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The true cost of policing football in England & Wales: Freedom of Information data from 2015-2019

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Research context

- In 2017, a legal ruling held that the police cannot charge for resources deployed on public land outside a football ground, therefore reducing the police's ability to charge for resourcing under Special Police Services (SPS) (Ipswich Town Football Club v Suffolk Police, 2017).
- In 2019, the reported cost of policing football in England & Wales was £48m, with only £5.5m being recovered by police forces (South Yorkshire Police, 2019), however there is no specific detail about how this figure has been calculated and this only relates to the 2017/18 football season. These figures were debated in Parliament and uncritically accepted as reliable.
- Following this data being put into the public domain, NPCC strategic lead for policing, Chief Constable Mark Roberts, called for legislation change and for the football industry to pay more towards policing costs for policing football (Sky Sports News, 2019).
- Stott et al. (2019) are critical of the high level of police resourcing at football, combined with the lack of effective threat assessment. Research (see Stott et al., 2012; 2018; 2019) suggests that improved dialogue between police and football supporters could lead to a reduction in football related violence.
- Following the Ipswich ruling, Hester (2020) suggests that research is needed to clarify how taxpayers money is being spent on football policing, to ensure an informed debate on the issue.

Methods

- Freedom of Information (FOI) is a valid, but underutilised tool in social science research (Walby & Luscombe, 2017), but can be challenging to obtain due to cost exemptions associated with organisations retrieving the data (Lee, 2005).
- The following questions were sent as an FOI to all 43 police forces in England & Wales, in an attempt to establish the costs associated with football policing:
 - From the 2014/5 to 2018/19 football seasons, how much Special Police Services have you received each season from football clubs in your force area?
 - From the 2014/5 to 2018/19 football seasons, how much have you spent each season on football policing operations?
- In addition, to establish further detail about the figures produced in 2019, the below questions were sent as an FOI to South Yorkshire Police, and subsequently to the NPCC:
 - You have stated that: Police forces nationally charge clubs £5,479,763.76, and unrecovered cost to police football nationally is £42,526,149.79.
 - Please explain how both these figures have been calculated
 - What is the timeframe that both these figures relate to?
- All FOIs were submitted between March 2021 and January 2022.

Findings

- Most police forces are not actively calculating how much they are spending on football policing (entered as 'no data' in Figure 1).
- Only 9 police forces were able to provide accurate data on how much they were spending on football policing as well as how much SPS they received, some were actually making a profit from football policing.
- Average SPS received each season was £10,172,434, the total SPS received in 2017/18 was £12,580,289, which is more than double the amount quoted by South Yorkshire Police / NPCC.
- The FOI data does not align with South Yorkshire Police / NPCC data.
- The NPCC advised that they no longer hold the data or methodology used to calculate the figures that had been put into the public domain.

Implications

- The lack of transparency over the previous data put into the public domain is concerning, and this cannot be judged as accurate if there is no record of the methodology used to calculate it.
- Despite some police forces providing data on the cost of policing football, it is not known how each force has calculated this.
- There are still a further 30 police forces that would need to be spending about £1m each on policing football to reach the suggested total of £48m. Given the data already indicates that most forces are not spending that much, and the relatively small size and lack of demand for football policing in some forces, the £48m can be seen as an overestimate as opposed to a reliable fact.
- There is disparity in resourcing between police forces, supporting existing research (see Stott et al, 2018; 2019; Hester, 2020).
- If measures suggested by Stott et al. (2019) of better risk assessment, and more targeted, liaison based resources were allocated to football, this could reduce policing costs.
- Research needs to be commissioned, so the true cost of policing football in England & Wales can be accurately established.

