



Institute for
Public Safety
Crime and Justice

Analysis of Special Constabulary National Statistics

National Briefing Paper 2

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Latest National Statistics on Special Constable Numbers

The mid-year national police workforce statistics were published on 25th January, relating to 30th September 2017. The mid-year statistics only report on total number of Specials, not on any of the detail in respect of BME, gender, joiners, leavers, etc. The next full-year national workforce statistics for Specials will be published in July 2018, relating to March 2018.

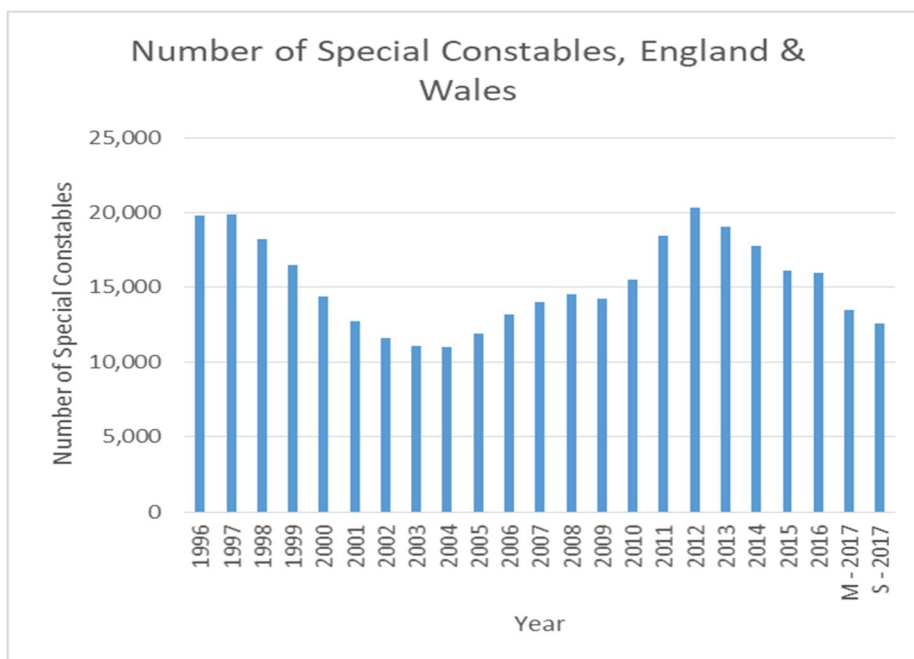
Key findings from the 30th September 2017 data:

- The data shows further reductions in Special Constable numbers nationally, with a 12 month reduction of 15.2% (2,263) resulting in there being 12,601 Specials in England & Wales (not counting the BTP), the lowest number of Specials for over a decade;
- This decline in numbers reflects the continuation of a consistently downward trend in Specials numbers in every data period since 2012;
- The data suggests that there may be some acceleration in the pace of that downward trend in the past 12-18 months;
- Whilst the Met continues to show large reductions (a 16.2% annual fall, with 500 fewer Specials), this only accounts for 22.1% of the national reduction in the 12 months to September 2017. Reductions in numbers of Specials were seen in 31 forces, with double-digit percentage reductions in 21 forces, meaning the pattern of reducing numbers is widespread across most forces, and not just accounted for by larger-scale changes in specific force contexts.

