



Report of the Police and Crime Panel

Report title: Professional and Ethical Standards Panel: Annual Assurance Report 2023

Date: 15th March 2024

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Purpose of the report: As requested by the Panel

Recommendations: Information only

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the Professional and Ethical Standards Panel's (PESP) activities and findings in 2023. It covers monitoring complaints handling, reviewing ethical standards, and providing recommendations within Thames Valley Police (TVP). Noteworthy achievements and challenges are highlighted, showcasing the Panel's commitment to transparency, integrity, and public trust in policing.

Key Findings:

The PESP's scrutiny revealed several key findings regarding TVP's complaints handling and ethical standards:

- A comprehensive review of closed complaint and misconduct files highlighted areas of improvement in procedural consistency and transparency.
- Thematic reviews underscored the importance of addressing issues such as violence against women, police misconduct, and mental health support for suspects.
- Positive feedback was received on notable improvements in complaint resolution times and enhanced clarity in reports, indicating progress in service delivery.
- Challenges persist, including resource constraints and operational complexities, which necessitate ongoing collaboration between TVP, the PCC, and the PESP to address effectively.

Next Steps/Conclusion:

Looking ahead, the report underlines the importance of implementing recommendations to address identified challenges and enhance TVP's complaints handling mechanisms. In conclusion, the PESP's diligent oversight and constructive engagement have strengthened public trust in TVP's operations. Continued collaboration and implementation of recommendations are vital to further improving professional standards and ethical policing.



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Professional and Ethical Standards Panel

ANNUAL ASSURANCE REPORT 2023

Introduction and Background

1. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley (PCC) is responsible for securing the maintenance of an efficient and effective police Force. The Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police (TVP) is responsible for maintaining the King's peace and has direction and control over TVP officers and staff.
2. The PCC, on behalf of the public, is responsible for holding the Chief Constable to account for the exercise of his functions, including those of persons under his direction and control, and for the overall performance of the Force. However, in law, the PCC must not fetter the operational independence of the Force or the Chief Constable who leads it.
3. Under the Police Reform Act 2002, the Chief Constable is the 'Appropriate Authority' responsible for dealing with complaints and misconduct matters raised against TVP police officers and staff below the rank of Chief Constable and/or complaints about the quality of service members of the public have received from the Force. The Chief Constable, therefore, has a duty to ensure adequate and effective systems and procedures are in place for managing and monitoring complaints against the Force. In practice, the Chief Constable delegates this statutory responsibility to his Professional Standards Department (PSD).
4. One of the PCC's 'holding to account' duties is to monitor the adequacy and effectiveness of the Force's handling of all complaints made against police officers, staff and the quality of service provided by the Force. To enable the PCC to discharge his statutory 'holding to account' obligations in relation to complaints made against the Force, the Chief Constable has a duty to ensure the PCC is kept informed of matters relating to the handling of complaints against TVP and any material issues arising from them. In addition to this duty, since the Policing and Crime Act 2017, which duly amended the Police Reform Act 2002, PCCs, have a duty to conduct reviews (formerly known as appeals). The Thames Valley PCC has opted for the minimum level of statutory responsibility, which is 'complaints model 1'. What this means is that the



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appropriate authority (PSD) retain control of making recording decisions and severity assessments on all complaints but where the relevant review body would have been PSD, it is now the OPCC. This provides for greater independence and transparency. Consideration is however currently being given to a potential move to 'model 2' or 'model 3', with research being undertaken by the OPCC with regards to the benefits and drawbacks of each approach. It is expected that a decision report to upgrade to Model 2 or 3 is to be signed off shortly but at the time of writing, the decision paper is yet to be finalised. See Appendix B.

5. To help discharge their respective responsibilities, the PCC and Chief Constable have jointly established the Professional and Ethical Standards Panel (PESP). As of December 2023, the Panel comprised of 6 independent members of the public who were appointed following an open recruitment and selection process having had one member leave during the year.
6. As well as helping the Chief Constable to obtain independent assurance that he is discharging his respective complaints duties and responsibilities effectively, other functions of the Panel include monitoring the proportionality and consistency of decision making by the Force, as well as constructively challenging the way that the Chief Constable and the PCC handle professional and ethical issues. Full details of the remit of the Panel can be found in the Terms of Reference, which are attached at Appendix A.

