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Tackling the mobile menace - Sanctions for mobile phone use by drivers, England and Wales

Key points

- Only 46,282 drivers were sanctioned for using a mobile phone in England and Wales in 2017 - an average of three sanctions per day per police service.
- Sanctions are down 67% from 2011, with 35% of the decrease in 2017 when Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for mobile phone use by drivers were increased to £200 and six penalty points.
- Wide variation exists between police areas in how often mobile phone use is sanctioned, when compared to the number of people reported killed and seriously injured in the police area.
- With traffic police officers cut by 43% since 2010 (excluding London), the decrease in mobile phone sanctions was to be expected.

RoadPeace calls

Mobile phone use by drivers must be deterred. This will require much more frequent detection. But the statistics show that most police areas are sanctioning fewer drivers using their mobile phone. This will be influenced by the lack of traffic police on our roads. Cuts have consequences. We need road crime to be treated as real crime with more police detecting more drivers on their phone and reducing the risk posed to other road users.

Introduction

Substantial evidence indicates the distractive impact of mobile phone use on the quality of driving and the likelihood of collisions (RoSPA, 2018). Use of a hand held mobile phone while driving was made illegal in 2003. Since then there have been various changes in the penalties attached, accompanied by an overall increase in compliance in England and Wales, see Figure 1¹.

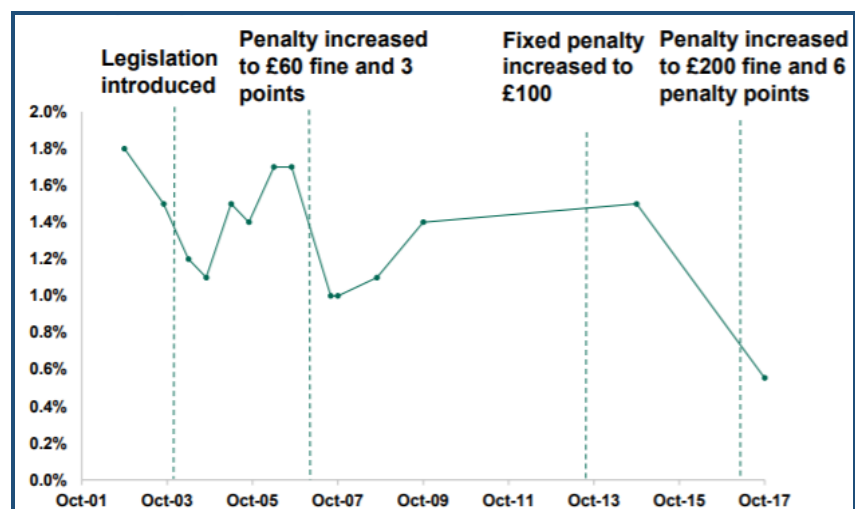


Figure 1 Hand held mobile phone use by drivers

¹ DfT (2019),

Despite the improvement, law breaking remains very high - 0.6% of all drivers surveyed in moving traffic (DfT, 2019). So, on an A road with a flow of 21,000 vehicles per day, this would equate to around one observed transgression per minute.

Enforcement

Since the law was introduced, the Police have been able to take drivers to court or issue an FPN. In 2013, the option of driver retraining became widely available. The analysis below looks at the changes in the use of these sanctions.

Trends

In 2017, there were 46,282 sanctions, a drop of 67% over 2011². In this period there has been a significant shift in both the total number of sanctions and their distribution between different types:

- Court prosecutions were down 71% to just over 9,000
- FPN fines³ were down 79% to nearly 23,000
- Retraining, which came into widespread use in 2013, was offered to 14,442 drivers (31%)
- Following the change in penalties in March 2017, there was a sharp switch in the ratio driver retraining courses to FPN fines, from 5:1 to 1:2

Detailed statistics can be seen in Figure 2 below. Though the single largest drop (33,560) was between 2016 and 2017, total sanctions dropped every year, despite the introduction of driver retraining as an option in 2013. How much sanctions may have declined because of the increased penalties in 2017 is not clear. What is clear, however, is that the pattern of declining sanctions was already well established.

