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

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Abstract

In 2019, the reported cost of policing football, according to an infographic on South Yorkshire Police's website, was £48 million per season with £5.5 million being recovered by the police from football clubs. These figures were discussed in Parliament and deemed accurate by politicians. Chief Constable Mark Roberts, National Police Chiefs' Council lead for football policing, says police forces cannot continue to subsidise a multi-billion-pound industry. This research uses Freedom of Information requests submitted to all police forces in England and Wales, to establish the true cost of football policing. The results demonstrate that previous data is unreliable, as the actual amount recovered through Special Police Services from football clubs averaged £10 million per season between 2015 to 2019. This paper shows that police forces do not have a grasp of how much is spent on football policing, and the £48 million headline figure is likely overestimated, raising concerns about the lack of transparency over the data in the South Yorkshire Police infographic. Finally, the paper calls for further research to establish the exact cost of football policing, and consideration of more efficient methods of football policing that can help to reduce costs and prevent disorder, not only in England and Wales, but across Europe.

Key words

football policing; Special Police Services; cost of policing; Freedom of Information

Introduction

It is common for the police service to provide an enhanced level of resourcing to meet the increased risk to crime and disorder from specific events which are typically attended by a large number of people. Examples of these include music festivals, horse racing meetings, large sporting events and routinely, professional football matches. Where these events are being organised on a for profit basis, police forces are able to cost recover from event organisers for policing resources that attend to police the event (with specific caveats that have been decided by case law). This is known as Special Police Services (SPS), which are legislated for under Section 25 of the Police Act 1996. The accepted legal position of what exactly the police can (and cannot) charge for has been shaped by a multitude of stated cases, most of which involving police forces and football clubs. These have arisen following disputes between a police force and football clubs over the charging arrangements for the policing of football matches. The latest case being Ipswich Town Football Club v Suffolk Police (2017), where the ruling was held that the police could not charge for resources deployed on public land outside the stadium, even when the football club were operating on such land. This led to police forces being limited in how much they can cost recover from football clubs and further research into SPS was called for (Hester, 2020).

The issue of resourcing football policing is an increasingly important area for consideration across Europe more broadly. For instance, Baxter et al. (2019) comment that there have been

legal disputes between the police and football clubs in Stockholm over policing costs, as football clubs that are considered as businesses that are making a profit, are liable for all policing costs connected with the event. This is a disparate position to that of England and Wales, and the uneven playing field for policing costs across Europe is of note. Furthermore, research on football policing and resourcing across various jurisdictions in Europe highlight different challenges and opportunities for learning, for example: In Sweden, Stott, Havelund & Williams (2018a) on a liaison-based approach to supporter interactions; in Denmark, Laursen (2019) examining enhanced awareness of crowd dynamics; in Switzerland, Brechbühl et al. (2017) on proactive policing and positive dialogue; in the Netherlands, Gemke et al. (2021) on intelligence led policing of football; in Germany, Winands & Grau (2018) on relationship building through educational projects targeted at youths; and in Scotland Atkinson & Graham (2020) on the value of plural policing.

This paper uses empirical data in an attempt to establish the true cost of the policing of professional¹ football matches in England and Wales, critically comparing this to previous figures which have been provided in media sources. Although not routinely published by official bodies, such as the Office for National Statistics, headlines figures were released in 2019 by then Deputy Chief Constable Mark Roberts, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for football policing. These figures suggest that there is a wide disparity between what football clubs pay compared to how much it costs the police service to police football. However, this study shows that the lack of transparency around this data means the data cannot be relied upon.

¹ Generally considered to be the Premier League, English Football League and Football Conference

In order for an informed debate to be developed around football policing, it is important to have accurate and reliable information. This paper considers the reported costs of policing football by critically analysing previously reported data that can be found in the public domain. There is a brief discussion on how football is policed, as the manner in which football policing occurs is central to the bottom-line figure of how much is spent doing it. The methods section describes how this research attempts to accurately establish the actual cost of policing football by using Freedom of Information Act requests to all 43 police forces in England and Wales. The results of this are presented and discussed, with consideration given for how these findings add to the broader discussion of how football should be policed in England and Wales. This paper shows that the data that is currently in the public domain on the cost of football policing cannot be considered as accurate, the true cost is still an unknown quantity and further research is required to establish this.