Total numbers of Special Constables nationally

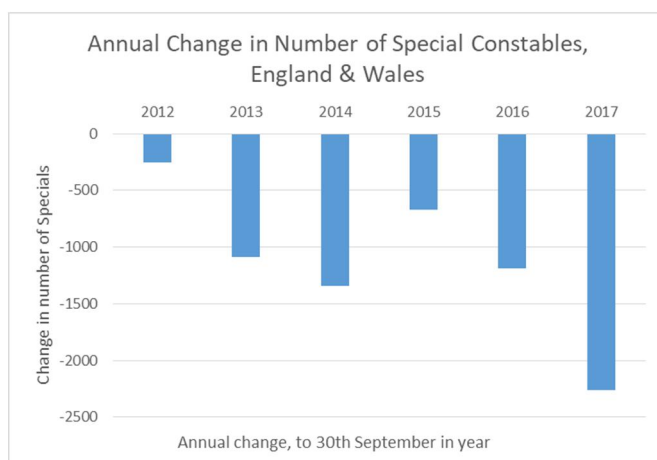
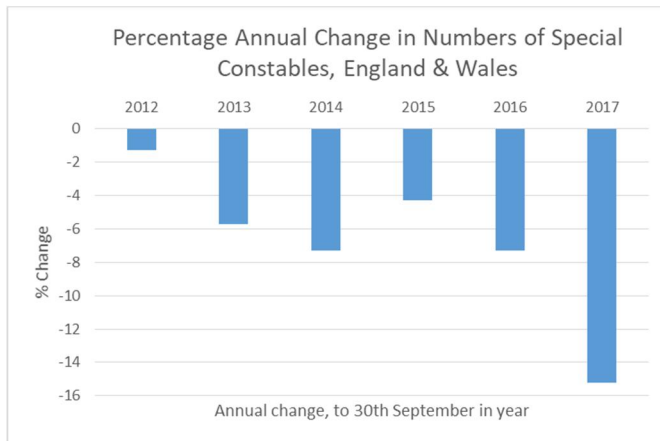
The total numbers of Specials has continued to fall, largely consistent with rates of reduction that have been the trend over the recent period of the past 5-6 years. The numbers of Specials are at their lowest level for over a decade, and current numbers represent a 38% fall from the peak numbers in the recent period (in 2012).

Total numbers in England and Wales of Specials (excluding BTP) have fallen from 13,503 in March 2017 to **12,601** in September 2017, a half-year fall of 6.7% (representing 902 fewer Specials). The totals for March 2017 (marked as M-2017) and September 2017 (marked as S-2017) are shown in the graph below, setting them in context of longer-term trend in numbers. The annual fall in numbers (comparing the 12 month period between September 2016 and September 2017) represents a 15.2% fall, in raw numbers a reduction of **-2,263** Special Constables over the full year period.



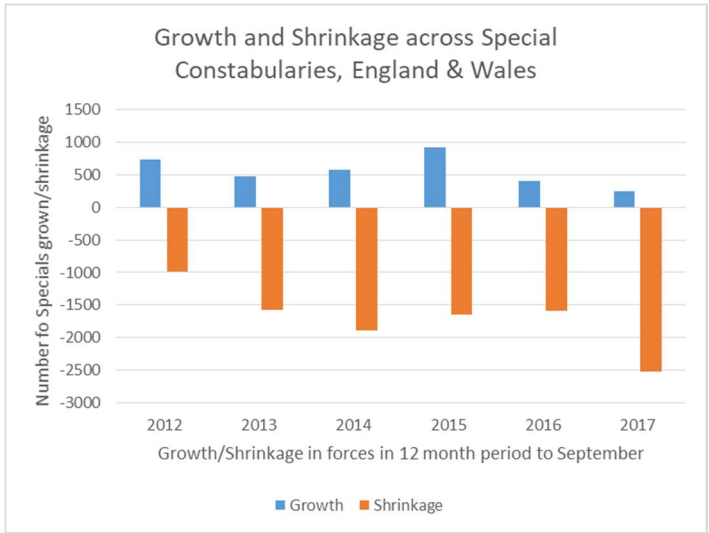
The recent reductions in numbers of Special Constables are summarised in the table below. In terms of trends over the recent past, the numbers of Specials grew consistently in every year between 2004 and 2012. As the table below shows, every data period since 2012 has shown a reduction. Therefore, a reduction in the current data period to September 2017 is entirely consistent with this trend over the past five years, in terms of direction. However, looking at the data in the table below, also summarised in the graphs on the following pages, there is an argument that the pace of reductions in the past 12-18 months has been somewhat greater than over the period of the past five years as a whole.

