



National Uniform & Equipment Survey

Results: July 2025

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POLICE
Federation



Foreword from Lancaster University

Inconsistent uniform quality across forces has created a 'postcode lottery', where access to high-performance kit depends more on local budgets than operational need. This inequity impacts health, wellbeing, morale, and undermines national policing standards. The Home Office now has a responsibility to establish coordinated procurement standards that ensure all wearers receive fit-for-purpose uniforms - enhancing operational effectiveness, promoting fairness, and reinforcing public confidence.

In December 2024, the Prime Minister of England and Wales, Sir Keir Starmer, introduced the Plan for Change, outlining some of the most significant reforms in recent decades including the restoration of public confidence through the re-establishment of a visible and responsive policing presence. To address these challenges, the Neighbourhood Policing Guarantee - a cornerstone of the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill - commits to assigning a named, contactable officer to every neighbourhood. This measure is supported by a £100 million investment aimed at recruiting 13,000 additional personnel, including neighbourhood police officers, PCSOs, and special constables, all deployed in clearly defined, community-facing roles. Given that the majority of existing personnel, as well as the planned 13,000 new recruits, are required to wear uniform and equipment, this period presents a strategic opportunity to review and standardise police uniforms. Enhancing uniform design may contribute to increased safety, improved perceptions of professionalism, and greater approachability. As the proposed legislative reforms seek to rebuild public confidence in policing, complementary changes in uniforms, equipment, and overall officer presentation will be critical to supporting that objective.

In 2024, more than 20,000 police officers and staff across England and Wales expressed their views in the first ever National Uniform & Equipment Survey. Their message was clear: the uniform must evolve - not only to reflect the realities of modern policing but to protect those who wear it.

Dr. Camilla De Camargo, Lancaster University.

Foreword from The Police Federation of England and Wales

Being a police officer is a unique and significant role in society. The police uniform is a key part of an officer's identity: it gives us the power to be visible and prevent crime. The uniform is more than just items of clothing and equipment: it enables the police to garner respect from the public and other organisations. The police do a job like no other, but to do this we must feel comfortable, protected, and supported. It is for this very reason that the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) has partnered with Lancaster University to create and launch the first ever National Uniform & Equipment survey in 2024. It is important to look at cross country differences in uniform, so we can identify key issues and assess what works and what doesn't. As a Federation we represent the interests of over 140,000 members and consistently aim to make their experience in policing better. The results of this survey will provide a solid evidence base to go forward and challenge all the relevant decision makers to invest in the best uniform that is of the highest standard, is ethically and environmentally sourced, and is made from the best materials which offer durability and enhance safety. In a nutshell, we want police uniform that is fit for purpose, fit for form, and indeed, fit for the future.

Zac Mader and Belinda Goodwin, National Board, Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW).

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Executive Summary

This report presents the key findings of the 2024 National Uniform & Equipment Survey, which collated over 20,000 responses from officers and staff who wear the police uniform as part of their everyday role. Overall sentiment towards the uniform is negative, with common descriptors including ‘unfit for purpose’ and ‘ill-fitting’. Moreover, the uniform is widely regarded as unsuited to the specific functional requirements of police officer and staff duties. Critically, whether engaged in physically demanding tasks or sedentary work, respondents consistently report a sense of restriction and persistent discomfort - conditions that have become a routine aspect of their working day. As a result, many state a variety of physical health conditions they attribute to wearing the uniform. While some officers and staff report feeling professional when wearing the uniform, they do not perceive it as visually smart or reflective of pride in the organisation.

Key Findings

Widespread dissatisfaction and inconsistency with uniform across forces

- More than half of respondents (56%) report a negative experience of wearing their uniform, compared to just 20% who report a positive experience.
- Satisfaction levels vary dramatically by force – a “postcode lottery” of uniform experience – with negative experiences ranging from 29% in one force to 75% in another.

Poor fit, restricts movement, and discomfort

- Half of respondents (51%) report that the uniform is not fit for purpose, compared with only 25% who say it is.

- 64% report their uniform restricts their movement and fails to regulate temperature, with 74% saying they are not kept cool in summer, and 40% not warm in winter.
- Quality and comfort are major concerns: 57% say their uniform is poor quality, and 61% say it does not fit well.

Critical items are rated poorly

- Systemic issues with the most commonly worn garments.
- Daily-use items like body armour and cargo trousers are flagged as problematic by over 60% of wearers.
 - 69% report negative experiences with cargo trousers.
 - 61% say body armour worsens their uniform experience.

Cost is prioritised over function and quality

- 76% of wearers believe that cost drives uniform decisions, with only 4% disagreeing.
- Many respondents believe that cost is prioritised at the expense of quality and wearer wellbeing.

Uniform impacting physical health

- 57% of all respondents report at least one physical health condition that they believe has been caused or made worse by their uniform (such as musculoskeletal conditions, crushed testicles, crushed breasts, and bloating).
- 85% of female respondents and 62% of male respondents reported at least one physical health condition.
- 40% experience these health conditions on a daily basis.

Wellbeing is at risk

- Nearly 2 in 5 report the uniform impacts their physical wellbeing and body image, with only 1 in 5 reporting that the uniform has not impacted these aspects of wellbeing.
- Almost 1 in 5 report the uniform impacts their mental and emotional wellbeing.

Uniform complaints are common, but often ignored

- Over a third (36%) have made a complaint about their uniform: yet only 8% received uniform replacements, and just 2% were refitted.
- 69% of complaints had no action taken, and 5% have had to take sick leave due to uniform-related issues.
- Almost half (48%) report negative effects of the uniform but did not take time off; fear of stigma, culture, or disclosure prevent many from speaking up.

Uniform undermines professional identity

- Under half (47%) of respondents feel proud wearing their uniform, compared to 22% that do not
- Half (51%) of respondents feel professional in their uniform, while 25% do not.
- Only 37% of respondents think they look smart in their uniform.

Support for a national uniform

- 48% support a move to a national uniform, compared to 18% who oppose this idea.

Recommendations

Given the findings from the National Uniform & Equipment Survey, the recommendations are set out in Section 15.1. The headline recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1: Determine the highest minimum national standards for police uniform.

Recommendation 2: Establish a single point of accountability in the form of a Strategic Uniform Board (SUB).

Recommendation 3: Create a framework to allow better procurement and design of uniform.

Recommendation 4: Improve user experience around the logistics of uniform.

Recommendation 5: Continuous review, feedback and iteration of uniform.

1 Introduction

This report presents the results of the first ever National Uniform & Equipment Survey. Although several forces have previously conducted localised surveys gathering information from uniform wearers, this is the first survey of its kind to seek a national perspective on police uniform. The findings reflect the experiences and opinions of uniform wearers and include both police officers and police staff that currently wear uniform.

Evidence of poor workwear design is widespread across various emergency service occupations¹ and research has highlighted the serious implications of overlooking problems with uniform and personal protective equipment (PPE), which are often trivialised and dismissed. These issues can accumulate and affect morale, productivity, workplace culture, and ultimately staff retention. Dr Camilla De Camargo's doctoral research (2017) examined the history and design challenges of the police uniform in England and Wales, leading to the later development of the 'When the uniform doesn't fit' project, which explored the lived experiences of wearing a police uniform through a series of focus groups across five forces in 2023. Building on this, and working in collaboration with Dr Stephanie Wallace from Lancaster University, and the Police Federation of England and Wales, the first National Uniform & Equipment Survey was developed. The survey also benefitted from support from UNISON, the Superintendent's Association, and Bluelight Commercial. Ethical approval for the project was granted by Lancaster University Ethics Committee in April 2024².

¹For example, see Caroline Criado Perez (2019): *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. London, Chatto & Windus.

²Ref: FASSLUMS-2024-4396-RECR-2 23/04/24

2 Methodology

The survey launched on Monday 1st July 2024, and was open for six weeks to all current uniform wearing police staff and officers from the 43 territorial police forces as well as six non-Home Office forces³. The survey closed on Monday 12th August 2024: however, the deadline was extended for responses still in progress (n=8,451), with the survey finally closing on Monday 19th August 2024.

In total 27,079⁴ responses were received. Respondents were excluded if they did not meet the following two criteria:

1. The respondent currently serves in a role that requires wearing a police uniform. Those who indicated that they no longer wear a uniform in their current role were excluded (n = 1,883).
2. The respondent answered the key question of the survey about their overall experience of wearing the police uniform. Responses missing an answer to this question were excluded (n = 4,108).

Due to the small number of respondents from the six non-Home Office forces that completed the survey, a further 216 respondents were also excluded from the sample data.

Therefore, after data cleaning⁵ the final sample size included 20,838 respondents. There were also several free-text response boxes to allow respondents to provide optional additional information, resulting in an extensive dataset of 43,372 comments, some of which appear in this report.

³These six forces are the British Transport Police (BTP), the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (CNC), the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP), the National Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP), the National Police Air Service (NPAS), and the Regional Organised Crime Unit (ROCU).

⁴A total of 26 respondents did not consent to their data being used in the study and were therefore excluded from the sample data.

⁵Data cleaning is the process of identifying and resolving inconsistencies and inaccuracies in raw data to improve its quality and reliability.

2.1 Reliability

To ensure the sample ($n=20,838$) reflects the total headcount ($n=259,094^6$), we calculate the margin of error. The margin of error is a statistical measure that tests the accuracy of the survey – a small margin of error increases the precision and reliability of the results.

We also consider confidence intervals and the confidence level, which are measures of statistical certainty. The confidence level tells us how confident we are that the true population value falls within the interval. For this report, we used a 95% confidence level to calculate the margin of error, resulting in a margin of error less than 1%.

This means that if 60% of the respondents choose a certain answer, we can say with 95% confidence that the true proportion in the population lies between 59% and 61%, considering the margin of error (less than 1%). Essentially, this margin of error quantifies the possible difference between the sample result and the actual population value, giving us a high degree of confidence in the calculated percentages.

2.2 Reporting

The term ‘average’ in this report refers to the median number. We use the median as the measure of central tendency as opposed to the mean or mode. The median represents the middle number when the numbers are ordered from the least to the most. The median is least affected by outliers (extreme numbers) in the data.

We also round to one decimal point. Any result greater than 0.5 will be rounded up, for example 24.5 would be rounded up to 25. A result of 24.4 would be rounded to 24. This means in some cases the percentages do not sum to 100%. For example, if the responses to a question had a third for each of three responses, e.g. 33.3% agree, 33.3% neutral and 33.3% disagree, these would all be rounded down to 33% based on the rounding method described, therefore totalling 99% when reported.

⁶Home Office (2025) Police Workforce, England and Wales, 31st March 2024: data tables [Dataset]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-open-data-tables>.

2.3 Representativeness

To ensure that each force is proportionately represented in the survey results, the data was weighted relative to the size of the force that the respondent selected they belonged to. This is standard practice in survey reporting. The weighting method used in this report was adapted from the Police Federation of England and Wales' Pay and Morale Survey (2023)⁷ and was extended to also include police staff. For those respondents who did not provide a force (9%), a weight of 1 was allocated to them to ensure they were included in the analysis.

In some sections of the report, we break down the responses by force to examine the differences between forces. When reporting on individual forces, two forces were excluded from analysis: Cheshire Constabulary (n=70) and City of London Police (n=82). This is due to the small number of responses from within these forces. This is common practice when working with counts less than 100, to avoid the risk of revealing respondent's identities. Respondents who did not specify their force (n=1944) are also excluded from force level analyses, but are included in all other calculations.

Additionally, in some sections of the report, we examine uniform experiences based on respondents' sex. Of the 20,838 respondents who completed the survey, 16,874 (81%) provided information about their sex. Therefore, when analysing uniform experiences by sex, we use this subset.

2.4 Qualitative comments

The survey generated a number of qualitative comments (43,372) in addition to the survey responses. Given the large volume of qualitative data, a thematic analysis was undertaken. This approach enabled the identification of key themes and recur-

⁷We first calculate the total workforce and survey responses across all forces of England and Wales. For each force, we determine its share of the total workforce (population proportion) and survey responses (sample proportion). A weighting factor is then computed by dividing the population proportion by the sample proportion and assigned to that force. Forces that are overrepresented receive lower weights, while under-represented forces receive higher weights, ensuring the responses better reflect the overall police population.

ring patterns, which provided valuable context for the results. Thematic analysis was particularly well-suited to handling the breadth and depth of the responses, allowing for the extraction of meaningful insights while preserving the richness and diversity of perspectives.

2.5 Respondent characteristics

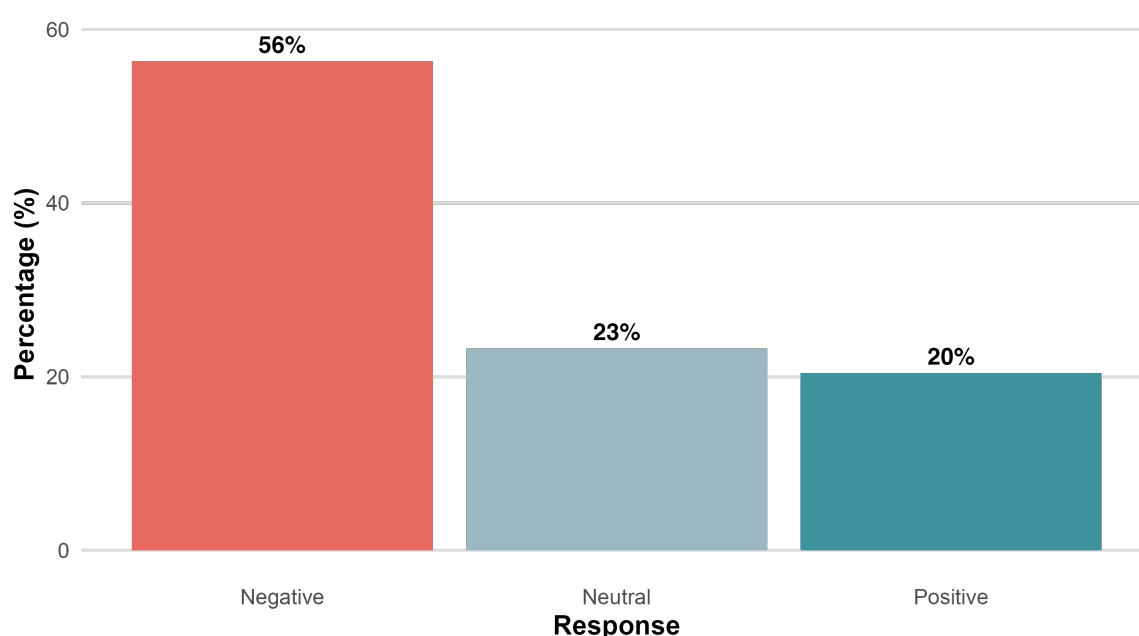
All respondents in the sample wear police uniform as part of their role and therefore were able to share their opinions, perspectives, and experiences of their current uniform. Of the 20,838 respondents, police officers made up the majority of the sample, representing 86%, compared to 14% that indicated that they are police staff. The average time in their current role was 3 years and the average time in service was 8 years.

The majority of the respondents were male (66%), 34% female and their average age was 37 years old. The ethnic breakdown of respondents was White British (88%), Asian (2%), Black (0.5%), Mixed (2%), White Other (4%), Other (0.5%), and 3% preferred not to say.

3 Experience of wearing uniform

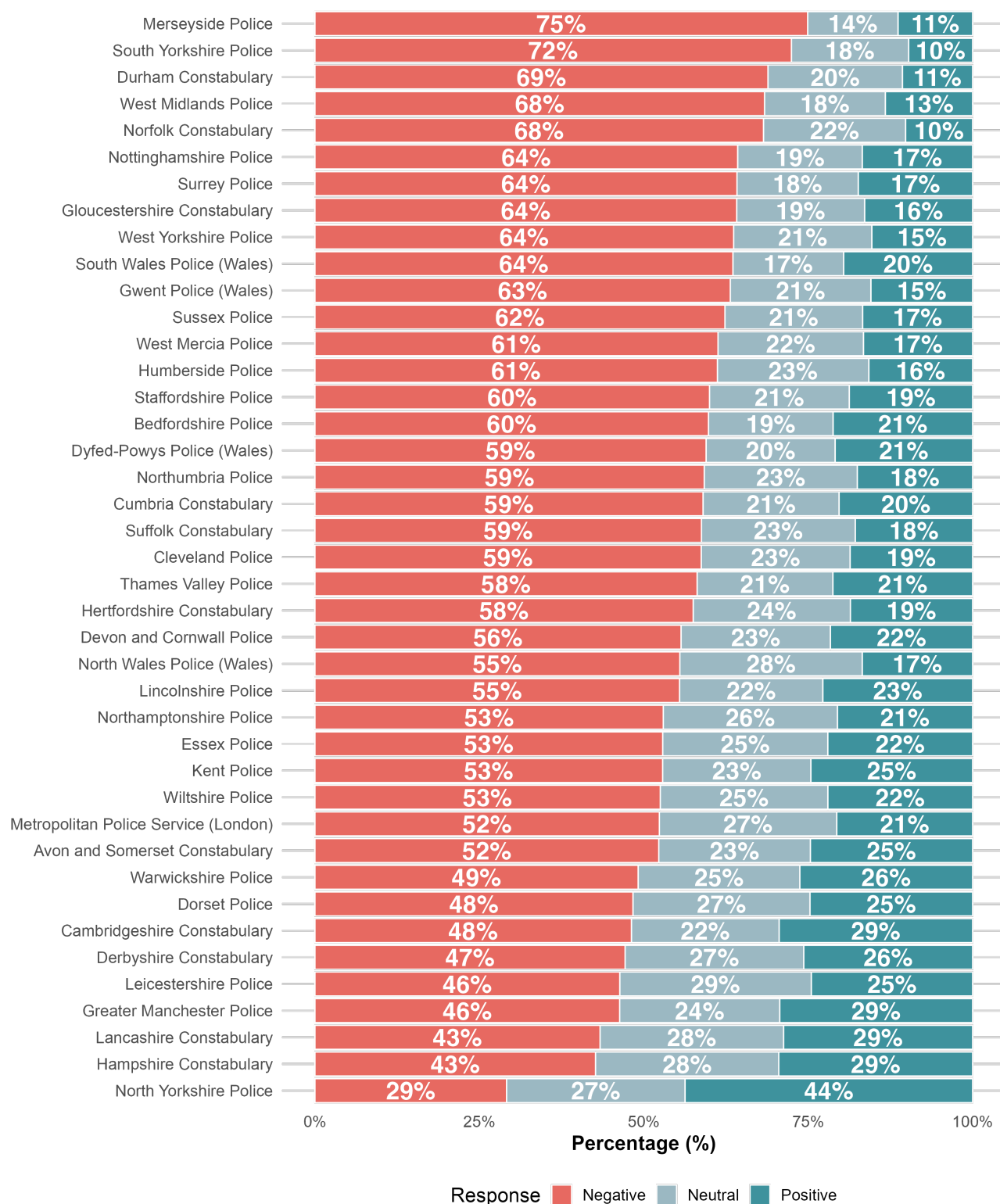
The results of the first National Uniform & Equipment Survey reveal that the overall experience of wearing police uniform in England and Wales is overwhelmingly negative, as demonstrated in Figure 1. The majority (56%) of the survey respondents reported their overall experience of wearing the uniform as negative, compared to just 20% that view their experience of wearing the uniform as positive. The remaining 23% remained neutral or did not have an opinion.

Figure 1: Overall experience of wearing uniform.
Overall, how would you rate your experience of wearing uniform?



As shown in Figure 2, experiences of wearing the uniform vary across forces, likely reflecting the differences in the quality of uniforms worn between them. Forces at the top of the graph are more critical of their experiences of the uniform than those towards the bottom of the graph. For example, over 70% of respondents from Merseyside Police and South Yorkshire Police reported negative experiences of the uniform. This negative experience of uniform is reflected, to a slightly lesser degree, in a further 38 forces, where between 43-69% of respondents expressed negative experiences of wearing the uniform.

Figure 2: Overall experience of wearing uniform by force.

Overall, how would you rate your experience of wearing uniform?

North Yorkshire Police stands out as the only force where the experience of wearing the uniform is positive for the greater proportion of uniform wearers. Forty-four percent

of respondents from North Yorkshire Police reported an overall positive experience of wearing their uniform. However, just under a third of respondents (29%) from North Yorkshire Police still reported their overall experience of uniform as negative, and a further 27% remained neutral. While North Yorkshire Police appears to exceed the majority of other forces in terms of uniform satisfaction, there are still aspects of the uniform that do not work for everyone.