Special Police Services

It is common for the police service to provide an enhanced level of resourcing to meet the increased risk to crime and disorder from specific events which are typically attended by a large number of people. Examples of these include music festivals, horse racing meetings, large sporting events and routinely, professional football matches. Where these events are being organised on a for profit basis, police forces are able to cost recover from event organisers for policing resources that attend to police the event (with specific caveats that have been decided by case law). This is known as Special Police Services (SPS), which are legislated for under Section 25 of the Police Act 1996. The accepted legal position of what exactly the police can (and cannot) charge for has been shaped by a multitude of stated cases, most of which involving police forces and football clubs. These have arisen following disputes between a police force

and football clubs over the charging arrangements for the policing of football matches. The latest case being Ipswich Town Football Club v Suffolk Police (2017), where the ruling was held that the police could not charge for resources deployed on public land outside the stadium, even when the football club were operating on such land. This led to police forces being limited in how much they can cost recover from football clubs and further research into SPS was called for (Hester, 2020).

The NPCC (2021) has produced and made publicly available guidance for police forces on how to charge for policing services and approach cost recovery processes with football clubs. It also provides detail of the amount that is charged per hour for officers of different rank (summarised in figure 1), as well as other police resources.

| Rank | SPS Full Economic Cost (per hour) | Officer salary² (per hour) |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Constable | £72.63 | £27.22 |
| Sergeant | £85.69 | £32.75 |
| Inspector | £87.45 | £40.10 |
| Chief Inspector | £92.15 | £42.53 |
| Superintendent | £119.51 | £56.30 |

Figure 1 – amount charged under SPS vs officer salary costs (Data from NPCC, 2021)

The NPCC (2021) charging guidance suggests that resources fully deployed to police football matches within the footprint of the stadium should be charged for six hours, and those that are deployed partially within the footprint should be charged for three hours. A typical deployment could be one Level 2 trained Police Support Unit (PSU), which consists of 1 Inspector, 3 Sergeants, 18 Constables and 3 drivers (College of Policing, 2018). An example deployment of one PSU for three or six hours would therefore cost £5,609.25 and £11,218.50 respectively. Although not required at all fixtures, when football clubs require SPS these are not insignificant

² Salary costs are approximate. NPCC lists officer annual productive hours as 1,508. The salary costs provided in the document have then been divided by 1,508.

amounts of money to clubs, particularly those in the Football League where many are reported as operating with a net debt (Deloitte, 2020). By way of contrast, a search of a recruitment website³ for match day stewards shows salaries ranging from £7 to £14 at football clubs from the Premier League to League 2. Given the cost difference between stewards and police officers, it is understandable that football clubs are reluctant to expend on police resources when stewards can be sourced more cheaply. There is a clear difference in powers and training between these two groups, although experienced stewards are likely to be well versed in crowd issues within stadia (O'Neill, 2005; Atkinson & Graham, 2020), perhaps even more so than police officers.

Given the amount of police resourcing that is allocated to football policing on a weekly basis, and the amounts per hour that police forces can cost recover, it is important to consider what the actual cost of policing football is as well as how much is received from football clubs. There is some data in existence in the public domain, which is discussed in the following section.

Football Policing

The College of Policing (2020) provide guidance around how football policing should occur, but this is somewhat limited in its prescriptiveness and therefore is left to interpretation by different police forces, and even different match commanders. There is a growing body of literature which suggests that a more liaison-based approach to the policing of football and an improved dialogue with football supporters could achieve a reduction in incidents of violence (Stott et al., 2008a; Stott et al., 2008b; Hoggett & Stott, 2010; Pearson, 2012; Stott, Hoggett &

³ Search of 'matchday steward salaries' on Glassdoor (as of 18 November 2021): https://www.glassdoor.co.uk/Salaries/matchday-steward-salary-SRCH_KO0,16.htm

Pearson, 2012; James & Pearson, 2015; Stott, West & Radburn, 2018b; Stott, Pearson & West, 2019; Hoggett & West, 2021). Stott et al., (2019) and Hoggett & West (2021) in particular are critical of the high level of resourcing allocated to football policing, and the lack of a comprehensive threat assessment that leads to the police service being less efficient in their use of resources. They also suggest that more bespoke resourcing that is well versed in football policing, will lead to better outcomes in terms of less disorder and a reduced number of police officers allocated to football operations. However, Hester (2020) identifies that there are resourcing issues within police forces which prevent greater use of more specialised football resources being utilised on match days, due to a reluctance of specialist officers to be released for football duty. This appears a paradoxical position, as trying to utilise fewer but more specialist resources should lead to a reduction in overall costs of any policing operation.

