

Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

Title: Topical Issues

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BACKGROUND

The Panel is provided with policing and crime news which the Scrutiny Officer of the Panel has horizon scanned to provide Panel Members with up-to-date information on topical issues.

Members of the Panel can ask questions of the Police and Crime Commissioner based on the information contained in these media articles.

Thames Valley Police received nearly 1 million contacts from the public, attended 170,000 incidents and made 31,000 arrests, in a single year
<https://www.bucksherald.co.uk/news/people/thames-valley-police-received-nearly-1-million-contacts-from-the-public-attended-170000-incidents-and-made-31000-arrests-in-a-single-year-4149651>

New statistics show Thames Valley Police received nearly one million contacts from the public, attended 170,000 incidents, and made 31,000 arrests, in a single year – with officers driving more than 13 million miles in the process.

The statistics based on the last financial year, from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, have been released as part of an ongoing commitment to inform the public of the work of TVP.

This period saw one of the largest policing operations in TVP's history with the committal service of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in Windsor. Officers also policed Reading Festival, Royal Ascot, Henley Regatta, and are proud to have policed four of the UEFA Women's EURO 2022 matches at Stadium MK.

Last year, police officers made 30,903 arrests in relation to a range of crimes, attended over 8,000 road traffic collisions, found 5,735 missing people, and sadly attended 1,700 tragic sudden deaths, which involved supporting families at the most difficult time.

Officers are completely committed to tackling domestic violence, with 30% of all arrests made being related to domestic violence. Extensive focus on domestic abuse led to a 27% increase in formal action for domestic abuse cases (3,138 to 3,987).

The Force also saw a 52% increase in charges for sexual offences (not including rape) and a 36% increase in stalking and harassment charges. Last year also saw a slight drop in charges brought in rape cases (from 126 to 121).

However, with close monitoring, and with a new structure in place to scrutinise investigations into rape and sexual offences, TVP say they are confident of improved outcomes for victims.

In April 2022, the force launched its strategy to tackle violence against women and girls, focused on dealing with perpetrators and working with partners to identify sexual and violent offending at the earliest opportunity. We also remain fully committed to targeting those who offend and display predatory behaviour in the night-time economy.

Tackling serious violence and knife crime continues to be a priority.

Through proactive work, TVP saw a 42% decrease in homicide cases from the previous year and arrested 841 people for crimes where a knife is involved, which is a two per cent rise.

TVP launched Operation Deter in Milton Keynes, which has also now been rolled out to Aylesbury, Slough, and Reading. Under this initiative, individuals arrested over the age of 18 for a knife-related offence will, wherever possible, be charged and remanded immediately.

If the individual is under 18, they will be visited by the Youth Offending Team and a plan is drawn up for intervention and rapid commencement of the Youth Justice Process.

Additionally, TVP supported the Knife Angel being hosted in Milton Keynes and Slough, where a commitment was made by us and our partners to stand together on tackling serious violence.

In the past 12 months, officers began using a new application developed by the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit to target violence hotspot areas.

So far, 10,000 patrols were made to reduce crime and tackle those carrying knives.

The Serious and Organised Crime Unit arrested 628 offenders involved in organised crime and seized and confiscated 34 firearms. In addition, the team secured 107 convictions amounting to more than 503 years in prison and safeguarded 149 adults and children believed to be at risk from these criminal enterprises.

On the roads, officers from our Roads Policing and response teams attended over 8,700 road traffic collisions, with 2,144 arrests for drink driving, 1,305 people arrested for driving while using a mobile phone, 1,610 people arrested for not wearing a seatbelt, and over

166,000 people were caught speeding through speed cameras and through officer detected speeding.

As these numbers show, TVP play a vital role in protecting Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Officers and staff work with pride and professionalism and strive to do their best for our communities every day.

Action plan to crack down on anti-social behaviour

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/action-plan-to-crack-down-on-anti-social-behaviour>

Perpetrators of anti-social behaviour will face swift and visible justice, increased fines and enhanced drug testing as part of a new crackdown launched by the Prime Minister.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan will make sure this issue is treated with the urgency it deserves, establish a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of anti-social behaviour, and give the police and local authorities the tools they need to tackle the problem.

Under the plan, 16 areas in England and Wales will be funded to support either new 'hotspot' police and enforcement patrols in areas with the highest rates of anti-social behaviour, or trial a new 'Immediate Justice' scheme to deliver swift and visible punishments. A select few areas will trial both interventions, and following these initial trailblazers, both schemes will be rolled out across England and Wales from 2024.

Hotspot trailblazer areas will see an increase in police presence alongside other uniformed authority figures, such as wardens, in problem areas for anti-social behaviour, including public transport, high streets or parks. The increased presence will help deter anti-social behaviour, step up enforcement action against offenders, make sure crimes are punished more quickly and drive deterrence efforts, helping to stop anti-social behaviour spiralling into more serious criminality.

Under the new Immediate Justice scheme, those found committing anti-social behaviour will be made to repair the damage they inflicted on victims and communities, with an ambition for them to start work as soon as 48 hours after their offence so victims know anti-social behaviour is treated seriously and with urgency.