Police Force	SPS Received from football clubs					Amount spent on football policing				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
1. Avon and Somerset Constabulary	£97,511	£353,618	£202,601	£366,243	£239,935	£69,862**	£188,401**	£241,009**	£229,315**	£221,300**
2. Bedfordshire Police	No data	No data	£53,167	£54,260	£79,063	No data	No data	£78,276	£72,129	£35,226
3. Cambridgeshire Constabulary	No data	£59,830	£69,139	£56,569	£49,916	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
4. Cheshire Constabulary	£85,776	£88,149	£58,275	£31,002	£27,304	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
5. City of London Police	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
6. Cleveland Police	£88,035	£84,876	£204,600	£163,699	£151,369	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
7. Cumbria Constabulary	£0	£30,818	£51,234	£50,127	£7,018	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
8. Derbyshire Constabulary	£342,172	£375,615	£413,268	£206,079	No data	£308,764	£522,526	£550,728	£556,491	£454,851
9. Devon and Cornwall Police	£25,177	£45,869	£38,453	£20,583	£22,603	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
10. Dorset Police	No data	£113,382	£124,231	£135,434	£126,952	No data	£434,804	£334,885	£421,729	£429,206
11. Durham Constabulary	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	0
12. Dyfed-Powys Police	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	0
13. Essex Police	£2,278	£18,722	£6,701	£0	£0	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
14. Gloucestershire Constabulary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
15. Greater Manchester Police	No data	£2,544,455	£2,777,264	£2,073,861	£1,721,122	No data	£1,857,979**	£2,249,630**	£1,843,000**	£1,698,479**
16. Gwent Police	No data	No data	No data	£10,761*	£18,497	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
17. Hampshire Constabulary	£317,635	£302,828	£326,152	£176,155	£196,028	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
18. Hertfordshire Constabulary	No data	£142,454	£85,852	£32,874	£39,984	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
19. Humberside Police	No data	£287,651	£455,654	£427,519	£353,758	No data	£467,677	£549,577	£761,556	£401,622
20. Kent Police	£9,949	£5,930	£10,921	£25,778	£7,085	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
21. Lancashire Constabulary	£421,386	£391,112	£366,800	£411,217	£346,771	£346,212**	£290,177**	£454,680**	£538,931**	£496,036**
22. Leicestershire Constabulary	£304,090	£294,456	£385,668	£340,516	£232,018	£82,398**	£54,136**	£129,918**	£84,236**	£107,721**
23. Lincolnshire Police	No data	No data	£6,171	£20,268	£13,043	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
24. Merseyside Police	£980,799	£991,742	£928,835	£1,089,029	£1,069,787	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
25. Metropolitan Police Service	No data	No data	£613,146	£559,170	£682,197*	No data	No data	£9,656,892	£8,549,734	£10,658,173.63*
26. Norfolk Constabulary	£236,852	£156,062	£70,000	£70,000	£91,735	£94,460**	£63,372**	£31,160**	£66,145**	£40,542**
27. North Wales Police	£16,929	£11,569	£14,286	£14,083	£8,755	£197,325	£182,049	£323,737	No data	No data
28. North Yorkshire Police	£15,637	£16,917	£0	£2,735	£0	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
29. Northamptonshire Police	£39,971	£39,219	£67,293	£74,616	£31,107	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
30. Northumbria Police	£610,099	£497,414	£449,470	£511,237	£474,917	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
31. Nottinghamshire Police	£217,484	£162,745	£216,577	£282,801	£155,602	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
32. South Wales Police	£175,499	£152,410	£154,216	£190,846	£166,793	£95,282**	£69,353**	£131,305**	£138,227**	£126,932**
33. South Yorkshire Police	No data	£34,719	£1,130,775	£688,807	£427,591	No data	£133,591	£1,971,950	£740,828	£1,316,444
34. Staffordshire Police	£170,602	£94,054	£71,549	£122,781	£151,902	£353,966**	£327,641**	£235,575**	£238,121**	£185,177**
35. Suffolk Constabulary	£169,826	£118,309	£68,800	£54,138	£69,972	£70,155**	£128,073**	£83,238**	£57,719**	£59,738**
36. Surrey Police	No data	£2,571	£2,705	£5,125	£2,435	No data	£1,484	£7,036	£10,251	£3,125
37. Sussex Police	No data	£169,188	£261,798	£366,841	£244,526	No data	£166,044	£273,394	£578,787	£363,572
38. Thames Valley Police	£159,567	£176,213	£137,805	£131,374	£76,121	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
39. Warwickshire Police	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
40. West Mercia Police	No data	£40,002	£12,384	£28,121	£24,232	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
41. West Midlands Police	£1,052,927	£1,046,400	£1,118,909	£1,106,841	£1,100,519	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
42. West Yorkshire Police	£637,752	£1,027,180	£1,398,188	£2,634,970	£1,263,826	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
43. Wiltshire Police	£44,512	£55,608	£63,925	£43,829	£36,033	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
44. British Transport Police	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0	£571,406	£874,884	£826,680	£642,157	£219,510
Total	£6,222,465	£9,932,086	£12,416,812	£12,580,289	£9,710,516	£1,618,424	£4,887,307	£17,302,991	£14,867,198	£16,598,144

Figure 1 – Freedom of Information data on Special Police Services received, and amount spent on football policing from 2014/15 to 2018/19.
*data is incomplete; **data is overtime only

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