This is supported by research on football policing across Europe, which also supports the position of having a more liaison based approach that utilises more specialised resources. Stott, Havelund & Williams (2018a) found that the policing of football matches in Sweden that deployed a more liaison based approach to supporter interactions had better outcomes in terms of a reduction in violent incidents. Laursen (2019) calls for police resources at football matches in Denmark to have an enhanced awareness of crowd dynamics, so that potential incidents can be de-escalated at an earlier stage using a dialogue based approach. Using a similar research approach, Brechbühl et al. (2017) also suggest that a more proactive policing approach which facilitates a positive dialogue between the police and football supporters in Switzerland, will lead to a reduction in violent incidents in connection with football matches.

Gemke et al. (2021) provide a case study research into intelligence led policing of football in The Netherlands, and suggest that by applying a more sophisticated intelligence led model of

policing, this creates a more efficient use of resources for policing football. They do stress however, that their findings need to be established in practice. In the German context, Winands & Grau (2018) highlight that educational projects, particularly those targeted at youths, are an effective way of building relationships between supporters, football clubs and the police. Closer to England and Wales, Atkinson & Graham (2020) emphasise from research in Scotland, that a solution to policing costs and resourcing at football is through plural policing. By utilising private security and stewarding companies, this can reduce the resource burden on the police and save football club's money, but effective training and career prospects for stewards are required for this to be effective.

Clearly, further research to explore the most effective approaches to football policing across Europe is required, and a combination of the policing approaches mentioned above will all have different costs associated with them. This research attempts to establish the true cost of football policing in England and Wales, and the next section provides some existing data on this.

The reported cost of policing football

The debates around cost for policing football are not new. In 2017 the BBC ran a news story that demonstrated that the Metropolitan Police spent £7.1 million each year on policing football, but only recovered 5% of this from football clubs. In 2012, *The Independent* reported that Assistant Chief Constable Andy Holt, then Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) strategic lead for football policing, claimed that clubs should contribute more to policing costs. Similar to his predecessor, Mark Roberts has been particularly outspoken in the media about the cost of policing football. Kopczyk (2018) reported that Roberts was critical of football clubs for cutting policing costs and stating that "police forces cannot subsidise football". In reality, this cost cutting may be a result of the Ipswich Town ruling, so a number of other clubs are

now paying less for policing under SPS because of the issues pertaining to the concept of the footprint. This was repeated in another story by Homer (2018), where Roberts reiterated the position and called for clubs to be doing more to meet the costs of policing. Roberts went further in a Sky Sports News (2019) story calling for legislation to be changed in order to make police forces pay more for the policing of football.

One would expect Roberts to take this stance given his position, it only seems right that he is looking to protect the interests of the police service and ensure that policing receives fair costs from a multibillion-pound industry. However, the Deloitte (2020) report on football finances highlights record revenues across some of the top English clubs, which would support Roberts' assertion that clubs can pay more. But the report also paints a stark picture with a range of Premier League clubs as well as Football League clubs operating at a loss. Deloitte (2021) reported that revenue also shrank across the top European football leagues in Germany, Spain, France and Italy, as well as other areas of Europe in comparison to recent growth. This could be indicative of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, but Deloitte (2021) suggest this could be a continued trend leading to clubs having to operate more sustainably. It is evident that although football is a multibillion-pound industry, the financial picture is complex and the wealth is not distributed evenly, leaving one to consider that the argument for clubs to just pay more is too simplistic, and a European wide discussion on football policing, and the financing of it is required.