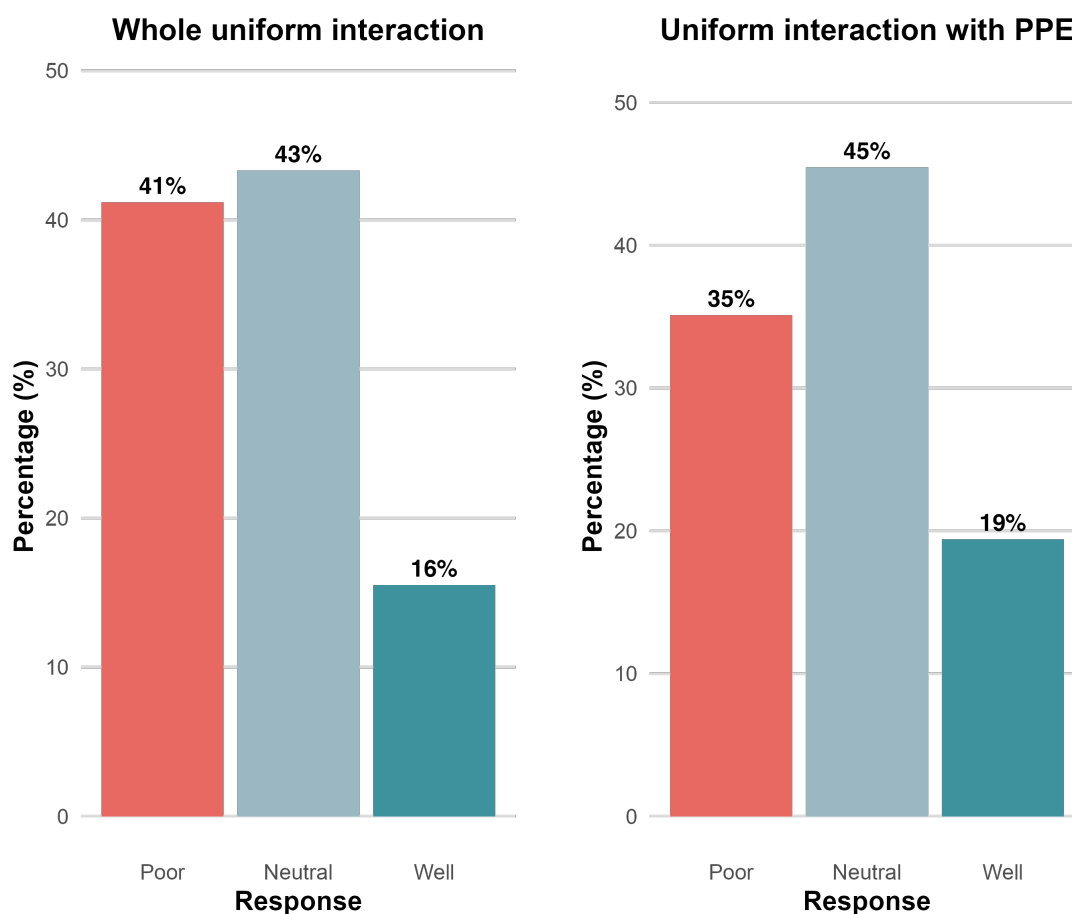
The survey results indicate that there are numerous factors that contribute to the overall experience of wearing the uniform. These will be discussed throughout the remainder of the report.

3.1 Interaction of uniform items

The police uniform consists of many individual items that are worn together as a system. The items can vary according to role, such as response, custody, and operational support. Police staff report wearing on average five items, while police officers report wearing an average of nine items. In some police roles, up to 18 items of uniform may be worn simultaneously. Therefore, it is important to understand how wearers feel these items work together.

The results in Figure 3 show that 41% of all respondents feel that the interaction of uniform items is poor. This means that for a large number of people working in uniformed positions, the uniform does not work well for them. Similarly, when we extend this to uniform and PPE, more than 1 in 3 (35%) respondents also say that the interaction of items is poor. Only 16% of respondents report that items work well together, and this increases to 19% when we include interaction with PPE. Therefore, it appears that the uniform only works well for a minority of wearers, while 43% and 45% remain neutral about their uniform interaction as a whole and with PPE respectively.

Figure 3: How does your uniform interact as a whole, and with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

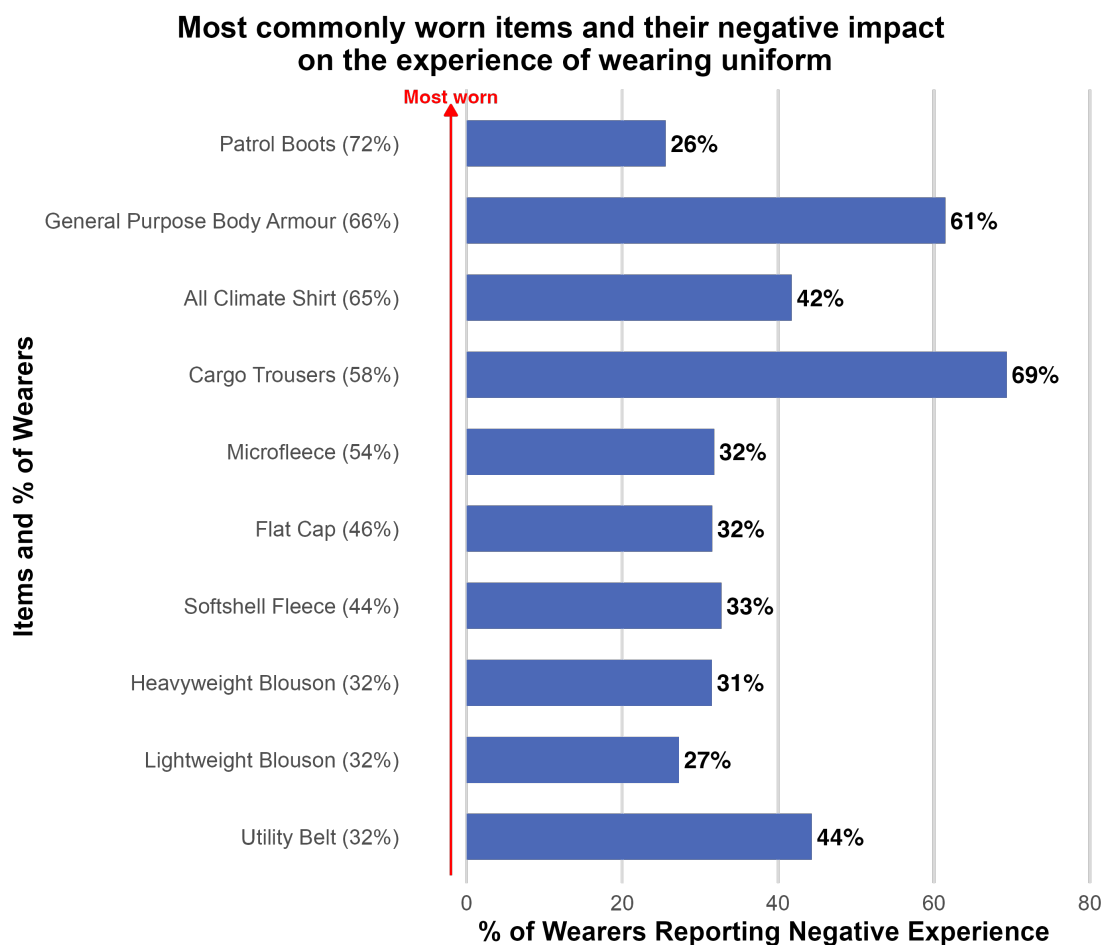


3.2 Most worn uniform items

When asked about specific items of uniform that negatively impact their experience, respondents were more inclined to relay some of the issues, even where previously they remained fairly neutral.

Figure 4 presents the ten most commonly worn uniform items listed by respondents. In addition to this, the bars on the graph show the proportion of those respondents who also report this item as negatively impacting their experience of uniform. For example, the most commonly worn item of uniform is the patrol boot, worn by 72% of respondents. Of these, just over a quarter (26%) report a negative experience of wearing this item.

Figure 4: Summary of the most commonly worn uniform items reported by survey respondents, and the proportion of those who said these items contributed negatively to their uniform experience.



The second most worn item is the General-Purpose Body Armour (GPBA), worn by 66%, and for 61% of these wearers, this item is considered problematic. The weight and fit of the GPBA were the key issues highlighted by wearers:

“The current uniform doesn’t seem to provide adequate coverage on officer’s bodies with large areas including armpit areas/ exposed compared to other forces vests that feel a lot more protective! On numerous occasions, offenders have commented how exposed our kit leaves us and state that our kit acts as a target of where to be stabbed!!”

“Body armour particular uncomfortable and causes more pain in breasts when at certain points in the menstrual cycle.”

“A lighter body armour would relieve back and shoulder pain regularly experienced.”

A key issue for GPBA wearers is the fit of the item. As the first comment above points out, there are areas of the body that the GPBA is not able to adequately protect, leaving frontline staff exposed and vulnerable to injury. The second quote draws attention to the rigidity of the GPBA and, for female wearers in particular, it does not provide adequate accommodation for the chest area. Related to this issue, the GPBA cannot then accommodate for any fluctuations in breast size which female wearers may experience during their menstrual cycle⁸.

The most prolific item of uniform identified as negative by wearers was the cargo trousers. This item was reportedly worn by the majority of survey respondents (58%) and of those that wear the cargo trousers, 69% of them view this item as problematic. The following quotes describe some of the issues associated with the cargo trousers:

“Cargo trousers are too restrictive when struggling with suspects, on foot patrol or foot chases do not allow for flexibility to climb, jump or fight as you should. The quality is poor, colour fades and Velcro stitching comes undone.”

“The main issue I have is the cargo trousers. They’re poor quality, uncomfortable and not fit for purpose.”

“The standard fit of the patrol/cargo trousers is not fit for purpose. They are extremely tight around the groin/thigh area and often cause rubbing and soreness.”

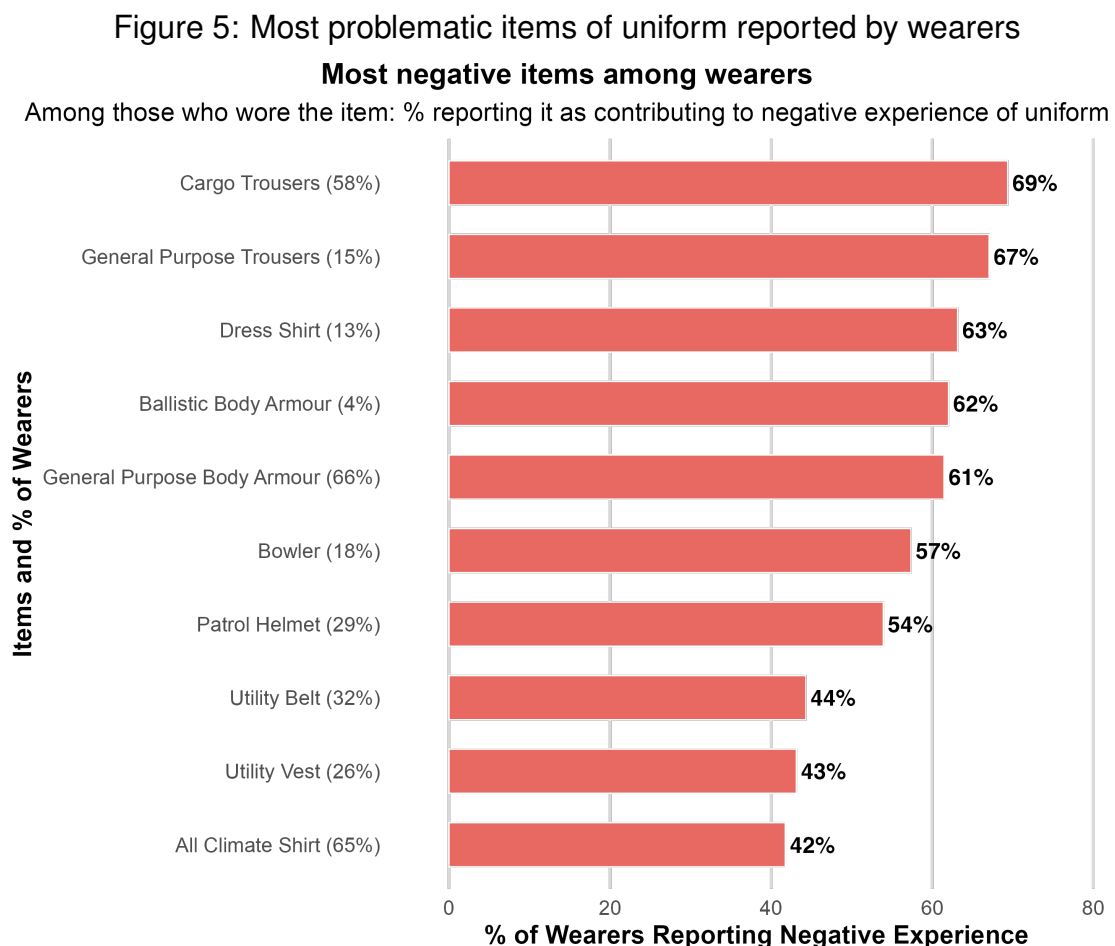
“The cargo trousers are completely unsuitable for frontline policing - They are baggy and dangerous.”

⁸The Home Office Body Armour Standard (2017) began categorising staff types and body armour inserts, noting that most male vests use flat inserts, while female vests are shaped around the chest. Supplementary Knife Resistance (SKR) technology in the 2017 stab vests improves comfort through increased flexibility, reduced bulk, better breathability, and a more ergonomic fit. Since 2023, all forces in England and Wales have had access to 3rd generation body armour, though many officers still aren’t issued it. Procurement depends on factors like supplier contracts, budgets, staffing, and cultural - and often gendered - attitudes toward officer wellbeing. At the launch, the Police Federation stated this was the first time in 17 years that female officers could feel as protected and comfortable as male colleagues - but only if forces adopt the new PPE.

These quotes highlight that the cargo trousers present a variety of issues in relation to quality, comfort, and functionality, with some respondents believing that they contribute to health problems and potentially pose a danger during duty.

3.3 Highest Dissatisfaction Items

While the previous section examined the most frequently worn uniform items and their impact across the largest number of respondents, this section focuses on items that generate high levels of dissatisfaction among wearers, regardless of how many people wear them overall.



This approach highlights items with a disproportionately negative impact on uniform experience, even if they are not worn by the majority. As can be seen in Figure 5 several of these items, such as the cargo trousers and GPBA, were already flagged

in earlier sections, with cargo trousers being identified as the most problematic item overall.

To investigate in more detail, these items will be grouped into four categories: trousers, PPE, shirts, and headgear.

3.3.1 Trousers

Figure 5 shows that both cargo and general-purpose trousers were frequently reported as the most problematic items. Cargo trousers, while more widely worn by the majority, were associated with negative feedback. The general-purpose trousers, though worn by only 15%, were rated as negative by 67% of these wearers:

“General purpose trousers are just awful. Our entire department of women choose to purchase their own due to the shortened crotch. Concerns were raised and women’s health issues were not given appropriate consideration by the men deciding what we should wear. It was viewed more of a fashion issue and anxiety about body image and the medical issues (thrush) were ignored.”

Quotes such as the following may explain why these trousers are not worn by many officers and staff, given the other options available:

“General purpose trousers are not comfortable or practical for front line roles in the force, it would be far more sensible and practical and more comfortable for officers to wear combat or cargo style trousers.”

The broader theme that trousers are an issue is highlighted here, showing that both in practicality they may be unfit for purpose, but also that mental and physical wellbeing are affected by wearing these items of uniform.

3.3.2 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As previously mentioned, GPBA has a high proportion of wearers reporting that it contributes to negative experience, while also being one of the most worn items. However, as shown in Figure 5, other items including utility vests, ballistic body armour, and utility belts also contribute highly to negative experiences of wearing uniform.

The utility vest is worn by 26% of respondents, and 43% of these respondents express this item contributes negatively to their overall experience of uniform. The comments suggest the design of the vest means equipment has to be placed on the front of the body, causing musculoskeletal strain. Additionally, some point out that there is not enough room for storing all necessary equipment:

“The utility vest provided by force do not offer enough room to add all items that the force requires us to carry.”

“The utility vest causes horrific back pain as the amount of equipment, and weight of that equipment, is too much to all be placed on the front.”

“I think that it is fairly shocking that in this day and age, female and male officers are expected to wear the same uniform. There is currently no option [in my force] for a female utility vest or female trousers, just all unisex. Ever since starting the job, I have had a bad back from wearing my vest all day and the weight that this puts on my shoulders and back.”

Ballistic body armour is worn by a small proportion of respondents (4%), but of these people 62% reported this item as contributing to negative experiences of wearing uniform and PPE. This is a specialised item, and therefore responses were limited. However, of those who wear this item, the comments expressed that the interaction with other items of uniform coupled with its weight causes physical duress:

“The wicking t-shirt isn’t breathable. Combined with the ballistic vest, my skin cannot breathe, and I have rashes on my skin due to this.”

“The belt rig and weight of uniform and ballistic helmets/body armour can negatively impact and cause spinal injuries. I regularly see a Chiropractor for readjustments as a result of wearing heavy uniform.”

“Specific attention needs to be paid to firearms body armour (and associated attachments), utility belt and gun holster. These are causing significant discomfort to many and causing long term back problems. With longer service year requirements, this equipment discomfort and injury will cause people to leave the role.”

Finally, the utility belt as mentioned in the above quote is worn by 32% of respondents, and of these, 44% of respondents report negative experiences associated with this item. Although some respondents praised the belt for the storage capabilities, the lack of practicality is pointed out when on duty and performing dynamic tasks:

“The utility belt makes it awkward getting in and out of car and bruises leg and hips.”

“My belt gets in the way a lot, like getting stuck on the car when I’m getting in and out.”

As in the discussion of utility vests, many struggle with interaction between items required to be worn with the utility belt:

“A better duty belt would assist in moving items to the belt from the armour vest. this would assist in weight movement and would assist in less pressure points on the current belt used. This would assist with comfort and back strains.”

“I’ve stopped loading the body armour with kit, only essentials, as it was hurting my back, heavy items can go on my belt. Wearing the utility belt at the same time as normal uniform belt just doesn’t work.”

“I used to have to place my handcuffs, baton and CS spray in my stab vest pockets because of how uncomfortable the utility belt is. For anyone with back or lower limb

problems, officers should get the choice of a stab vest where this equipment attaches to it, rather than needing a belt.”

The physical health implications of this and other uniform items are discussed in more detail later in the report.

3.3.3 Shirts

Respondents identified two shirts in particular as contributing to a negative experience of wearing uniform; the dress shirt and the all-climate (wicking) shirt.

The dress shirt is worn by 13% of respondents, but 68% of them report negative effects related to this item. While some perceived the dress shirt as smart:

“Please don’t get rid of white dress shirts and black tie. They look the part and a good reason I feel proud to work for the Met.”

Others criticised the item for being uncomfortable, low quality, and impractical. Concerns were also raised about the uniform’s standardisation across various roles, with some commenting that the dress shirt is ill-suited to the specific demands of their duties within the force:

“White dress shirts for normal policing duties are outdated and not practical for modern day policing.”

“Not quite sure why in the comms centre we need to wear a full-dress shirt with wings in the back. Throughout summer, a smart polo would suffice. We are not trying to fight against uniform - we are just complaining about it being so uncomfortable for no reason - we are not in a client facing role.”

The all-climate (wicking) shirt is one of the most worn items (65%) as highlighted in Figure 4. Of these wearers, 42% report this item has contributed to a negative

experience in uniform. Complaints centred on perspiration, discomfort around the neck area, and poor fit – especially when combined with PPE.

“We are now issued awful fitting plain black wicking shirts with high collars that rub on the Adam’s Apple, no embroidery and a “one shape fits all” approach to body style which I don’t think actually fits anyone!”

“Cheap, polyester wicking shirt dries quickly but smells and is very sweaty under non-breathable body armour.”

Some stated that the wicking shirts are comfortable, however, others suggested they do not look professional when compared with other shirt items due to their lack of police branding, which creates an unprofessional appearance. There were also comments around the lack of tailoring for those in office roles who have to wear them:

“Because the force policy is to issue everyone with wicking shirts despite them being suitable for [only] police officers. I am staff working inside...very uncomfortable and as I am not of athletic build, I do not feel happy to wear the wicking shirt unless I have a fleece over the top.”

This again emphasises the lack of role-based adaptability of uniform items.

3.3.4 Headgear

The custodian helmet (also referred to as the patrol helmet) was one of the most negatively rated items. Worn by 29% of respondents, more than half of these (54%) reported that it negatively affects their experience. While some comments highlighted the helmet’s symbolic value and its role in maintaining professionalism, the overall consensus is that it is an impractical item for modern policing.

“The option of a patrol helmet is something that is widely available in many forces and I do not believe it is appropriate to remove this option. The patrol helmet provides protection whilst maintaining professionalism, unlike other options such as a bump cap.”