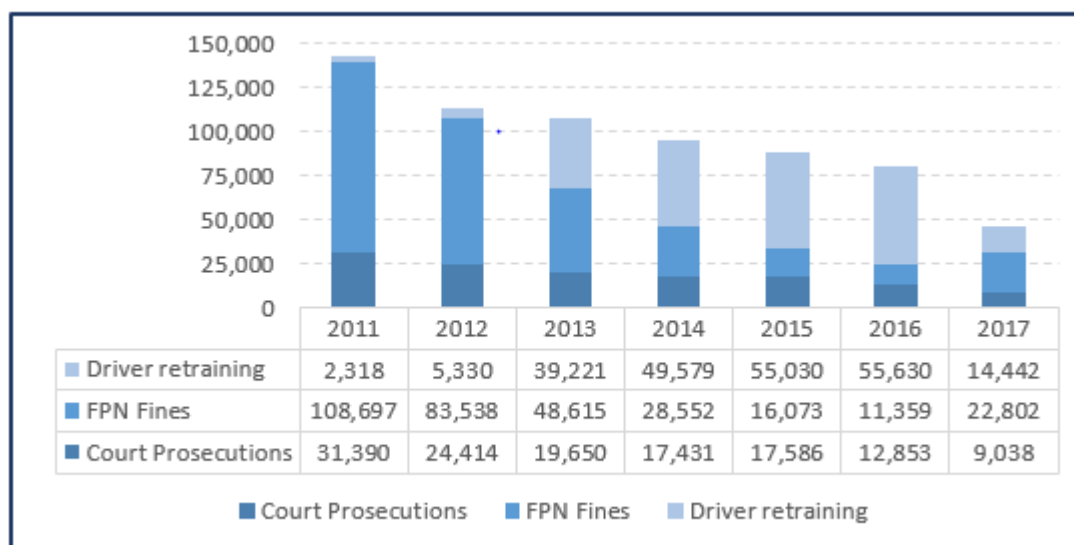


Figure 2 Sanctions for mobile phone use from 2011-17, England and Wales

Analysis for police areas

Changes in the total number of sanctions of all types for each police area⁴ are in Appendix Table 1. In the period 2011 to 2017, only three recorded increases and only two more had decreases that were less than 50% of the 2011 figure:

² This is the first year for which Home Office data is available on FPNs for mobile phone use.

³ All those convicted at court would also have received fines

- Thames Valley (33%)
- Staffordshire (21%)
- Hampshire (17%)
- West Mercia (-33%)
- Norfolk/Suffolk (-48%)

The great majority of police areas saw declines on the 2011 total of 70% or more. Police areas with the largest declines were:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of London (-83%) • Lancashire (-88%) • North Yorkshire (-83%) • Northamptonshire (-84%) • Northumbria (-82%) • Nottinghamshire (-85%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Wales/Gwent/Dyfed-Powys (-87%) • South Yorkshire (-88%) • Sussex (-87%) • West Midlands (-81%) • Wiltshire (-87%)
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These figures tell us how they performed in 2017, compared to how they performed in 2011. But how did they perform relative to each other?

This can be assessed by dividing the number of sanctions by the number of killed or seriously injured (KSI) casualties in each area in 2017. The police areas are listed in rank order below, with the number of sanctions/KSI in brackets after each. So, Cheshire comes first as it has the highest number of mobile phone sanctions per KSI (3.8), South Yorkshire comes last, with 0.5 sanctions per KSI.

- The median police area was Bedfordshire with 1.3 mobile phone sanctions per KSI
- Cheshire, the highest (3.6), is nearly three times the median
- South Yorkshire, the lowest (0.5), is just over one third of the median
- The ratio of the highest to lowest is 6.9 to 1

Similarly, calculated estimates of sanctions per KSI for other years can be seen in Appendix Table 2. The values reinforce the picture of considerable variation between police areas in the enforcement of the laws of mobile phone use while driving (and the year on year decline in the level of protection provided).