South Yorkshire Police (2019), where Mark Roberts was Deputy Chief Constable from 2017 to 2021, published an infographic on their website⁴ containing information about the cost of

⁴ Web address: <https://www.southyorks.police.uk/find-out/accessing-information/request-information-under-the-freedom-of-information-act/football-costs-re-20190645/>

football policing across England and Wales, as well as financial data concerning football clubs. This is significant, as it appears to be the only national costing exercise that has been done that offers an insight into the cost of football policing. Key highlights from this are summarised below:

- Premier League TV rights are worth £5.136 billion (2016-2019)
- Premier League football clubs paying £2.3 billion in wages (no dates given)
- Premier League clubs paid £211 million to agents last year (no date given)
- Police forces receive £5.48 million from football clubs through SPS
- Police forces have spent a further £42.5 million on policing football which was not recovered from clubs

It seems that the reason for highlighting these figures is to emphasise the point that the football industry has a lot of wealth, which is then contrasted against the figures which highlight that the police service is spending a lot more on football policing than it is recovering. The data is not attributed to a specific football season, but according to Sky Sports News (2019) this was 2017/18 and in this press report, Mark Roberts clearly calls for football clubs to pay for more police resources and cites the wealth of the football industry.

Although it is not clear how these figures have been calculated, they have been discussed in parliament as legitimate. MP Gill Furniss (2019) took this issue to a debate in the House of Commons, stating that police forces need to be suitably reimbursed for their expenses from football. This received support from other MPs, as well as a response from then policing minister, Nick Hurd who in summary said he was understanding of the issue, but stressed that the Premier League and football clubs pay a vast amount of taxes as well contributing to society in other ways. Hurd considered that this should be framed within a broader debate around police

funding and made a commitment to discuss this further with the Secretary for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. No further discussion has been brought back to parliament on this issue at the time of writing.

Football is a multibillion-pound industry, with the Premier League alone estimated to have contributed £7.6 billion to the UK economy in 2016/17 (Slater, 2019; Ernst & Young LLP, 2019). A straightforward argument, such as the one put forward by Deputy Chief Constable Mark Roberts in support of the data produced in South Yorkshire, is to say that because of this wealth, the football industry should be paying the full cost of policing football matches. We argue however, that this position underestimates the complexity and nuance of how wealth is distributed across the football pyramid, as well as the ways in which support behaviour can vary between contexts and as a result the need for police resources will vary. Furthermore, as the data in this paper shows, the figures used to calculate the cost of policing football do not appear to accurately reflect the costs to forces. Similarly, the recovery of SPS from clubs does not appear to be accurate in the figures presented by South Yorkshire Police. In order to have a more informed debate on the topic, it is necessary to understand the precise finances that are involved, which this research sought to address using the methods described below.

Methods

This paper uses Freedom of Information (FOI) data to further investigate the cost of football policing in England and Wales. There is potential for secondary data from other FOI requests that can be retrieved from public facing websites that could provide information about the costs of policing football, as well as SPS income. However, it is unlikely that this secondary analysis will provide data for all 43 police forces in England and Wales, and they would not also likely

cover the required time period. As there is no central Home Office database or publicly released figures on the cost of policing football as well as the amounts that are cost recovered, another way to establish this data is through FOI requests. Section 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 allows:

- (1) Any person making a request for information to a public authority is entitled
 - (a) to be informed in writing by the public authority whether it holds information of the description specified in the request, and
 - (b) if this is the case, to have that information communicated to him

FOI data is considered as a valid research tool but is currently underutilised in social sciences research (Brown, 2009; Walby & Luscombe, 2017). Furthermore, FOI has been shown to be an effective research method within the context of policing approaches to sporting events, by analysing previously restricted policy and making future recommendations (see Menaker et al., 2021). However, FOI can be problematic as a research tool however, with some data being exempted due to processing costs, leading to the data that is actually available being meaningless and not suiting the research requirements (Lee, 2005; Afful-Dadzie & Afful-Dadzie, 2017).

In order to establish the cost of football policing, the following questions were submitted to all 43 police forces in England and Wales as an FOI request:

Question 1 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?

Question 2 From the 2014/5 to 2018/19 football seasons, how much have you spent each season on football policing operations?

By requesting the data which covers these football seasons, it creates a picture of the changing trends in cost recovery, particularly following the Ipswich Town v Suffolk Constabulary (2017) ruling which had the effect of restricting some of the resources that police forces can charge football clubs for. It also captures the period prior to Covid-19 altering the football landscape,

when fans were absent from stadia and therefore removing the necessity to police inside the footprint. Due to the cost limits attached to FOI requests and the staffing required to fulfil the request (see Information Commissioner's Office, 2015) there is potential for some or part of the data to be refused. This was considered to be particularly relevant to the second part of the request as police forces may not be actively calculating the cost of policing football matches. In addition, this can be complex to calculate for forces as they will need to consider a number of factors such as staff costs, overtime, specific equipment costs, pension contributions, staff subsistence, travel expenses and so on. This information was still requested however, as a negative FOI response can be valuable in identifying gaps in knowledge (Holman, 2020) or in this case gaps in data being collected by police forces. Police forces were better able to provide part one of the request as they have accounting records of payments received from football clubs for SPS. Previous research that utilises FOI requests (see Hester, 2020; Hester & Pamment, 2020) found that the majority of requests are declined due to exceeding cost allowances, therefore limiting this request to two questions is likely to yield more meaningful responses.