	Number of Specials	% change on previous six months	% change on previous twelve months
September 2017	12,601	-6.7%	-15.2%
March 2017	13,503	-9.2%	-15.6%
September 2016	14,864	-7.1%	-7.3%
March 2016	15,996	-0.3%	-0.5%
September 2015	16,050	-0.1%	-4.3%
March 2015	16,074	-3.9%	-9.4%
September 2014	16,722	-5.6%	-7.3%
March 2014	17,789	-1.5%	-6.4%
September 2013	18,068	-5.0%	-5.7%
March 2013	19,011	-0.7%	-6.5%
September 2012	19,154	-5.9%	-1.3%



The national figures for change in Special Constable numbers shown above are an average across different patterns of growth and reduction across the 43 geographical forces in England and Wales. The figures summarised above are a result of subtracting the totality of shrinkage in forces (for those forces with reducing numbers) from the totality of growth in numbers in forces (for those forces with expanding Special Constabularies). It is interesting to look separately at trends in the scale of growth in expanding forces and scale of reductions in shrinking Special Constabularies. These figures are summarised in the table below, and in the graph on the following page.

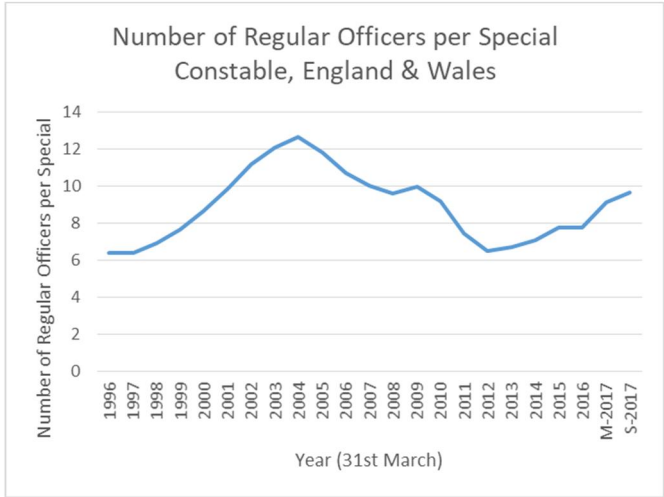
Change in the 12 months to...	Total growth, across all forces with growing numbers	Total reductions, across all forces with falling numbers
September 2017	254	-2,517
September 2016	409	-1,587
September 2015	920	-1,642
September 2014	572	-1,890
September 2013	485	-1,571
September 2012	736	-984



The data in the table and graph above reflect that the 12 month period to September 2017 has seen both the least numerical growth across expanding Special Constabularies, and the greatest fall in numbers in shrinking Special Constabularies, since 2012.