Table 1 Ranking of Police areas for mobile phone enforcement (2017)

Top Ranked	Middle Ranked	Lower Ranked
Cheshire (3.8)	Greater Manchester (1.7)	Humberside (1)
Thames Valley (3.6)	Cleveland (1.7)	Cambridgeshire (1)
MPS (3.6)	Warwickshire (1.4)	Lancashire (0.9)
Merseyside (3.1)	North Wales (1.4)	Gloucestershire (0.9)
Staffordshire (2.9)	Dorset (1.4)	Wiltshire (0.9)
West Mercia (2.9)	Avon and Somerset (1.3)	Devon and Cornwall (0.8)
Norfolk/Suffolk (2.7)	Bedfordshire (1.3)	North Yorkshire (0.8)
Essex (2.2)	Cumbria (1.2)	Northamptonshire (0.8)
Surrey (2.2)	Derbyshire (1.2)	Nottinghamshire (0.7)
Hertfordshire (2.1)	Durham (1.2)	Lincolnshire (0.6)
West Yorkshire (2.1)	South Wales/Gwent/Dyfed-Powys (1.2)	Sussex (0.6)
City of London (2)	West Midlands (1.2)	Northumbria (0.6)
Hampshire (2)	Leicestershire (1.1)	South Yorkshire (0.5)
	Kent (1)	

Note: Figure in brackets is Mobile Phone Sanctions per KSI

⁴ Some PFAs (Norfolk and Suffolk; South Wales, Gwent and Dyfed-Powys) are analysed together here, as their Home Office data on FPNs and driver retraining cannot be separated.

2017 decline in driver retraining

Most police areas shifted from the use of driver retraining to FPNs in 2017, with the increase in the FPN to six penalty points and £200. Police were encouraged to give FPNs instead of retraining courses as the latter does not involve any penalty points. The ratio of the two sanctions in 2016 and 2017 can be seen in Appendix Table 3. But this was not uniform. Some police areas shifted very significantly; those where the number of driver retraining courses dropped by more than 85% were:

- City of London (-86%)
- Essex (-100%)
- Lancashire (-87%)
- Lincolnshire (-92%)
- Norfolk/Suffolk (-100%)
- North Wales (-97%)
- Northamptonshire (-85%)
- Northumbria (-85%)
- Staffordshire (-87%)

Others continued to increase their use of driver retraining, including Greater Manchester, Cumbria, Merseyside, and West Yorkshire.

Impact of cuts in traffic police

Cuts in police budgets and the number of officers employed has affected traffic policing disproportionately (RoadPeace, 2019). Police areas were ranked on their proportionate decline in mobile phone sanctions over the period 2011-17 and on the proportionate cuts in the numbers of traffic officers over the same period. There was a positive correlation between the ranking scores: there were larger declines in mobile phone sanctions in Police areas where there had been greater reductions in the number of traffic officers – cuts have consequences. See Appendix Table 4.

RoadPeace calls

RoadPeace is campaigning for road crime to be treated as real crime. This includes deterring mobile phone use by drivers. This will require much more frequent detection. But the statistics show that most police areas are sanctioning fewer drivers using their mobile phone. This will be influenced by the lack of traffic police on our roads. Cuts have consequences. We need road crime to be treated as real crime with more police detecting more drivers on their phone and reducing the risk posed to other road users.