“Headgear is outdated and impractical, especially custodian helmets. The rest of the uniform is modern (wicking shirts, cargo trousers, etc.) so I feel that headgear should be modernised.”

“... if you are foot chasing suspects... custodial hats fall off in a chase!”

On a day-to-day basis, some view this item as impractical in meeting the demands of front-line officers. The bowler hat, worn by 18% of respondents, was also highlighted as problematic. Concerns included discomfort in hot weather, poor fit, and impracticality during physical activity.

“The bowler hats are far too hot to wear during warm weather.”

“The bowler hats do look smart, but I do not feel they are fit for purpose. They hold all the heat in and when you get sweaty or wet from the rain the dye rubs off onto our forehead.”

“The bowler hats absorb water when it rains and lose shape.”

Further comments indicate issues with the fit of bowler hats: whether too tight and causing health issues such as headaches, or too loose and therefore a hindrance when completing day to day physical tasks:

“My bowler hat gets tight when I have been walking for a while and leaves a red welt across my forehead and often leads to having a headache.”

“...in any sort of conflict, it is just going to fall off anyway. . .”

Although the bowler hat is generally perceived negatively, there were also associations with the bowler hat looking ‘smart’ and symbolising professionalism compared to other hats such as the baseball cap or bump cap. However, many stressed the importance of having choice, particularly as the bowler hat is often issued exclusively to female officers.

Some items including the black anorak and baseball cap had much lower rates of proportional negative impact (less than 20%), however, all other force issued items included in the survey had more than 20% of wearers reporting negative effects from those items contributing to their experience of wearing uniform. This was with the exception of items worn by 1% or less of the survey respondents that had no negative impact reported by wearers (afro band, cycle trousers, skull cap/kippah, and turban).

Across all of these items, the themes of functionality, choice, and inclusivity were evident. Often items fail to accommodate the diverse roles and physical needs of officers and staff. Many respondents express a need for modernised and flexible options that support their work – not hinder it.

4 Ceremonial Dress

The survey also included questions about uniform wearers' experiences with ceremonial dress. A significant proportion of respondents did not answer the questions related to specific ceremonial items, which may reflect not having been issued ceremonial dress, or not needing it thus far. Certainly, this was alluded to in the comments. That being said, respondents who answered these questions reported being generally satisfied. Participants were specifically asked about any issues with the ceremonial tunic, trousers, and skirt. The majority reported no issues with the tunic (72%), trousers (71%) or skirt (88%). However, a smaller proportion did report experiencing problems; 28% for the tunic, 29% for the trousers, and 12% for the skirt.

A recurring theme in the comments was the lack of access to personal ceremonial uniform, with many noting that they could only borrow items rather than be issued their own:

"We don't generally get issued ceremonial uniform and must have it loaned from stores. The tunic and trousers don't match (different materials) and there is a limited amount of stock."

"I have not been issued with one. Myself and my cohort had our "pass out" ceremony in white shirt and cargo trousers."

The comments about ceremonial dress allowed further insight into the perception of these items. Respondents frequently raised concerns about the sizing, material mismatch between items, and overall appearance of the ceremonial dress, particularly in comparison to the uniforms of other public-facing services.

"It feels and looks like a children's fancy dress outfit. I feel embarrassed when I wear it. Compared to those worn by other emergency services and the military - we look poor."

"... does not look smart when compared to other forces across the world."

“Fit is terrible, and material is awful.”

Comments also indicated that access to ceremonial dress differs between forces and can make respondents feel devalued in their workplace by not having their own uniform with the option to sew on medals and display their officer number:

“We are not issued proper ceremonial dress which damages morale.”

Again, many cited cost-cutting as a reason for these issues.

5 Uniform Functionality

Many of the issues identified thus far relate to the practical operation of the uniform. The functionality of the uniform is therefore paramount to the overall experience in uniform and is summarised in the following quote:

“The uniform is a requirement of the job - so the force should ensure the uniform is ‘fit for purpose’. I wear it every day and sometimes for shifts that can last 17+ hours. So, it is not right that the uniform is not fit for purpose! It is definitely a reason I would consider moving out of this role.”

As communicated in this quote, the uniform is a requirement of the job and thus worn for extensive periods of time. It is imperative that it then works well for the individual wearing it. Functionality, therefore, relates to how the uniform performs for that individual and will be affected by their role, level of physical activity in that role, and the tasks they carry out on a daily basis. External factors such as weather can also impact the experience of wearing uniform. Table 1 displays the results on the functionality of the uniform.

When asked if their uniform is fit for the purpose they require, the majority (51%) disagreed with this statement. Furthermore, 6 in 10 (64%) respondents reported that their uniform restricts their movement which makes certain tasks difficult. The following quotes highlight some of the implications of this which makes frontline officers vulnerable:

“The cargo trousers are not practical to search house(s) in and carry out stop searches when bending to floor/restraining someone on the floor. They teach us all these good restraints and moves in Personal Safety Training, but I can’t do half of them in these trousers.”

“I cannot move about easily and it restricts my leg movement and effects my physical ability, which makes me feel less safe and at a disadvantage.”

Table 1: Uniform functionality ratings.

Function	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
It is fit for purpose	51%	24%	25%
It restricts my movement	16%	20%	64%
Keeps me cool in summer	74%	18%	8%
Keeps me warm in winter	40%	27%	33%
Is waterproof	62%	23%	15%
I'm wearing good quality clothing	57%	25%	19%
I'm wearing durable clothing	46%	26%	28%

Certainly, when we compared this last result by the level of physical activity associated with their role, the outcome was more profound. For those that reported having the highest level (level 5), of physical activity in their role (front line officers, for example) just under three-quarters (74%) reported that their uniform restricts their movement, compared to two-thirds (66%) that had a more sedentary role (level 1 – the least physically active).

However, those in more sedentary roles also report issues with uniform functionality:

“It is not taken into consideration that staff within uniformed but office-based roles spend upwards of 10 hours sat at a desk. The trousers can often feel like they’re cutting you in half when sat down for this long and the shirts ride up with movement.”

“Office based, police staff who are not service user facing should not be expected to wear a restrictive uniform style of shirt or trousers - we are currently expected to wear

the same trousers as active police officers. When you are seated for a 9-hour shift, tight fitting clothing makes your job worse.”

Police staff also highlight that their uniform is restrictive and note that different roles call for alternative uniform provision based on the requirements of the job. The current uniform design does not accommodate prolonged sitting, making certain items unsuitable for desk-based work. A lack of differentiation in uniform policy based on job function may leave both officers and staff feeling like their needs are overlooked.

Respondents were asked further questions in relation to how functional they feel their uniform to be. Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) reported their uniform does not keep them cool in the summer. Comments detail the excessive sweating and discomfort experienced by respondents due to uniform wear, which leads to rubbing on the skin and the shirts becoming see-through. Consequently, respondents reported feelings of self-consciousness:

“The wicking shirts do not work well in warm weather resulting in excessive sweating causing irritation around my waist where the shirt is tucked into my trousers.”

“[Wearing] full black during hot temperatures causes officers to sweat, get itchy and smell which can be embarrassing for colleagues and be an unpleasant experience if liaising with members of the public.”

At the other end of the seasonal cycle, every 4 in 10 (40%) of respondents feel their uniform does not keep them warm in winter and most (62%) feel that their uniform is not waterproof when required.

“The coats given are not warm at all, far too thin when you are stood out on a scene for six hours in December. I easily get cold and flu and must have [got ill] six times last winter due to being too cold. If I wear more layers under my clothes as advised, it is very hard to move and uncomfortable for foot chases, climbing over walls and fences [or] restraining people.”

“We are not issued adequate uniform for bad weather conditions. Our [high-visibility] jackets aren’t even waterproof. I’ve had to stand on a scene of an [Road Traffic Accident] in the snow and couldn’t work the next day because I had such sore muscles.”

“The “waterproof” traffic coat and trousers, get soaked through very quickly and after spending hours on a motorway in pouring rain, I came down with a heavy cold/flu on two occasions. Our body armour is not suited for a microfleece or windproof during the winter, as the windproof is supposed to go over the [armour], which then means you cannot access your PPE. This in turn means we don’t wear the layers, which again leads to colds flu etcetera.”

The comments here are illustrative of some of the wider issues identified in the survey. One issue raised is that respondents feel they do not have access to adequate uniform and PPE to deal with the climate in which they are working. Respondents expressed that items are not fully waterproof, not windproof and not insulated enough to keep those working in extreme conditions protected from the elements. The consequence, as detailed above, is that these issues are affecting the health and wellbeing of the workforce. This is consistent with findings from Search and Rescue uniform research⁹ which noted that the uniform is generally not fit for purpose in cold weather environments. Similar common failures or limitations of issued uniforms including boots not keeping feet warm, lack of waterproof trousers, saturation of uniform material in snowy and icy conditions, and the lack of base layers and appropriate gloves were all raised as concerns by participants in the Search and Rescue study.

Our survey results demonstrate the uniform is perceived to be dysfunctional, poor quality and quickly perishable with replacements needed frequently. On the whole, respondents feel the uniform is not durable (46%) and is poor quality (57%), which is reinforced in the comments. Many use the word ‘cheap’ when discussing the quality of the uniform and the materials used. Furthermore, and directly connected to this, there

⁹Farrell, A.L., and Jones, S. (2025). Understanding the effect of Extreme Weather on our Emergency Services: An exploratory study. Report of Findings from the Pre- and Post-Exercise Mixed Methods Data Collection. Report for Exercise Winter Storm 2024 presented to Cheshire Police Constabulary.

is a very strong belief that uniform decisions are based on cost (which we discuss further in Section 7), rather than whether the uniform is fit for purpose.

6 Uniform Fit

This section of the report discusses the experiences of wearing the police uniform in relation to the how the uniform fits and works for the individual wearing it. We then look broadly at three of the fundamental items of uniform – shirts, trousers and General Purpose Body Armour (GPBA) to understand how they compare in relation to their comfort, quality and function. Finally, we break this down further into the specific shirt and trousers worn to capture the variation across these different items.

Table 2: Uniform fit and comfort ratings.

When I wear my uniform, I feel that it...	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Fits well	61%	21%	18%
Comfortable	58%	21%	20%

As shown in Table 2, the overall consensus is that uniform does not fit well, nor is it comfortable. Almost two thirds (61%) of respondents think the uniform does not fit them well, while over half (58%) also think the uniform is uncomfortable. Discomfort is frequently mentioned in the qualitative comments, for example:

“We wear our uniform for ten hours a day. It should fit correctly and be comfortable whether we are sitting, standing, driving or walking.”

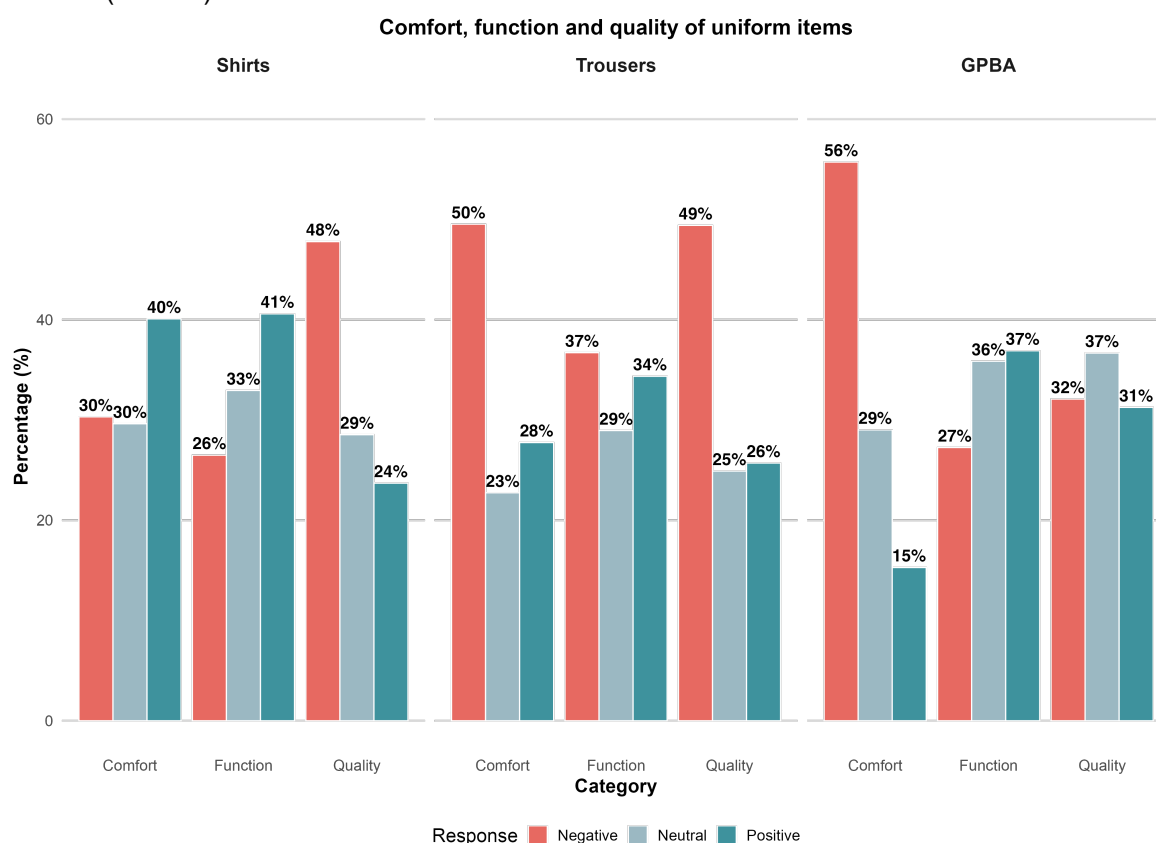
“Being comfortable in my uniform would change my opinion on policing and be able to conduct my role in a more positive and productive way.”

“Just to be more comfortable on a daily basis would make a huge difference. Sometimes I cover up by wearing a microfleece on days when I’m feeling very bloated, just so others can’t see how bloated I am.”

“Make it more comfortable to work in height of summer and winter. I am either too hot or too cold. Constantly feeling disheartened when I am not entitled to a waterproof coat.”

Given the amount of time spent wearing the uniform, being comfortable should be a fundamental requirement. Respondents believe having a more comfortable uniform would increase productivity and confidence, making it easier to do every-day basics such as walking, running, climbing, etc., thus ultimately making life in uniform better.

Figure 6: Comfort, function and quality of Shirts, Trousers and General-Purpose Body Armour (GPBA).



Until this point, we have presented findings on the overall functionality of uniform and PPE. We now turn to specific uniform items. When asked about individual components, respondents expressed varying views regarding the comfort, functionality, and quality of the shirts¹⁰, trousers and GPBA worn shown in Figure 6. Approximately 40%

¹⁰We refer to shirt as a general item of uniform worn on the top half of the body. There is variety of different shirt options worn and these are discussed in Figure 7

of respondents felt the shirts were functional and comfortable, but the quality of the shirts was regarded as poor (48%). This is consistent with the qualitative comments which previously mentioned issues of sweating and smell, rubbing and the material going see-through.

There was less of a consensus in relation to the trousers with 37% reporting negatively for functionality. In terms of comfort and quality, the results were overwhelmingly negative. Around 50%¹¹ of respondents feel the trousers are uncomfortable and poor quality. This is consistent with earlier findings in relation to the restriction of movement caused by wearing the trousers, ultimately inhibiting respondents from carrying out routine tasks.

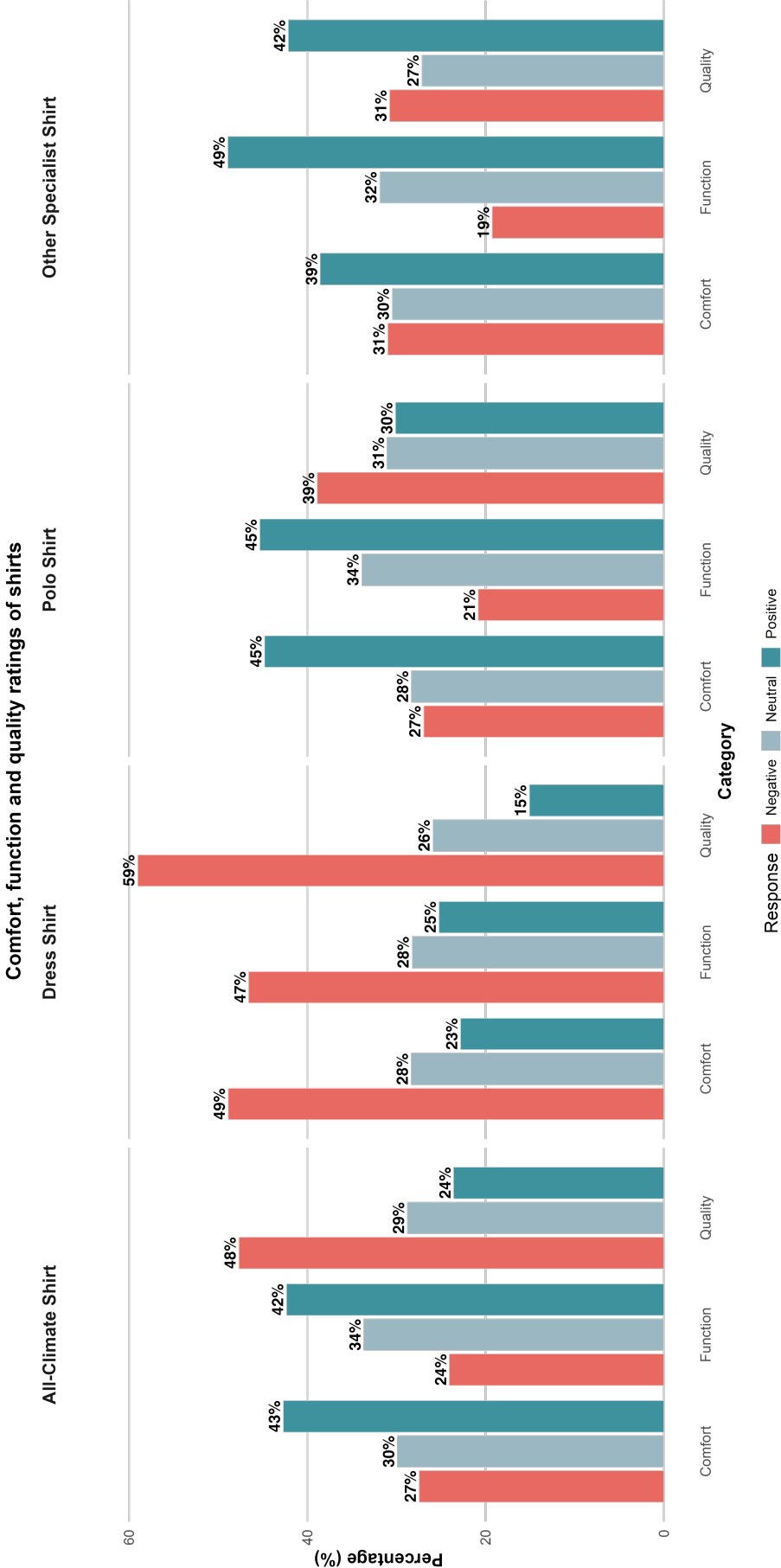
Finally, in relation to GPBA, comfort stood out most negatively with 56% of those that wear the GPBA reporting how uncomfortable it is. Some respondents (37%) felt that the GPBA is functional, but the results were mixed in relation to the quality: 31% agreed the quality was good but 32% disagreed.

6.1 Comparison of uniform shirts

When the different shirt styles worn across England and Wales are compared, there is far more variability in terms of the comfort, function, and quality as can be seen in Figure 7. The dress shirt, as worn by the Metropolitan Police for example, stood out as being the least comfortable, the least functional, and worst quality of all the shirts worn. The specialist shirts and polo shirts were viewed far more favourably in terms of comfort and function. However, the quality of the polo shirt, as well as the all-climate shirt were viewed unfavourably by 48% and 39% of respondents respectively. The quality of the all-climate shirt (wicking style) was also considered to be poor, but on the whole, these were considered more functional and comfortable than the dress shirt.

¹¹ While the survey did not ask respondents to rate specific brands, initial research unveiled how purchasing power, senior management preferences, and budgets (amongst other things) act somewhat as a 'postcode lottery' for what uniform is available for officers. There are many brands, and many variations of trousers, the complaints of which have permeated local uniform surveys for decades without much reprieve. This report discusses overall trouser satisfaction without identifying specific 'worst offenders' or brands.

Figure 7: Comfort, function and quality ratings of shirts.