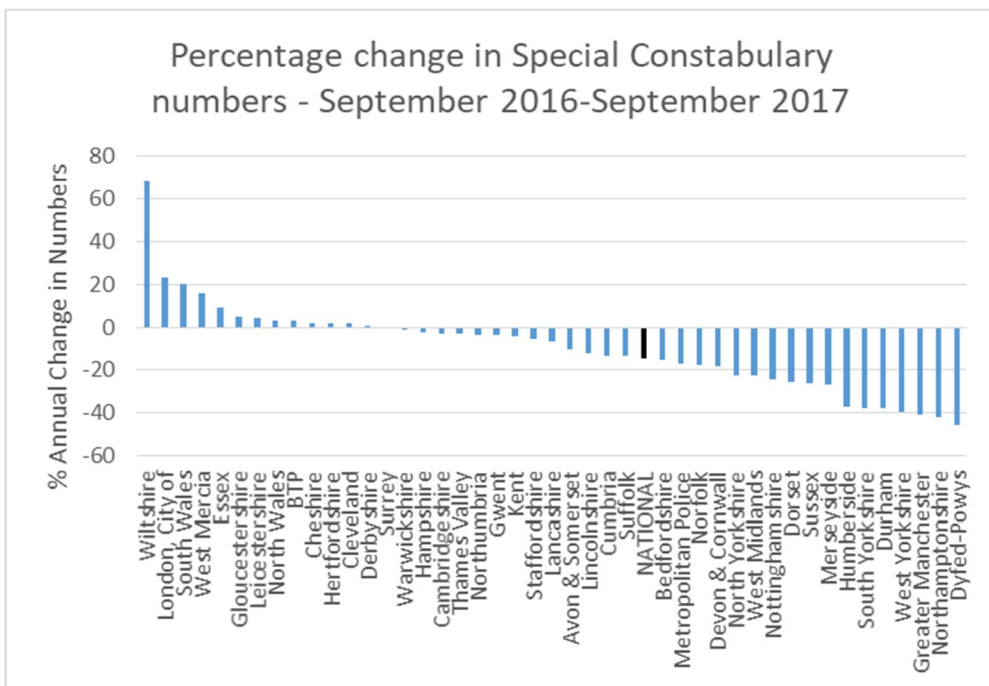
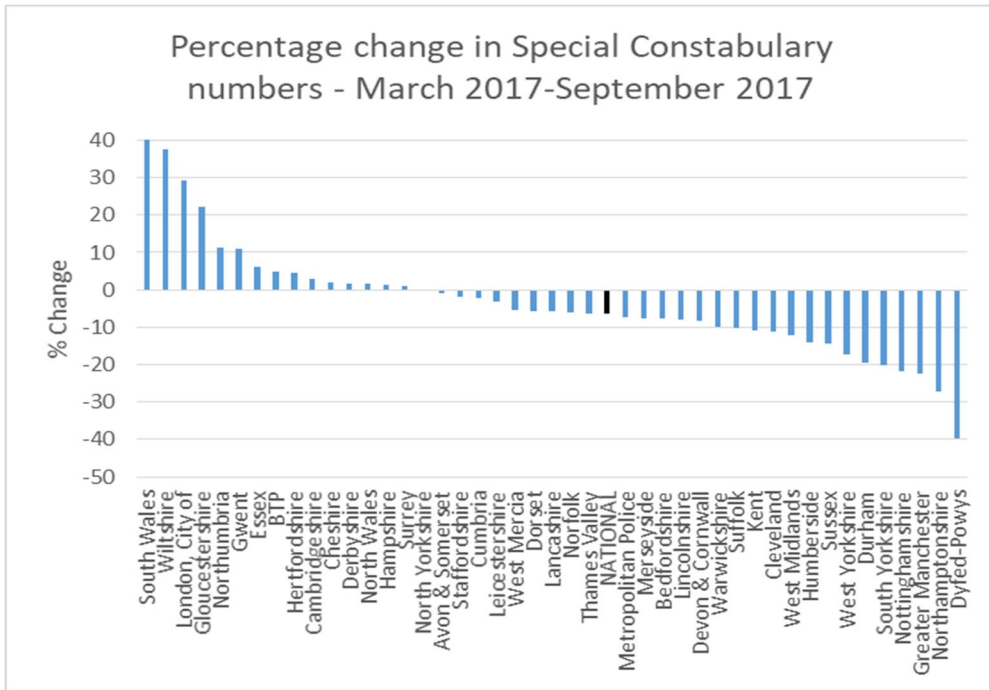
Comparing numbers of Specials with numbers of Regulars

The numbers of Special Constables have been falling over the past five year period at a faster rate than falls in Regular officer numbers, meaning that the ratio of Specials to Regulars has been trending to reflect fewer Specials pre Regular officer. The latest data in September 2017 continues to reflect this trend.

