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice – this degree of unexplained variation is striking, and points towards explanations that go beyond prisoner composition and resource allocation. One natural candidate is prison management.

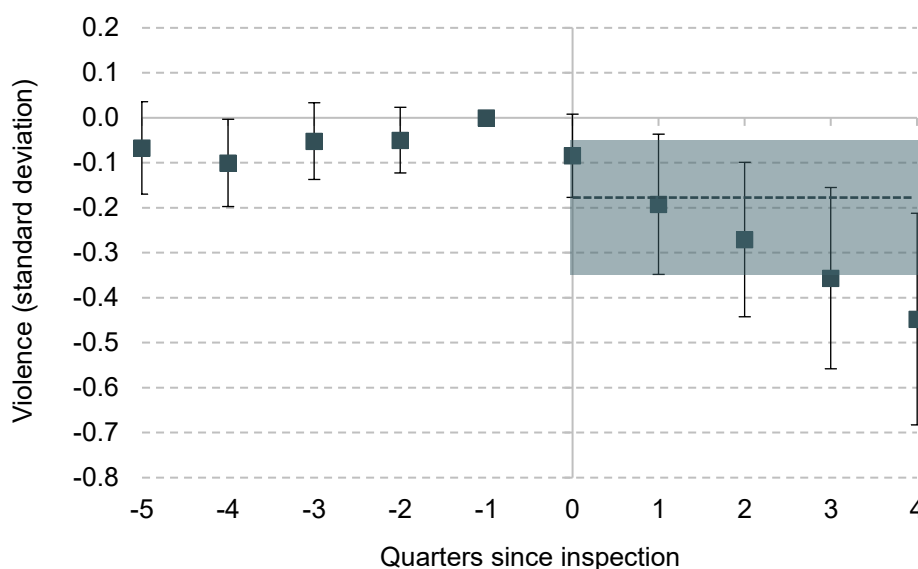
HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) inspections provide one way to examine whether management can affect prison conditions. HMIP is an independent body whose multidisciplinary teams of inspectors visit each prison in England and Wales every 30 months on average, fulfilling four main functions (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2026): diagnosis, as inspectors examine conditions and treatment; dissemination of good practices, as inspectors identify and share examples of good practice from other inspected establishments; recommendations, where inspectors set out concrete proposals for improvement; and transparency and accountability, as HMIP publishes reports to inform the public of its findings and to hold government and those running places of detention to account. In this sense, inspections can be understood as a management intervention.

Between 2004 and 2019, HMIP conducted 818 full inspections, generating publicly available reports that document conditions and track the progress of recommendations over time. Prisons accepted about 90% of recommendations, but only about 40% of those were fully implemented by the next inspection.

<sup>8</sup> Economists studying private firms, as well as a wide range of public organisations, encounter a similar pattern: performance differences across organisations performing similar functions, and benchmarked against the same technology and inputs, are large and persistent. The literature has highlighted a positive relationship between the adoption of ‘good’ managerial practices and organisational performance in both the private sector (Bertrand and Schoar, 2003; Bloom and Van Reenen, 2007; Giorcelli, 2019; Bandiera et al., 2020) and the public sector – schools (Bloom et al., 2015), hospitals (Chandra et al., 2013), public procurement (Best, Hjort and Szakonyi, 2019) and civil service (Rasul and Rogger, 2018). The dispersion in violence we document across prisons is comparable in magnitude to the productivity dispersion documented across manufacturing plants, and exceeds that found across hospitals (Syverson, 2004; Chandra et al., 2013). In a system run almost entirely by a single public authority — the Ministry of Justice — this degree of unexplained variation is a striking finding, and points towards the exploration of potential explanations that go beyond prisoner composition and resource allocation.

Inspections lead to a sustained, statistically significant reduction in violence across all three forms. Figure 4.4 shows violence levels in the months before and after an inspection, relative to levels in prisons where the inspection did not take place. Before an inspection, the figure shows no measurable difference in violence between soon-to-be-inspected prisons and other prisons. After the inspection, violence begins to fall, and this fall is statistically significant. On average, in the 15 months following an inspection, inspected prisons experience 12 fewer violence incidents per 1,000 prisoners per month relative to the pre-inspection period. This breaks down as 1 fewer assault on staff (a 23% reduction relative to the pre-inspection mean), 3 fewer assaults among prisoners (22%) and 8 fewer self-harm incidents (25%). Figure 4.4 also shows that these effects build gradually over time, which suggests that the effects are not due to temporary incapacitation (i.e. inspectors physically present preventing violence) and are instead consistent with a process of sustained management change.

**Figure 4.4. The effect of HM Inspectorate of Prisons inspections on prison violence**



Note: Figure shows an event-study estimate of the change in prison violence in the months before and after an HM Inspectorate of Prisons inspection, relative to prisons not yet inspected, in standardised units (a change of one standard deviation). Dashed line indicates the average effect of an inspection for the entire post-inspection period, and shading provides its 95% confidence interval.

Source: Authors' calculations using Ministry of Justice, HM Prison & Probation Service and HM Inspectorate of Prisons data.

We find no statistically significant post-inspection changes in inmate composition, per-prisoner expenditure, staffing levels or drug enforcement. Controlling for each of these factors individually leaves the inspection effect shown in Figure 4.4 essentially unchanged. This suggests that inspections do not reduce violence by changing the resources available to a prison, but by changing how existing resources and practices are managed. Increased accountability from the inspection process is likely part of this mechanism, but accountability alone does not

appear sufficient: we find that recommendations tailored to a prison's specific context are implemented far more often than generic ones and that the share of recommendations issued by inspectors that are subsequently implemented predicts the magnitude of the reduction in violence. This suggests that accountability needs a specific diagnosis to act on to translate into reduced violence, rather than working on its own. The evidence suggests that a central challenge in improving prison conditions may lie less in the diffusion of information about 'best practices' than in the identification and implementation of context-appropriate practices and sustained organisational change (Gibbons and Henderson, 2012).

The potential cost-effectiveness of inspections is also important. An inspection costs around £35,000–£50,000 in terms of the inspection team's time, comparable to the compensation paid for a single moderate-injury claim by a prison officer. This figure captures only a fraction of the true return on reduced violence, as it leaves aside avoided healthcare costs, other compensation claims and lost working days, as well as the harder-to-quantify effects on staff retention, organisational climate and prisoners' prospects on release – with consequences for future demands on the justice system. Overall, mirroring the earlier results on police management, these results suggest that management interventions can offer high returns, particularly in a system where adding capacity through new prison places or additional staffing is expensive and slow.

## 5. The geography of resources in the justice system

Debates around the provision and quality of public services in the UK often have an important geographic dimension. The same can be true for the justice system, a highly centralised service in England and Wales, with courts and tribunals overseen nationally by HM Courts and Tribunals Service. This chapter examines how the geographic distribution of resources shapes the justice system's performance, focusing on three examples from our research: civil legal aid provision, court closures and police station closures. In all cases, a central issue is not only the level of resources but how and where resources are allocated, which can shape outcomes across areas. Even when the overall quantity of resources remains unchanged, different patterns of allocation can affect access to justice and outcomes.

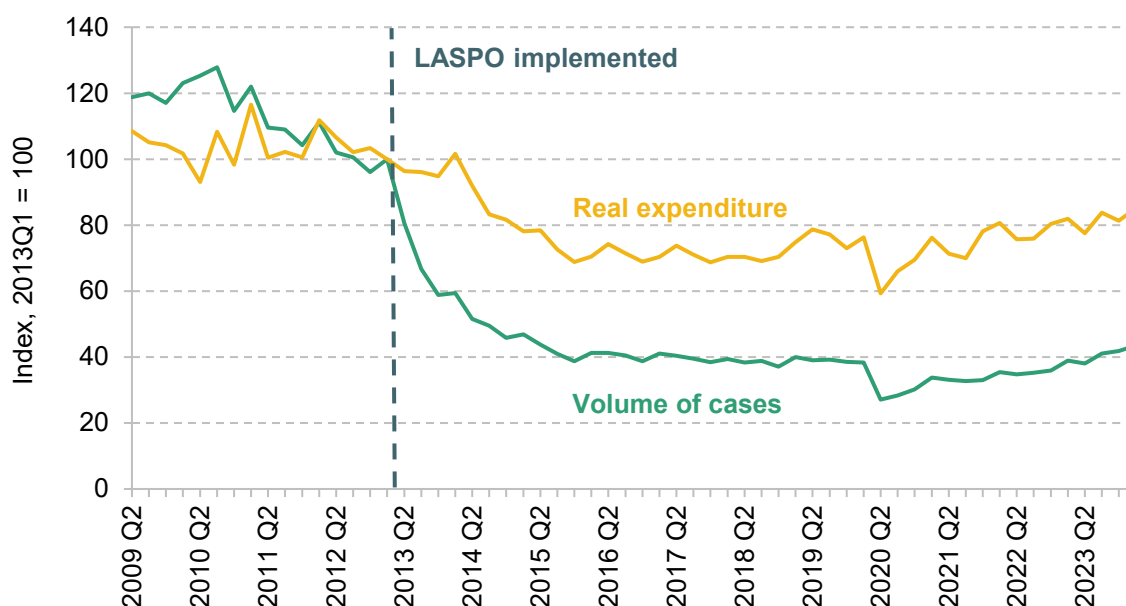
### 5.1 Legal aid provision

Civil legal aid is one route through which people who cannot afford legal advice or representation can access support in civil justice matters. It covers areas such as family, housing, welfare, immigration and asylum, debt, and challenges to public authorities, subject to scope and eligibility rules. These are areas in which legal problems can have important consequences for individuals and households, including for housing stability, income, family arrangements and interactions with public services. Changes in civil legal aid provision are therefore of central relevance to an assessment of the state of the justice system.

Drawing on Burrows and Domínguez (2026), this section examines how civil legal aid provision in England and Wales has changed since the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO). It focuses on changes in case volumes, expenditure, provider numbers, and the geographic distribution of provision, including the emergence of local authorities with no observed activity by civil legal aid providers.

LASPO, which came into effect in April 2013, substantially changed the structure of legal aid in England and Wales. It restricted civil legal aid to a narrower set of case types, changed financial eligibility and contribution rules, reduced fees and moved more work onto fixed-fee arrangements. These reforms were intended, in part, to reduce public expenditure. The analysis does not isolate the causal effect of LASPO from other changes affecting the justice system, but the period after LASPO was associated with a large contraction in publicly funded civil legal help.

**Figure 5.1. Civil legal aid cases in England and Wales: volume and real expenditure (indexed to 100 in 2013 Q1)**



Note: Expenditure values are expressed in real terms and adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Prices Index including owner-occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) from the Office for National Statistics.

Source: Authors' construction based on Ministry of Justice (2024b).