Offenders, could be made to pick up litter, remove graffiti and wash police cars as punishment for their actions, and victims of anti-social behaviour from the local community will be given a say in offenders' punishments to ensure justice is visible and fits the crime. The trailblazers will be launched as soon as possible and follow research that shows anti-social behaviour is the main reason people do not feel safe in their local area.

Under the zero-tolerance approach, Nitrous oxide or "laughing gas" will also be banned to send a clear message to intimidating gangs, that hang around high streets and children's parks and litter them with empty canisters, they will not get away with this behaviour. The drug is now the third most used among 16 to 24-year-olds in England and both the police and public have repeatedly reported links between use of the drug and nuisance or anti-social behaviour.

Police will also be given new powers to crack down on illegal drug use, often a catalyst for other crimes, including expanding powers for drug testing on arrest so more suspected criminals can be tested, and more drugs tested for, including ecstasy and methamphetamine. Currently, only suspected criminals who have committed certain offences can be tested in police detention without additional requirements, but we will

expand the range of trigger offences to include crimes linked to violence against women and girls, serious violence and anti-social behaviour.

A new reporting tool will also be developed over the next 12 months to act as a digital one-stop shop where people can quickly and easily report incidents of anti-social behaviour when these occur. The tool will help address problems people have faced when trying to report these sorts of crimes because of a lack of clarity around how to raise an issue or who to speak to, or a lack of confidence that these crimes will be dealt with seriously.

As well as being able to report any type of anti-social behaviour, people will have access through the tool to advice and guidance on what to do next in their cases and receive updates on what action is being taken by local police and councils following a report being logged. As well as giving the public confidence that action is being taken, the tool will help support local agencies to share information on perpetrators within their local area more effectively, so they can more quickly identify repeat offenders and take the necessary action to prevent future crimes from happening in the first place

Other measures include:

- Increasing the punishment for those who graffiti, litter or fly tip with fines of up to £500 and £1,000– council league tables will be published for fly tipping, and we will work with the Office for Local Government to increase transparency and improve accountability on anti-social behaviour outcomes
- Giving landlords and housing associations more powers to evict unruly tenants who ruin their neighbours' lives through persistent noise or by being drunk and disorderly
- Reopening empty shops by giving councils new powers to quickly take control and sell off the rental rights for empty buildings
- An anti-social behaviour Taskforce jointly led by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up will bring together national and local partners, with a sole focus of addressing anti-social behaviour and restoring pride in place in communities. This will bring together Police and Crime Commissioners, police and local partners and agencies
- An extra one million hours of youth services in areas with the highest rates of anti-social behaviour to put people on the right track and prevent them from offending in the first place
- Tackling the awful practice of 'cuckooing' or home invasion by engaging with stakeholders on the scope of a potential new criminal offence
- Parks and green spaces will also be restored with up to £5 million to make them safer with new CCTV and repairing equipment and playgrounds, and to plant more trees and flowers

Nobody should be criminalised simply for having nowhere to live which is why government committed to repealing the antiquated Vagrancy Act, passed in 1824. This comes alongside last year's unprecedented £2 billion commitment over three years to accelerate efforts to end rough sleeping for good.

It will be made an offence for criminal gangs to organise begging networks for extra cash, which is often used to facilitate illegal activities. To ensure police and local councils can address activity which is intimidating or causes the public distress, they will have the tools to direct people causing nuisance on the street, including obstructing shop doorways and begging by cash points, towards the support they need, such as accommodation, mental

health or substance misuse services. The debris and paraphernalia which causes blight will then be cleared.

The government has also announced that an additional 43 youth centres are to benefit from the next £90 million investment from the Youth Investment Fund, distributed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. As a result, 45,000 more young people a year will have access to state-of-the-art facilities and regular, out-of-school activities, as part of an overall £300 million to be distributed through 2025. From Lincolnshire to Liverpool, Peterborough to Portsmouth, the government's National Youth Guarantee will support the wellbeing of young people in some of the country's most underserved areas, giving them opportunities to develop vital skills for life, and empowering them to be active members of their community.

The new cross-government action plan builds on the government's focus to deliver common sense policing, backed by an unprecedented recruitment drive of 20,000 additional officers by the end of March, which we are on track to achieve. It works in tandem with our priorities to drive down murder rates, tackle serious violence – including against women and girls – and solve and prevent more burglaries.

The government has also funded 216 projects via rounds one and two of the Levelling Up Fund, totally £3.8 billion, which is driving the regeneration of town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport and investing cultural and heritage assets.

Thames Valley Police to get more neighbourhood officers

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-65267101.amp>

The number of neighbourhood police officers across Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire is set to increase. Thames Valley Police has confirmed it will allocate 150 additional officers, doubling the size of its neighbourhood policing teams, over the next year.

The force said there would be more visible patrols, with officers focusing on crime hotspots.

Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Barber said he wanted to deliver "a more proactive and responsive service".

Mr Barber said crimes such as thefts, burglaries, shoplifting and those associated with anti-social behaviour could "blight the lives of those affected".