Appendix Table 1 Mobile phone sanctions by police area, 2011-17

Region/PFA	All Mobile Phone Sanctions							Change since 2011	Change since 2016
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017		
North East									
Cleveland	1,144	1,040	947	597	347	352	271	-76%	-23%
Durham	911	623	669	374	467	369	296	-68%	-20%
Northumbria	1,803	1,487	1,300	896	389	576	327	-82%	-43%
North East Total	3,858	3,150	2,916	1,867	1,203	1,297	894	-77%	-31%
Yorkshire and the Humber									
Humberside	2,777	1,917	1,503	1,236	1,133	1,050	587	-79%	-44%
North Yorkshire	2,154	1,603	1,045	727	779	552	373	-83%	-32%
South Yorkshire	3,770	1,940	1,663	1,580	1,416	944	444	-88%	-53%
West Yorkshire	5,942	4,294	4,520	3,014	2,846	3,629	1,784	-70%	-51%
Yorkshire and the Humber Total	14,643	9,754	8,731	6,557	6,174	6,175	3,188	-78%	-48%
North West									
Cheshire	3,516	3,082	2,966	2,195	2,040	2,544	1,426	-59%	-44%
Cumbria	1,345	1,251	949	836	650	613	398	-70%	-35%
Greater Manchester	6,128	6,880	5,096	2,718	2,957	2,314	1,347	-78%	-42%
Lancashire	5,569	3,857	3,610	1,220	931	1,054	685	-88%	-35%
Merseyside	5,359	4,209	2,857	3,509	2,758	2,449	1,701	-68%	-31%
North West Total	21,917	19,279	15,478	10,478	9,336	8,974	5,557	-75%	-38%
West Midlands									
Staffordshire	704	492	1,836	1,441	1,486	1,721	850	21%	-51%
Warwickshire	1,218	966	800	733	626	665	499	-59%	-25%
West Mercia	2,464	2,043	2,808	2,485	2,129	2,352	1,640	-33%	-30%
West Midlands	6,182	4,068	2,034	2,128	2,522	2,638	1,188	-81%	-55%
West Midlands Total	10,568	7,569	7,478	6,787	6,763	7,376	4,177	-60%	-43%
East Midlands									
Derbyshire	1,468	764	994	1,019	916	454	447	-70%	-2%
Leicestershire	1,469	1,251	1,356	1,186	686	568	321	-78%	-43%
Lincolnshire	1,708	1,174	1,489	1,534	1,113	734	366	-79%	-50%
Northamptonshire	1,400	742	717	675	348	386	223	-84%	-42%
Nottinghamshire	2,130	1,734	3,424	3,345	3,119	977	320	-85%	-67%
East Midlands Total	8,175	5,665	7,980	7,759	6,182	3,119	1,677	-79%	-46%
East of England									
Bedfordshire	1,253	1,482	1,072	973	830	550	370	-70%	-33%
Cambridgeshire	2,138	2,169	2,593	2,106	2,291	961	466	-78%	-52%
Essex	6,989	5,133	5,009	4,795	5,566	4,795	2,063	-70%	-57%
Hertfordshire	3,353	2,229	2,474	3,014	1,941	1,229	869	-74%	-29%
Norfolk/Suffolk	3,712	2,886	2,181	1,988	3,139	3,348	1,919	-48%	-43%
East of England Total	17,445	13,899	13,329	12,876	13,767	10,883	5,687	-67%	-48%
London									
City of London	707	254	196	193	244	636	120	-83%	-81%
MPS	31,602	26,907	24,418	21,065	18,646	20,748	13,695	-57%	-34%
London Total	32,309	27,161	24,614	21,258	18,890	21,384	13,815	-57%	-35%
South East									
Hampshire	1,719	1,235	3,502	5,417	5,317	3,764	2,018	17%	-46%
Kent	4,554	2,938	1,573	897	718	717	950	-79%	32%
Surrey	3,656	2,592	2,451	2,608	1,808	1,426	1,206	-67%	-15%
Sussex	4,896	4,495	2,569	1,669	1,659	1,029	616	-87%	-40%
Thames Valley	2,227	2,205	6,082	8,603	9,583	7,768	2,952	33%	-62%
South East Total	17,052	13,465	16,177	19,194	19,085	14,704	7,742	-55%	-47%
South West									
Avon and Somerset	1,765	1,409	1,096	953	849	771	505	-71%	-35%
Devon and Cornwall	2,309	2,380	1,501	1,396	1,246	1,046	732	-68%	-30%
Dorset	1,151	919	918	939	905	715	492	-57%	-31%
Gloucestershire	1,069	583	562	713	898	548	275	-74%	-50%
Wiltshire	1,796	1,391	1,393	820	441	382	236	-87%	-38%
South West Total	8,090	6,682	5,470	4,821	4,339	3,462	2,240	-72%	-35%
Wales									
North Wales	1,363	1,638	1,557	1,576	1,290	964	405	-70%	-58%
South Wales/Gwent/Dyfed-Pow	6,985	5,020	3,756	2,389	1,660	1,504	900	-87%	-40%
Wales Total	8,348	6,658	5,313	3,965	2,950	2,468	1,305	-84%	-47%
England & Wales Total	142,405	113,282	107,486	95,562	88,689	79,842	46,282	-67%	-42%