As Figure 5.1 shows, civil legal aid case volumes and associated expenditure fell sharply after the reforms. By 2024, civil legal aid case volumes had fallen by around 57% and real expenditure by nearly 15% compared with pre-reform levels; the smaller fall in expenditure relative to case volumes implies a substantial rise in average cost per case, though testing what drove this would require case-level data on cost and complexity that are not available in the publicly available data used here. Lower recorded civil legal aid activity should not be interpreted straightforwardly as evidence of lower legal need. The number of completed legal aid cases reflects both demand and the capacity of the system to meet that demand. When eligibility rules are tightened, provider fees are reduced or fewer providers are available to take cases, legal aid activity may fall even if underlying need remains substantial. External indicators of advice need, including in areas such as debt, housing and cost-of-living pressures, have remained significant. The fall in legally aided case volumes may therefore reflect changes in access and supply as well as changes in underlying demand.

The geographical pattern of change is also important. Before LASPO, civil legal aid activity was much higher in more deprived local authorities. That pattern continued after the reforms: the system still served more deprived areas more intensively than less deprived areas. However, levels fell across the country. Percentage declines were large across the deprivation distribution, around 40–65%, with little evidence that more deprived areas saw systematically smaller percentage falls than less deprived areas. As more deprived areas had much higher volumes of

legal aid cases to begin with, similar percentage reductions translated into larger absolute falls in provision in places where legal need is likely to be higher.

This is an important distinction. The reforms do not appear to have substantially changed the broad relative distribution of civil legal aid by deprivation: poorer areas still had more legal aid activity than richer areas. But they did reduce the overall level of provision. In practical terms, this means that the system remained relatively targeted towards disadvantaged communities, while serving fewer people than before.

The supply side of civil legal aid has also changed. Legal aid advice is not delivered by a public legal service in the same way that healthcare is delivered by the NHS. It is largely provided by private and non-profit organisations that decide whether legal aid work is financially viable. Provider numbers are therefore an important indicator of the availability of civil legal aid, although not a complete measure of effective access. A provider may have limited capacity, may not be accepting new clients or may not cover all areas of law.

The number of civil legal aid providers has declined substantially. Provider numbers fell from roughly 3,000 in 2010 to around 1,400 by 2024. This decline began before LASPO, so should not be attributed entirely to the reforms. However, LASPO appears to have intensified financial pressure on providers by reducing fee levels, narrowing the scope of funded work and increasing reliance on fixed fees. Wider evidence also suggests continuing concerns about provider sustainability. Many firms report high demand but weak financial incentives to undertake legal aid work, and 40% of firms reported in 2023 that they expected to leave the legal aid market within five years (Ministry of Justice, 2024a).

The decline in provider numbers has coincided with greater geographic unevenness in access. In 2010, only 1.6% of local authorities had no civil legal aid provider. By the end of 2023, around 12% did so, meaning 38 local authorities had no observed activity from civil legal aid providers. Around 3.5 million individuals resided in a local authority without a civil legal aid provider. While this measure identifies areas with no observed provider activity, it does not measure unmet need directly, and it does not imply that areas with at least one provider have adequate provision.

The characteristics of these areas also matter. Civil legal aid ‘deserts’, defined here as local authorities with no observed civil legal aid provider activity, are geographically widespread, often rural or semi-rural, smaller in population, and on average less deprived than other areas. Local authorities without providers had very low levels of legal aid provision even before LASPO, which may indicate lower historical demand or lower levels of financial eligibility. The absence of providers in these areas therefore does not necessarily imply a high volume of unmet need. However, for eligible individuals living in such areas, the lack of local provision may still

make access more difficult, particularly where travel distances are longer or where local referral networks are weaker. This is a limitation of provider-presence measures more generally, and developing better measures of unmet legal need is a promising avenue for future research. Distance is one reason local provision may continue to matter, even where some legal services can be delivered remotely. Telephone or online advice may reduce barriers for some individuals. Some may face difficulties related to digital access, language, disability, confidence navigating legal processes, or the complexity of the issue they are trying to resolve. Some areas of law, such as housing or welfare, may also benefit from providers with knowledge of local institutions, practices and referral routes. For these reasons, the geographic distribution of providers remains relevant, even though local presence is not the only determinant of access.

The available provider data should also be interpreted with caution. The measure counts providers that start at least one civil legal aid case in a local authority and quarter. This is a useful proxy for local legal aid activity, but it does not capture staffing levels, caseload capacity, whether providers are accepting new clients, how much legal aid work they undertake or whether they cover the relevant area of law. In areas with at least one provider, provision may still be limited. In dense and deprived urban areas, for example, providers may have to prioritise the most urgent cases while earlier-stage problems receive less support.

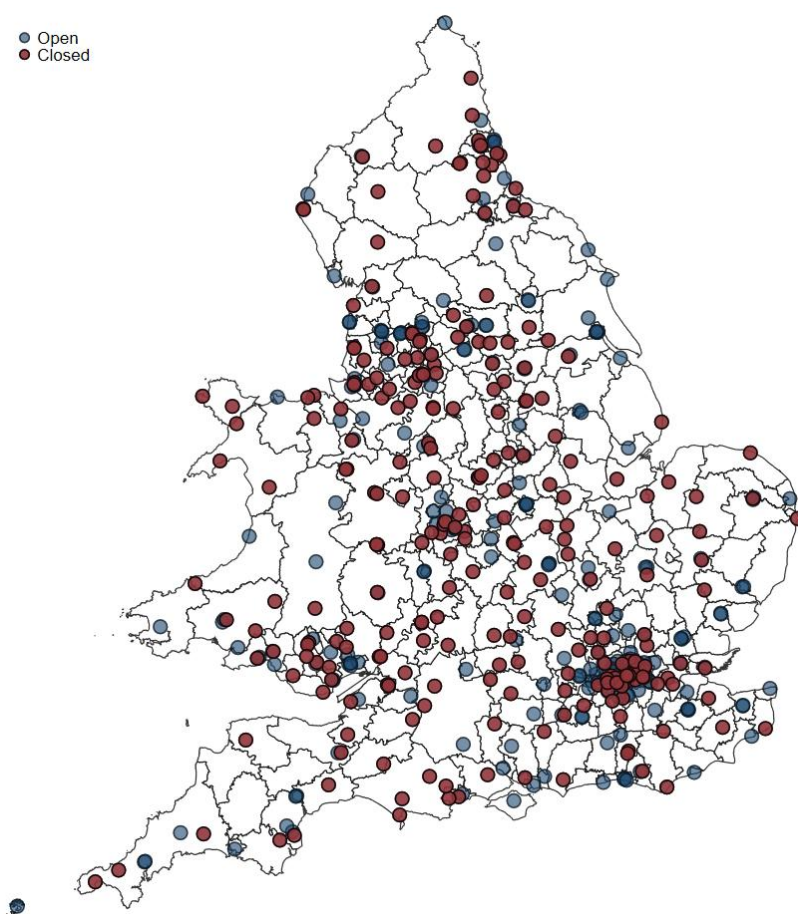
Overall, the evidence points to a civil legal aid system that is smaller than before LASPO and more uneven in its geographic availability. Case volumes and expenditure have fallen, provider numbers have declined, and a growing number of local authorities have no observed civil legal aid provider activity.

The policy issue is therefore not only the level of public expenditure, but the structure and sustainability of provision. Eligibility, scope, fees, provider incentives, remote advice and local availability all affect whether civil legal aid can be accessed in practice. Civil legal aid remains more concentrated in areas of higher deprivation, but at a much lower overall level than before LASPO, with a smaller provider market. It should therefore be considered as part of the broader capacity of the justice system, rather than only as a spending category.

## 5.2 Court closures<sup>9</sup>

The location and density of court sites determine who has practical access to justice and how quickly cases can be processed. Since 2010, the Ministry of Justice has consolidated the court estate in two waves, in 2011 and 2016. Across jurisdictions, 306 court sites closed; of these, 178 sites were magistrates' courts. Because magistrates' courts process the majority of criminal

**Figure 5.2. Geographic spread of sites open in 2019 and sites closed since 2010 across England and Wales: magistrates' courts**



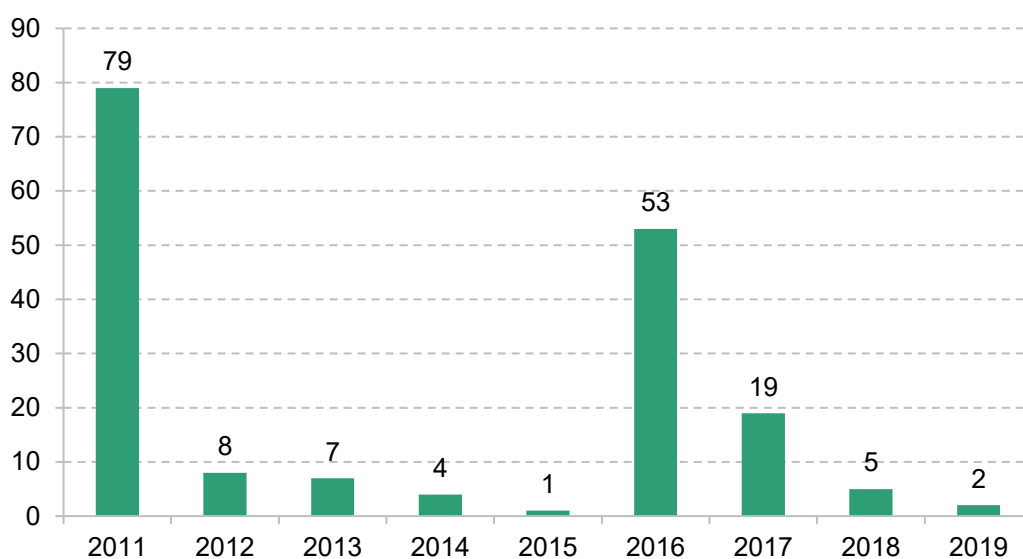
Note: Magistrates' courts in England and Wales, 2010–19. Blue circles indicate sites operating at the end of 2019. Red circles indicate sites that closed between 2010 and 2019. Boundaries show local authority districts.

Source: Data from Freedom of Information requests to the Ministry of Justice. Office for National Statistics geography.

<sup>9</sup> This preliminary work was produced using administrative data accessed through the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Secure Research Service. The use of data in this work does not imply endorsement by the ONS or the data owners (e.g. HM Courts and Tribunals Service, HM Prison and Probation Service, and the Ministry of Justice) of the interpretation or analysis. This work uses research datasets which may not exactly reproduce Accredited Official Statistics aggregates. Accredited Official Statistics follow consistent statistical conventions over time and cannot be compared with Data First linked datasets.

cases, closures in this jurisdiction are directly relevant for criminal justice timeliness. The number of operating magistrates' court sites in England and Wales fell from 406 in 2010 to 228 by the end of 2019; in London, 15 of 33 sites closed. Figure 5.2 shows the geographic spread of open and closed sites across England and Wales, and Figure 5.3 shows the timing of closures. Of the 178 magistrates' court closures, 79 took place in 2011 and a further 53 in 2016, accounting for around three-quarters of all closures over the period.