Purpose of Report

7. The purpose of this Annual Assurance Report is to provide the PCC and Chief Constable with independent assurance as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Force's arrangements for handling and dealing with complaints made against the Force and the appropriateness of the reviews being conducted by the OPCC. This report brings to the attention of the Chief Constable and the PCC whether the Panel has any collective views, concerns or recommendations, based on its independent assessment of the type and volume of complaints made against the Force. The report also details how any complaints concerning issues relating to policing integrity, ethics and professional standards were dealt with by the Force.
8. The report covers the period of PESP Meetings from January to December 2023. Meetings are held bi-monthly and in 2023 were held both remotely and in person on the following dates:
 - 1 February 2023
 - 5 April 2023
 - 7 June 2023
 - 9 August 2023
 - 11 October 2023
 - 15 December 2023



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Panel Focus – Complaints and Reviews Handling

9. During every other meeting, the Panel review a random selection of closed complaint/misconduct files from PSD, usually based on a mutually agreed theme. The case files are made available before meetings for the Panel to scrutinise in readiness to feedback comments at the Panel meeting and to address issues arising. Panel members also attend confidential PSD Tasking meetings where live cases are discussed.
10. Further to complaint files being scrutinised, the Panel also complete a dip-check of complaints in order to consider the proportionality of severity assessments undertaken by PSD. These files are selected by PSD based on themes requested by PESP. PESP have sight of these files in advance of the main meeting.
11. On a bi-annual basis the Panel also review a random selection of completed reviews from the OPCC. These files are selected by the OPCC. As with complaints files, the documentation is made available to Panel members prior to the meeting at which they are being discussed, so that they consider any elements of the review that they wish to challenge.
12. During the period January to December 2023, some of the Force-wide themes and cases reviewed at the Panel meetings were as follows:
 - Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).
 - Police Perpetrated Domestic Abuse (PPDA).
 - Sexual Misconduct.
 - Abuse of power/position or inappropriate comments amongst colleagues.
 - Occupational Health involvement where officers have drink/drug issues and how TVP deal with these issues.
 - Stop and Search.
 - Right care, right person.
 - MARLENE- a system that populates complaint data automatically.
 - Vetting requirements for all staff.
 - Gross misconduct sanctions.
 - The Casey Review- police culture and standards of behaviour.
 - Op Vigilant- patrols during the night time economy to proactively prevent VAWG.
 - Op Reassure- to encourage an open and transparent attitude within TVP.
 - Analysing Key PSD Performance Data.
 - Victim Satisfaction.

Facial recognition.
BWV policy.



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Panel Focus - PSD Complaints & Misconduct Performance Reporting and Monitoring System

13. At each meeting, the Panel receive a copy of the PSD performance monitoring report presenting data covering complaints and misconduct matters. The data is divided into two sections, namely 'Complaint Information' and 'Conduct Information'. Previously the Panel changed the frequency of data presented to make it more pertinent. Members of the panel also continue to offer advice and guidance to the PSD analytical team in their best use of available technology to improve performance reporting and data visualisation.

Matters of concern

14. Matters of concern and issues raised or noted by members during the year included:

- Concern for public confidence if there are a large volume of complaints about a single officer.
- How TVP deal with suspects who have mental health issues.
- Impartiality of PSD dealing with PPDA matters.
- Code of Ethics and culture within TVP.
- Gender of Federation Representatives in sensitive cases.
- Victim contact and requirements being fulfilled.
- How TVP deal with collisions between emergency services, when both are responding to incidents on blue lights.
- The backlog of digital forensic jobs and whether certain matters can be prioritised, noting the impact this has to both case progression and returning valuable items like mobile phones to victims.
- Caseloads being given to larger geographical areas when the Force changes from having 11 Local Policing Areas (LPAs) to 5 Local Command Units (LCUs), and the necessity to ensure standards are maintained.
- Officers not being encouraged to attend all burglaries.
- Data collection/storage within business intelligence and evidential/intelligence requirements.
- Staff wellbeing.
- Risk identified is the frequent disruption of staff turnover and general retention. This leads to backlogs and training demands / lack of specialist experience in PSD creating an ongoing risk to efficiency and effectiveness.

All of these concerns and issues were satisfactorily considered and explained either at the relevant meetings or 'action items' were tabled to address the concerns at future meetings, which are referenced below.



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Panel Focus - Special Measures/Actions

15. As part of the meetings, all attendees are able to raise actions and the panel may make recommendations. Examples of actions that have been raised in 2023 are as follows.

- TVP to confirm whose portfolio DBS checks sits under and report back to the Panel.
- For consideration to be given on the use of MS Teams for meetings outside of the main PESP Meetings.
- OPCC to discuss with TVP the potential of publishing PESP minutes with appropriate redactions for public interest and transparency.
- For the Panel to discuss what, how and why the notes from meetings should be published, with this being fed back to the OPCC.
- For TVP to establish whether links can be made between recruitment and Op Reassure. For example, whether there were links between young, inexperienced officers from the uplift programme that were leading to less than completely professional responses to delivery of Op Reassure and potentially to a lack of public confidence.
- For TVP to discover whether there is a plan for tracking actions identified at Force Performance and Service Improvement Review (SIR) meetings.
- For the Panel to make a recommendation to TVP that the governance around facial recognition needs to be considered, agreed and embedded at the earliest opportunity.
- For TVP to look at the impact on mental health statistics during Covid and lockdown and check whether online training relating to mental health is mandatory.
- For consideration to be given on good news stories being circulated to members of the public to assist in securing trust and confidence.