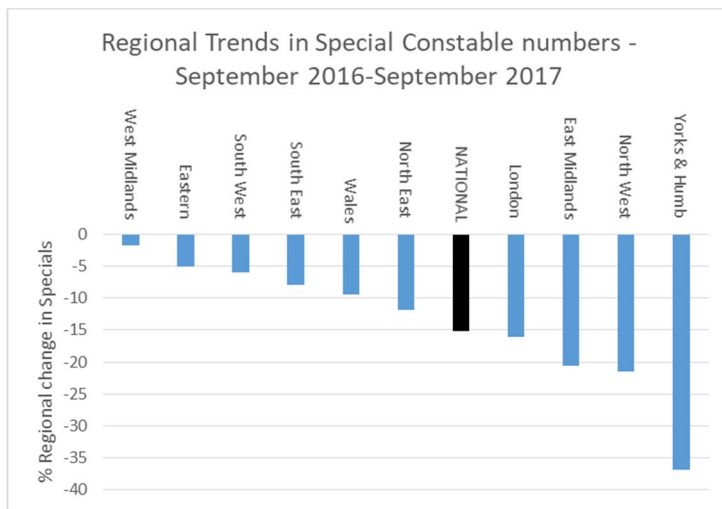


Change in numbers at individual force level

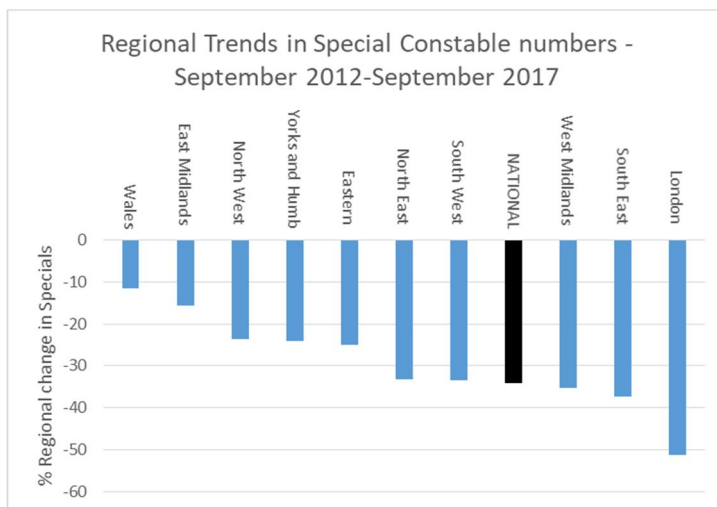
As is typically the case, there is a very mixed picture with wide variation in terms of trends in the data when looked at across individual forces. The percentage changes for the six month period (March 2017-September 2017) and for the annual change period (September 2016-September 2017) are shown for each force in the graphs below. Caution is needed in focusing too much on relatively short-term trends at individual force level, as some apparently large changes in percentage terms may represent relatively small raw numbers of Specials, some force changes may reflect local data issues, and the data at force level for Specials numbers tend to be quite volatile. Nevertheless, what these graphs do show is that whilst the national average reflects a wide degree of variation at force level, a majority of force contexts have seen reductions in the September 2017 data.



Looking on a regional scale, the trends over the 12 month period between September 2016 and September 2017 are shown in the graph below. All regions have seen falls over the 12 month period, but the scale of falls varies quite widely.



Looking over a longer timeframe, the changes by region between September 2012 and September 2017 are shown in the graph below.



In every one of the past six years of data, a majority of forces have had falling numbers in their Special Constabularies. However, looking across the recent trends in growth and shrinkage at individual force level, shown in the table on the next page, the data does suggest that the 12 months change to September 2017 to be *slightly* worse than the comparative pattern in recent years. There were fewer forces growing their Special Constabularies (only 12), and more forces with a falling number of Special Constables (31), in the 12 month period to September 2017 than in any of the previous five years. Similarly, there were more forces with double-digit falls in Specials numbers than in any of the previous five years (21), and there were fewer forces with double-digit growth in Specials (4) than in any of the previous five years.

Change in the 12 months to...	Number of forces with growing numbers	Of those, the number of forces with double-digit percentage growth	Number of forces with falling numbers	Of those, the number of forces with double-digit percentage reductions
September 2017	12	4	31	21
September 2016	14	7	28	17
September 2015	16	9	26	16
September 2014	13	8	29	13
September 2013	14	5	29	18
September 2012	19	7	23	12

Having said that, the key message from this data table is that the recent 2017 data reflects a continuing pattern of forces with shrinking Special Constabularies being in the majority, which has now been consistently the case since 2012. Taking all the data collectively for each annual data set since 2012, annually on average one-third of Special Constabularies have seen growth in any given 12 month period, and two-thirds of Special Constabularies have seen numbers fall. Similarly, looking over the whole data period, in 37.5% of annual changes forces have seen double-digit reductions in numbers, whilst only 15.5% of annual changes in forces have seen double-digit growth. So, overall, over the period since 2012 the picture collectively across forces had been one of annual reductions in numbers being much more common at force level than annual growth in numbers. This reflects that whilst large reductions or growth in individual forces may catch the eye (e.g. the scale of the Met reductions since 2012, or trends in forces such as Northamptonshire or West Yorkshire which have seen large rises and falls in recent data periods), the underlying pattern across all forces has been one of falling rather than growing numbers over the past five years.

Biggest risers and fallers

The largest numerical falls in numbers of Special Constables occurred in six forces which have each seen reduction of over 100 Specials over the annual period between September 2016 and September 2017.