**Figure 5.3. Number of magistrates' court closures by year, England and Wales**



Source: Data from Freedom of Information requests to the Ministry of Justice.

We have examined in preliminary work how these closures affected the way criminal cases move through magistrates' courts. Closures pull in two directions. On one hand, they save money and concentrate cases in fewer, potentially better-staffed courts. On the other hand, they can create congestion in the courts that remain open and add to the travel time and costs faced by defendants, witnesses, victims, lawyers, police and court staff, all of which can slow cases down. Closures may also reduce the proximity of justice provision to the communities it serves, independent of any effect on case processing times. The question is whether savings from closures have come at the cost of slower or reduced justice and, if so, where those costs fall. Below, we set out what we have established so far, and then the questions the next stage of the work will answer.

Our analysis draws on administrative records from the Ministry of Justice's Data First programme, which cover every criminal case brought in the magistrates' courts and Crown Court. They let us follow each case from its start, through the first hearing, to the final outcome and sentence. We combine these records with the dates on which each magistrates' court opened or closed, obtained through Freedom of Information requests, focusing on the closures from 2011 to 2019; and with data on how far each small neighbourhood (a Lower-Layer Super Output

Area, or LSOA, of about 1,500 people) is from its nearest open court. This provides a rich quantitative picture, for each neighbourhood and year, of both court access and the flow of cases.

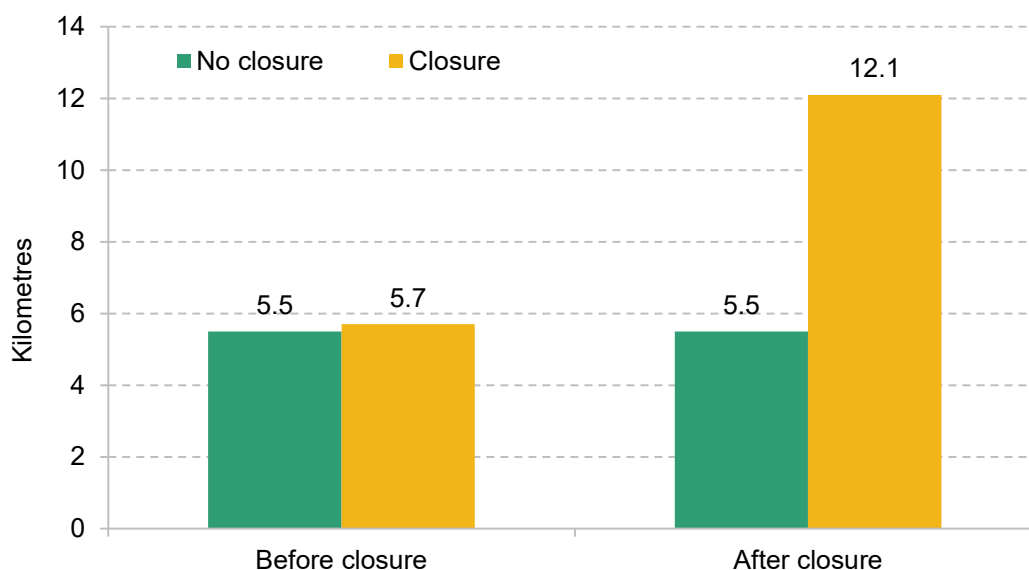
The average neighbourhood saw around 41 magistrates' court cases a year (in 2011), about 76% of them less serious 'summary' offences (such as minor motoring or public-order matters) and the rest more serious cases that can, or must, be heard in the Crown Court. Of the 34,752 neighbourhoods in England and Wales, 21,716 never lost their nearest court (our comparison group) and 13,036 did. Before any closures, cases took a similar time in both groups: about 37 days from charge to first hearing, and a further 22 days to the result, or just over 59 days end to end.

For our empirical analysis, we consider an LSOA as 'treated' if its nearest magistrates' court closed at some point during 2011–19. We then compare these areas with nearby 'control' LSOAs whose nearest court remained open, before and after each closure event. The closures generate substantial variation in physical access. Figure 5.4 shows the average distance to the nearest open magistrates' court for the two groups, before and after closures. The distance for control LSOAs is essentially unchanged at around 5.5 kilometres. For treated LSOAs, mean distance more than doubles, from 5.7 to 12.1 kilometres – an increase of 6.4 kilometres, or roughly 110% of the pre-closure baseline. Figure 5.5 shows the underlying distribution of changes in distance to the nearest magistrates' court: while about half of treated LSOAs experienced moderate increases of less than 5 kilometres, a substantial share – 21.5% – saw their distance to the nearest open court rise by 10 kilometres or more, with 4.1% increasing by more than 20 kilometres. These are large changes in physical access, and they are unevenly distributed across the treated population.

The areas that saw their nearest court close differ from those that did not, in ways that matter for interpreting the analysis. We document that LSOAs near closed courts are less densely populated, more rural, and slightly less income-deprived than control LSOAs – a geographic pattern that echoes both our findings on police station closures (Section 5.3) and the legal aid 'deserts' created by changes to civil legal aid provision (Section 5.1). Importantly, however, pre-closure case profiles in treated and control LSOAs are very similar: the total number of cases per area, the share of summary offences, and the durations from case initiation to first hearing and from first hearing to result all align closely across the two groups in 2011. The differences between affected and unaffected areas therefore lie in their geography rather than in their pre-closure criminal justice activity.

The descriptive evidence conveys that while the magistrates' court estate has shrunk substantially over the past decade, the resulting changes in physical access are large and unevenly distributed across areas, and the affected areas were not selected at random. This is in line with work by HMCTS explaining the rationale for the court closures (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2019).

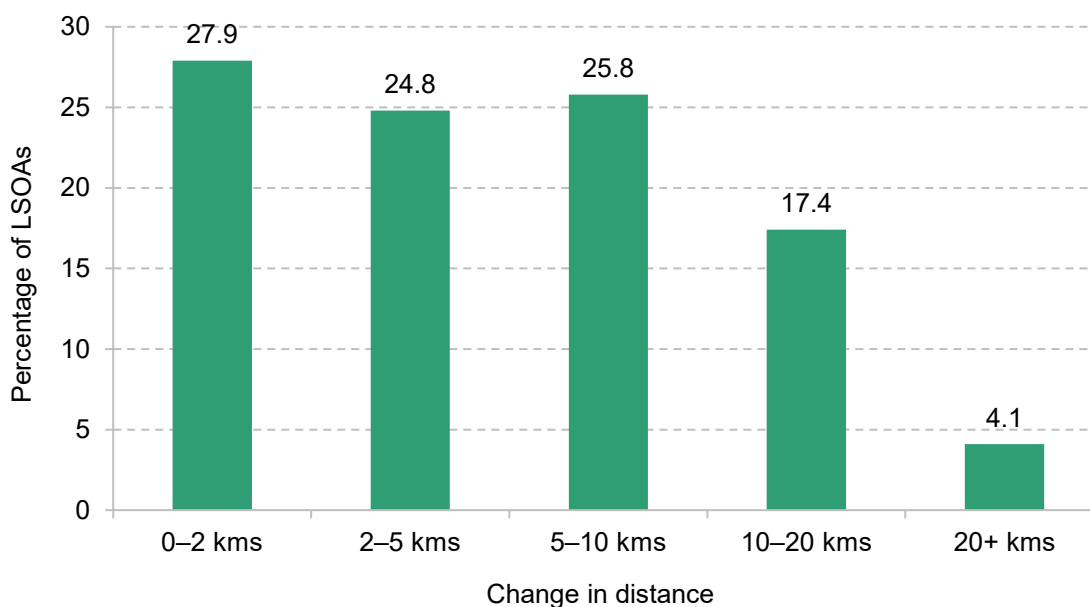
**Figure 5.4. Mean distance to the nearest open magistrates' court (in kilometres) in LSOAs that experienced a court closure (treated) and LSOAs that did not experience a court closure (controls), before and after the closure**



Note: Green bars are for areas whose nearest magistrates' court remained open throughout the sample period. Yellow bars are areas whose nearest magistrates' court closed during 2011–19.

Source: Data from Freedom of Information requests to the Ministry of Justice.

**Figure 5.5. Distribution of changes in distance to the nearest open magistrates' court**



Source: Data from Freedom of Information requests to the Ministry of Justice.

Our future work will focus on four substantive questions about how the closures affect the criminal justice pipeline, using data from both magistrates' courts and Crown Courts. This will

also involve examining how closures affect police behaviour, which is itself a channel through which closures could affect case timeliness and outcomes.

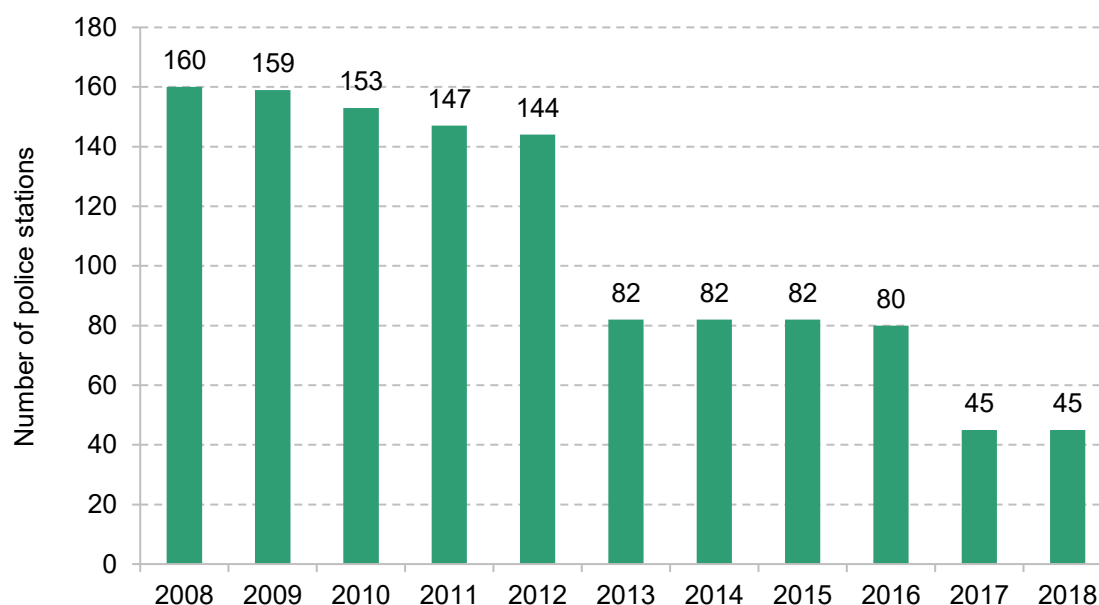
- First, case duration. How do the baseline timelines summarised above – about 37 days from case initiation to first hearing and a further 22 days from first hearing to result – respond to a closure, and which stage of the case absorbs the change?
- Second, case flow. Do closures change the volume of cases entering the courts, and to what extent are any changes driven by police decisions over when to charge individuals (for instance, charging less when the nearest court is further away) rather than by underlying changes in offending?
- Third, composition. Do closures alter the mix of cases the system handles, in particular the relative share of less severe summary offences versus more severe either-way and indictable offences, which are routed and processed differently?
- Fourth, outcomes. Do closures affect how cases are ultimately disposed of, including conviction rates and the type of sentence imposed?