These requests were submitted on police force websites, all of which have a dedicated section for completing an FOI request, or emailed directly to the police force on the address provided on their website. The requests were sent in March 2021 to all 43 police forces in England and Wales, as well as question 2 to British Transport Police. The majority of responses were received within the twenty working day timeframe, but some were longer with Covid-19 given as the reason for delay. Only one police force (Gloucestershire Police) did not respond at all.

In order to understand the South Yorkshire Police infographic in more detail, a further FOI request was sent to South Yorkshire Police in December 2021 about the Infographic, as follows:

Figure 1 – Police forces nationally charge clubs - £5,479,763.76

Figure 2 – Unrecovered cost to police football nationally - £42,526,149.79

1) *Please explain how both figure 1 and figure 2 have been calculated*

2) *What is the timeframe that both figure 1 and figure 2 relate to*

This FOI was subsequently also sent to the NPCC in January 2022 along with a request to speak to someone who had processed this data, as South Yorkshire Police referred me to them as they claimed that the data belonged to NPCC and not South Yorkshire Police. The NPCC did provide a response to this, which is discussed in the next section along with further presentation and discussion of the FOI data obtained in this research.

Despite FOI being a powerful research tool, there are limitations to this study. The data provided offers no explanation of how the figures requested as part of Question 2 have been calculated. Further FOI requests could have been sent to police forces, however this was precluded as more complex requests such as this, would exceed the FOI cost limit and therefore be rejected by the police force. Although beyond the scope of this research, conducting interviews with individuals who generated the cost data for police forces, would have provided further data for analysing the methodology of how police forces have calculated the cost of football policing. Further research is recommended to establish how police forces have calculated their costs, as this methodology could be applied to other areas of policing and not solely for football policing.

Data

Figure 2 shows the data collected from the FOI requests submitted to all 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales, as well as British Transport Police. The majority of responses were received within the 20-working day period from sending the requests in March 2021, however some took longer into the autumn of 2021. Some forces indicated that the data they provided was incomplete, but this was limited and only present on two elements of data regarding received SPS and one element of the data regarding the amount spent on football policing. The vast majority of police forces were able to indicate accurately the amount of SPS they had received from football clubs within their force area. A small number of forces were not able to give exact data on SPS received, but this related to earlier football seasons and reasons such as a change of accounting software were cited.

Eight police forces indicated that they were only able to provide financial information on the amount spent on overtime for policing football, and that this was not representative of the total cost. The data shows that a further twenty-five police forces either had no available data on the amount spent on policing football, or they were able to confirm that they had not spent any money on this. In total, this means that thirty-three police forces either have no information on the total amount that they are spending on policing football, or they are not actually spending any money on it. Police forces typically responded to this saying that to calculate the amount spent policing football would exceed the cost allowance for an FOI request, which demonstrates that they are not actively calculating it.

| 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 Services | 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** | £118,227** | £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 2 – SPS received and amount spent on football policing 2014/15 to 2018/19

*data is incomplete; **data is overtime only

It seems apparent that the figures in the South Yorkshire Police Infographic do not align with the FOI data in this study. The response to the additional FOI that was sent to South Yorkshire Police (dated 20th January 2022) was that they did not hold the requested information, and that enquiries should be made with the NPCC instead. The same request was then sent to the NPCC, and they provided the below response (dated 9th February 2022):

The infographic above was released in 2019 following a significant period of work. Forces were asked to provide data to the NPCC, however the NPCC no longer holds the returned information (including date ranges) or methodology used to calculate these final finance totals.

A request to have a meeting with an employee of either the NPCC, or the police service who had worked on this data and could therefore explain it, was not responded to. Without someone who can provide this detail around how these costs were calculated, it is difficult to judge the accuracy of the data presented in the Infographic, even though it has been presented as fact in parliament. It may be that the data is extremely robust and provides a very accurate picture of the true cost of football policing in England and Wales, we simply do not know without an explanation of how public funds are being spent.