Appendix Table 2 Total mobile phone sanctions/KSI by Police area, 2013-17

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Avon and Somerset	2.2	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.3
Bedfordshire	4.9	4.1	3.2	1.9	1.3
Cambridgeshire	6.6	5.3	6.5	2.1	1.0
Cheshire	6.4	4.0	4.3	5.8	3.8
City of London	3.3	3.5	5.7	12.5	2.0
Cleveland	6.6	3.8	1.7	2.3	1.7
Cumbria	4.0	3.6	2.8	2.0	1.2
Derbyshire	2.6	2.0	2.3	1.2	1.2
Devon and Cornwall	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.3	0.8
Dorset	2.5	2.4	2.2	1.9	1.4
Durham	2.8	1.8	1.9	1.7	1.2
Essex	7.3	6.3	7.2	4.7	2.2
Gloucestershire	2.6	3.2	3.5	2.0	0.9
Greater Manchester	7.8	3.8	4.5	3.4	1.7
Hampshire	3.4	5.1	5.1	3.5	2.0
Hertfordshire	6.4	7.7	4.8	2.7	2.1
Humberside	2.9	2.5	2.7	2.1	1.0
Kent	2.4	1.3	1.0	0.7	1.0
Lancashire	4.6	1.4	1.1	1.3	0.9
Leicestershire	4.6	3.2	1.8	1.6	1.1
Lincolnshire	3.6	3.9	3.5	1.7	0.6
Merseyside	5.1	5.7	4.7	4.1	3.1
MPS	10.8	10.0	9.1	8.5	3.6
Norfolk/Suffolk	3.2	3.2	5.3	4.7	2.7
North Wales	4.5	3.9	3.9	3.1	1.4
North Yorkshire	2.0	1.4	1.5	1.1	0.8
Northamptonshire	2.2	2.1	1.0	1.2	0.8
Northumbria	3.1	2.0	0.8	1.0	0.6
Nottinghamshire	7.4	7.4	6.8	2.1	0.7
South Wales/Gwent/Dyfed	4.7	2.8	1.9	1.9	1.2
South Yorkshire	3.5	3.4	3.5	1.5	0.5
Staffordshire	8.6	6.5	4.8	4.6	2.9
Surrey	4.1	3.5	2.7	2.6	2.2
Sussex	2.8	1.6	1.7	1.0	0.6
Thames Valley	6.5	8.5	9.7	7.7	3.6
Warwickshire	2.8	2.3	2.0	1.8	1.4
West Mercia	7.0	5.8	4.3	4.2	2.9
West Midlands	2.3	2.2	2.6	2.4	1.2
West Yorkshire	5.2	3.3	3.1	4.1	2.1
Wiltshire	5.4	2.6	1.4	1.2	0.9
Mean	4.5	3.8	3.5	2.9	1.6
Maximum	10.8	10.0	9.7	12.5	3.8
Minimum	2.0	1.3	0.8	0.7	0.5
Max/Min Ratio	5.5	7.9	11.8	17.0	6.9