Together, these margins will allow us to assess whether the savings generated by the court estate consolidation come at the price of slower, smaller or differently composed criminal justice activity, and where any such costs fall.

## 5.3 Police station closures

The spatial allocation of police resources – where stations are located, not only how many officers are funded – is itself a key input into the production of public safety. A large body of literature establishes that, on average, more police reduce crime (e.g. Machin and Marie, 2011; Chalfin and McCrary, 2017). What is much less well understood is what happens when the spatial organisation of policing changes while overall workforce is held constant. We present work conducted under the Transforming Justice agenda that studies this question in the context of London (Facchetti, 2025).

The 2010 Spending Review reduced police funding across England and Wales by around 20% in real terms (HMIC, 2011). The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) was required to find £600 million in savings between 2012 and 2016 (Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime, 2017), and between 2010–11 and 2018–19, central government funding to the Metropolitan Police fell by 29% in real terms (National Audit Office, 2018). As police officers cannot readily be made redundant, forces had limited scope to reduce officer numbers, and savings fell instead on staff and buildings. In the MPS, the number of front-line officers fell by only 1% between 2010 and 2016, while headcount among civilian staff and police community support officers fell by about 60%. Closing stations and selling buildings were among the savings available: as Figure 5.6 shows, the number of operating stations fell from 160 in 2008 to 45 in 2018 (Pratt, 2019).

**Figure 5.6. Number of police stations operating in Greater London, by year**

Source: Data from Freedom of Information requests to the Metropolitan Police Service.

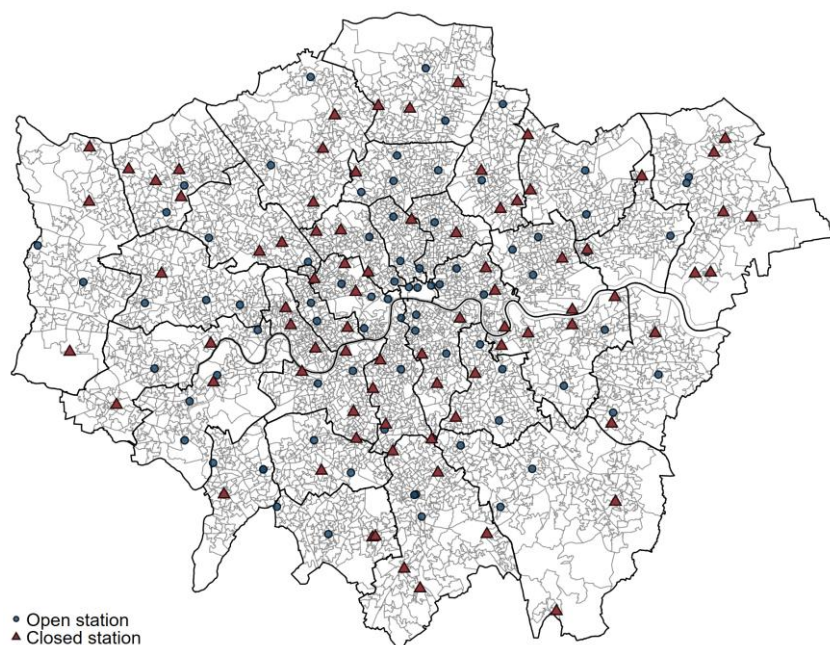
It is hard to know exactly what the causal effect of closing these police stations is on justice-related outcomes. That is because, on average, stations were originally located in persistently high-crime areas, and closures tended to affect less deprived, lower-crime neighbourhoods (Lower-Layer Super Output Areas, or LSOAs), while remaining stations experienced an increase in the number of police officers stationed there. The closures changed how far away the police were: on average, the distance from a neighbourhood to its nearest station roughly doubled, from about 1.3 kilometres to 3 kilometres, and the median response time rose by 45%, from 13 to 19 minutes (for violent crimes, it roughly doubled). Across the 2011–16 window over which we observe the police workforce,<sup>10</sup> the average number of officers per remaining station rose from about 100 to more than 180. As a result, every LSOA in London experienced either a change in proximity to a police station, a change in local officer numbers, or both.

To isolate the effect of losing a nearby police station, we compare how crime changed in the neighbourhoods that became further from a station and how crime changed, over the same period, in otherwise similar neighbourhoods that did not experience a police station closure. Figure 5.7 shows the location of police stations and those that closed. Closures were spread across London. The average number of stations per London borough fell from 5 in 2010 to 2.4 in 2016 and 1.3 in 2018. Official documents describe the broad rationale for the later closures, such

<sup>10</sup> The study excludes periods after December 2016 because the MPS began restructuring its territorial police divisions in 2017. Including later years would make it difficult to distinguish the effects of station closures from this wider organisational change. A 2017 MOPAC strategy committed to retaining one 24-hour public front counter in each borough (Mayor's Office for Policing & Crime and Metropolitan Police Service, 2017).

as declining use of front counters and savings from building maintenance (Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, 2013, 2015 and 2017). The stations that closed were located in areas with lower crime rates and lower house prices than those of the stations that remained open.

**Figure 5.7. Geographic spread of open and closed sites across London: police stations**



Note: Open stations (blue circles) and closed stations (red triangles) at the end of 2016. Thick black lines mark the 33 London borough boundaries, which coincide with police division boundaries. Thin grey lines mark the LSOA boundaries.

Source: Data from Freedom of Information requests to the Metropolitan Police Service.

This comparison requires an assumption: without the closures, outcomes in the two groups would have followed similar trends. That cannot be proved, because we do not observe what would have happened after a closure if that station had not closed. However, crime and other outcomes moved similarly in the two groups before the closures, supporting the assumption. Both groups of neighbourhoods were exposed to the same national trends in policing, the economy and crime more broadly. Hence, the difference between their before-and-after changes can be attributed to the closures themselves. Throughout the analysis, we hold the number of officers at the nearest surviving station constant in order to isolate the effect of greater distance from a police station, not changes in staffing.

Our comparison shows that closing the nearest police station caused violent crime (assaults and murders) to rise by about 9% relative to neighbourhoods where the distance to the nearest station did not change, after accounting for changes in staffing levels at the nearest station. The rise came quickly, within the first months of a closure, and did not fade, pointing to weaker deterrence when the police are further away and hence slower to respond to reported crime. The

police also became less effective at solving crime: the chance that a recorded crime was cleared fell by 2–3 percentage points, for both violent and property offences. Both effects were concentrated close to the closed station and faded with distance, consistent with slower response times. Stations that stayed open and took on more officers saw the opposite pattern on crime: a small fall in violent crime nearby, but these gains were localised. Across London as a whole, the net effect was a rise in violent crime of about 2%. This city-wide average hides wide variation: across police divisions, the effect ranged from roughly no change to a nearly 14% increase in violent crime.

In retrospect, this net increase was largely avoidable. We simulate alternative scenarios of which stations to close. The best-performing combination would have kept the average distance to the nearest station around 40% shorter and turned the London-wide increase in violent crime into a fall of about 1.4%. For comparison, closing stations at random would have increased violent crime by around 4.3%. The exercise holds the scale of the estate reduction fixed, although it does not account for differences in the sale values or running costs of individual buildings, and therefore does not maintain the precise cash saving constant. The results nevertheless show that the location of the closures mattered: prioritising stations whose closure caused the smallest increases in distance could have substantially reduced, or even reversed, the effect on violent crime.

Drawing on the Crime Survey of England and Wales, we find that where stations closed, the share of victims who reported a crime fell by about 2 percentage points (from a base of 37%), with the decline concentrated in less serious offences. Victims in affected areas also became less satisfied with how investigations were handled, and residents became less confident that the police were effective. As policing depends on the public being willing to report crime and work with officers, this weakening of confidence and cooperation is itself a way in which closures can reduce the justice system's effectiveness over time.

We also measure the cost to residents of police station closures through changes in house prices, which capture not only higher crime but also less tangible losses – for instance, reduced amenities and a diminished sense of safety. Using the same before-and-after comparison, we estimate that station closures caused house prices in affected neighbourhoods to fall by around 2% relative to comparable areas where the distance to the nearest station did not change. They fell most in already deprived, high-crime areas and where closed buildings were left empty – and rose modestly near surviving stations. Counting both the losses near closed stations and the gains near surviving ones, we estimate that every £1 the MPS saved by closing stations came with about £0.63 of cost to society; counting only the losses in the areas that experienced a police station closure, the figure rises to about £1.30 per £1 saved. Both estimates are conservative, because they leave out costs that are hard to price – lower reporting, weaker confidence in the police and a reduced sense of safety. As with other spending cuts during the 2010s (Fetzer,

2019; Giulietti and McConnell, 2020), the losses fell most heavily on already deprived neighbourhoods – the same places that were most affected by other government spending cuts in this period.

Three points follow. First, police station closures are usually judged simply on the money they save; but once their effects on crime, on public cooperation and on house values are counted, they look poor value for money – and the costs fell hardest on already deprived neighbourhoods. This is a statement about how the savings were made, not about whether savings should have been made at all. Second, where the police are physically located is a distinct lever from how many officers there are: proximity matters for response times, for deterrence, and for the everyday contact that keeps people reporting crime and confident in the police. Third, much of the harm was avoidable at no extra cost – a different choice of which stations to close would have saved the same money with far smaller increases in crime and far smaller losses for residents. Decision-makers could not have known all this at the time; the lesson for future consolidation, in policing and elsewhere in the justice system, is that such decisions should weigh not just the total savings, but also where the costs fall and on whom.

## 6. Spillover effects from other policies onto the justice system

Changes in resources outside the justice system can have important consequences for the justice system and its outcomes. Focusing only on courts, police, prisons or other justice institutions can therefore miss part of the wider picture. This chapter considers two examples of these spillover effects: the Sure Start policy and closures of youth clubs. Both are relevant because they show how changes in provision elsewhere can alter demand on justice institutions, as well as wider social and economic outcomes. The evidence in this chapter highlights how decisions about resources in other public services may therefore shape pressures on the justice system, even where no direct change is made to justice spending itself. Understanding the state of the justice system therefore requires a broader perspective than that of justice institutions alone.