Force	Numbers of Specials reduced in past year
Metropolitan Police	-500
Greater Manchester	-356
West Yorkshire	-284
Northamptonshire	-250
South Yorkshire	-132
Humberside	-129

One factor in shifts in the national picture, in terms of accelerating rate of fall in Specials numbers, is the position in West Yorkshire, GMP and Northamptonshire. In September 2015 these three forces had significant year-on-year growth in numbers of Specials, with +275, +121 and +225 respectively, which served in that year to offset a reducing picture in many other forces. Now all three of those forces have significant reductions in the twelve month period to September 2017.

In recent years, given the significant reductions in numbers of Specials in the Met since 2012, (following a significant build-up in numbers leading up to that Olympics year), national falls in the Special Constabulary data have often been attributed primarily as being driven by the falls in numbers in the Met. Looking across the past five years this explanation has some merit. Between September 2012 and September 2017, the Met Special Constabulary has reduced in size by 2,653, a reduction of 51.7%. Over the same period, the national picture as a whole has seen a reduction of 6,228 Specials, a reduction of 32.5%. Over the five year period of reducing numbers the Met reduction constitutes a sizeable 40.6% of the total national reduction, and it is right therefore to conclude that this has been one major factor in the national trend downwards over the longer-term.

However, whilst the reduction in raw numbers in the Met over the most recent 12 month data period, as shown in the table above, is again the largest numerical fall nationally, as it has been for the past five years, the reduction in the Met in percentage terms over the past year is quite close to the national average (a twelve month fall of -16.8%, set against -15.2% nationally). The Met Special Constabulary has 2,470 Specials recorded on this September 2017 data, representing 19.6% of all Specials nationally, and the Met reduction in numbers of 500 represents 22.1% of the overall national fall, so the 'Met effect' in this most recent data period is not particularly out-of-scale, as is reflected in the graph on the previous page which shows 15 forces with higher percentage reductions in numbers.

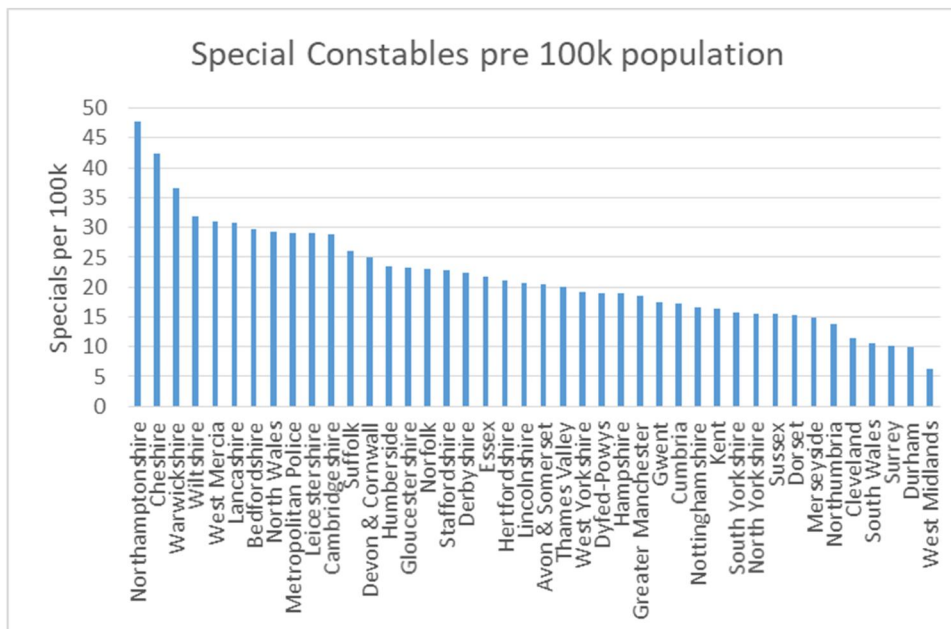
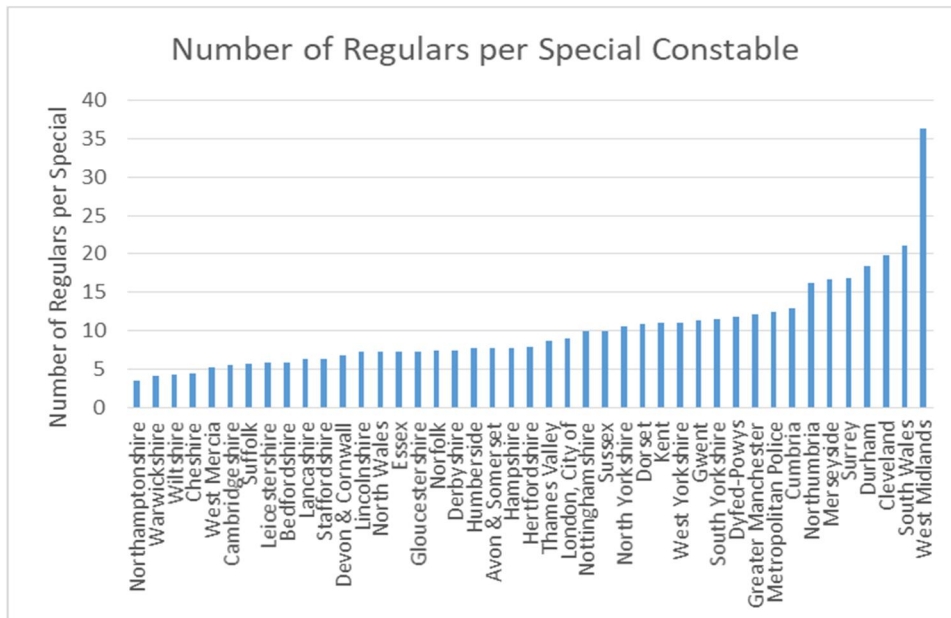
Therefore, whilst continuing significant reductions in the Met are still playing their part in pulling the national figures lower, it is no longer a particularly disproportionate one. Unlike in some recent years, the vast majority of the reductions in numbers in the annual fall to September 2017 is to be found in forces other than the Met. In numerical terms, the Met reduction in 2016-7 is broadly in line with similar annual reductions over recent years (-464 in September 2016; -532 in September 2015; -724 in September 2014), so again it is not the Met which is particularly driving the recent acceleration in rate of falling numbers.