The amount of SPS that police forces have received from football clubs each season (see figure 2) obtained in this study should be considered as a reliable data, as it is a direct result of records from police force accounting departments. This means that the average SPS that police forces have received from football clubs from the 2014/15 to 2018/19 seasons is £10,172,434. This is much higher than the figure that has been quoted in parliament of just under £5.5m, which was supposed to be from the 2017/18 football season. The total SPS received in the 2017/18 season is shown to be £12,580,289, which is more than double the figure presented in the South Yorkshire Police infographic. This raises serious doubt about the veracity of the data in the

| | Net spend (amount spent on football policing minus SPS received) | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Police Force | 2014/15 | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
| Bedfordshire Police | N/A | N/A | £25,109 | £17,869 | -£43,837 |
| Derbyshire Constabulary | -£33,408 | £146,912 | £137,460 | £350,412 | N/A |
| Dorset Police | N/A | £321,422 | £210,654 | £286,295 | £302,254 |
| Humberside Police | N/A | £180,026 | £93,923 | £334,037 | £47,864 |
| The Metropolitan Police | N/A | N/A | £9,043,746 | £7,990,563 | £9,975,976 |
| North Wales | £180,396 | £170,480 | £309,451 | N/A | N/A |
| South Yorkshire Police | N/A | £98,872 | £841,175 | £52,021 | £888,853 |
| Surrey Police | N/A | -£1,087 | £4,330 | £5,126 | £690 |
| Sussex Police | N/A | -£3,144 | £11,597 | £211,946 | £119,046 |
| Total | £146,988 | £913,481 | £10,677,445 | £9,248,270 | £11,290,846 |

Figure 3 – net spend on football policing from police forces with confirmed data

South Yorkshire Police Infographic in terms of SPS received, as this clearly has not been calculated using the same method that this study has done, and as a result the figures are vastly different. If this aspect of the Infographic is not reliable, it does raise questions over the reliability of the cost to police football as well.

Nine police forces in total were able to provide confirmed data in terms of both the amounts they received in SPS and the amount that they have spent on football policing. Although, they did not always have the amount they had spent confirmed for each season that was requested. Figure 3 shows the net spend for each police force based on their confirmed data, this was calculated by deducting the amount they had received in SPS from the amount they said they had spent on football policing. Despite the gaps in this data, it provides some interesting findings and shows that many police forces do not have a clear picture of what they are spending on football policing.

The lack of transparency over the Infographic is concerning, as a simple question has been posed around the calculation of this data and it has not been answered. In order to have an informed debate on this, the public need to know how taxpayer's money is being spent. Therefore, a number of questions remain over the data in the Infographic around how it has been calculated. Firstly, how have police officers been costed? Has this been at the rate that they actually cost the police force, or is it at the Full Economic Cost as displayed in Figure 1? Secondly, what other costs have been considered to arrive at the total cost figure? Thirdly, has this exercise been conducted over an entire season, or one matchday, or a series of census points across a season? Fourthly, have all police forces taken part in this exercise? One must assume that it is unlikely that there has been full participation from all police forces in this data, and therefore there has had to be some extrapolating with the data to cover any gaps in how data has been returned. The main concern is that this data actually comes with more questions than answers, and therefore should be treated with a degree of scepticism before being readily accepted as fact, particularly by politicians.

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Discussion

Having accurately established the amount that the police service is receiving from football clubs between the 2014/15 to 2018/19 seasons, it is necessary to consider the more pertinent question of whether or not this SPS amount is proportionate to what it actually costs the police service to police football. From the FOI data (see figure 2), the logical answer to this is that there is insufficient data for this to be effectively judged. This is because, the majority of police forces have given a response that indicates that they are not actively calculating how much it costs them to police football matches. Those that have indicated that they are actively calculating it (see figure 3) are in the main, not actually losing vast sums of money on the

policing of football matches. Some police forces (Bedfordshire, Derbyshire, Surrey and Sussex) have actually indicated that they have even made a profit in some seasons from SPS after their costs have been accounted for. This is in direct contradiction to the comments by Mark Roberts that the police service is subsidising the costs of policing football (see Kopczyk, 2018; Homer, 2018; Sky Sports News, 2019). There are other forces however, which indicate that they are not covering costs and could be seen as making a significant loss on the policing of football, notably South Yorkshire Police and The Metropolitan Police. The Met indeed appear to be a significant outlier in terms of SPS received against amount spent on football policing, so much so that if they were taken in isolation, it would appear that the police service is losing more money on policing football than it perhaps is.