6.2 Comparison of uniform trousers

In Figure 8, we display the results of the different style of trousers worn in terms of the comfort, function and quality. When we examine the specific trousers worn, the cargo and all-purpose trousers performed the worst. Around 60% of wearers felt the cargo and general-purpose trousers were not comfortable to wear and nearly half said they were not functional and felt the quality of these trousers was poor. However, the combat style trouser, cycle trouser and other (specialist) trousers were all viewed far more favourably. More than 70% of wearers reported the combat and cycle trousers to be functional, while a large majority (67%) felt the combat trouser and the cycle trouser (74%) were comfortable to wear. They also reported the trouser material to be better quality. Similarly, the other (specialist/non-standard trousers) were viewed more positively in terms of functionality (58%), comfort (54%) and quality (56%).

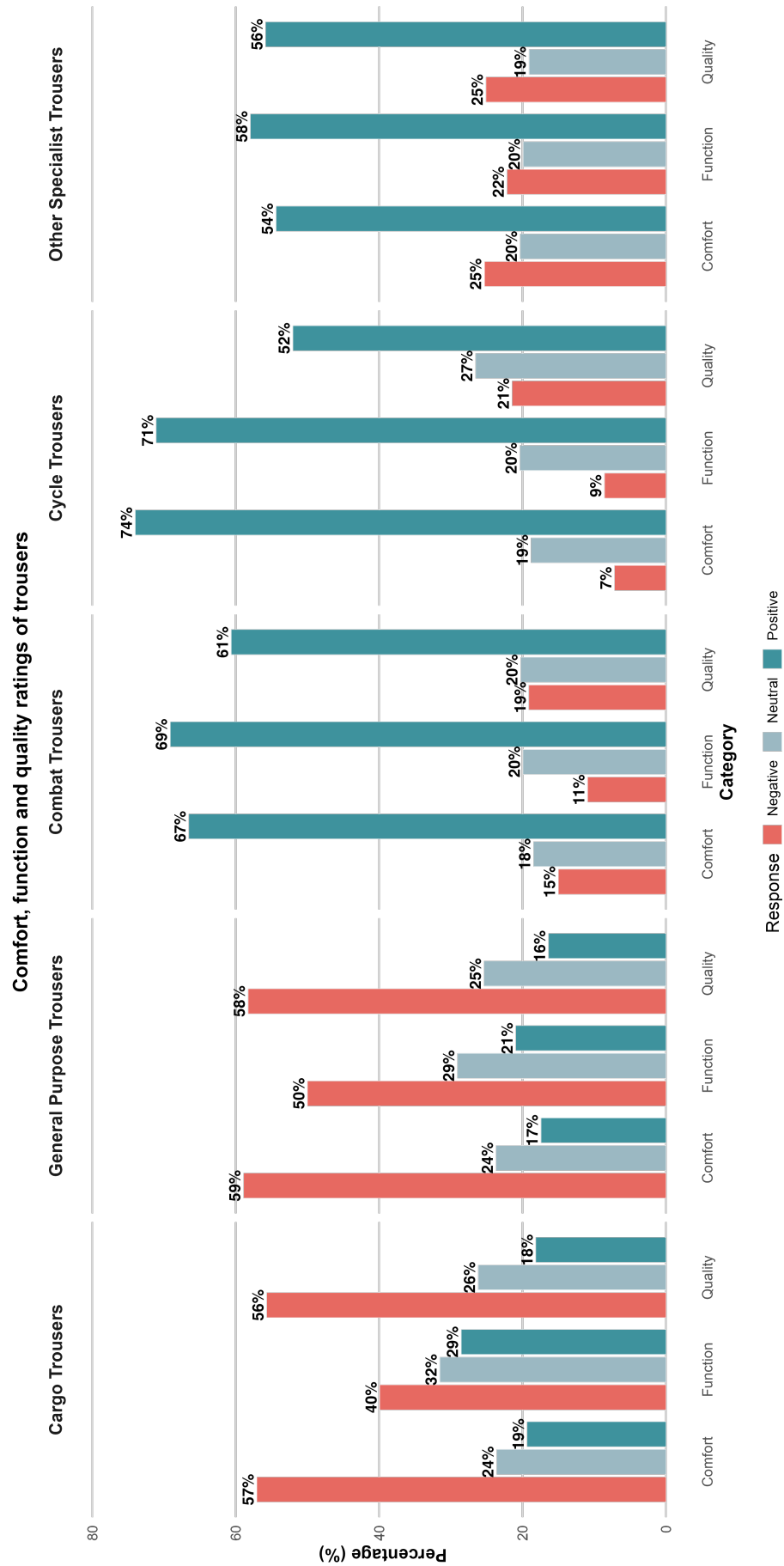
In the qualitative comments there were numerous issues with the overall fit of the trousers. For example, respondents reported issues with the trousers being too baggy and not fitting well around the waist, and thus not accommodating different body shapes appropriately:

“They do not fit the waist and the leg length, you either have to get a bigger size to fit your waist but then the legs are like parachutes and do not fit.”

“Too wide on the leg, I have to wear two times smaller than I usually am for it to fit my waist, meaning it’s too tight in the crotch and I rip the seams when I crouch down. [I suggest] expanded crotch panels, [and] tapering the legs so they don’t look like I’m wearing flares.”

This was more profound amongst the female respondents. In an effort to alleviate the problems associated with the uniform trousers, 59% of female respondents reported they have to wear trousers in bigger sizes than their civilian clothing, 14% said they have resorted to having their trousers tailored and 24% bought their own. Many also noted they wear men’s trousers instead:

Figure 8: Comfort, function and quality ratings of trousers.



"I altered my work-issued general purpose/cargo trousers, as [I was] provided with unisex trousers (with no alternatives) and had to increase sizing by 3-4 dress sizes in order for the trousers to fit me. [I was] only allocated two pairs of trousers (for 6-day working week) and none are fit for purpose. Therefore, I had to alter waistband and leg widths myself, alongside purchasing own pairs of cycle trousers after recommendations from other officers (with no reimbursement by my force)."

"As a female they are not fit for purpose. To be able to move, bring my leg up higher than 90 degrees to climb over a wall or bend down I have to order a huge size to get the seat size right. Then I have to take the waist in by five-inches so that it fits, a belt simply crumples the material making it very uncomfortable around the lower back."

"Can't get hold of the right leg length. I'm a size 12, short leg usually. Have to go up to a size 14 because the trousers are just straight up and down like men's, the material is so rigid and has no give in it for the way a woman's body size and shape naturally fluctuates throughout cycles (bloating etc). Because of going up a waist size, for slightly more comfort, the legs are then too wide and far too long - you can't get a 14 or 16 short leg, so I have to have them tailored for leg length and width because they're just massive on the legs. So, in their natural state, they look like we don't know how to dress/present ourselves properly and they're not functional."

"The female cotton office trousers are cut too short in the crotch. They dig into the female genitals. If I wear office uniform trousers, I have to order men's. I currently wear [brand] which are more comfortable."

A quarter of all respondents have purchased their own trousers (25%), reporting that poor fit and comfort of issued trousers led them to purchase externally, for example from 'outdoor' retailers, despite the risks associated with this¹². Despite the vast majority (55%) not being reimbursed for this expense, others reported that they bought their own to help alleviate medical issues associated with wearing the supplied trousers:

¹²Such as lack of rip-stop qualities and little to no fire retardancy.

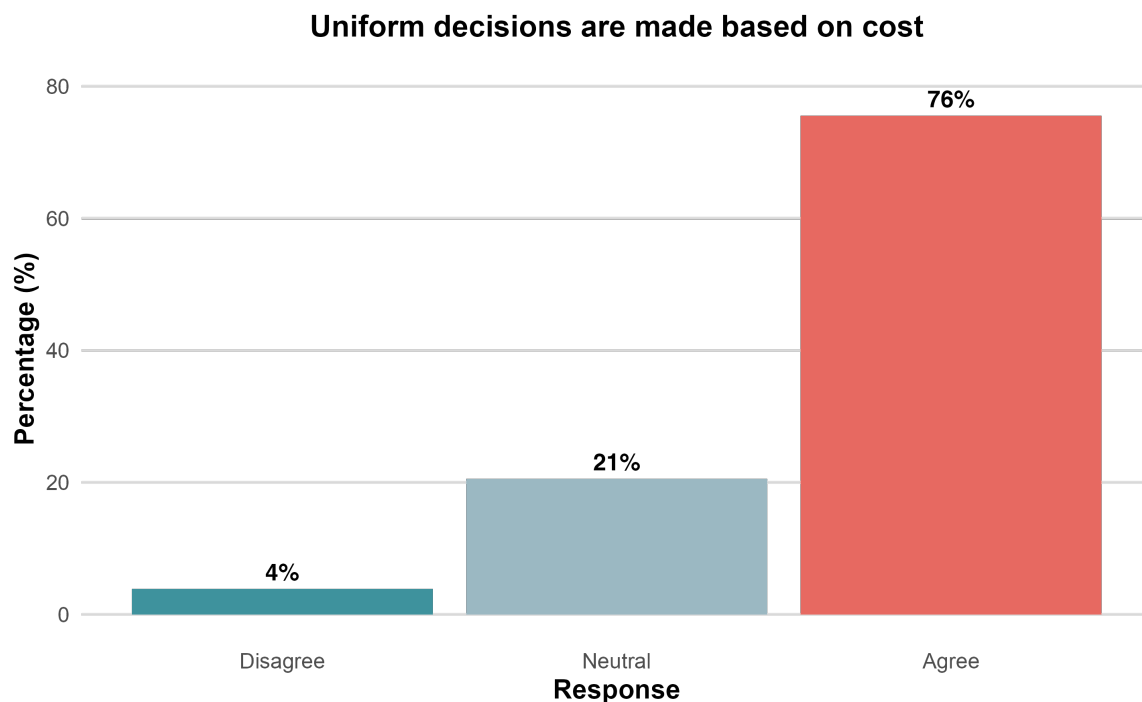
“Police trousers look like clown pants and are very uncomfortable. I would rather pay £70 just to be comfortable as the Police don’t seem to care...”

“I cannot go to work each day and suffer being uncomfortable and in pain. The fit and sizing is ridiculous. . . When I am walking about it is not comfortable, but the worst is when sitting down, and in my role, I am often sat in a car for anything up to 12-hours-a-day, if I was to wear force issue trousers I would be extremely uncomfortable and in physical pain and this is why I purchase my own.”

We will return to physical pain and other medical issues later on in the report.

7 Value for money

Figure 9: Most uniform decisions are based on cost.



Overwhelmingly respondents felt that uniform decision making is based on cost. Three-quarters (76%) of respondents agreed that most uniform decisions are based on cost (see Figure 9, compared with only 4% who disagreed).

Quality and cost were reoccurring themes that emerged from the qualitative comments. It is expressed that the low quality and poor durability of uniform is attributed to the cheapest and lowest quality materials being sourced and used for the uniform:

“There are companies being paid too much money to supply below par items that can be found elsewhere in the civilian world for a fraction of the cost. I feel that no one listens to cops about their uniform as its just another moan for more but if we get supplied the best to start with there would be no moaning points.”

This concept of value came up many times throughout the survey. Respondents felt that the uniform is not designed to last, and decisions are made without the police workforce in mind leaving employees to suffer:

“Whilst cost needs to be considered, if you buy cheap, you buy twice.”

“Quality is the issue. Clearly cost saving.”

“Uniform is currently decided on a battle of the lowest cost. It is a race to the bottom of cost rather the quality and comfort of officers.”

Survey comments indicate that investment in better quality clothing from the outset would not only improve workforce morale, but also increase longevity of uniform pieces, and would improve the public’s perception of the police:

“If uniform was of a better quality, it would look smarter, last longer, be more comfortable and fit for purpose, and be less impactive on the environment. It appears that the uniform provided is the cheapest option available and consideration is not made for the actual purpose.”

“I would be happier to stay in a uniform role and roles which don’t have specialist wear if the general clothing was of better quality.”

“Higher quality uniforms not only demonstrate that the organisation takes their employees seriously but allows for a better first-impression with the public.”

Research¹³ shows that cost-cutting measures can result in employees feeling betrayed, making them less likely to uphold the values of the organisation and unwilling to perform their jobs well. Not feeling ‘cared for’ can result in employee-management relations deteriorating, in turn, increasing the number of employee complaints about their working conditions. This is especially true when the uniform is so closely linked to employee wellbeing. The research shows that cost-cutting actions (whether perceived by the wearer accurately or not) may increase feelings of being undervalued by the organisation.

¹³Ogbonnaya, C., Dhir, A., Maxwell-Cole, A., & Gorny, T. (2022). Cost-cutting actions, employment relations and workplace grievances: Lessons from the 2008 financial crisis. *Journal of Business Research*, 152, 265–275. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.07.055>

Table 3: Wellbeing and uniform wear.

Uniform has affected my...	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Physical wellbeing	24%	37%	38%
Relationship with my body	25%	37%	38%
Mental wellbeing	35%	47%	18%
Emotional wellbeing	33%	49%	19%

8 Uniform-related wellbeing

This section of the report discusses the wellbeing of uniform wearers. We posed a series of statements to explore the relationship between wearing the uniform and wellbeing, in relation to respondent's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. We also wanted to understand if wearing the uniform has had any impact on respondents' relationship with their bodies.

As shown in Table 3, just under four in ten respondents (38%) agree that their uniform has affected their physical wellbeing, while a similar proportion (38%) also agree that the uniform has affected their relationship with their body, consistent with the results indicated throughout this report. On further investigation, those who reported high physical activity in their role were more likely to report effects on their physical wellbeing, perhaps a sign of the incompatibility between uniform and high physicality roles. This was reflected in comments where officers felt their uniform was not suitable for the level of physical activity involved, therefore impacting their physical wellbeing:

“Response policing is inherently often a very physical and demanding role, police uniform should assist with this and not hinder it.”

On the other hand, those who reported less physical activity in their role face a different

set of issues, but ultimately the uniform also impacts their wellbeing:

“Uniform does not translate well over to those who are in office jobs - it may be practical for more physical exercise but is not for internal work. The uniform has created long lasting effects on me both mentally and physically to a point where it is a key reason I am actively trying to leave the force.”

“Told if I’m cold to wear the shell jacket – but I struggle to type and work wearing it at a desk.”

This may point to broader issues in having a single uniform regardless of role, which does not fulfil the needs of officers or staff.

When asked about mental and emotional wellbeing, many respondents disagreed (35% and 33% respectively) that the uniform has affected these aspects of wellbeing, while the majority remained neutral. However, 18% and 19% of respondents recognised that wearing the uniform had indeed affected their mental and emotional wellbeing respectively.

9 Uniform-related physical health

The survey asked about specific physical health conditions that respondents believe have been caused by or made worse by wearing their police uniform. The results here are more definitive than in the previous section which focused on wellbeing more generally.

While cause and effect (for example, “my trousers caused X problem”) can be difficult to prove, we wanted to explore the physical health conditions that respondents directly attribute to wearing their uniform. For example, while dermatological conditions such as eczema are not caused by wearing uniform per se, specific materials next to the skin can agitate a pre-existing condition and thus make it flare up. However, other physical conditions could develop through wearing specific items of uniform.

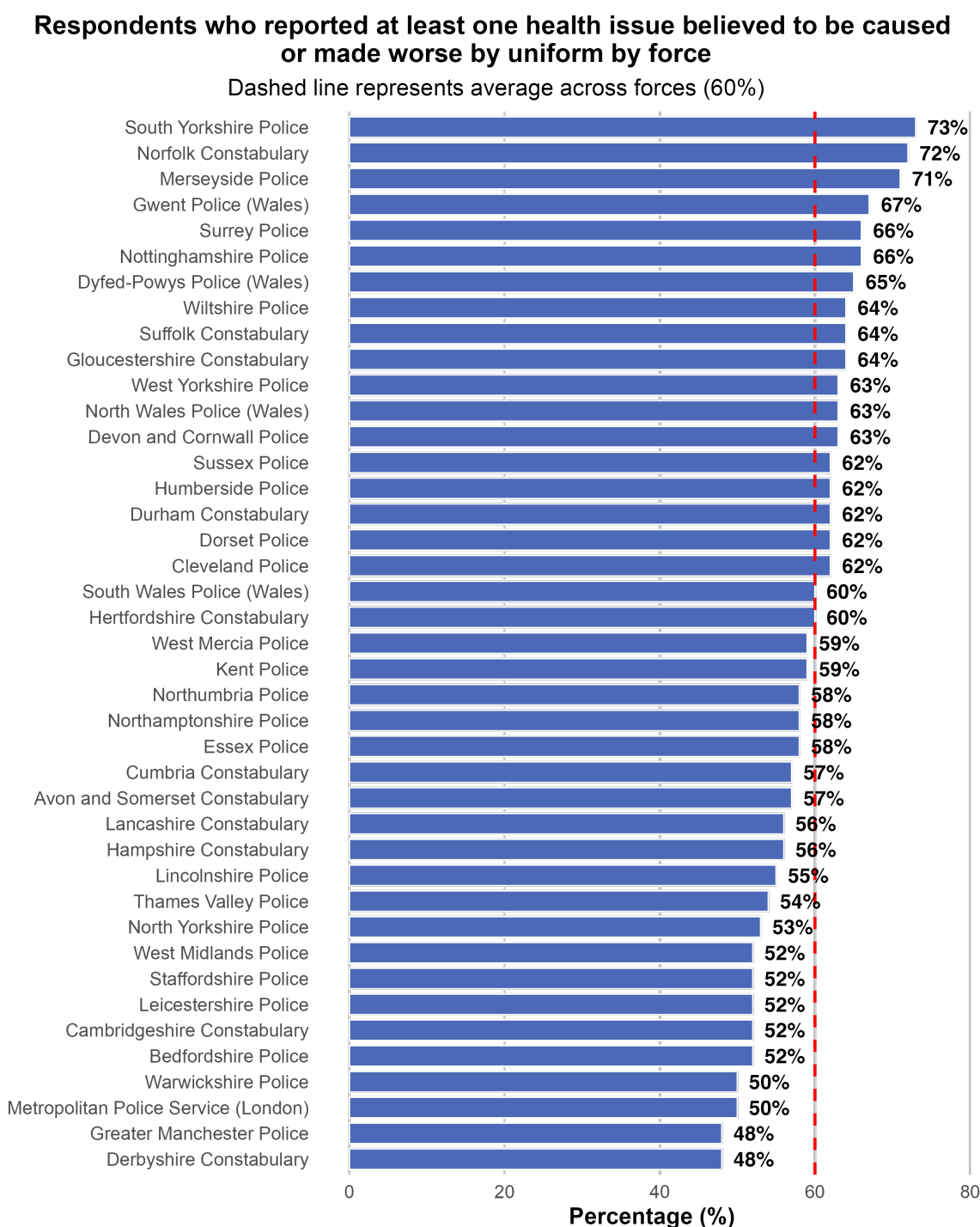
Respondents were presented with a list of physical health conditions¹⁴ and asked to indicate if they believed any of these conditions they have experienced had been caused by or made worse by wearing the uniform. There was also an option to add other conditions that were not listed, that again, they believed had been caused by or made worse by wearing the uniform. In total, 57% of all 20,838 survey respondents selected at least one physical health condition they believed had been caused by or made worse by wearing their uniform.

Figure 10 provides a breakdown by force which shows considerable variation in the proportion of respondents that reported at least one physical health condition. In some forces such as South Yorkshire Police, Norfolk Constabulary, and Merseyside Police, over 70% of respondents reported having at least one physical health condition they believed was caused or made worse by uniform.

For the majority of forces, more than half of respondents reported at least one health condition they attribute to wearing the uniform. Greater Manchester Police and Der-

¹⁴The conditions listed were identified by the research team in collaboration with PFEW and included; andropause, bloating, crushed breasts, crushed testicles, cysts, endometriosis, fibromyalgia, Crohn's disease, Coeliac disease, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), incontinence, menstrual symptoms, meralgia parasthetica, musculoskeletal pain, peri menopause, rubbing of scars, skin conditions, thrush, urinary tract infections (UTIs).

Figure 10: Respondents who reported at least one physical health condition that they believe to be caused by or made worse by wearing uniform.