Panel Focus – policies and practices concerning professional standards, integrity and ethics issues

16. During the year the Panel requested presentations, reports and 'question and answer' sessions in the form of 'deep dive' exercises that provided the opportunity for members to hold to account the force on its performance, and reflect on professional standards, integrity and ethical issues and how well they are reflected in operational policing policies and practices.

17. Presentations received covered the following topics:

- PSD Performance.
- VAWG.
- Op Reassure.
- Digital Forensic Services.
- Facial Recognition.
- Impact of Mental Health incidents on Resourcing.
- Response to Casey Review.



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18. As part of their scrutiny of the Force, Panel members have also attended the below meetings and written reports to be passed to the rest of the Panel for potential discussion and any necessary follow up actions / recommendations for TVP / PSD, aligned to the terms of reference for the PESP:

- 9 January - VAWG board.
- 18 January - Tasking Meeting.
- 8 February - Operational Force Performance.
- 8 February - Organisational Force Performance.
- 8 February - VAWG Silver.
- 23 February - SIR- Repeat Demand.
- 28 February - VAWG Silver.
- 1 March – Tasking.
- 7 March - VAWG Board.
- 7 March - Ethics and Integrity Board.
- 25 April - PSD Tasking.
- 27 April – Operational Force Performance.
- 27 April – Organisational Force Performance.
- 2 May – VAWG Conference.
- 24 May – SIR.
- 24 May – PSD Tasking.
- 13 June – Ethics and Integrity Board.
- 19 June – VAWG Governance Board.
- 5 July – PSD Performance and Tasking Meeting.
- 13 July – SIR- Front line supervision.
- 20 July – Force Briefing on Misconduct Process and Upcoming Cases of Local/National Significance.
- 26 July – Operational Force Performance.
- 26 July – Organisational Force Performance.
- 15 August – Force Performance Group- Operational.
- 16 August – PSD Tasking.
- 22 August – SIR- Neighbourhood Crime.
- 5 September – VAWG Strategic Board.
- 5 September – Ethics and Integrity Board.
- 18 September – Force Performance Group.
- 19 October – Operational Force Performance.
- 19 October – Force Performance Group.
- 8 November – Tasking Meeting.
- 8 November – Governance Meeting.
- 17 November – Force Performance- Operational.
- 30 November – SIR- Child Exploitation.
- 5 December – VAWG Strategic Board.



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- 5 December – Ethics and Integrity Board.
- 14 December – SIR- Welfare and Wellbeing.
- 18 December – Force Performance Group- Operational.
- 20 December – Tasking Meeting.

It was highlighted that Panel members are only in attendance at these meetings to observe and not contribute to the meeting. It was to be clarified what Panel members can and cannot receive in terms of police documentation. However, members of PESP may make informal contributions if they deem it of assistance and appropriate.

Positive Feedback

19. Whilst the PESP challenge the Chief Constable and PCC by providing constructive feedback and scrutiny, they also provide positive feedback where they believe that the Force are doing something in an exemplary fashion. Some positive feedback that the Panel provided during 2023 meetings is as follows.

- The Panel applauded the 40% decrease in time taken to deal with complaints.
- PSD reports now contain more clarity so that Panel members can see the decisions made.
- It was noted that PSD timelines are good, considering the volume and complexity of complaints being received.
- The Panel highlighted that they recognise the sterling work being done by PSD.
- After the digital forensics presentation, the Panel said that TVP should feel confident in how the project was being progressed.

Other Panel Business – General

20. The OPCC confirmed that they would be conducting a scrutiny review, which would involve discussion with the Panel and other scrutiny groups, with recommendations being made by an independent facilitator.

21. The OPCC also advised that they would be recruiting a Trust and Confidence Support Officer to support all the joint Panels within Thames Valley. This role has been recruited and is due to commence on 1 March 2024.

22. TVP confirmed that 3 members of staff have been recruited by PSD at a DS and DC level to provide PSD with the support required in dealing with DA matters. Training will also be provided to staff as appropriate.

23. It was confirmed that DCC Ben Snuggs would be joining TVP on 6 April 2023 as Deputy Chief Constable who is the Force representative along with D/Chief/Supt Ailsa Kent from PSD.



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24. PSD confirmed that DCI John Batty would be transferring to another department within TVP and that his replacement would be DCI Aiden Donohoe.

25. Former Panel member John Barlow's last meeting was on 9 August 2023 and both TVP and the OPCC would like to thank him for his many years of service.