### 6.1 Sure Start and early years interventions

A growing body of evidence suggests that investments outside the justice system can have important effects on crime and offending. In particular, services that support children and families have been shown to influence a range of factors associated with later criminal behaviour, including cognitive and socio-emotional development, educational attainment, family functioning and mental health. Early childhood may be a particularly important period for intervention, as experiences during the first years of life can have lasting effects on children's development and future life trajectories. As a result, policies that improve outcomes in early childhood can yield benefits that extend well beyond education and health, including reductions in later involvement with the criminal justice system.

One of the largest early years interventions implemented in England was Sure Start. Introduced in 1999, Sure Start provided integrated support for families with young children through a network of local centres offering services such as parenting support, health services, early education and childcare, and employment advice. The scale of the programme and its gradual roll-out across England have made it the subject of extensive evaluation, providing valuable evidence on the extent to which investment in early childhood can influence later offending and interactions with the justice system (Carneiro et al., 2025).

Sure Start was part of the New Labour government's strategy to reduce child poverty and social exclusion. It aimed to improve the health, development and well-being of young children through integrated early years and family support services. Delivered through local centres, the programme brought together a range of services for families with children aged under 5, including childcare, parenting support, health services and employment advice.

The programme initially operated through Sure Start Local Programmes, which were targeted at disadvantaged communities and delivered through partnerships between local authorities, health services and voluntary organisations. While centres were expected to provide support across several broad areas, they retained considerable flexibility to tailor services to local needs.

Sure Start expanded rapidly during the 2000s. From 2003 onwards, Local Programmes were gradually replaced by Sure Start Children's Centres, reflecting a shift towards a more universal model of provision and a more standardised service offer. By 2010, around 3,300 centres were operating across England, with most young children living within easy reach of a centre. At its peak, Sure Start accounted for £2.7 billion of annual public spending (in 2023–24 prices), making it one of the largest early childhood interventions ever implemented in England.

Estimating the causal effect of Sure Start on crime is challenging because the programme was not introduced across areas at random. Indeed, Sure Start centres were initially targeted at the most disadvantaged areas of England and subsequently expanded to less deprived communities. As a result, simple comparisons between children who lived near a Sure Start centre and those who did not would capture both the effects of Sure Start and pre-existing differences between areas.

To address this issue, we have used an approach that exploits variation in the timing and location of the Sure Start roll-out. For each child, exposure to Sure Start is determined using their residential location at age 5. Children are considered 'exposed' if they lived in a neighbourhood that had a Sure Start centre within 2.5 kilometres throughout their first five years of life. This definition reflects the programme's aim of providing services within easy reach of local families.

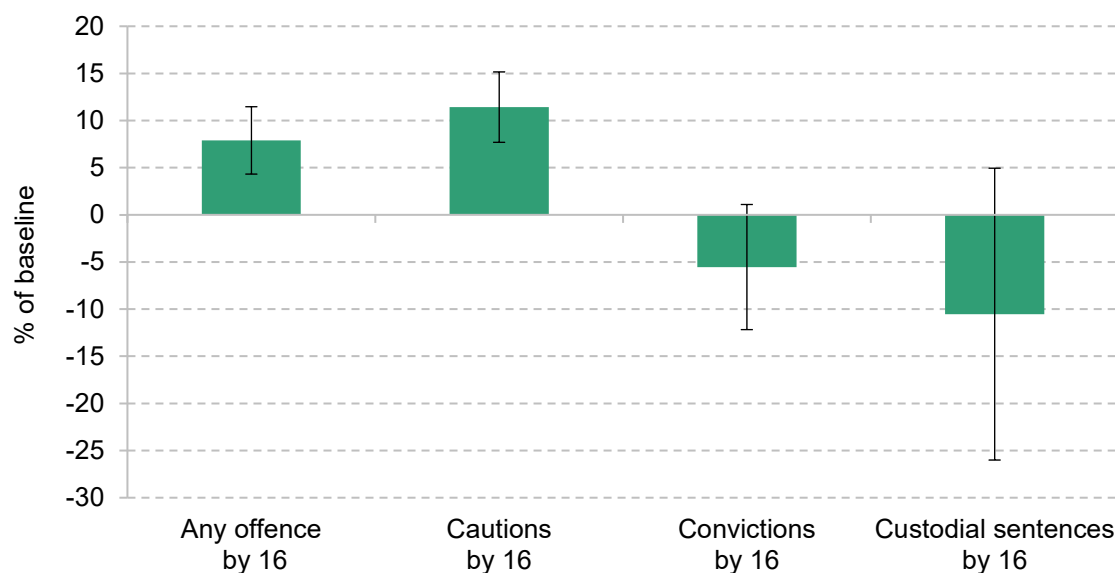
The evaluation compares outcomes for cohorts of children born before and after a centre opened within the same area. These within-area comparisons are then contrasted with changes observed over the same period in comparable areas that did not yet have access to a Sure Start centre. By comparing changes over time between treatment and comparison areas, the methodology removes both permanent differences between places and national trends affecting all children. To further improve comparability, greater weight is given to comparison areas with similar levels of deprivation to those that received a Sure Start centre. Under the assumption that outcomes would have followed similar trends in the absence of the programme, this approach allows us to estimate the causal effect of exposure to Sure Start on later criminal behaviour.

The analysis is implemented using linked administrative data from the National Pupil Database (NPD) and Ministry of Justice records. The NPD contains information on all pupils in state schools in England, including demographic characteristics, school outcomes and pupils' home postcodes. Since addresses are first observed at age 5, children's postcode at this age is used as a proxy for where they lived during the pre-school years, when they may have had access to Sure Start.

To measure crime outcomes, the NPD is linked with Police National Computer data. These records include all recordable offences for which an individual received a formal sanction, through a police caution or a conviction in court. The data also include information on the type and seriousness of offending. Offences are grouped into broad categories, such as violent crime, theft, drug offences and weapons offences. For court convictions, sentencing information is used to distinguish between custodial and non-custodial sanctions.

The evaluation finds that exposure to Sure Start during early childhood had mixed effects on youth offending. Overall, as shown in Figure 6.1, children who lived near a Sure Start centre were around 8% more likely to have any criminal record by age 16. This increase was driven entirely by a rise in cautions, with the probability of receiving a caution increasing by around 11%.

**Figure 6.1. Effect of Sure Start on criminal behaviour up to age 16**



Note: Results represent the effect on the probability of having any criminal offences of the specified type as a result of living within 2.5 kilometres of a Sure Start centre, relative to living further away. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

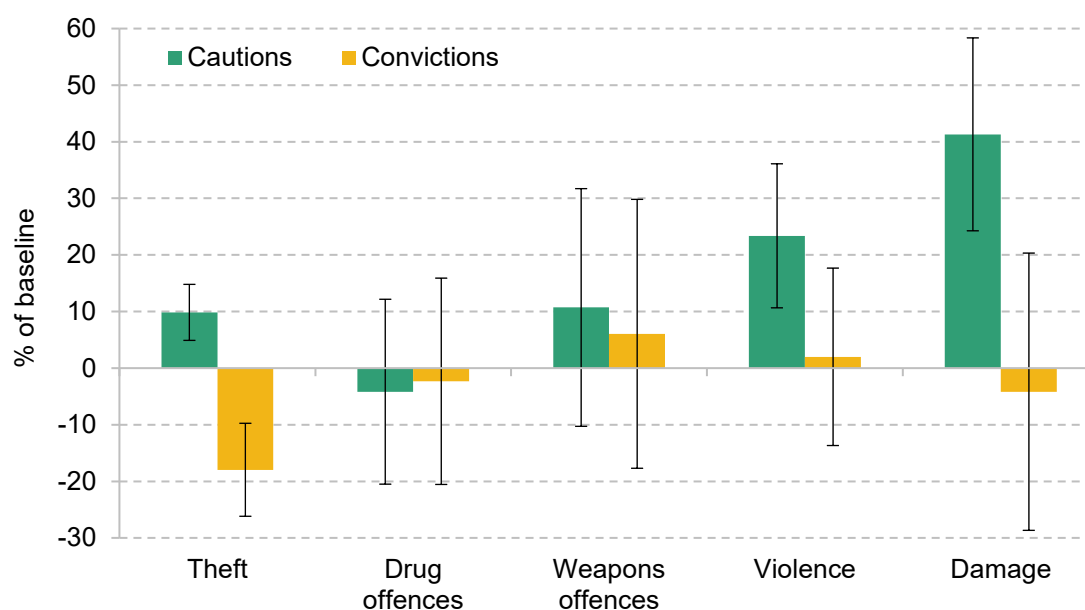
Source: Authors' calculations using data from the National-Pupil-Database–Ministry-of-Justice linked data.

However, there is little evidence that Sure Start increased more serious offending. In fact, estimates suggest reductions in convictions (6%) and custodial sentences (11%), although these effects are not statistically significant. Taken together, the findings suggest that Sure Start may have shifted young people away from more serious forms of offending towards lower-level offences that are more likely to result in a caution rather than a conviction.

Examining offence types as shown in Figure 6.2 provides further support for this interpretation. The increase in cautions was concentrated in theft, violence and criminal damage. At the same time, Sure Start led to a statistically significant 18% reduction in theft convictions, indicating that some young people who might otherwise have committed more serious theft offences instead engaged in less serious behaviour.

The increase in cautions was also concentrated among younger adolescents (Figure 6.3). The largest effects were observed between ages 10 and 12, when exposure to Sure Start increased cautions by more than 15%. These patterns suggest that the overall rise in recorded offending was driven primarily by relatively minor offences among younger teenagers, such as fighting or graffiti, rather than by increases in serious criminal behaviour.

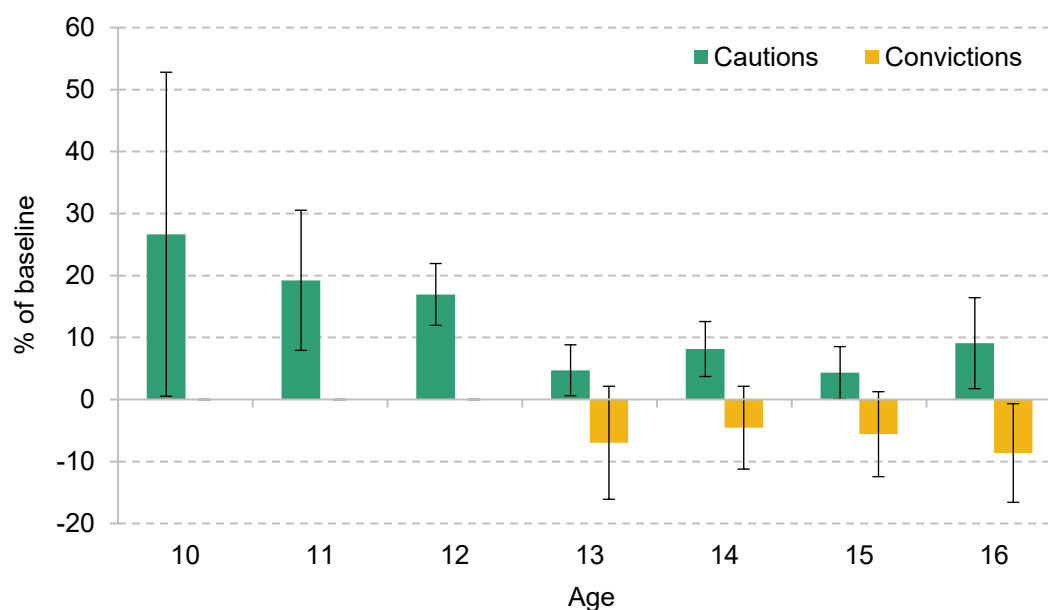
**Figure 6.2. Effect of Sure Start on criminal behaviour up to age 16 by offence type**



Note: Results represent the effect on the probability of having any criminal offences of the specified type as a result of living within 2.5 kilometres of a Sure Start centre, relative to living further away. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from the National-Pupil-Database–Ministry-of-Justice linked data.