Meanwhile, the fastest growing Special Constabularies during the same period have seen much smaller numerical growth in Specials, compared to the biggest falls in numbers at force level. This reflects the graph shared earlier (on page 4), which shows that there is less growth across forces in the most recent 12 month data period to September 2017 than has been the case in other recent years.

Force	Numbers of Specials increased in past year
Leicestershire	12
London, City of	14
South Wales	23
Essex	32
West Mercia	53
Wiltshire	91

The updated picture across forces

Based upon this most recent September 2017 national data, the following two graphs show the picture of current numbers of Specials across all forces in England & Wales. The first one shows ratio of Specials to Regulars in each force, and the second shows Specials per 100k population in each force.



Predictions for the future

The data on Special Constabulary numbers at force level tends to be quite volatile (seeing a lot of movement in the numbers between data periods), which makes predictions of the future challenging.

Some broad predictions of future trends can be drawn from the data in recent years, adding in some contextual knowledge:

- It seems likely that numbers of Special Constables will continue to fall in coming data periods;
- The rate of reductions seen in the past 12-18 months (double-digit annual shrinkage) however may come to reflect a peak, with the rate of reduction likely reducing again in upcoming data periods. It seems reasonable to predict that the reduction of Met numbers will at some point soon begin to 'bottom-out'. There have also been some marked reductions in recent data periods in some forces which had seen previous bursts of growth (e.g. West Yorkshire, Northamptonshire), reductions which are probably 'one off' and are not likely to persist in future data periods;
- Added to this, there seems likely to have been some 'surge effect' in terms of departures of Specials to join the Regulars in the data over the past two years, as recruitment processes have opened up again in most forces. Whilst no doubt resignations to join the Regulars will continue across many forces at a quite high rate in coming data periods, the past two years may have represented something of a 'spike' in the level of departures at the point that recruitment processes have initially opened up again;
- Growth in local Special Constabularies seems likely to remain at historically low levels in coming data periods. There are few forces locally driving growth agendas within their Special Constabularies, and there is also little focus or investment at national level on recruitment and growth. The recommencement of Regular recruitment has also impacted in many force settings on capacity to recruit and train Specials.