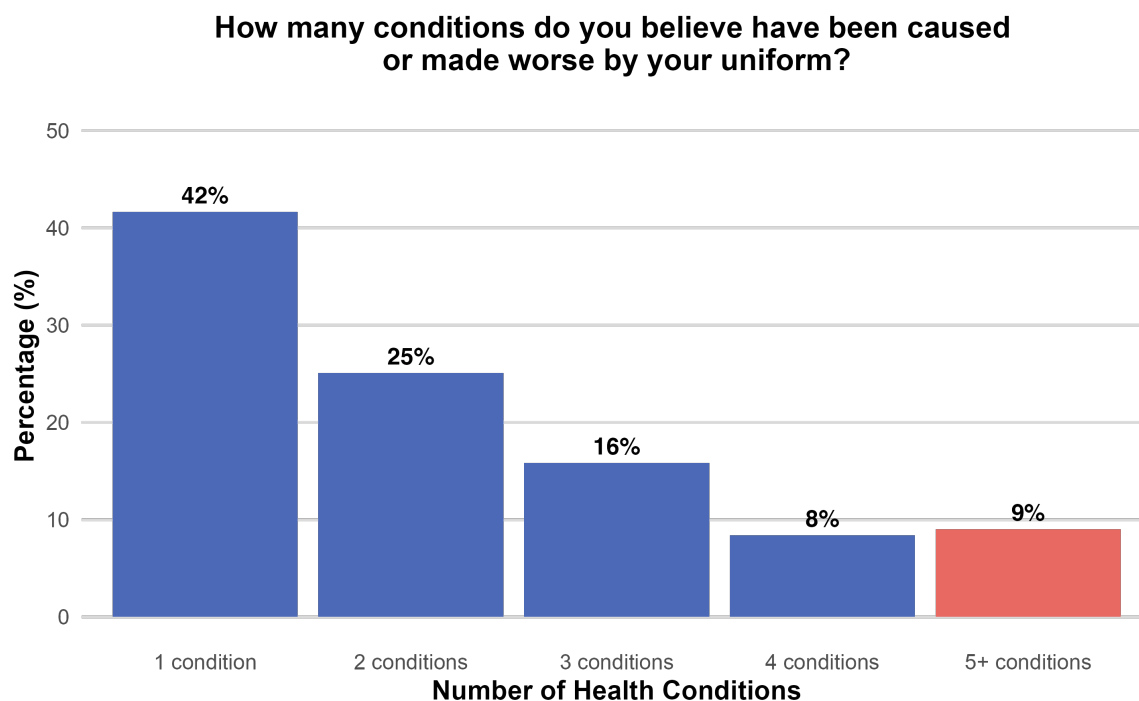


byshire Constabulary were the only two forces where that figure was less than 50%.

For those that indicated they experience a physical health condition associated with wearing the uniform, there was considerable variation in the number of conditions they selected. Figure 11 shows that while the majority of respondents reported just one

physical health condition (42%), a quarter reported at least two conditions (25%), and 9% reported five or more conditions.

Figure 11: Number of conditions caused or made worse by uniform indicated by those who reported at least one health issue.



Importantly, these are not just one-off experiences. As Figure 12 then shows, the majority (four in ten) report they experience these health conditions every day, as a result of wearing the uniform. A further 21% report experiencing these conditions weekly and 10% monthly. Around a quarter (24%) report their physical conditions are experienced occasionally.

9.1 Specific health conditions

The list of health conditions presented to respondents included some conditions which were specific to male or female respondents¹⁵. Therefore, for this next section, where respondents have provided information on their sex and have reported at least one health condition they believe to have been caused or made worse by police uniform, we report the health conditions separately for each sex.

¹⁵These categories are based on biological sex assigned at birth, as specified by respondents.

Figure 12: How often respondents who indicated at least one issue experience the condition(s).

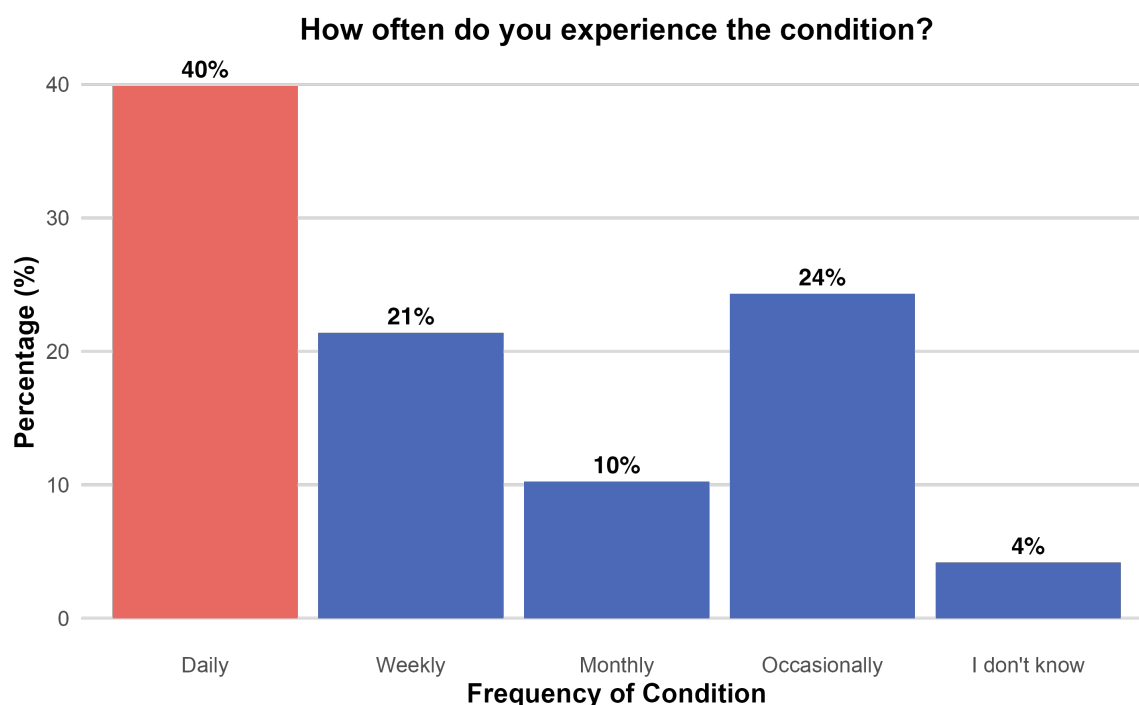


Table 4: Health and uniform breakdown by sex.

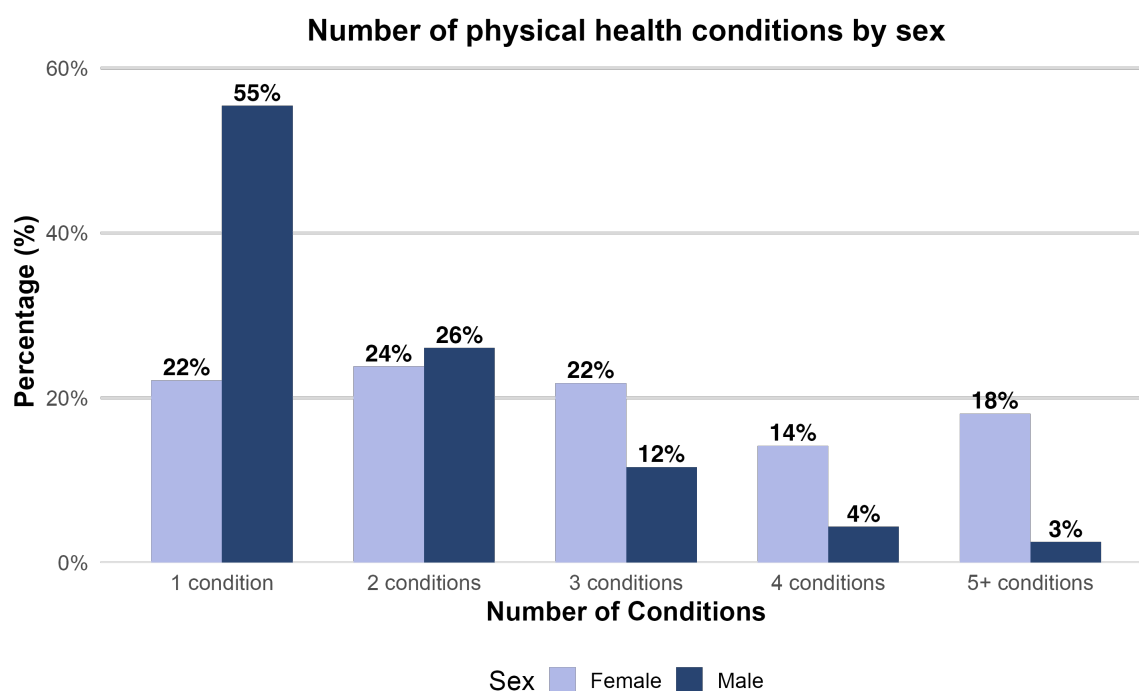
Physical health condition caused or made worse by uniform	
Male	62%
Female	85%

A higher proportion of female respondents (85%) reported at least one condition was caused or aggravated by uniform (including PPE), compared to 62% of male respondents.

Figure 13 and Figure 14 further demonstrate the substantial differences in how uniform has affected respondent's physical health. Most male respondents that reported a physical health condition indicated at least one condition (55%) which they attributed to wearing their uniform, with a further 26% reporting a second condition. Just under one in five reported three or more conditions (19%). The experience of female respondents is different: females were more likely to report multiple conditions they attribute

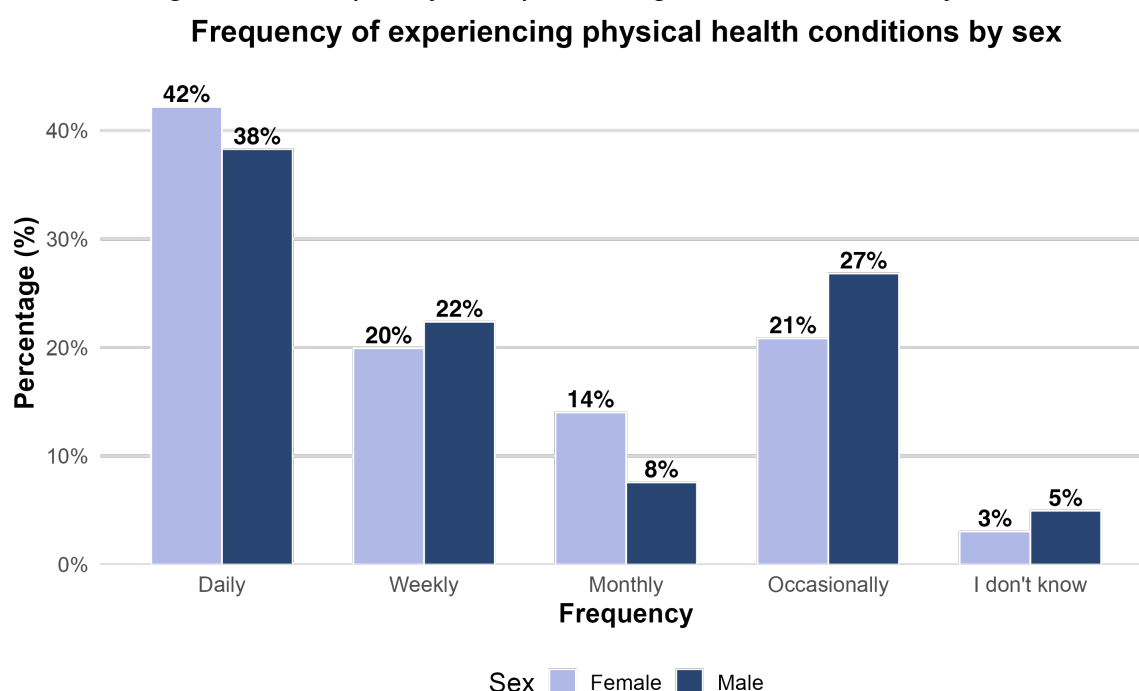
to wearing the uniform. Just over one fifth (22%) of females reported a single physical health condition, while just under a quarter (24%) listed two conditions and 22% reported three conditions. As many as one in five (18%) females reported five or more conditions.

Figure 13: Number of reported physical health conditions believed to have been caused or made worse by uniform wear by sex.



In terms of how frequently respondents experience these conditions, there was little variation between male and female respondents. Of respondents that reported a physical health condition, 42% of females and 38% of males experience these health conditions on a daily basis. A further 20% of females and 22% of males experience these conditions weekly. More females reported experiencing conditions monthly (14%) compared to males (8%), whereas male respondents were more likely to report experiencing these conditions occasionally (27%) compared to 21% of female wearers.

Figure 14: Frequency of experiencing health conditions by sex.



9.2 Male experienced health conditions

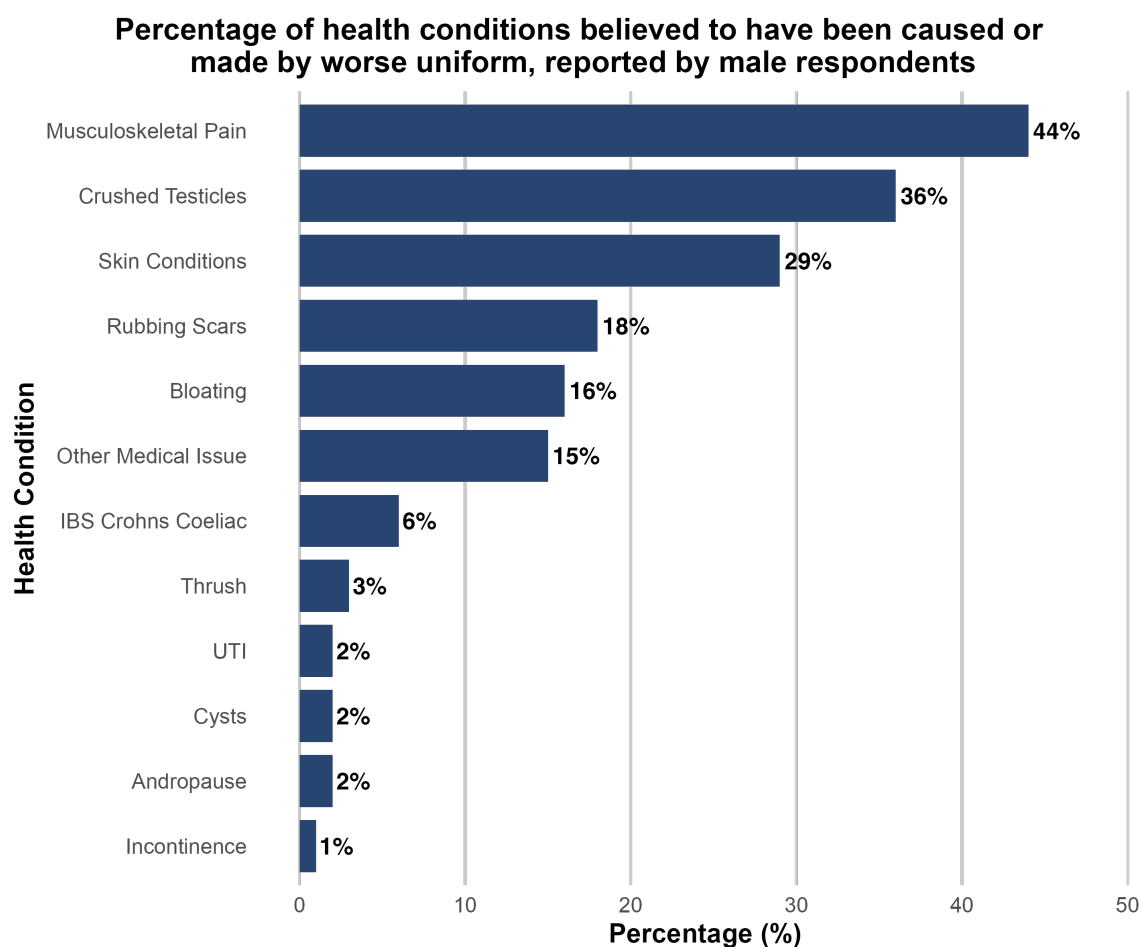
The most common physical health condition experienced by male respondents are displayed in Figure 15. For male respondents, musculoskeletal pain was the most common health condition reported. Just under half (44%) of the male respondents selected this as a condition they believed has been caused by or made worse by wearing the uniform.

This figure may even be an underestimation of this issue, as many respondents elaborated in the comment boxes. There were over 400 comments across all respondents listing back pain, back injuries, and back spasms, with many attributing this pain to their body armour or equipment as demonstrated in the following quotes:

“My body armour causes back ache when standing for a long time”

“Back pain and bruising from utility belt and harness”

Figure 15: Health conditions reported by male respondents.



“Back pain and lipoma¹⁶ on hip where stab vest pushed – also previous baton position used to disrupt blood flow to right leg.”

“Back pain due to poor design of stab vest.”

“Bad back with the weight of load vest, stab vest and equipment together weighing over two stone.”

“Our stab vest uses a weight bearing cummerbund system that does up under the plates. Using it often causes me to suffer from acid reflux, [but] not using it often causes back pain from improper load bear.”

¹⁶A lipoma is a slow-growing, fatty lump that's most often found between skin and the underlying muscle layer.

Many respondents attribute the weight and fit of PPE and equipment as a contributor to musculoskeletal pain. Even where there have been attempts to remedy one issue in relation to the weight of equipment, uniform wearers explain they then experience other physical health conditions, such as acid reflux¹⁷, as mentioned in the previous participant response. Similarly, many documented the utility belts digging into their body, causing bruising in and around the lower back and hip area. Other comments demonstrate the scale of the problem with the PPE and equipment in relation to musculoskeletal conditions:

“Just saying ‘pain’ does not cover it. Positional issues with the constant weight have reshaped by back and neck over years of wear”

“I’ve had ongoing problems with my knee for years. The standard stab vest with utility belt restricts your movement massively. The utility belt sits right across your glutes and hips and prevents you for walking properly and engaging your glutes. This leads to stiffness, soreness, tightness and joint pain.”

These results demonstrate integral parts of the uniform, particularly PPE and equipment, cause some wearers discomfort in relation to musculoskeletal conditions but also lead to more serious long-term damage and injury. Consequently this can cause inter-related and very painful conditions such as sciatica¹⁸, scoliosis¹⁹ and spinal damage.

The second most common condition for men was crushed testicles, reported by over a third (36%) of male respondents with most comments pertaining to the ill-fitting nature of the trousers around the crotch area which was experienced by those in both sedentary and active roles:

¹⁷Gastroesophageal reflux disease is a chronic upper gastrointestinal disease in which stomach content persistently and regularly flows up into the oesophagus, resulting in symptoms and/or complications. Tight clothing, especially around the stomach area can worsen acid reflux symptoms by increasing pressure on the stomach.

¹⁸Sciatica refers to pain that travels along the path of the sciatic nerve. The sciatic nerve travels from the buttocks and down each leg.

¹⁹Scoliosis pinches and compresses the spine indirectly through unnatural curvature, it can squeeze the sciatic nerve. This squeezing produces troubling sciatic pain that can often be debilitating for people who have scoliosis.

“[I’ve had] testicular torsion due to the trousers”

“Trousers have literally exploded in the crotch when I’ve crouched down causing bruising to my testicles”

Some respondents attributed this specifically to wearing the standard issue and/or cargo-style trousers:

“The standard trousers really dig into the testicles.”

“General discomfort [in them], the male cargo trousers do not really accommodate the male private area.”

“Crushed testicles with force-issued cargo-style trousers. No issues with the [brand] though. . . ”

Crushed testicles were not the only problem identified in the groin area. Many respondents also refer to chafing in the groin area and the tops of their thighs, which is exacerbated when it is hot. Respondents drew attention to the poor quality of the trouser fabric and lack of breathable materials. In some cases, the restriction in this area has also led to rubbing, friction rashes, ingrown hairs, skin irritation and even open sores. Over a quarter of male respondents (26%) have purchased trousers externally, most likely as a result of these issues.

More generally, skin conditions were reported by almost three in ten (29%) male respondents. Again, this is likely an underestimation as many more referred to this health issue in their comments. Eczema was frequently cited, as was cellulitis²⁰, acne, breaks in the skin, rashes and chafing. Respondents attribute these conditions to tight clothing, which tends to rub in concentrated areas and the perceived poor quality of materials and fabric used in the uniform caused them to sweat excessively. Heat rash

²⁰Cellulitis is a common, potentially serious bacterial skin infection. It typically affects the deeper layers of the skin and subcutaneous tissues.

and hyperhidrosis²¹ were also reported to have been caused by or made worse by the uniform.

In addition to the skin conditions listed, almost one in five (18%) respondents indicate the uniform also rubs on pre-existing problem areas and new scars.

“[I’ve] definitely gotten skin cysts from the pressure of wearing the armour, because when I’ve stopped wearing it for an extended period I get far less. Bruising of ribs from body armour pressing against lowest rib after multiple days of running in it.”

“[My uniform] rubbed on a mole and repeatedly caused it to bleed and [I had to have it] removed.”

“[It] aggravates [my] surgical sites.”

“[I’ve] had surgery from an infection on my [testicles]. The trousers cause pain and discomfort around the scar tissue due to toughness of the material and overheating”

The comments above highlight the severity of this condition. Rubbing against scar tissue is a concern for wound management, particularly in preventing infection at the scar site. This is especially problematic when the scar is not fully healed or when excessive or prolonged friction occurs, as it can delay healing, cause pain, and increase the risk of infection or reinfection.