Conclusions

- i) The Panel's purpose is to monitor and, where necessary, challenge the way complaints against TVP police officers and staff are handled by the Force, and how the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements and outcomes are overseen by the Chief Constable and PCC. In addition, the work of the Panel includes the review and challenge of associated ethics and professional standards issues.
- ii) Constructive challenges over the past twelve months on a wide range of topics have given the Panel a greater insight to the types of complaints and conduct issues faced by the Force and how they are addressed and responded to. It remains of the utmost importance that the public can have complete trust and confidence in the integrity, professionalism and service of their local police.
- iii) In receiving this insight, however, the Panel continues to appreciate the various external challenges faced by the Force, and the instrumental role played by the PSD. The role of PSD entails ensuring complaints are handled and investigated in a consistent, transparent and fair manner, and identifying police officers and staff who do not reflect the values, ethics and professional standards expected by Thames Valley Police and the communities it serves. Where appropriate, they are held to account for their shortcomings in accordance with law and disciplinary regulations. The Panel also recognised the importance of 'best practice' and the way PSD seeks this out and implements it across the Force.
- iv) The Panel continues to feel that the positive relationship and degree of trust that has developed with the Chief Constable, the PCC and senior staff has enabled the members to contribute constructively and objectively to Force performance in two main ways. Firstly, the ongoing monitoring of the adequacy and effectiveness of the arrangements for handling complaints, together with the testing of operational policies and practices and from an external, independent, professional standards, integrity and ethics viewpoint.

Positive Impact Statement

The panel has struggled with decreasing numbers, resulting in an additional workload for the remaining members. Despite this, they have attended all requested meetings and have delivered as per their terms of reference. Whilst sometimes critical of TVP, that criticism has been well received and has often resulted in beneficial changes being made. Further



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to this, the panel have not been shy in praising TVP where praise is due. Panel members have a broad belief that they are doing a good job of representing the public and holding TVP to account.

Assurance Statement

In summary, based on the information and knowledge that the Panel have gathered collectively or know about individually, the Panel can provide an assurance to the PCC and Chief Constable that the complaints handling and management arrangements in place within Thames Valley Police are operating satisfactorily with an improved efficiency, and effectively within the limits of the resources at their disposal.

Panel members:

Mark Harris (Chair)

Michael O'Connell (Vice Chair)

Umar Butt

Joanna Patil

Verity Murrucane

Steve Buckeridge

Professional and Ethical Standards Panel

Date 23.02.24

Signed by Mark Harris

Chair



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Appendix A

PROFESSIONAL & ETHICAL STANDARDS PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose

Policing in this country is by consent of the public. Police integrity is critical if the public are to trust the police to use their powers wisely and fairly.

The Professional & Ethical Standards Panel (the Panel) has been jointly commissioned by the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). The purpose of the panel is to provide a transparent forum that encourages constructive challenge over the way complaints against police officers and staff and professional and ethical standards issues are handled by Thames Valley Police and overseen by the Chief Constable and the PCC.

This will help to ensure that Thames Valley Police has clear ethical standards and achieves the highest levels of integrity and service delivery.

Terms of Reference

1. To regularly review a selection of complaints files so that the panel can satisfy itself that the Force's working policies and procedures for handling and resolving complaints made against police officers and staff comply with current legislation, regulation and statutory guidance.
2. To use performance data regarding complaints to ensure that the Force has an effective complaints reporting and monitoring system in place and is identifying and learning from any recurring patterns or themes.
3. To review the progress of live complaint cases or misconduct investigations, including appeals, which cause or are likely to cause particular community concern.
4. In undertaking terms (1) to (3), to continually monitor the proportionality and consistency of decision making, and raise any concern with respect to the occurrence of, or potential for, apparent bias or discrimination against minority groups as appropriate.
5. To review areas relating to professional and ethical standards and to make appropriate recommendations.
6. To consider specific matters referred to the Panel by either the Chief Constable or the PCC and to make recommendations.
7. To report, on an annual basis, the summary findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Panel to the Chief Constable and the PCC.
8. To consider within one month any allegation of misconduct or proposal for dismissal made against the Chief Executive and/or the Chief Finance Officer of the Office of the PCC, and recommend to the PCC whether it should be further investigated or progressed.
9. At all times, to maintain confidentiality with respect to the matters and information to which the panel have access.



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August 2020

PCC options			
	Model 1*	Model 2*	Model 3*
Receiving & making initial contact with complainant	POLICE	PCC	PCC
Handling complaints outside of Schedule 3 and recording complaints	POLICE	PCC	PCC
Keeping complainants and interested parties update and informed of outcome.	POLICE	POLICE	PCC
Investigating complaints	POLICE	POLICE	POLICE
Complaint Reviews	PCC	PCC	PCC

**LPB never becomes AA for the complaint under any of these models*