The difficulty in extrapolating this data from different police forces, is that we do not know the methods used to calculate the cost of football policing from those police forces that have said that they are calculating it. Even if we were to accept the calculated costs in the FOI data as fact, there are still a further thirty 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.

In addition to this, previous research indicates that there is varying practice in terms of how police forces approach football policing (see Stott et al., 2008b; Hoggett & Stott, 2010; James & Pearson, 2015; Stott et al, 2018b; 2019; Hester, 2020; Hoggett & West, 2021). This is reflected in this data, as some forces are spending a lot more than others. However, the data cannot establish if this is linked to the level of demand, variations in approaches to resourcing,

or a combination of this. Whilst previous research (see Stott et al., 2008; Stott et al, 2019; Hoggett & West, 2021) indicates that there is a practice of over resourcing football matches and not necessarily policing them in line with the threat and risk that is presented, it is difficult to discern from the data whether the practice of over resourcing is occurring. Further research is required, which builds on existing literature (see Stott et al., 2008b; Stott et al.,2012; James & Pearson, 2015; Stott et al., 2018b; 2019; Hoggett & West, 2021), perhaps through use of pilot studies, which adopt a more proportionate policing response, with fewer but more specialised resources. This could then examine if there is a reduction in disorder, as well as if the actual cost of policing football could be reduced for the force as well as the taxpayer. Furthermore, additional research is needed in order to not only accurately establish the cost of football policing, but also to build an evidence base for policing football in the most cost-efficient manner. This is not just an issue which is pertinent in England and Wales, there is an abundance of football policing operations every year across Europe which result in police resources being redeployed from other critical work. Adang & Brown (2008) highlight the importance of organisational learning for large scale policing of football across Europe, and this research offers an insight into the complexities of the cost of policing football in England and Wales. It can be seen that there are a range of approaches across Europe to reducing violence and disorder in connection with football matches, such as better liaison and dialogue between the police and supporters (see Stott et al., 2008a; 2008b; Hoggett & Stott, 2010; James & Pearson, 2015; Brechbühl et al., 2017; Stott et al., 2018a; 2018b; 2019; Laursen, 2019; Hoggett & West, 2021), supporter education (see Winands and Grau, 2018), improved intelligence led policing approaches (see Gemke et al., 2021) and a greater reliance on plural policing (see Atkinson & Graham, 2020). Ultimately understanding the cost and resource implications for football policing forms the basis of taking the approaches suggested above to

reduce disorder and police resources. This study has clearly highlighted the need for further research to establish the true cost of football policing more broadly.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that there is a clear narrative that has been developed by those in a position of authority regarding football policing, that it costs a lot more to police football than clubs are paying towards those costs, and that the football industry needs to contribute more. This issue is of importance across many countries, and is reflected in work that examines the relationships between football clubs, police forces, and supporters, including in Sweden, (Stott, Havelund & Williams (2018a), Denmark (Laursen 2019), Switzerland (Brechtbühl et al. (2017) the Netherlands (Gemke et al. 2021), Germany,(Winands & Grau, 2018) and in Scotland (Atkinson & Graham, 2020).

In the context of England and Wales, it is of concern that the figures of £5.5m received and £48m spent have been readily accepted as fact in parliamentary debates, without the necessary due diligence or requests for an explanation of the figures being conducted. The true amount that has been received in SPS from football clubs' averages at around £10m each season, as evidenced by detailed FOI data. It is much more difficult to judge the amount that is spent policing football, but the FOI data is indicating that most police forces are not actively calculating this. It also indicates that the £48m figure, is not necessarily accurate and is potentially an overestimate. In order to have a more informed discussion about the cost of policing football, greater transparency about how all the figures in the public domain have been calculated is required. Furthermore, this will assist future research that seeks to provide accurate data over the cost of football policing. Ultimately, another viewpoint, and one that requires further research, is not necessarily to consider how the football industry can (or even

if they should) pay more towards the policing of football, but how the police service themselves can modify their approach to football policing so that it actually costs them less.

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