Bloating was another condition that 16% of male respondents who reported a health issue indicated was caused by or made worse by their uniform. Possibly related to this are conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)²² /Crohn’s Disease²³ (6%),

²¹Where the body uses sweat as a form of temperature control in order for the body to cool itself.

²²Irritable Bowel Syndrome is a long-term digestive condition that causes a group of symptoms that can significantly affect your everyday life including abdominal pain, bloating, excessive gas, feeling sick, and heartburn.

²³Crohn’s disease is a long-term condition where the gut becomes inflamed. The main symptoms of Crohn’s disease are diarrhoea, stomach aches and cramps, and blood in stools.

urinary tract infections²⁴, bladder infections (2%) and incontinence²⁵ (1%) which can all cause inflammation in the lower abdominal area:

“[I have] general stomach issues due to trousers being so tight.”

“[I] need to go to the toilet all the time [because the uniform] puts pressure on my bladder”

Several comments noted stomach aches and digestive issues, and more often than not, blamed tight and restrictive uniform for causing these issues. Others acknowledged their problems were pre-existing health conditions but believed them to be exacerbated by the constricting nature of trousers.

9.3 Female experienced health conditions

Female respondents experience many of the same physical health conditions as their male colleagues, as shown in Figure 16. As reported previously, females also report experiencing these physical health conditions simultaneously.

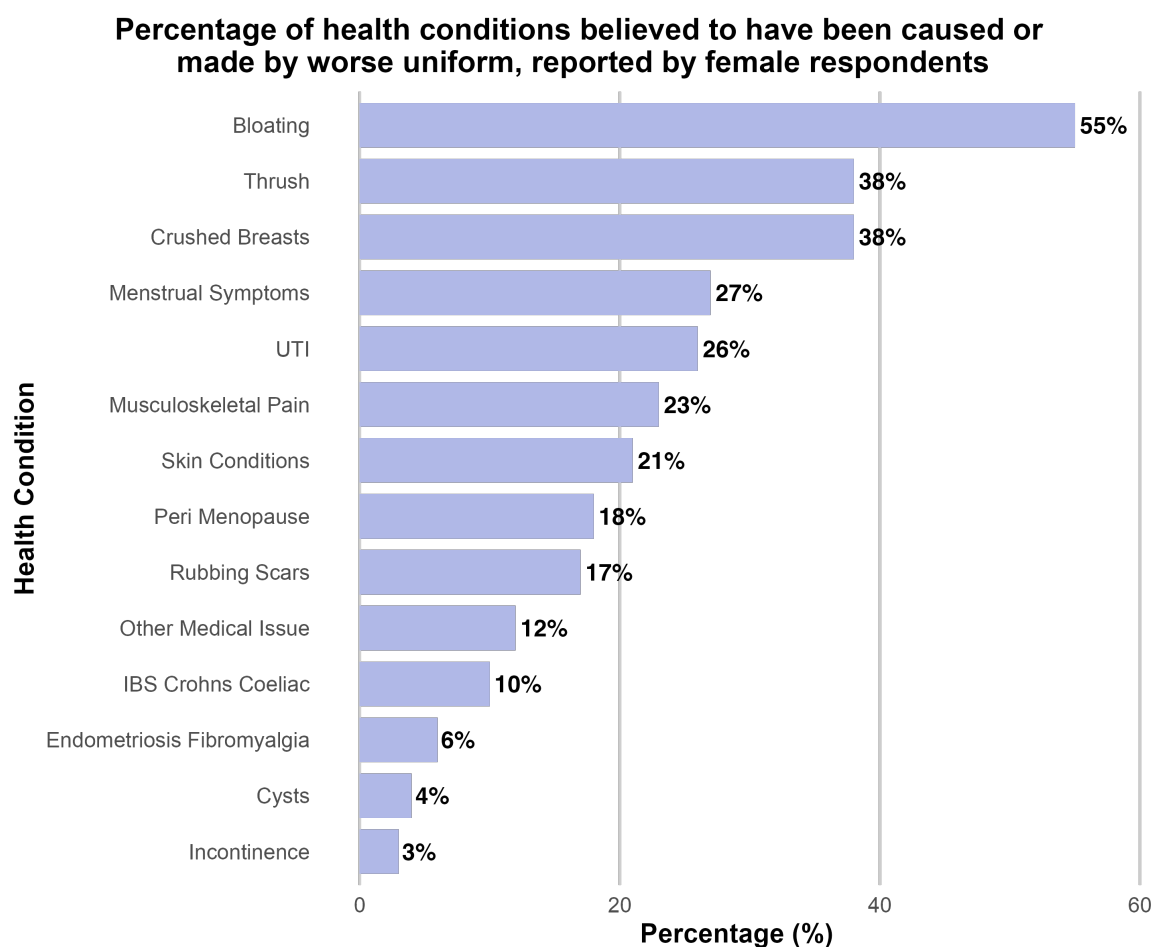
For the female respondents, the stomach area was a key concern, with more than half of female respondents (55%) reporting bloating. Qualitative comments further support previous findings that the restrictive design of uniform trousers can exacerbate these health conditions:

“Stress-related stomach cramps (and never been diagnosed with IBS) – the trousers are rigid, and my stomach can bloat up, making it worse. I now wear elasticated which I know the Sergeants hate and comments have been made but I work 10.5-hour shifts in a stressful role, so I wish to focus on my job, not the fact my stomach is giving me bad pain.”

²⁴A urinary tract infection (colloquially also known as a ‘water infection’) is an infection of your bladder, kidneys or the tubes connected to them. Symptoms of a urinary tract infection include a sudden need to pee and pain or a burning sensation when peeing.

²⁵Urinary incontinence, also known as involuntary urination, is any uncontrolled leakage of urine. It is a common and distressing problem, which may have a significant impact on quality of life.

Figure 16: Health conditions reported by female respondents.



Over a quarter of female uniform wearers (27%) listed menstrual symptoms, while also reporting peri or menopausal symptoms (18%), Endometriosis²⁶ /Fibromyalgia²⁷ (6%) and IBS, Crohn's disease, and Coeliac disease (10%). While these conditions are not caused by wearing the uniform, the uniform is contributing to greater levels of discomfort for many female wearers.

For female uniform wearers, the trousers are also considered to be ill-fitting and restrictive in the hip, groin and upper thigh areas. Many report that the trousers dig in at the crotch, and in some extreme cases have led to blistering, swelling and cuts to their genitalia. These issues are reported across officer and staff roles:

²⁶Endometriosis is a long-term condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb grows in other places such as the ovaries and fallopian tubes. Symptoms include pelvic pain, and severe period pain.

²⁷Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition causing widespread musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, and sleep disturbances, often accompanied by cognitive issues and mood changes.

“The female cotton office trousers are cut too short in the crotch and dig into the female genitals. If I wear office uniform trousers, I have to order men’s.”

“The current duty trousers dig uncomfortably and painfully into female genitals especially when crouching or lifting your legs.”

“Sitting in them can get very uncomfortable and I am physically unable to cross my legs should I wish to due to the way the trousers are made.”

“Crushed vagina, constantly having to stand up to rearrange trousers. They are so horrific, they gape at the back, dig in at the front and rise up into the groin area. Honestly, if I left my job these would be the number one reason.”

These accounts speak to problems with the fit of the trousers, namely being too big on the waist, too short from the waist band to the crotch and too tight in the hip and thigh area. This restrictiveness, particularly around the crotch area, likely contributes to almost four in ten female wearers reporting thrush²⁸ (38%) and over a quarter (26%) reporting urinary tract infections (UTIs). This is inevitably made worse during the female monthly menstrual cycle where they may also need to wear sanitary products.

The chest area was another area of concern for some female respondents reflecting the variation in how the uniform interacts with breasts. Thirty-eight percent of females report they experience crushed breasts predominantly due to the fit of the body armour. Female respondents also reported breast lumps, particularly cysts²⁹ (4%), and mastitis³⁰, operations following breast cancer, such as full or partial mastectomies³¹, as well as rubbing on scars more generally (16%):

²⁸ Thrush, also known as candidiasis, is a fungal infection caused by an overgrowth of Candida, a type of yeast. It is usually harmless but can be reoccurring and very uncomfortable.

²⁹ A breast cyst can feel like a soft or hard lump in the breast and are typically oval or round can develop quickly anywhere in the breast.

³⁰ Mastitis is an inflammation of the breast tissue, often occurring in breastfeeding women, characterised by pain, swelling, redness, and sometimes fever, and can be caused by a blocked milk duct or infection.

³¹ A mastectomy is a surgical procedure to remove all breast tissue, often performed to treat breast cancer or as a preventative measure for those at high risk.

‘The stab vest doesn’t incorporate breasts, pressing on my chest and making it hard to breathe.’

“Poorly fitting body armour caused/contributed to a case of mastitis. . . My body armour is not shaped to the female form, and therefore to make it fit snugly at the bottom, it has to be very tight at the top. I still continue to breastfeed my child, so I continue to run the risk of re-occurrence. I refuse to let it affect my child, but it could affect my role at work.”

“Pain, numbness and discomfort due to breast cancer surgery, also excessive heat which is exaggerated by the uniform in hot weather.”

“[The stab vest puts] pressure on the area where a cyst has developed resulting in surgery.”

The quotes above demonstrate that for some uniform wearers, the issues go beyond general discomfort, and have long-lasting health implications.

Additional challenges faced by female wearers wearing PPE, both due to diversity in the female form in terms of body shape and size, as well as the rigidity and lack of malleability in certain PPE items can lead to significant discomfort, restricting movement and even cause or aggravate health conditions. Moreover, hormonal fluctuations throughout the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, menopause, and breastfeeding (to give a few examples), can influence body shape, size and sensitivity, further complicating the fit and comfort of PPE. PPE designed without this variability in mind may contribute to the worsening of health issues as outlined above, highlighting the need for inclusive, flexible PPE that can accommodate a full range of female bodies.

Female respondents (23%) also reported musculoskeletal pain, and similarly, they specifically cited back, neck, hip and shoulder pain and injury, generally associated with the weight of the equipment, as demonstrated in the following comments:

“The stab [vest], jacket, and utility belt has caused issues with my hips and back long-term.”

“Chronic neck and back pain, hunching and stomach aches. I have consistent trouble breathing and I am chronically uncomfortable during work hours for these reasons.”

“Stab vests do not help back pain. I have had a re-fit after spinal surgery but they’re still too heavy.”

“[I get] bruising on my hip bones due to the utility belt.”

“I get stomach pain from having to wear heavy equipment on my torso.”

As reported previously, female health conditions are also compounded by additional health conditions they experience simultaneously when wearing the uniform. The following quote sums this up:

“I have extreme back pain that only occurred once I started wearing the uniform. I get the worst pain in my ovaries as the band of the cargo pants has no elastic and presses into them.”

9.4 Other health concerns

In addition to the health conditions listed, other health conditions emerged in the comments, alongside the connection to different items of uniform. These were common across all survey respondents.

Headaches and/or migraines were frequently listed and often attributed to the type of headwear worn, specifically from helmets, bowler hats and flat caps:

“The female bowler hat is the most uncomfortable piece of uniform. It is not practicable for response policing in the slightest and for a migraine and headache sufferer can make it worse/bring on an attack.”

“The current custodian helmet is not fit for purpose. They do not fit all head shapes correctly and cause pain and headaches.”

“The hat causes headaches due to ill-fitting and makes a red mark and indentation across my forehead.”

There is variability in footwear provision across and within police forces. Around a quarter of survey respondents (27%) said their force provides footwear but only 22% of those supplied actually wear them. The majority (73%) stated their force does not provide their footwear. Footwear, specifically the patrol boot, was identified as causing foot problems (26% reported they have a negative effect on experience of wearing uniform, for an item worn by 72% of respondents). For example, Plantar Fasciitis³² was listed by respondents, along with conditions such as athlete's foot³³, fungal nail and foot infections. The quotes here demonstrate the range of conditions reported by wearers:

“Since wearing the [brand] Public Order boots I have developed gout³⁴ in my little toe on right foot and occasional bursitis³⁵ in left ankle.”

“[I get] blistered painful feet from poor public order boots.”

“Footwear caused popped calf when running. I run out[side] of work and never had this issue.”

³²Plantar fasciitis is inflammation of the plantar fascia, a thick band of tissue on the bottom of your foot that connects your heel bone to your toes, causing pain, especially in the heel and arch.

³³Athlete's foot, or tinea pedis, is a common fungal infection of the feet, often causing itching, scaling, and cracking, particularly between the toes, which can be very irritating and uncomfortable.

³⁴Gout is a type of inflammatory arthritis characterized by sudden, severe joint pain, often in the big toe, caused by the buildup of uric acid crystals in the joints

³⁵Bursitis is an inflammation of a fluid-filled sac that cushions bones, tendons, and muscles near joints, leading to pain, swelling and stiffness.

These conditions are likely worsened given the amount of time spent on active patrol.

In summary, this section has highlighted the extent to which specific items of uniform and PPE are impacting the physical health for a substantial proportion of wearers. The findings are clear: the ill-fitting and restrictive nature of the uniform and equipment goes beyond general discomfort and could lead to long-term health conditions and further legal implications.

In 2023, a female firearms inspector won £820,720 in an employment tribunal against The Chief Constable of West Midlands Police³⁶ on the grounds of direct and indirect sex discrimination, part of which was being provided with ill-fitting, not fit-for-purpose, men's uniform. This particular case highlights the precarious position that police forces could find themselves in if they do not proactively listen to these uniform issues and accommodate them accordingly, both under strategic Equality Diversity Inclusivity (EDI) priorities and legal obligations.

³⁶Mrs R Kalam v The Chief Constable of West Midlands Police: 1301519/202: <https://www.gov.uk/employment-tribunal-decisions/mrs-r-kalam-v-the-chief-constable-of-west-midlands-police-1301519-slash-2021>

10 Uniform complaints

Given the issues highlighted in the report, just over a third of respondents (36%) have raised complaints with their line manager about their uniform. In most of these cases (69%), no action was taken. In only a small proportion of these cases, the complaint was recognised and met with some form of positive action, for example, just under ten percent (8%) were provided with a change of uniform and 2% had their uniforms refitted. A further 8% were referred to occupational health and some (less than 1%) were put on adjusted duties. In some instances, individuals were allowed to wear or purchase alternative clothing, though reimbursement often appeared to be at the discretion of individual managers or forces.

While some complaints were heard by immediate line managers, they were either denied or not acted upon when escalated to senior management. Many respondents reported feeling powerless in these decisions, as demonstrated in the following quotes:

‘I was granted change of trousers to alleviate health issues, but upper management refused me to wear them.’

“I complained to stores who said it was force policy.”

“Advised it is ‘uniform policy’ with what we are provided for our job role.”

For others, their complaints were not recognised, even when they involved serious physical health concerns. Respondents expressed frustration in a significant number of comments (n=790), some of which are illustrated in the following quotes:

“I was sent some newer plates for my stab vest however these are still too heavy following a compression back fracture in 2020. I have asked for lightweight plates, and I was refused. I have also complained about my trousers being too tight and I have been told I have to wear them.”

“I complained about the stab and tactical vests compressing [my] breasts and causing sagging, as well as neck and back pain. It was raised in a meeting for ‘Rethinking the Uniform’ in 2022, but there was no outcome. My line manager at the time was male, and he became very uncomfortable that I was talking about breasts and said to me that he was considering not raising the issue because it was uncomfortable for him. He didn’t seem to understand that the matter was not trivial.”

“I am ignored no matter how many times I raise this matter. I am put at risk every day and despite highlighting this on numerous occasions no action is taken - I feel as though my wellbeing and welfare is completely disregarded and I am not important.”

While some had complained to their line manager about uniform, 19% had considered complaining but decided against it. When asked why, a common theme emerged: a strong sense that complaining would be futile, and would not lead to meaningful change:

“Although [my] line manager would be sympathetic, the force would not care whatsoever, and any complaints or suggestions would be met with an uncaring wall of bureaucratic responses and barriers.”

“There is nothing I feel they would be able to action as this is the set uniform standards. So many people have issues with it, it is almost expected to just get on with it as this is what we are working with.”

“I feel nothing would change [if I did complain] and I would have to continue to wear it anyway.”

A recurring pattern was the belief that uniform issues are structural or systemic problems, rather than matters that can be addressed through individual complaints. Respondents often describe poorly fitting uniforms as a widespread and persistent issue affecting “everyone”, “every officer”, especially “every woman”:

“Everyone is issued the same uniform. Every officer I have spoken to has the same issues with the trousers, particularly woman. Complaining would not achieve anything.”

“Every woman is in the same boat. If the trousers fit around the waist, they are too big everywhere else and vice versa.”

“I didn’t feel my line manager would be able to make any changes to the uniform we are forced to wear.”

“They won’t be able to effect change.”

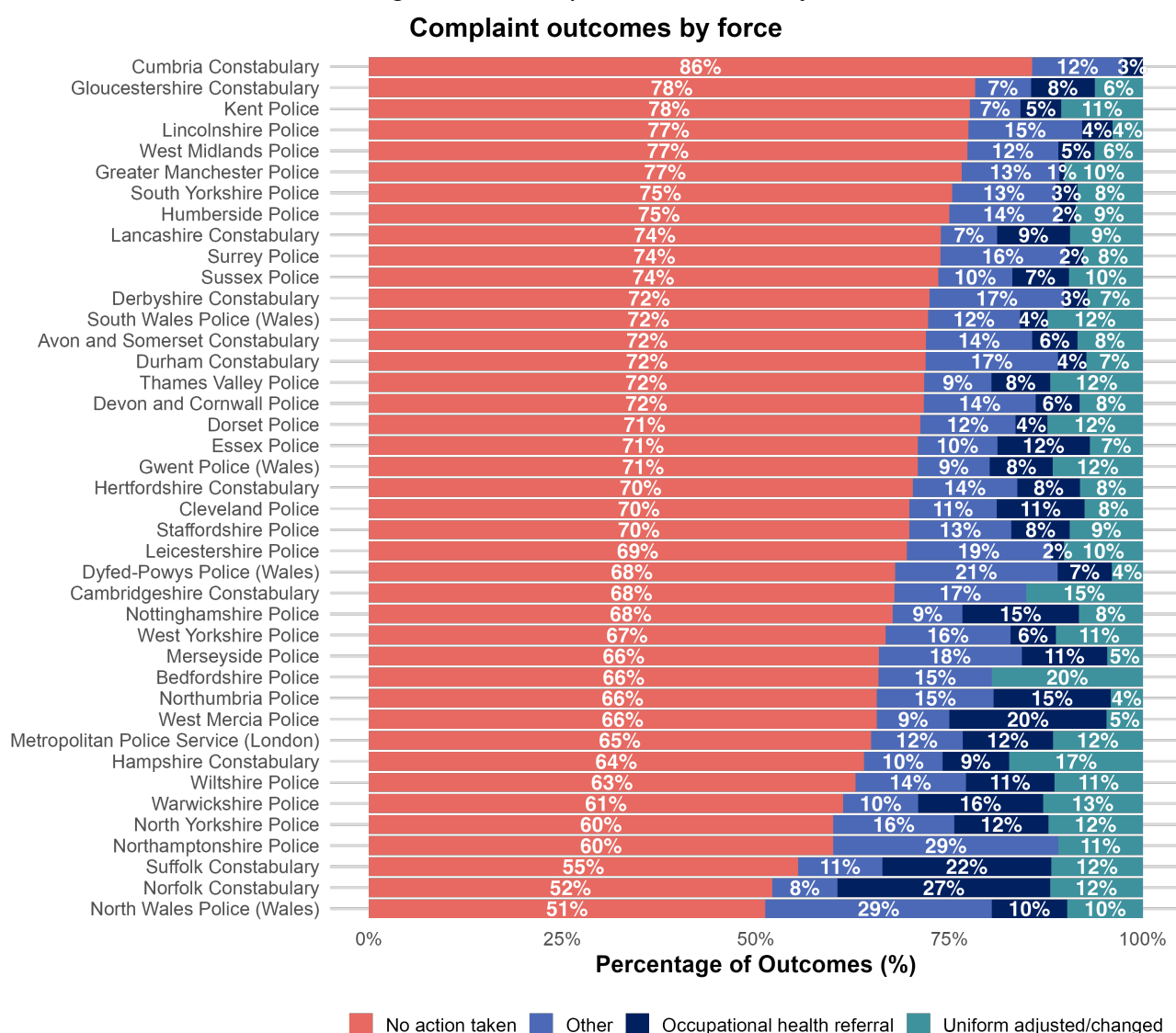
The comments also suggest that because the problem has remained unresolved for such a long time, there is little expectation that raising it individually will lead to meaningful change.