Figure 6.3. Effect of Sure Start on criminal behaviour by age



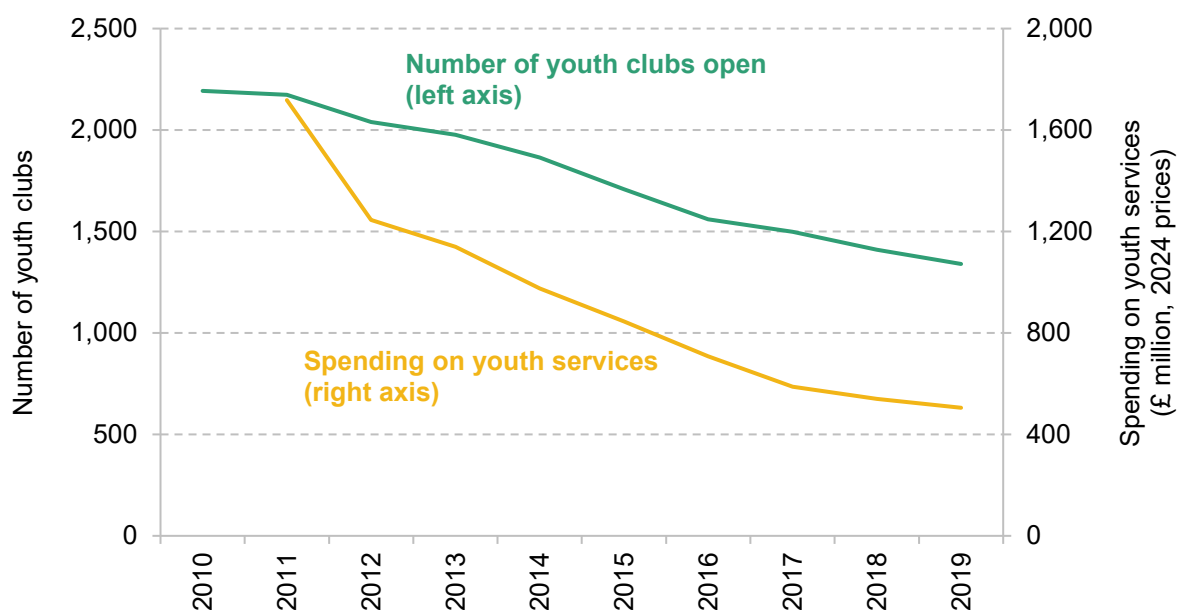
Note: Results represent the effect on the probability of having any criminal offences of the specified type at the specified age as a result of living within 2.5 kilometres of a Sure Start centre, relative to living further away. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals, and are removed for the effect of convictions at ages 10–12, where the effect is 0 but convictions are very rare. The set of cohorts used is different for each age group.

Source: Authors' calculations using data from the National-Pupil-Database–Ministry-of-Justice linked data.

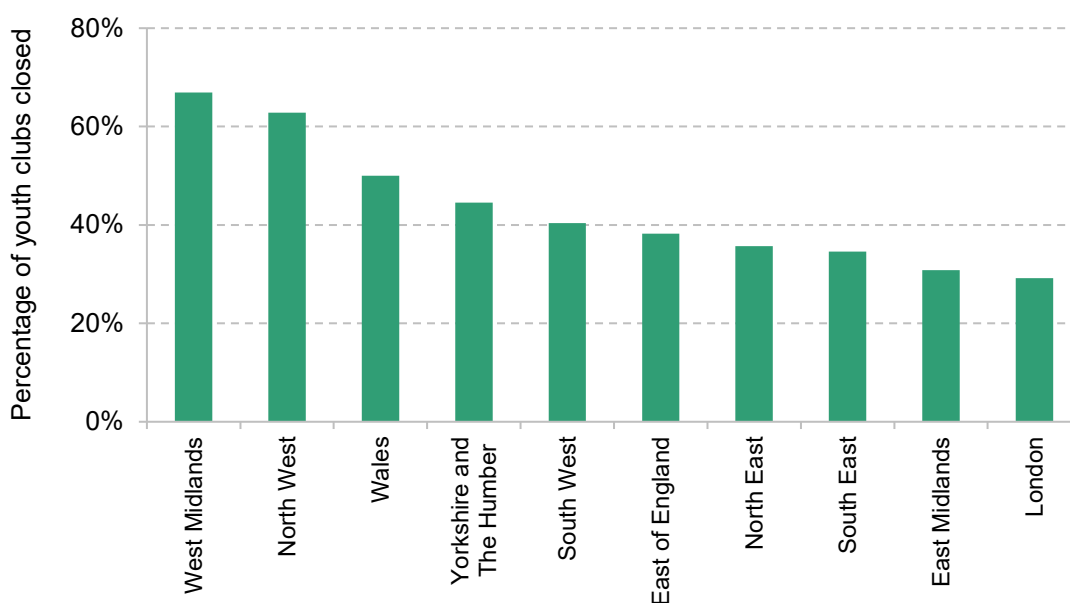
Subgroup analysis suggests that the effects of Sure Start on criminal behaviour were broadly similar across groups, with some differences in magnitude. The increase in youth cautions was larger for students eligible for free school meals (FSM), although there were no statistically significant effects on convictions or custodial sentences for either FSM or non-FSM students. Differences by gender were also limited: while the absolute reduction in convictions and custodial sentences was larger for boys, this mainly reflects their higher baseline levels of offending, and percentage effects were not statistically different between boys and girls. There is somewhat stronger evidence of differential effects by ethnicity. For non-white young people, exposure to Sure Start increased the likelihood of receiving a youth caution by age 16 by 14%, while also reducing the likelihood of receiving a custodial sentence. However, the latter estimate is imprecise because custodial sentences are rare, particularly within smaller subgroups.

## 6.2 Youth club closures

Youth clubs provide universal after-school support, mainly in deprived communities, where young people are at higher risk of crime involvement. These programmes are free or heavily subsidised, offering a safe space for young people aged 10–18 to meet friends outside of school hours, access mentorship from youth workers, and participate in a variety of activities such as

**Figure 6.4. Operative youth clubs and real-terms spending on youth services**

Note: The yellow line depicts aggregate spending on youth services in England (millions of pounds), available from 2011–12 onwards from the Department for Education. Expenditure values are expressed in real terms and adjusted for inflation using implied GDP deflators at market prices from the Office for National Statistics. The green line depicts operative youth clubs open in England and Wales between 2010 and 2019 and is from an IFS-compiled database of youth clubs using Freedom of Information requests.

**Figure 6.5. Share of youth clubs closed by region, 2010–19**

Note: Graph depicts the closure of clubs by the end of 2019 that were already open in 2010, excluding any clubs that opened between 2010 and 2019, from an IFS-compiled database of youth clubs using Freedom of Information requests.

music or sports. At the beginning of the last decade, they were very embedded in local communities. In London alone, 40% of young people aged 11–16 reported attending these spaces at least weekly in 2009 (Greater London Authority, 2009).

Youth services were one of the services most severely affected by the cuts following the 2010 Spending Review. Dedicated grants were removed, and the funding available for local authorities to run and manage programmes supporting local youth decreased substantially. According to official data from the Department for Education, between 2011 and 2019, youth services spending fell by 71% from a real-terms £1.7 billion in 2024 prices (Figure 6.4).

Across England and Wales, 40% of youth clubs open in 2010 had closed by the end of the decade. These closures differed in intensity by region. London, which saw the smallest share of closures among regions, had nearly 30% of its youth clubs close by 2019; meanwhile, the West Midlands was the most affected, with 67% of its clubs closing (Figure 6.5).

The effects of youth clubs on young people’s development were not well understood in the existing literature,<sup>11</sup> and popular opinion pointed at different potential channels through which youth clubs might either increase or decrease crime. On the one hand, youth organisations and local communities have long argued that youth clubs provide a useful environment for developing social skills, becoming positively connected to their local community, and steering away from antisocial behaviours that might otherwise occur during idle time or without mentorship. On the other hand, youth clubs often concentrate young people from deprived backgrounds, who might learn criminal skills or become connected to peers who commit crimes.

Disentangling whether such beneficial or detrimental effects dominate is difficult, due to data limitations and statistical challenges. First, data on youth clubs and who attends them are limited; second, young people attending youth clubs might differ from those not attending – for instance, they might come from lower-income backgrounds or more deprived parts of the country. Recent work at IFS has generated the first credible causal estimates for the effects of youth clubs, focusing on closures in London. Villa (2024) explores the effects of youth club closures on young people’s education and crime outcomes using a newly created database of youth club availability derived from Freedom of Information requests and administrative data from the Metropolitan Police Service and the Department for Education.