Mr Barber said the neighbourhood officers would focus their efforts where they were most likely to reduce crime. The new strategy will also include an investment in technology to improve and expand channels for reporting crimes and incidents, he said.

Further details are yet to be revealed, but the police said the strategy marked the start of a shift towards growing the role of community policing within the force.

The news comes as in 2019 the government announced a police uplift programme to recruit new officers across the country.

Thames Valley Police said increases over the past few years would bring the overall number of officers within the force to more than 5,000.

Police Target to increase Police by 20,000 reached

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/65377091>

The government has reached its target to recruit 20,000 more police officers in England and Wales. It has employed 20,951 more officers since 2019 so the total is now 149,572.

But there are concerns that the rise hasn't kept pace with the increase in population since 2010 and that many experienced officers have left. Many of the new officers are replacing the approximately 20,000 who left between 2010 and 2019.

The new headcount of 149,572 officers in England and Wales (including part-time employees) is higher than the previous record of 146,030 in 2010.

It has been reached after a big rise in the first three months of 2023 - 4,000 extra officers - by far the biggest quarterly jump since the government's police uplift programme started.

While the number of police officers is a few thousand higher than 2010 levels, the population has grown - by about 7% - since then.

If the number of officers in England and Wales had risen in line with the population since 2010, there would need to be thousands more officers.

In the year to March 2022, the number of full-time police officers leaving the force reached a 20-year high of 8,117. Half of those leaving retired - police officers can claim their pensions in their 50s. However, an increasing proportion resigned - about 40% in 2021-22, compared with a third the year before.

About 9% of newly recruited officers leave during their two-year probation periods, a report by the Public Accounts Committee, which examines government projects, found last year.

There are now fewer senior full-time police officers than in 2010. The number of inspectors is down 14% to 6,245. The number of superintendents and sergeants has also fallen.

Currently, a third of all police officers in England and Wales have fewer than five years' experience where the length of service is known. This is more than double the number six years ago.

Rise in Private Police Forces

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11894535/How-private-police-forces-hired-patrol-High-Streets.html>

Police strip-searched children as young as eight

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65081765>

Children as young as eight are being strip-searched by the police, according to a report showing "deeply concerning" and "widespread" failures. It also found some children were strip-searched in the back of police vans, schools and fast-food outlets.

The report by Children's Commissioner Dame Rachel de Souza showed 2,847 children were strip-searched in England and Wales from 2018 to mid-2022. The National Police Chiefs' Council will "carefully consider" the findings.

The report found black children were up to six times more likely to be searched than the overall child population. More than half (52%) of the searches took place without an appropriate adult confirmed to be present - a legal requirement, except when there is serious risk to a child's life or welfare.

And the data shows 51% of the searches led to no further action.

Dame Rachel requested data in the wake of the Child Q scandal, which came to light in March 2022.

Some 39 of 43 forces responded. The figures cover searches under stop-and-search powers over four-and-a-half years.

It was identified that searches at 27 forces raised concerns about children's safeguarding or indicated a breach of the statutory code of practice. It has asked for these to be referred to the police watchdog.

Of the nearly 3,000 searches, almost a quarter (24%) took place on children aged 10-15. The youngest was eight years old.

The vast majority were boys (95%), and black boys accounted for more than a third (37%) of strip-searches.

Home Secretary praises the work of Thames Valley's Rural Crime Taskforce

Thames Valley Police's Rural Crime Taskforce have recovered stolen goods worth more than £1.5m and their proactive approach has seen a significant impact in reducing hare coursing offences. Inspector Hutchings, who leads the team, explained the close working relation that has been developed with farmers and organisations such as the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Matthew Barber said: "It was great to showcase some of the work being done by Thames Valley Police to protect our rural communities. The Home Secretary heard from farmers and the NFU about the challenges that theft of machinery and tools present to those farming in Thames Valley. It also provided an opportunity to explain the work being done to improve forensic marking of machinery and equipment."

Greg Smith, Member of Parliament for Buckingham, has sponsored a Private Members Bill that will make the marking and registration of such machinery a legal requirement. The Equipment Theft (Prevention) Bill is currently making its way through Parliament, and the visit provided an opportunity to demonstrate to the Home Secretary some of the measures that can be put in place to safeguard machinery.

Police delays to fore as judge queries wait in court case

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23428573.police-delays-fore-judge-queries-wait-animal-porn-case/>

Delays with 'triaging' digital devices was blamed for the 16 month wait to get a case to court.

Last year, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary raised concerns about the provision of digital forensics in police forces around the country.

Inspectors found that, nationally, there were more than 25,000 devices such as phones or laptops waiting to be analysed by a digital forensics specialist.

Inspector of Constabulary commented that "Delays, lack of resources and lack of adequate training means some victims are being let down and officers are missing their chance to bring offenders to justice."

A report prepared last month for the Thames Valley's Police and Crime Panel – responsible for scrutinising the police and crime commissioner – about the force's cyber and digital priorities made no mention of backlogs in analysing digital devices.

Sexual offences in Thames Valley reach record high since 2007

<https://www.bracknellnews.co.uk/news/23491037.sexual-offences-thames-valley-reach-record-high-since-2007/>