The breakdown of complaint outcomes by force is shown in Figure 17. This graph indicates that across all forces, the most common outcome of uniform-related complaints was that no action was taken, although this varies between 51-86% of respondents depending on the force. This indicates that some forces are more likely to action complaints than others. For example, one of the worst-performing forces in this regard was Cumbria Constabulary, where 86% of complaints resulted in no action taken. This compares considerably to North Wales, where that figure is 51%. This highlights considerable inconsistency across forces, but at minimum, at least one in two complaints went unaddressed.

Across forces, between 4%-20% of uniform complaints resulted in a change of uniform or adjustment being made. This variation shows that, between forces, uniform complaints are not dealt with in a consistent way, with some forces rarely making necessary adjustments to uniform, often at the cost of officer and staff wellbeing.

Of uniform-related complaints, between 1%-27% of these result in an occupational health referral. Many respondents across forces said they had other outcomes from

Figure 17: Complaint outcomes by force.



their complaint (between 7% and 29%), although on further investigation, many of the comments detailed that their complaint outcome is ongoing/under review, with no sign of it being resolved. Other comments detailed that complaints had been collated and sent to senior management³⁷, but the issues are yet to be resolved.

When asked if uniform has influenced decision-making to pursue specific roles in policing, 9% were unsure, 5% had chosen roles based on the uniform, and 4% of respondents were currently transitioning to a non-uniform role. Another 5% of respondents

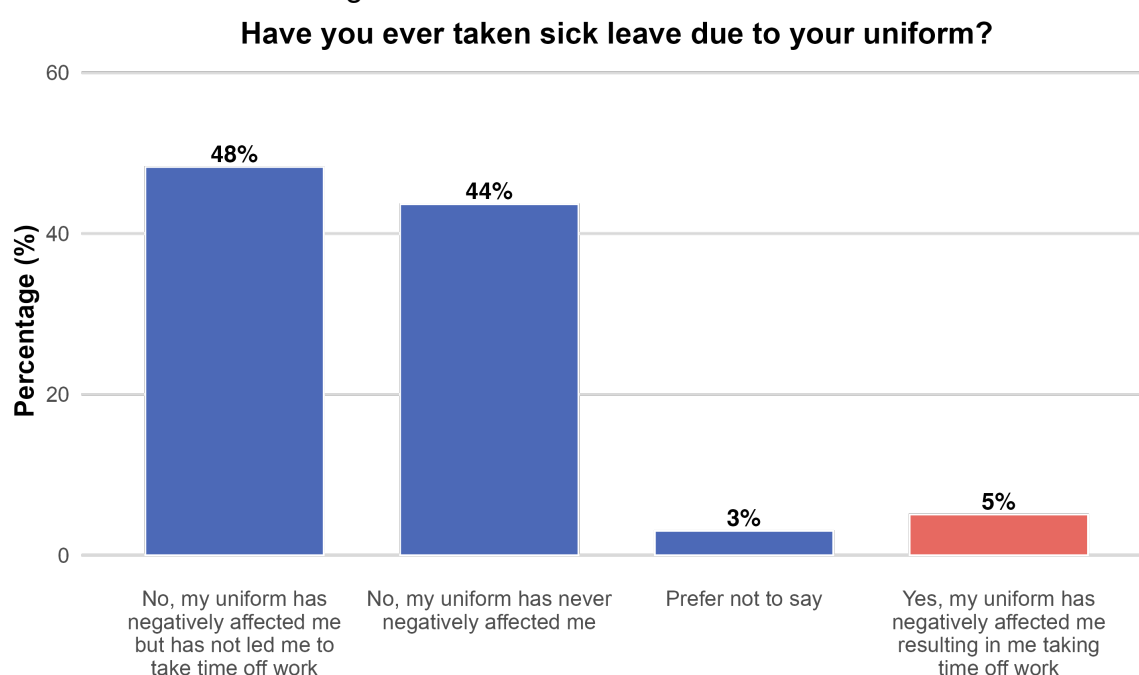
³⁷Different points of contact were named in qualitative comments such as 'senior leadership team', 'uniform board', 'staff network', 'complained to stores', 'Senior Management Team', and 'Chief Officer Group'.

admitted they have considered leaving the service completely because of the uniform. The majority, however, stated that the uniform has not played a part in their decision making to pursue or leave specific roles in policing (51%).

11 Uniform related sick leave

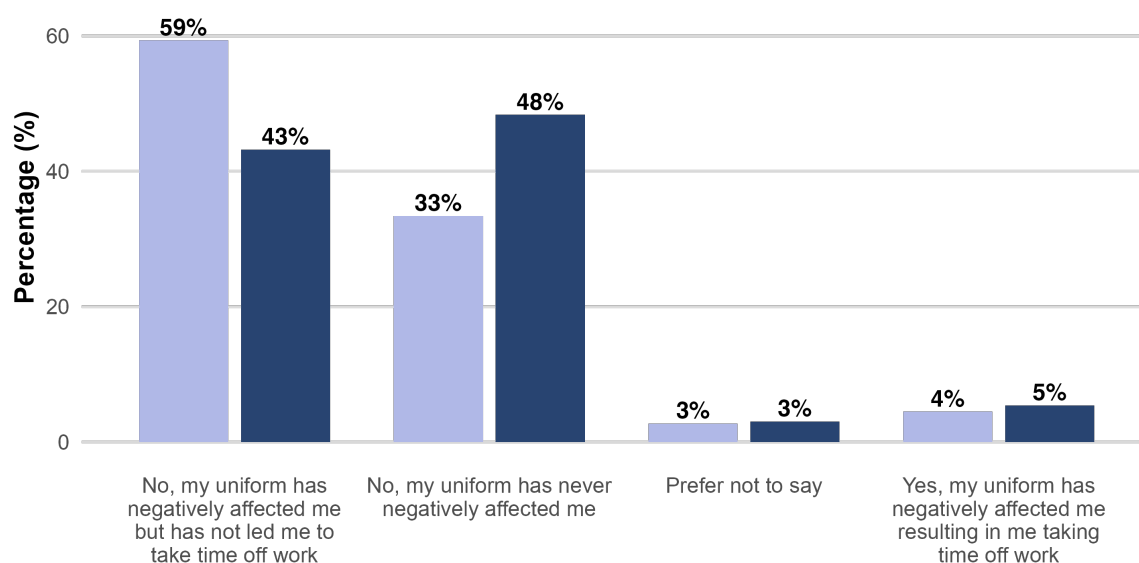
The results so far have highlighted a variety of issues with the uniform and for some, the uniform severely affects users' physical health, and psychological health and well-being. To explore the wider implications of this, the survey specifically asked respondents if the physical issues they experience with the uniform have led them to take time off work through sick leave. Figure 18 shows the results for all survey respondents.

Figure 18: Uniform related sick leave.



The survey results reveal that four in ten respondents (44%) maintain the uniform has never negatively affected them. That being said, nearly half (48%) of all respondents recognise the uniform has affected them negatively but did not lead them to take time off work because of it. However, a small proportion of uniform wearers – on average, one in twenty (5%), report their uniform has affected them so badly that it has led them to take time off work through sick leave. This ranges between 2%-9% across forces, with Lincolnshire Police, Staffordshire Police and North Wales Police having the lowest rates of sick leave (2%), and Hertfordshire Constabulary and Bedfordshire Police having the highest rate of sick leave (9%) related to uniform.

Figure 19: Uniform related sick leave by sex.
Have you ever taken sick leave due to your uniform?



Given the stark differences in male and female experiences of uniform based on physical health, sick leave by sex is also explored (see Figure 19). In terms of those who have taken sick leave due to issues with the uniform, the figure is comparable for both male (5%) and female (4%) uniform wearers. Furthermore, the reasons listed for taking sick leave map directly onto the key issues that were highlighted previously when discussing physical health conditions, such as musculoskeletal pain and stomach problems.

Figure 19 shows the distribution of sick leave responses among respondents who reported their sex. More female respondents reported that their uniform has physically affected them, but this has not led them to take time off work (59%) compared to male respondents (43%). This is likely indicative of the myriad of conditions experienced by female uniform wearers, although, this survey indicates females are not any more likely than their male colleagues to take time off work because of their uniform. It is interesting to note that 3% of both male and female wearers selected 'prefer not to say'. The rigorous sickness policy that police forces implement, may mean that people

do not choose to take sick leave at all for fear of triggering a review³⁸ or are using annual leave as a substitute, as detailed in some of the qualitative comments in the following section.

11.1 Reasons for taking sick leave

There were 717 comments from uniform wearers detailing the reasons for taking sick leave. While we cannot list every condition mentioned, we have identified the most common reasons respondents document as reasons for taking sick leave. It is clear the decision to take sick leave was not taken lightly, and many respondents refer to years of sustained or reoccurring health conditions they feel were caused by or made worse through wearing their uniform. Often the conditions are attributed to specific items of uniform, not just by the wearers themselves but from medical professionals including doctors, occupational health practitioners and other specialists.

The most common reason for taking sick leave was related to musculoskeletal problems³⁹. Back pain and/or injury was specifically mentioned in 407 comments, neck pain was referred to 40 times and hip pain 33 times. Many respondents detailed the extent of their conditions which finally resulted in them taking sick leave:

“The poor design and restricted movement of the force-issued trousers (general purpose and cargo) coupled with the weight and poor design of the cheap body armour placed increasing load on my lower back and prevented me from bending at the knee properly. This led to a herniated disc L4-L5 and resulted in several months sick leave and requiring extensive treatment.”

³⁸As a rule, this is three separate short-term absences triggering a review of officer attendance, potentially leading to further investigation or action if it indicates a problematic pattern. Since most health conditions noted in this report can be perceived to be embarrassing, or stigmatising, it is likely the affected officer may not feel comfortable disclosing the ‘reasons’ for absence and therefore may avoid taking sick leave at all.

³⁹Which fits with previous research findings nearly 30 years ago that show that most long-term sick leave was due to musculoskeletal problems and stress-related issues (we wonder how many absences in previous research were also uniform-related...). See Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) (1997) Lost time - The management of sickness absence and medical retirement in the police service.

“Constant wearing of an extra 29lbs in weight, due mainly to firearms ballistic vest, plus ballistic plates, magazines and thigh-drop holster for pistol, all created back issues when worn for 12-hour shifts, put my back into spasm.”

“21 years of body armour use, 12 of which were ballistic armour and belt rig with leg holster, which has caused back and hip problems.”

These comments refer to the weight of the equipment and PPE, and the cumulative effect that sustained use has had on the body. In particular, weight bearing areas such as the back, shoulders and neck, hips, and knees were mentioned. Specific items were also often referred to as attributing to the condition. For example, the term ‘body armour’ was used 174 times and stab or TAC (tactical) vest was used 171 times in the reasons for sick leave responses. While the equipment listed is a necessity for more specialist roles, the materials, quality of the equipment and fit are areas that respondents identify that could be improved.

It is not just musculoskeletal pain that was reported as a result of wearing ill-fitting uniform and equipment. Respondents also noted lumps in their breasts and conditions such as costochondritis⁴⁰ which medical professionals attribute to wearing stab and TAC vests, and ultimately led to taking sick leave:

“I had to be off work due to the extreme pain and lumps caused in my breast from the stab vest. I had to book an emergency doctor’s appointment for 23.30hrs the day after discovering the lump and get checked due to the level of pain I was in. I then had to be referred to the breast clinic where I had to undergo scans and further tests. This has happened 3 times in my 4-year career. I have never had an issue with lumps in my breast before this job. Two medical professionals have put in writing that I require a specialised made to measure stab vest.”

“I have been diagnosed with costochondritis, due to the tightness of the body armour which has caused inflammation in my chest and can sometimes feel like I am having

⁴⁰Costochondritis is inflammation where your ribs join the bone in the middle of your chest (breast-bone) and can cause sharp chest pain, especially when moving or breathing.

a heart attack. I often get sharp, shooting pains in my breasts too. Even when I'm not wearing the body armour, I now get pains. I have tried getting a bigger stab and tac vest as well as trying the lightweight one too, however, those have not worked for me either - I have the same issues. I cannot wear a belt either to relieve some of the tension on my chest and to the front of my body, however, the belt causes pain and discomfort in my hips. The body armour is not designed for women at all and as much as I appreciate that it's not designed to be comfortable and we wear it for our safety, I can't be safe when I wear it because of the issues it's causing me. I frequently have to take it off and have struggled when dealing with physical conflict."

The results documented here highlight the medical problems that may have developed through wearing equipment that is not designed for the female form. As a result, the equipment applies undue pressure on the chest and is made worse for female wearers with fuller breasts as there is no room to accommodate them. There is an acute awareness that the safety of frontline officers is paramount and should take precedence above all other factors. However, this is undermined when the items of uniform and equipment do not fit or function properly.

Female wearers frequently reported reoccurring issues with their stomach, as well as thrush and urinary tract infections (UTIs), as a result of wearing uniform trousers. They report the trousers either compress their lower stomach and or dig into their groin area; in some cases, these conditions are caused or are made worse because of the issues mentioned. In the comments about sick leave, IBS was reported 20 times, thrush 18 times, and UTIs/water infections 37 times;

"[I get] stomach issues with IBS due to tight trousers and not being able to get them to fit during a flare up, and I have had thrush caused by tight trousers as well as the crotch space is too limited in the women's trousers."

"The issued cargo trousers have caused reoccurring thrush which has been extremely uncomfortable requiring medication."

"I have experienced repeated UTIs which are exacerbated by trousers worn every day

- wouldn't mention this to my Sergeant at the time as he was male."

The final quote refers to suffering repeat UTIs and the reluctance to mention this to a male line manager. There is a level of embarrassment and discomfort around discussing issues which are considered more personal in nature, and this is a recurring theme that respondents have alluded to at various points in the survey. For some, there is a heightened level of discomfort around disclosing certain physical health conditions, especially when they are related to female body parts. This affects so many females (85%) on a daily basis (42%), but they feel they cannot draw attention to these issues.

The third condition that was frequently reported in relation to uniform related sick leave involved respondents' feet. Foot problems such as plantar fasciitis were declared 9 separate times, issues with feet more generally were mentioned 15 times and boots were cited 36 times:

"After wearing the patrol boots issued by the police and patrolling the streets with them, I developed plantar fasciitis. A physio documented that it was because of the boots I had been issued and stated that it is very common with these types of boots. I now buy my own boots."

"Due to a long standing issue with fallen arches (flat feet) which has led to lower limb complications (shin splints⁴¹), I have not been able on occasion to pass my annual fitness test without costly physio and podiatrist intervention. This has meant extended periods where I have been non-operational, but not technically 'off sick'."

These comments detail some of the issues mentioned in relation to feet and the uniform boot provided by forces. As mentioned previously, not all forces issue boots as part of the uniform and it appears common that wearers can and do resort to purchasing their own boots to alleviate certain foot related issues. These comments also

⁴¹Research shows that poorly fitting footwear can lead to increased stress on the shin bones, muscles, and tendons, which can result in shin splints, see for example Wilder, R.P. and Sethi, S., (2004). Overuse injuries: tendinopathies, stress fractures, compartment syndrome, and shin splints. Clinics in sports medicine, 23(1), pp.55-81.

highlight that uniform wearers will use various health practitioners to relieve and treat these issues but ultimately, there are instances where the problems become so great they are unable to work resulting in taking time off work or having to change roles in order to recover.

11.2 Reasons for not taking sick leave

When asked why respondents did not take time off work (sick leave) due to uniform-related experiences, just over a quarter (28%) stated they felt it was a personal matter and that it did not warrant time off from their role. Others reported that while it did cause them some level of discomfort, it was not enough to warrant taking time off work. There was a general feeling that everyone is suffering with similar uniform issues, and this is a natural hazard of the job, as summarised in the following quotes:

“A large number of people appear to feel the same. There’s an attitude of “The equipment’s bad for everyone, not just yourself, so we all have to live with it”.”

“It’s not something that is worth taking time off for, everybody gets an aching back when driving for long periods in the stab vest, and everyone has experienced being “pinched” by the poorly fitted trousers. These are minor issues but over a long career it isn’t surprising many senior colleagues have back issues.”

There was, however, recognition that these issues are cumulative, and that sustained wear of certain items (such as the stab vest) is likely to lead to back injuries over time. Despite this, some respondents expressed reluctance to take actions like sick leave, as they did not want to be perceived as giving in to these ‘minor issues.’ Others acknowledged experiencing persistent physical problems due to wearing the uniform, but felt a strong sense of duty and did not want to ‘let their colleagues down’:

“I have had persistent lower back pain, which has led to being unhappy due to pain. I did not take time off work as I could still turn up to work, albeit in pain, and help colleagues. It didn’t feel right to abandon them.”

This quote reinforces the importance of collegiality and camaraderie within policing, while also highlighting that taking time off work can feel like ‘abandoning’ colleagues. Some respondents felt compelled to continue working despite the physical issues caused by their uniform. This sense of obligation was a recurring theme in comments explaining why they chose not to take sick leave.

Other comments indicate a slightly more sinister undercurrent in succumbing to (or even acknowledging) any uniform issues, particularly when it leads to taking time off from work:

“I’m not a snowflake.”

“I’m not dramatic about trivial things.”

“You just have to get on with it, you knew what the uniform was when you started and it’s your problem not the forces.”

The first two comments left by male respondents may reflect the presence of a masculine police culture which has been well documented in policing research⁴², whereby to admit any physical issues relating to the uniform would be considered a sign of weakness. This is articulated in the third comment provided by a female respondent and may also explain why, in particular, female uniform wearers feel unable to express their uniform-related health issues to senior male colleagues. This was further evidenced in that 9% of those who gave a reason for not taking sick leave said there are negative attitudes in the force toward taking sick leave, 5% said there is a lack of empathy from line managers, 3% said they had had negative experiences disclosing their reasons for uniform related sick leave. A further 3% were worried about their colleagues finding out. Most respondents said they did not know why they had not considered taking sick leave (34%).

⁴²See for example Silvestri, M. (2017) Police Culture and Gender: Revisiting the ‘Cult of Masculinity’. Policing, 11 (3). pp. 289-300. ISSN 1752-4512., Campeau H. (2019). Institutional myths and generational boundaries: cultural inertia in the police organisation. Policing and Society, 29(1), 69–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2017.1371718>, Loftus, B., 2010. Police occupational culture: classic themes, altered times. Policing and society, 20 (1), 1–20. Westmarland, L. (2001). Gender and policing: sex, power and police culture. Willan.

It is clear from the comments that taking sick leave tends to be the very last resort. Respondents document other strategies they have adopted to try and alleviate the health-related uniform issues:

“The pain the uniform causes to my body often results in me coming back to the police station early to rest. I’ve taken annual leave on several days to give my body a rest from wearing the uniform. I’m surprised more officers haven’t sued the job for having no second/other options for lighter more suitable and quite frankly a better designed body armour.”

The quote here documents two strategies that have been commonly adopted to deal with the physical effects of wearing the uniform; firstly, to prematurely end patrol and return to the station to remove the uniform, and secondly, taking annual leave to allow their body time to recover. Other respondents also listed altering the uniform (such as sizing up), removing plates or exchanging for lighter plates, and changing working patterns (such as working reduced hours and thus reducing time in uniform).

12 Uniform access and stores

This section of the report focuses on how uniform is obtained and the experiences of using the uniform stores. The results show the majority of uniform wearers (83%) were initially fitted for their police uniform by uniform stores. The remaining 17% were self-measured or were measured by an external company and submitted to the stores. Some respondents report the uniform fitting service was not available to their force, that services were temporarily suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic, or that there was resource pressure from the Police Uplift;

“[My] force no longer allows the fitting of uniform by measurement. You have to measure yourself at home and send it in.”

“No fitting or measuring provided, you just try some on and go from there.”

“We were told there were too many new officers, so there were no slots available.”

When asked about obtaining new or replacement uniform items, 50% of respondents report that obtaining new items is somewhat or extremely difficult, compared to 31% that report it was somewhat or extremely easy. There was some variation in wait times for new uniform items, with just under half of respondents (48%) receiving replacement items quickly (within a few weeks), but others (30%) reported moderate wait times of up to three months. A further 19% said they have had to wait a long (3-6 months) or very long time (over 6 months). Very few respondents never received their items (1%). This variation could be the result of resourcing, but also different force suppliers of uniform items.

Following initial fitting for uniform, more than half (56%) of respondents had subsequently visited uniform stores to try on uniform. A small proportion (12%) of respondents did not know it was possible to visit stores, while a further 12% said it was no longer an option to attend stores, or they were not allowed (8%). For some employees

(12%), the closest uniform store to their force is too far away to visit⁴³.

For those that were able to visit uniform stores, 68% state they were able to access at least some items in their size if not all, but 32% state that was not the case. Some respondents reported positive experiences with their visit to the uniform stores commenting on the helpfulness and friendliness of staff, and the ease of the visit:

“Positive experience and staff always happy to help.”

“It was positive, staff were friendly and supportive.”

