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Met Police to Expand Facial Recognition Use as Part of Wider Crime Strategy

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— Categories: Crime



The Metropolitan Police Service (Met) will double its use of live facial recognition technology to target wanted criminals and registered sex offenders as part of a wider operational restructure prompted by rising crime and budget pressures.

Currently used four times a week over two days, the technology will now be deployed up to ten times weekly across five days. The tool is designed to help police identify and arrest suspects involved in serious offences, including violent crimes and robbery.

The expansion comes as the Met faces a £260 million funding shortfall, leading to the loss of around 1,400 officers and 300 civilian staff. In response, the force is reallocating resources and moving officers into higher-demand areas such as neighbourhood patrols and protest response units.

Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley said the technology is used with care and delivers results. “We’re only using it to look for serious offenders like wanted offenders and registered sex offenders,” he explained. “We routinely put it out there and capture multiple serious offenders in one go, many of whom have committed serious offences against women or children, or people who are wanted for armed robbery.”

The Met revealed that live facial recognition has already led to more than 1,000 arrests, with 773 resulting in charges or cautions. Sir Mark added, “It’s a fantastic piece of technology. It’s very responsibly used, and that’s why most of the public supports it.”

High Street Policing

The Met is also increasing its public order team from 48 to 63 officers to manage the growing number of protests in the capital. Many recent demonstrations have been related to international issues, such as the Israel-Palestine conflict and environmental activism.

“The numbers of protests have grown over the last couple of years,” Sir Mark told the *Press Association (PA)*. “We don’t have any powers that are there to reduce the number of protests, to cancel them. Laws are very permissive and encouraging of protests... but what we’ve seen, unfortunately, is a proportion of those create crime and offences.”

Neighbourhood policing is also being bolstered, with 80 officers now assigned to the West End, a 50 percent increase. The area has seen a rise in phone thefts, anti-social behaviour, and shoplifting, prompting concern from business groups. In 2024 alone, shoplifting offences surpassed 500,000.

“The West End generates £50 billion for the UK economy,” said Sir Mark. “It’s important we police and protect that well.”

A further 90 officers are being moved to local teams in areas hit hard by robbery and theft, including Brixton, Kingston, Ealing, Finsbury Park, Southwark, and Spitalfields.

However, civil liberties group Liberty raised concerns about the rise in facial recognition use. Policy officer Charlie Whelton said, “It’s incredibly concerning to see an expansion of facial recognition, especially at a time when there is a complete lack of regulation governing its use.”

The Met employs over 33,000 officers and 11,000 staff and continues to adjust its operations to meet both public demand and financial constraints.