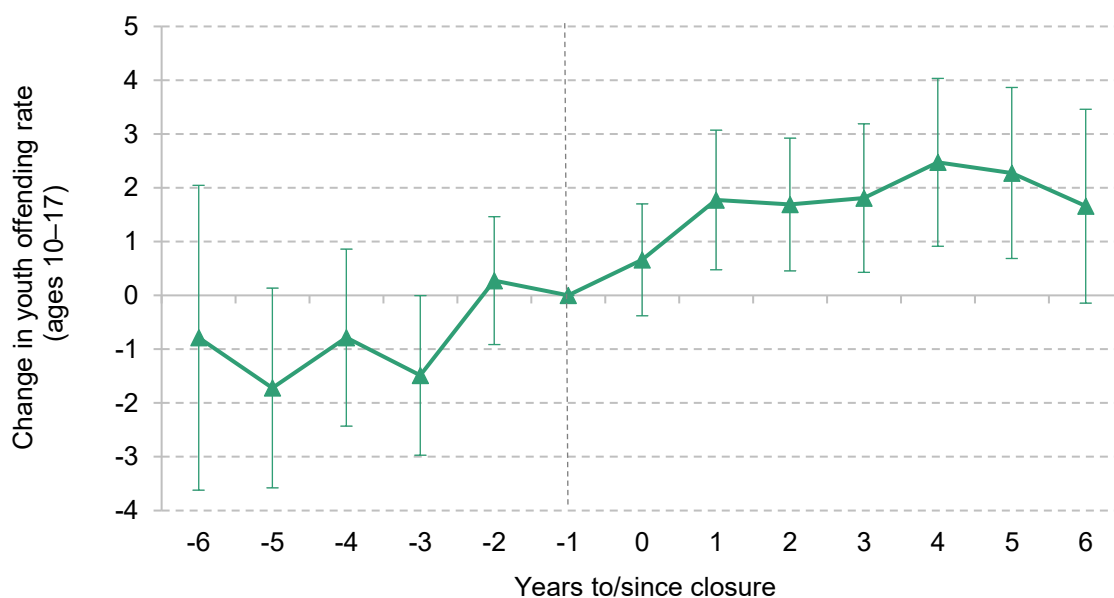
<sup>11</sup> Existing research has identified a range of contributing factors that affect the involvement of young people in crime and, importantly, has shown that some are malleable through policy. A large literature establishes that formal education raises skills and reduces offending (Lochner and Moretti, 2004; Machin, Marie and Vujić, 2011; Hjalmarsson, Holmlund and Lindquist, 2015; Bell, Costa and Machin, 2022). A second strand shows that targeted, often intensive interventions for disadvantaged youth – summer jobs, mentoring and cognitive-behavioural programmes – can reduce offending (Heller, 2014; Heller et al., 2017; Modestino, 2019; Davis and Heller, 2020). Yet schooling accounts for only part of a young person’s week, and targeted programmes are costly and may fail to reach many at-risk individuals. Far less is known about how young people spend the rest of their time, and whether leisure-based provision such as after-school youth clubs shapes developmental and criminal trajectories.

The analysis exploits the geographic variation in youth club availability caused by youth club closures, comparing young people living in areas (Lower-Layer Super Output Areas, or LSOAs) where all local youth clubs within a 40-minute walk closed, and those in LSOAs where all nearby clubs remained open. The work shows that the closure of youth clubs did not occur in areas disproportionately affected by other spending cuts, and that closures were not more likely in more deprived areas.

Youth club closures led to an increase in teen offending. Young people aged 10–17 in London who lost access to their nearby youth clubs were 14% more likely to engage in criminal activity in the years following closure (an increase of 2 offenders per 1,000 over a base of 15 offenders per 1,000). In Figure 6.6, event-study estimates show the evolution of offending rates in the years before and after the closure. It indicates that crime increases persist for up to six years after closure, relative to areas where youth clubs remained open. The magnitude of these effects is notable. The 14% rise in youth offending is comparable – though of opposite sign – to the fall in crime achieved by keeping young people in school for up to two years longer (Bell, Costa and Machin, 2022).

Youth offending rates rose particularly in acquisitive crimes (e.g. theft, robbery and shoplifting), drug offences and violent crimes. Both first-time offenders and repeat offenders increased their participation in crime. There was no change in adult crime rates.

**Figure 6.6. Effect of youth club closures on offending rates per 1,000, ages 10–17**



Note: The graph shows the difference in offending rates per 1,000 for children aged 10–17 living in areas affected by closures relative to areas where youth clubs remained open, before and after closures. Year 0 is the year in which the youth club closed, according to Freedom of Information data. The plotted line shows the point estimate and error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

What makes youth clubs so valuable? One possibility is that they simply occupy young people during after-school hours when they might otherwise drift into trouble. Another is that they offer something deeper – a combination of a safe space to spend time with peers, supportive youth workers, and a diverse set of activities that together build skills and habits with lasting benefits.

Three findings point firmly to the second explanation. First, the rise in crime was not confined to after-school hours: following closures, offending by young people increased throughout the day, not only in the times they would otherwise have spent at the club. Were youth clubs merely keeping young people off the streets, the effect should have been concentrated in club hours alone. Second, the effects were larger for those who were younger when their local club closed, suggesting that the benefits accumulate the longer a young person has access to a club – consistent with a developmental rather than a purely custodial role. Third, when the nearest club closed, having another youth club nearby cushioned the impact, but proximity to libraries, parks or sports centres did not. If any safe, supervised space would do, these alternatives should have helped; that only other youth clubs did points to something specific about what they provide. Together, these results suggest that the value of youth clubs lies not in simply giving young people somewhere to go, but in the structured, supportive environment they offer.

Villa (2024) compares the savings from closing youth clubs with the associated social and fiscal costs due to increased crime and educational losses that are also documented in the work. Teenagers who do less well in their GCSEs go on to earn less over their lifetime (Hodge, Little and Weldon, 2021), paying lower taxes as a result. Meanwhile, crimes are costly – not only to victims, but also to communities and to the criminal justice system (Heeks et al., 2018). When considering lost tax revenues (due to lower educational attainment and forgone earnings) and criminal justice costs, the research estimates that for every £1 saved from closing youth clubs, there were societal costs of nearly £3. Though local authorities saw most of the savings, young people, their families and victims of crime bore most of the costs. Considering that future crime, spillovers into other neighbourhoods and broader effects are not included in those estimates, true costs are likely larger.

Future work at IFS will explore whether the effects observed in London are mirrored in other parts of the country. Doing so will help us understand the continued value of youth club provision in a context where many local authorities are still debating whether to make further cuts to or invest in youth services. This work reframes youth clubs not as a discretionary leisure expense but as an investment in young people's development, with measurable returns for the justice system and society at large.

## 7. Measuring the returns to preventing crime

Understanding the returns to crime prevention is a critical issue for policymakers. A number of the earlier chapters have conducted cost–benefit analysis of interventions that impact justice-related outcomes. These interventions can arise either from reforms within the justice system, such as police station closures, or from other areas of public policy, such as Sure Start centres or youth clubs. For policies that affect crime-related outcomes, when the government considers whether to fund a policy, it compares the policy’s cost with the value of the crimes it is expected to prevent. That value is commonly summarised by the social cost of crime: an estimate, expressed in monetary terms, of the burden that crime places on individuals, public services and wider society. If this cost is underestimated, the benefits of prevention will also appear too low, and effective policies may wrongly be judged not to offer value for money.

This chapter summarises research conducted as part of the Transforming Justice programme by Facchetti, Rasul and Sijthoff (2026), which re-evaluates how such social costs of crime are calculated and presents evidence that they may underestimate the true costs of crime. Researchers have previously used a variety of approaches to estimate costs of crime. Some studies examine how much people would be willing to pay to reduce their risk of becoming a victim (Ludwig and Cook, 2001; Cohen et al., 2004). Other methods attempt to trace out the costs of harm that follow from being a victim of crime – such as those arising from stolen or damaged property, medical treatment, lost earnings, spending on alarms or other measures intended to reduce the risk of crime, and injuries related to physical pain, fear, anxiety and reductions in quality of life. The estimates commonly used in England and Wales follow the second approach, which traces costs borne by victims of crime. They combine these different forms of harm with costs incurred by the police and the criminal justice system to produce an estimate for each type of crime. The Home Office methodology for this approach is set out in Heeks et al. (2018).

We find that accounting for witnesses is important: an individual who witnesses an assault, a break-in or vandalism has not been victimised in the usual sense, but may still feel frightened, become less confident in the police or the justice system, feel less safe locally or change their daily behaviour. Ignoring such effects of crime can understate both the total burden of crime and the value of preventing it.

To assess the social costs of crime after accounting for costs to witnesses, the study uses 17 waves of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), covering 2001–02 to 2017–18. This period is chosen to ensure consistent availability of key measures used in the analysis, and to avoid changes to the survey design following the COVID-19 pandemic. The CSEW interviews a representative sample of around 40,000 adults each year and asks about both their experiences of crime and their views of crime and the justice system.<sup>12</sup>

Many individuals experience crime as victims. The 2015–16 CSEW shows that 12% of individuals reported being a victim of crime in the previous 12 months – corresponding to 5.8 million individuals, or a victimisation occurring every six seconds. However, crime-related experiences extend beyond victimisation. In the same survey, 31% of individuals report having personally witnessed a crime or antisocial behaviour. Witnessing is therefore not a rare experience: substantially more people encounter crime as witnesses than as direct victims.

The study shows that both victimisation and witnessing crime are associated with worse outcomes relevant for calculating the social costs of crime: both increase the fear of future victimisation, reducing feelings of safety, and increase the perceived effect crime has on an individual's quality of life. The study uses these findings to extend the standard social cost estimates produced by the Home Office to account for costs borne by witnesses, in addition to the usual costs included which are borne by victims of crime. We find that this approach raises the estimated unit social cost of crime – namely, the cost arising from a single crime – by around 25% on average (relative to when only victims are accounted for), as shown in Table 7.1. The increase differs across crime types: it is around 28% for violent crime, 27% for criminal damage, 15% for burglary and 14% for theft.

Accounting for witnesses also changes the picture of how the total social costs of crime have evolved over time. This is important because it can help resolve the puzzle that, despite long-run falls in crime victimisation rates, many individuals still perceive crime to be rising. As shown in Figure 7.1, between 2003–04 and 2014–15, the CSEW data show that victimisation rates fell by around 25%. This fall in victimisation rates does translate into a fall in the total social costs of crime when only victims are accounted for. The conventional Home Office victim-only measure of aggregate social costs falls by 17.4% over the same period. This is slightly smaller than the actual fall in victimisation rates because the composition of victimisation has shifted towards violent offences, which carry higher social costs. However, our work shows that over the same period, the estimated aggregate costs borne by witnesses rose by 35.5%. Combining the victim and witness components produces an overall decline in the total social costs of crime of only

<sup>12</sup> The witnessing questions refer to events respondents directly observed, rather than incidents heard about through friends, family, word of mouth or the news media.

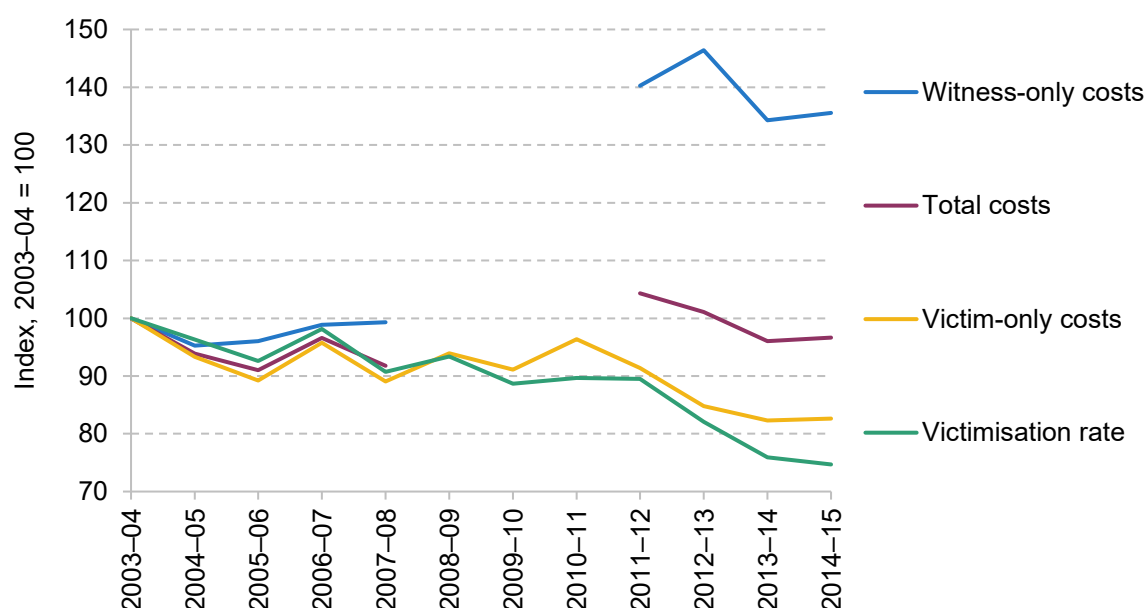
3.4%. Including witnesses therefore offsets almost all of the decline shown by the victim-only measure.