“Positive - The staff were incredibly helpful but also realistic about the fit of the uniform and the quality.”

However, other comments were less positive in the reporting of experiences, noting some store staff were hesitant to provide uniform, augmenting the difficulty in obtaining items:

“(Stores are) very possessive of giving items out. Despite the fact I have a specific role that will be well documented on many systems, I continually have to prove why I’m requesting the item.”

“Sometimes they are friendly, [but other times] they are abrupt and suspicious when you ask for new uniform or kit.”

“They appear to believe the uniform is theirs and better stacked in boxes than being issued.”

⁴³Some forces are a ‘Tri-Force’, who share resources (including uniform stores) with neighbouring forces and often have low numbers of staff working in them trying to supply several thousand officers’ requests. Some line managers were trying to establish their own ‘uniform wardrobes’ where wearers could go and try things on, and then order from stores directly, but outside of wider policy this relies on manager initiative within wider structures given discretion to do so.

The experience of uniform stores was also negatively affected by difficulties in booking appointments, and reluctance to consider requests outside of standard-issue:

“It is almost impossible to get a fitting date at our uniform stores. We cannot attend without an appointment and the phone is rarely answered.”

“It’s a nightmare to get a response from stores or an appointment. It always feels like you’re bothering them and how dare we disturb them.”

“Felt like an inconvenience to ask for alternative equipment.”

“I felt my digestive health was disregarded in favour of uniform standards.”

This again highlights the ‘postcode lottery’ of uniform experience and uniform provision. This is further hampered where managers have the authority to supply ‘workplace passports’ or ‘uniform points’⁴⁴ and are less empathetic to uniform-related concerns.

12.1 Uniform Provision

Uniform provision was raised in the qualitative comments and several respondents expressed dissatisfaction about the way replacement uniform is obtained in their force. Although these were not questions in the main survey, respondents used the free-text options to discuss the way in which their force use a points-based system. They refer to a system (although this is not present in every force) for accessing and replacing uniform items. Respondents reported not having enough ‘points’ to replace essential items of uniform:

⁴⁴A workplace passport (but known by other names such as ‘wellbeing passport’) is a document that covers all challenges or barriers faced in the workplace including all physical and mental health conditions, neurodivergences, the menopause, learning, communication, or functional disorders, and caring and familial responsibilities. The idea originated as a solution to the often-lengthy process for officers experiencing menopause to obtain agreed uniform adjustments. This is not available in every force yet, but the passport was featured in the 2024 ‘Uniformity’ newsletter from the NPCC as a ‘Spotlight on Innovation’.

“The points system we have to replace uniform is insufficient and I feel that I have to ration the points to replace shirts and trousers throughout the year as each item is one point but the shirts, in particular, do not seem to last very long. My coats and hat have not been replaced to save my points for the everyday items...”

“I haven’t got a new tunic since I joined the police in 2005 as they cost too many points.”

Other respondents noted they were unable to replace uniform items at all due to lack of authorisation or difficulties with the fitting of uniform items:

“Only issue was once 10 years ago - unable to obtain new tunic or trousers due to how many points they are worth. No approval to request, also no idea what size is needed as no fitting provided.”

“Tunic is now too small, it’s the same one I have had for my entire career. The level of points I need for a tunic requires inspector sign off which isn’t always easy. Even with a fitting the item is always inaccurate and then requires private tailoring.”

These comments demonstrate the frustration at the restriction of uniform and the ‘gate-keeping’ of these resources. Highlighting further issues around the fitting of uniform, and general fit of items, all impacting the overall experience of wearing the police uniform. As noted previously, this also impacts staff morale, physical and mental well-being.

13 Perceptions of wearing uniform

While the previous sections have outlined many of the issues with uniform highlighted by respondents, the findings around uniform perception show that respondents still feel strongly about how their uniform is perceived by themselves and others.

Research suggests the police uniform serves an important purpose, both to the wearer and to the public and is one of the most important visual representations of policing⁴⁵. Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the uniform and how they feel when wearing it (see Table 5).

Table 5: Perceptions of wearing uniform.

When I wear my uniform, I feel...	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree
Professional	25%	24%	51%
I look smart	34%	29%	37%
Proud	22%	32%	47%

Half of the survey respondents felt they looked professional (51%) and slightly less than half (47%) were proud to wear the uniform, compared to the other respondents who disagreed or remaining neutral. One in five (22%) did not feel proud wearing the uniform, with another 32% staying neutral. Many respondents (34%) think they do not look smart in their uniform. Previous uniform studies show that the smarter and more presentable the uniform, 'the greater the perception of authority they [the public] had for the wearer and the greater level of respect they [the public] had for the organisation'⁴⁶. However, respondents reported that the poor fit of some uniform items, particularly

⁴⁵De Camargo, C. R. (2025). 'Fact (TBC): The police uniform serves an important symbolic purpose', in Hart, M, Lamb, J. B., Lynes, A., Treadwell, J., and Kelly, C. (Eds.), 50 Facts Everyone Should Know About the Police, Bristol University Press. See also De Camargo, C. R. (2017). "A Uniform Not Uniform: An Ethnography of Police Clothing, Performance, Gender and Subculture in Neighbourhood Policing". Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Salford.

⁴⁶Cooke, C. A. (2004). Public and private policing: The uniform as a mediator of public perception'. PhD Thesis: University of Teesside.

the shirts, made them feel unprofessional, 'scruffy', and self-conscious:

"I'm an athletic build and shirts do not fit correctly making me look larger than I am and makes me conscious that I don't look professional."

"My main concern [is] the fitting of the shirt as I look ridiculous. The arm sizing is so big that a member of the public even pointed it out. I sometimes walk with my arms bent so it looks fitted."

"The fit is appalling, unprofessional and I [can't] bear to be seen in public looking so bad."

"The current uniform looks unprofessional/looks old and behind the times – Members of the public are often commenting on this. (I know the view is of some that the public would rather see us in high vis but I actually don't agree – I think they'd rather see us looking professional. Officers don't feel proud enough wearing the uniform because we look a mess!"

This result is consistent with other research that has shown that uniform wearers who feel they look professional, smart, and have pride wearing it 'binds the individual to his or her peers, underscores common membership, and encourages a sense of loyalty among members [of the police force]⁴⁷.

A case in point is the frequent mention of the City of London police uniform by respondents, who refer to it as smart and professional. Respondents noted:

"Without doubt the most impressive and smart uniform is City of London, I'd like us all to look that smart."

"Looking around the country, the City of London Police have a very smart, well invested uniform."

⁴⁷Rubenstein, R. P. (2001). Dress Codes (2nd Edition). Westview Press: Oxford. P. 87.

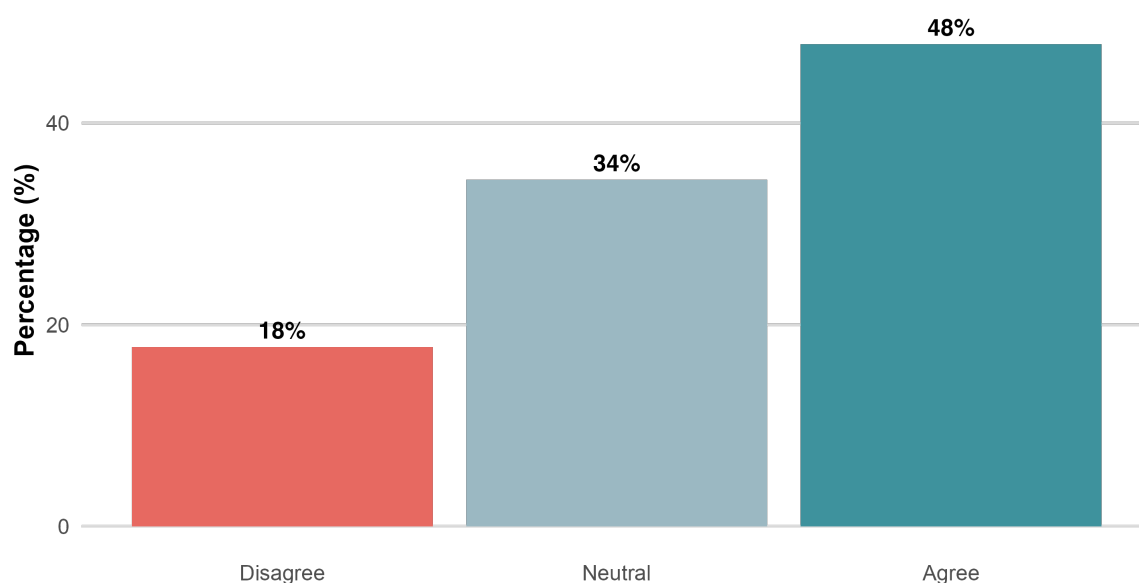
City of London uniform is used as a benchmark of professionalism by the respondents, suggesting that aligning a high quality national uniform could improve officers' sense of pride and cohesion.

It is worth noting that City of London Police were removed from the force level breakdowns due to a small sample size which was below the minimum reporting threshold. Their limited participation in the survey may be indicative of greater uniform satisfaction, and consistent with greater investment in uniform provision compared with other forces that have not benefitted in the same way.

14 A National Uniform

Respondents were asked whether a national uniform should be introduced, with 48% agreeing, 34% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and a further 18% disagreeing.

Figure 20: Thoughts on introducing a national uniform.
The police forces of England and Wales should have a national uniform



In the comments, respondents elaborated on the benefits of standardising uniform, which they believe would also be of better quality:

“1. Standard is key to policing (every force looks different - as if we are competing with each other – 30 minute’s drive and you would see officers in various different uniforms from different forces). 2. Be easily identifiable, wherever we go. 3: Make officers feel proud to wear the uniform - France/Spain/Belgium and other parts of Europe officers strongly believe that the impact the uniform has on the public is huge, they looked professional and raised standards.”

“Please develop kit with the officers who have to wear them day in and day out but also in conjunction with specialist companies. If we standardise uniform and make it

mandatory, it prevent forces and officers looking awful when inevitably they end up on the media or social media looking a mess. Considering France, Germany, Netherlands etc national uniform, everyone looks consistent and professional. This needs to be completed with urgency.”

Some go on to express preferences for particular uniform they have seen in various forces across England and Wales:

“A major gripe is the difference in uniform both within Force (where it can create [a] sense of elitism such as black vest [versus] hi-vis vest for example) and nationally. [For example] Mutual Aid⁴⁸ officers looking vastly different - some look very smart (in my opinion North Wales/BTP/Met, and others look quite scruffy and not all the same (such as West Mids/North Yorkshire). One smart, good quality uniform that’s had due diligence and national consultation conducted would be good.”

Importantly, some respondents acknowledge the importance of adaptable uniform items for role specific purposes, which is a key theme of the overall survey results.

“Please advocate for our archaic uniform standards to be replaced with modern, practice solutions. I’m not asking for the Australian shorts or the French Beret but perhaps something that reflects the physically demanding role that we do. And a standardised uniform across all organisations in England and Wales would mean less disparity between forces, and it promotes a professional appearance to people visiting the country. (aside from the obvious roles requiring changes to uniform for operational reasons e.g. firearms, dog handlers etc).”

Police uniform varies greatly between force areas, as well as within force. A national police uniform can symbolise a cohesive policing identity across England and Wales but also fosters a sense of shared purpose, values, and national service.

⁴⁸Mutual aid in policing refers to police forces assisting each other, usually in response to major incidents or events, governed by Section 24 of the Police Act 1996.

Uniform inequality across forces - driven by inconsistent budgets, procurement practices, and design standards - has resulted in a postcode lottery of uniform functionality and quality. As we have reported, this has implications for health, wellbeing, and morale.

From a financial perspective, a national uniform would enable economies of scale, with the promise of improved procurement efficiency and value for money. For example, bulk purchasing could reduce costs and improve the quality and consistency of uniform across forces.

Despite these potential benefits, implementing a national uniform is complex and will require coordinated leadership. Securing the commitment of both government and senior policing stakeholders would be essential in this endeavour.

15 Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2024 National Uniform & Equipment Survey has provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of uniformed officers and staff, highlighting some positives, but also key areas for development in current uniform provision. The results of the survey are clear; police uniform needs to be fit for purpose, fit for form, and indeed, fit for the future. There is also support for a standard national uniform across England and Wales and this would be key for implementing the reform needed to improve the overall experience of uniform.

15.1 Recommendations

Implementing a national minimum standard will require a structured, collaborative, and evidence-led approach by the various government and policing agencies that contribute to this decision-making process. Based on the findings from this project, the recommended course of action is outlined as follows:

Recommendation 1

Determine the highest minimum national standards for police uniform.

To ensure consistency, equity, and operational effectiveness across all police forces, national minimum standards should be developed for the provision of police uniforms. These standards must define core requirements for functionality, safety, inclusivity, comfort, and professional appearance, ensuring that all officers and staff are adequately and appropriately equipped with fit-for-purpose clothing and equipment suited to their roles.

Before uniformity in supply can be achieved, mandatory technical and operational specifications must be established for each item of uniform and equipment.

To support this, it is recommended to:

- Develop prototypes incorporating improved materials, interoperability, inclusive design and sizing.
- Conduct pilot trials across diverse forces (urban, rural, specialist units), roles, and seasonal conditions.
- Collect ongoing feedback via surveys, focus groups, and health/wellbeing assessments involving operational staff.
- Facilitate sharing of evidence-based best practices across forces.
- Fully audit current uniforms decision-making processes and staff communications in all forces.
- Integrate medical, operational, and equality-based considerations into standard uniform policy.

Ultimately, one overarching uniform policy must be established for all 43 forces in England and Wales.

Recommendation 2

Establish a single point of accountability in the form of a Strategic Uniform Board (SUB)

A formal Strategic Uniform Board (SUB) should be established with clear decision-making, procurement, and uniform design authority. The SUB must have responsibility for implementing changes to uniform in partnership with police forces. The SUB should lead implementation of Recommendation 1, by conducting a holistic review of current uniform policies, building on this survey's findings.

The Strategic Uniform Board (SUB) should include representatives from:

- Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW), UNISON, GMB, and minority groups.
- Uniform designers and suppliers.
- Procurement and logistics teams.
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) specialists.

In addition, smaller, issue-specific working groups should be formed as needed. These groups should include frontline officers and independent advisors, to ensure community perspectives and operational realities inform decision making.

Recommendation 3

Create a framework to allow better procurement and design of uniform.

Achieving better uniform and value for money requires closer collaboration with innovative suppliers and designers who apply a 'fit for form' approach. Aiming for a national uniform will help incentivise suppliers to engage fully across all production stages. It can lead to significant financial savings by standardising costs across all forces. Bulk purchasing also improves procurement efficiency and ensures better use of taxpayers' money.

As above, the Strategic Uniform Board must have the authority for budget decisions, so they are able to work with suppliers flexibly. They will be responsible for generating contracts that include:

- Required material standards (e.g., breathable, durable, insulating fabrics), which are environmentally friendly and ethically sourced.
- Inclusive sizing, ergonomic design, and mandatory interoperability testing.
- Flexibility to incorporate future improvements based on user feedback.

Procurement must adopt a collaborative, benchmarked approach. Involvement of the following should be considered:

- Uniform designers, retailers, and frontline personnel to ensure practicality and comfort.
- Occupational health and safety experts to verify compliance.
- HR and diversity officers to guarantee inclusivity across gender, body diversity, and medical needs.
- Procurement and supply chain managers to streamline operations and negotiate contracts.
- Sustainability officers to promote ethical and eco-friendly sourcing.
- Ergonomics specialists and industrial designers to optimise physical comfort and PPE functionality.
- Technology consultants to explore innovations like smart textiles and wearable technology.
- Staff Associations or Trade Unions that represent impacted groups to safeguard worker interests and equity.

This multi-stakeholder framework ensures uniform procurement and design meet modern, operational, ethical, and wellbeing standards.

Recommendation 4

Improve user experience around the logistics of uniform.

The survey results indicate that uniform wearers not only have an issue with uniform fit and functionality, but also with uniform access and using the uniform stores. Whether

it be obtaining new or replacement uniform items, dealing with unaccommodating uniform store staff or difficulties in booking appointments, the data shows that overall user experience must be improved.

The Strategic Uniform Board should help create and mandate uniform services in every force to avoid current issues such as the 'postcode lottery' of uniform stores experiences. To achieve this, the recommendations are outlined as follows:

- Every force should create a fit-for-purpose uniform service (whether online/in-store, or both), that must be user-friendly.
- All forces should provide a re-fitting service, especially for those who are returning from sick or extended leave.
- Ensure uniform fitters/staff follow EDI principles to accommodate officers and staff with reasonable adjustments.
- Develop evidence-based policies for fitting male and female officers and staff uniforms, based on the lived experience reported in this survey.
- Maternity KIT days should include opportunities to discuss re-fitting of uniform to make sure it is still fit for purpose.

Recommendation 5

Continuous review, feedback and iteration of uniform.

The survey has revealed many uniform related complaints are unresolved or dismissed across forces. This discourages officers from raising concerns, as shown in the survey data. Police forces must implement clear, transparent procedures for handling uniform-related complaints, ensuring that issues around fit, comfort, safety, and inclusivity are formally acknowledged and addressed. Crucially, failing to act may expose organisations to legal liability or potential lawsuits.

To address these issues, the following is recommended:

- Line managers should be trained to take uniform-related complaints seriously and escalate them appropriately.
- Complaint mechanisms must be accessible, stigma-free, and backed by a culture of respect and openness.

Additionally, there must also be a constant ability to have real time feedback from the officers and staff that will be using the uniform and kit. The data throughout this survey provides evidence that there are strong views on all aspects of uniform and this needs to be taken into account when considering the population who actually wear the uniform. The Strategic Uniform Group must ensure that decision making around uniform design changes affords officers on the frontline the opportunity to engage in these processes.

The recommendations to achieve this include:

- Enabling officers and staff to submit uniform-related health concerns or suggestions by introducing mandatory reporting channels, which enable confidentiality.
- Schedule regular reviews of uniform performance, incorporating frontline input and new research.
- Communicate transparently with officers and staff about changes and timelines.
- Actively involve frontline personnel in decision-making to ensure designs reflect real operational needs.

15.2 Closing statements

As demonstrated by the results from this survey, uniforms that are fit for purpose, and well-fitted can significantly enhance physical performance, reduce fatigue, and improve situational responsiveness by allowing unrestricted movement and reducing garment and PPE-related distractions. In turn, this can lead to greater operational effectiveness,

improved safety during dynamic tasks, and increased confidence in high-pressure environments. Additionally, a professional appearance reflects institutional standards of excellence and supports public trust.

It is evident that the uniform has a significant impact on police officers' and staff experiences of their job. Respondents emphasised their desire for the survey to lead to meaningful outcomes, and not simply serve a procedural purpose.

The first ever National Uniform & Equipment Survey affords the police service a unique opportunity - to have a holistic and forensic review and revised approach to police uniform. We must invest back in the people who serve and protect our society and provide one of the best policing services in the world with the best uniform that is fit for purpose, fit for form, and fit for the future.

"I welcome this survey as an opportunity to voice my discomfort and hope it brings about positive change for my colleagues and I."

Reflections on impact

This survey has not only highlighted some of the key issues surrounding uniform within policing but has revealed the personal and professional impact of those who wear it. Many respondents shared that their uniform is far more than just workwear – it is something that directly affects their physical health, mental wellbeing, and morale.

Conducting a national survey on uniform fit, function, and embodied experience offers valuable insights and helps bring greater visibility to the lived realities of uniform wearers — voices that have often been overlooked in decision-making processes. Such a survey moves beyond anecdotal frustration to establish patterns, inequalities, and urgent areas for reform, enabling a shift from reactive, individualised complaints to systemic understanding and institutional accountability. As one respondent says:

“Uniform should not be detrimental to an officer’s health and wellbeing. If we can get uniform right, we can reduce sick days, improve motivation and improve officers’ health and wellbeing.”

Some responses had an emotive tone, with deep appreciation for the opportunity to be heard:

“Thank you for doing this survey, let’s hope we can change the future.”

“Thank you to the organisers for creating/communicating this survey via federation. It is nice to be given a voice, and I hope this has the desired impact.”

Beyond this gratitude, however, was a strong desire for tangible change. Respondents want the survey to lead to meaningful outcomes, and not simply serve a procedural purpose:

"I really hope this survey is not just a tick box exercise, because if these changes were implemented it would quite literally change my working life, my mental well-being, finances and my physical health."

"Please help us find better kit and make us happy."

Note on additional findings

Additional findings from the 2024 National Uniform & Equipment Survey as well as the individual force reports will be made available following publication of the Headline report. In the meantime, if you have any specific questions about the report please contact impactofuniform@gmail.com or ResearchandDataCollection@polfed.org to discuss.

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⁵⁰Grant Number: LU LWA7702