Appendix Table 3 Shift in mobile phone sanctions 2016-2017

PFA	2016			2017		
	FPN Fine	Driver Retraining	Ratio	FPN Fine	Driver Retraining	Ratio
Avon and Somerset	91	620	7:1	347	103	1:3
Bedfordshire	73	378	5:1	209	107	1:2
Cambridgeshire	150	636	4:1	259	108	1:2
Cheshire	376	1,830	5:1	916	367	1:2
City of London	140	496	4:1	53	67	1:1
Cleveland	35	268	8:1	67	176	3:1
Cumbria	83	477	6:1	41	314	8:1
Derbyshire	31	271	9:1	224	136	1:2
Devon and Cornwall	159	736	5:1	446	202	1:2
Dorset	241	345	1:1	358	63	1:6
Durham	39	271	7:1	78	183	2:1
Essex	965	3,331	3:1	1,765	0	
Gloucestershire	66	419	6:1	176	64	1:3
Greater Manchester	231	1,796	8:1	115	1,149	10:1
Hampshire	432	2,912	7:1	1,116	643	1:2
Hertfordshire	167	861	5:1	449	273	1:2
Humberside	126	797	6:1	50	445	9:1
Kent	217	428	2:1	776	94	1:8
Lancashire	143	693	5:1	450	90	1:5
Leicestershire	88	367	4:1	221	62	1:4
Lincolnshire	128	436	3:1	249	36	1:7
Merseyside	288	1,544	5:1	161	1,268	8:1
MPS	2,678	14,733	6:1	5,631	4,060	1:1
Norfolk/Suffolk	776	2,401	3:1	1,692	0	
North Wales	118	636	5:1	310	17	1:18
North Yorkshire	60	420	7:1	238	81	1:3
Northamptonshire	40	282	7:1	138	42	1:3
Northumbria	127	336	3:1	222	50	1:4
Nottinghamshire	63	455	7:1	153	84	1:2
South Wales/Gwent/Dyfed-Po	200	712	4:1	560	119	1:5
South Yorkshire	128	625	5:1	246	107	1:2
Staffordshire	153	1,248	8:1	557	162	1:3
Surrey	212	1,050	5:1	723	342	1:2
Sussex	135	768	6:1	378	155	1:2
Thames Valley	1,147	5,533	5:1	1,408	939	1:1
Warwickshire	78	425	5:1	235	152	1:2
West Mercia	269	1,846	7:1	872	540	1:2
West Midlands	179	1,543	9:1	561	242	1:2
West Yorkshire	391	2,705	7:1	147	1,400	10:1
Wiltshire	336	0	0:1	205	0	
<i>England and Wales Total</i>	<i>11,359</i>	<i>55,630</i>	<i>5:1</i>	<i>22,802</i>	<i>14,442</i>	<i>1:2</i>

Appendix Table 4 Comparison of police cuts and reduction in mobile phone sanctions, 2011-17

PFA	Change Traffic Police Numbers	Change Mobile Phone Sanctions	Rank	
			Traffic Police Numbers	Mobile Phone Sanctions
Avon and Somerset	-52%	-71%	29	19
Bedfordshire	-43%	-70%	22	17
Cambridgeshire	-37%	-78%	17	25
Cheshire	29%	-59%	3	8
City of London	-50%	-83%	27	32
Cleveland	-78%	-76%	38	22
Cumbria	-18%	-70%	8	16
Derbyshire	-32%	-70%	14	13
Devon and Cornwall	-75%	-68%	37	12
Dorset	-31%	-57%	13	6
Durham	-39%	-68%	18	10
Essex	-58%	-70%	34	18
Gloucestershire	-53%	-74%	32	21
Greater Manchester	-55%	-78%	33	23
Hampshire	-36%	17%	16	3
Hertfordshire	-42%	-74%	21	20
Humberside	-52%	-79%	30	27
Kent	-35%	-79%	15	28
Lancashire	-31%	-88%	12	38
Leicestershire	-44%	-78%	23	24
Lincolnshire	-97%	-79%	39	26
Merseyside	-45%	-68%	26	11
Norfolk/Suffolk	-61%	-48%	35	5
North Wales	-29%	-70%	11	15
North Yorkshire	-40%	-83%	20	31
Northamptonshire	-53%	-84%	31	33
Northumbria	-29%	-82%	10	30
Nottinghamshire	10%	-85%	4	34
South Wales/Gwent/Dyfed-Powys	-13%	-87%	6	36
South Yorkshire	-45%	-88%	25	39
Staffordshire	-18%	21%	7	2
Surrey	-5%	-67%	5	9
Sussex	-40%	-87%	19	37
Thames Valley	-26%	33%	9	1
Warwickshire	579%	-59%	1	7
West Mercia	67%	-33%	2	4
West Midlands	-45%	-81%	24	29
West Yorkshire	-51%	-70%	28	14
Wiltshire	-63%	-87%	36	35

Notes: MPS excluded due to data anomalies, see RoadPeace (2019)

Pearson correlation = 0.26. This indicates a weak positive relationship.

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