**Table 7.1. Unit social costs of crime, adjusting for witnesses, compared with only considering victims**

| Crime type      | Adjusted unit social cost |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| All crime types | 25% higher                |
| Violent crime   | 28% higher                |
| Burglary        | 15% higher                |
| Theft           | 14% higher                |
| Criminal damage | 27% higher                |

Note: The table reports percentage differences relative to the conventional victim-only unit cost estimates in Heeks et al. (2018). We add costs borne by a person who directly witnesses the crime. Witness costs are scaled relative to victim costs using the estimated associations of witnessing and victimisation with personal safety, worry about crime and quality of life.

**Figure 7.1. Estimated social costs of crime for victims, witnesses and both**



Note: All series are indexed to 100 in 2003–04. The graph shows the victimisation rate, the aggregate costs borne by victims, the aggregate costs borne by witnesses and the combined victim-and-witness total costs. The victim and witness components are constructed separately, using their own annual counts and crime-type composition, before being added together. Unit costs are held fixed in 2015–16 prices. The series end in 2014–15 because this is the final year of the last continuous block of survey waves containing the detailed witness module. The series are missing when witnessing questions are not asked in the CSEW (2008–09 to 2010–11).

Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales, various years.

Two forces help explain the increase in witness costs – at a time when victimisation rates are falling. First, witnessing shifted towards violent crime, which carries a much higher cost than other crime types. Second, the number of people reporting witnessing violent crime increased. This could reflect a genuine change in how visible violent crime was. The CSEW survey evidence suggests that violent crime became somewhat more likely to occur outside the home and during the day, where more people could observe it. However, the increase in the number of witnesses could also partly reflect changes in what respondents regarded as violent crime or reported as having witnessed.

The flatter trend in the total social costs of crime over time once witnesses are accounted for offers one possible explanation for the persistent gap between falling victimisation and public concern about crime. If the monetary estimates capture real losses in well-being, the overall burden experienced through direct encounters with crime changed much less than victimisation rates alone suggest. This does not imply that witnessing is the only explanation for public concern, but this work identifies an important experience that victimisation statistics omit. The wider gap between crime trends and public perceptions has been documented in a substantial social science literature (e.g. Garland, 2001; Duffy et al., 2008; Esberg and Mummolo, 2018; Campedelli et al., 2023).

The evidence in this chapter suggests that conventional approaches may understate the social costs of crime by overlooking its wider effects on witnesses and communities, not just direct victims. As a result, the benefits of effective crime reduction policies – particularly those targeting violent crime – may be far larger than is often assumed. Better measurement of justice outcomes can therefore improve understanding of which interventions deliver the greatest social value and where scarce public resources can have the largest returns.

## 8. Conclusion

This report has brought together evidence on a range of questions about the connections between resources in the justice system in England and Wales. The examples considered are drawn from different parts of the system and different strands of research, so they do not support a simple general conclusion. However, they do suggest that it is useful to think about resources in the justice system in broader terms than spending alone, and to pay attention to how existing resources are measured, allocated and used in practice.

One implication is that budget measures, on their own, are unlikely to capture all the constraints facing the justice system. In some contexts, spending is central. In others, the more relevant issue may be the availability of judges, lawyers, courtrooms, provider capacity, management practices, or access to services in particular places. This does not mean that funding levels are unimportant, but it does suggest that changes in spending may not map straightforwardly onto changes in performance, and that a fuller picture often requires looking beyond financial budgets alone.

The evidence discussed in the report also suggests that different parts of the justice system are linked in ways that can make it difficult or even misleading to assess any one part of it in isolation. Police activity can shape the flow of cases into courts. Court delays can affect prisons, victims and defendants. Legal aid may affect whether problems are resolved early or instead deepen and move further into the system. These interdependencies are familiar in principle, but the examples in the report show how they can matter in practice when considering the effects of changes in resources.

Such spillovers are not specific to justice; most public services generate effects that extend beyond their own boundaries. One feature that may be distinctive to justice, however, is that it often absorbs demand generated elsewhere in the public sector. Our analysis of tribunals' demand illustrates this in one direction: pressure in the SEND system appears to translate into rising caseloads in the tribunals system, and civil legal aid similarly covers housing, welfare and immigration problems that originate outside the justice system itself. The relationship can also run the other way, though the evidence here is more mixed: our analysis of Sure Start finds that early exposure increased minor youth offending, with no significant effect on more serious crime. This illustrates that investment in unrelated services can shape later contact with the justice system, without necessarily reducing demand on it. These examples suggest that interdependencies between justice and other public services, not only within the justice system itself, may be a relevant consideration for policy.

However, much of this evidence concerns criminal justice. Whether similar interdependencies exist within civil and administrative justice, and how important they are relative to those documented here, are not matters the evidence in this report can address. Civil and administrative disputes are resolved through a wider range of routes, including courts, tribunals, ombudsmen and alternative dispute resolution, which may make such interdependencies harder to characterise than in criminal justice. Extending this analysis to civil and administrative justice is a priority for future work, both generally and within the Transforming Justice programme at IFS.

A related point is that the use of resources appears to matter alongside their level. The Crown Court backlog analysis, for instance, suggests that increases in resources do not necessarily translate into falling backlogs if case mix changes or if other parts of the system constrain what can be achieved. Evidence from policing and prisons points in a similar direction: organisational practices, management and implementation may help explain why similar formal resources can be associated with different outcomes.

The report also shows how resource decisions made outside the justice system may affect justice outcomes. Studies on Sure Start and on the closures of youth clubs suggest that changes in services for children and young people may have later effects on offending and on contact with the justice system. These examples are necessarily specific, and they should not be taken to imply that all spending outside the justice system has similar effects. They do, however, indicate that pressures on justice services may sometimes reflect policy choices made elsewhere and over time.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that much of the analysis reported here has utilised newly available administrative data on the justice system – made available through the Ministry of Justice’s Data First initiative. Such administrative data – which are also being used in other projects under the Transforming Justice research agenda that are not mentioned in this report – are an invaluable resource.

Having such large-scale data available for analysis means that new stylised facts around the functioning of the justice system can be established. These data also help advance understanding of how the justice system operates differently across the country, as well as how different population groups might experience it differently. It is worth noting that data availability, quality and utility for research are generally stronger for crime and criminal justice than for other areas of the justice system, such as civil, administrative or family justice; this is one reason why our analyses to date have concentrated primarily on criminal justice, as noted in the Introduction.

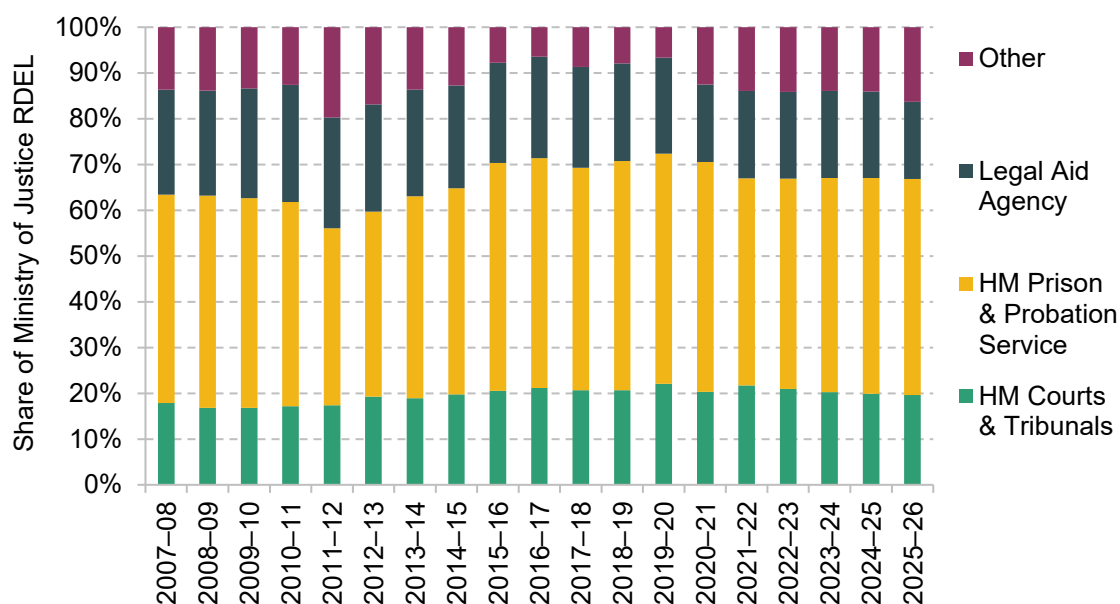
There is also a broader point about resource and performance management within courts and tribunals specifically. Many public services operate against explicit performance frameworks,

such as NHS waiting-time targets or school inspection regimes. Our own analysis suggests courts and tribunals have less of an equivalent: in both the Crown Court and the tribunals system, we had to construct our own measures of productivity – disposals per sitting day, and the gap between receipts and disposals – rather than drawing on any existing standard metric for either institution. This may reflect the practical difficulty of defining what constitutes good or cost-effective justice and, in the case of courts, the tension between government’s interest in efficiency and judicial discretion in individual cases (Woodhouse, 2007), though our analysis does not test this directly.

This report began with the observation that, despite the justice system’s importance to social and economic life, economists have paid relatively little attention to how it operates and how resources shape its performance. The evidence brought together here illustrates the value of applying economic analysis to these questions. By broadening how we think about resources in justice, economic analysis can contribute to a richer understanding of how justice systems work, where pressures emerge and how scarce public resources can be used most effectively to improve outcomes.

# Appendix

Figure A.1 Composition of Ministry of Justice's day-to-day spending over time



Note: HM Courts and Tribunals series is adjusted for fee income for years prior to 2016–17, as explained in Domínguez and Zaranko (2025). RDEL stands for resource departmental expenditure limit.

Source: Ministry of Justice and HM Courts and Tribunals annual report and accounts, various years.

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