

Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

Title: Topical Issues

Date: 15 September 2023

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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.

Staff retention a challenge for Thames Valley Police - senior officer

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-66288531>

Retaining personnel is among the biggest challenges for police forces, a senior Thames Valley Police officer has said. Supt Gavin Wong has been involved in the force's "action plan" to reflect the ethnic make-up of the population it serves.

A study released last year found black, Asian and ethnic minority groups had been underrepresented in the force.

Supt Wong currently heads the joint firearms unit for Thames Valley Police and Hampshire Constabulary.

Speaking on BBC Radio Berkshire, he admitted the police service could be a "lonely place" for someone joining from a black or ethnic minority background, adding: "I think its improved over the last 30 years.

"It's really important we have people that are representative of the community - you've got to increase trust and confidence.

"One way of doing that is seeing that visibly diverse workforce - that's reassuring for communities and helps us understand communities better."

He said policing faced challenges affecting the wider workforce: "The world is different now - 30 years ago, you had a defined career with the police.

"There is a danger for policing - people have more short term aspirations and want to move around in their careers.

"For us, we want to keep people here to get their experience and help develop other people."

The force, which serves Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, last year said it was developing an action plan to "enhance the experiences of all ethnically diverse colleagues".

The Thames Valley force serves about 2.4m people, of which 15.4% is made up of black, Asian and ethnic minority groups.

However, 6.5% of its officers are from such backgrounds and they have been consistently underrepresented.

Mandatory anti-racism training has been introduced to tackle racism, discrimination and bias following criticism of police forces across the country.

[Record number of police officers resigning in Thames Valley new figures show](#)

A record number of police officers voluntarily resigned from Thames Valley Police last year, new figures show.

Home Office figures show 212 full-time police officers voluntarily left Thames Valley Police in the year to March. It is up from 159 the year before and the highest number since records began in 2006. And, including officers who retired or were fired, a total of 308 left the force last year.

It meant Thames Valley Police had a leavers rate of nearly seven per cent, excluding transfers to other forces.

Across England and Wales, a record high 4,575 full-time officers voluntarily resigned from policing last year. It was a 33 per cent increase from 2021-22.

Overall, the leavers rate also reached its highest level at 6.6 per cent.

While the turnover rate was at its highest, it was met by a joiners rate of 11 per cent. It meant the headcount for all forces increased from 140,200 officers in March 2022 to 147,400 in March this year.

The Thames Valley force grew from 4,534 officers in 2022 to 4,957 in 2023.

A Home Office spokeswoman said a record number of officers across England and Wales had been delivered, and it had made its expectation that numbers are maintained, with robust plans in place, clear to forces.

She added: "Policing is a career like no other and our latest survey of new recruits showed 82 per cent respondents were satisfied with the job and 77 per cent plan to stay in policing for the rest of their careers."

Thames Valley: Taxpayers paying more than ever for policing

<https://www.bracknellnews.co.uk/news/23688199.thames-valley-taxpayers-paying-ever-policing/>

The Police Federation of England and Wales said police cannot reach 'proactive and consensual' standards without the Government ensuring sufficient resources are provided.

Home Office figures show £245 million in funding for Thames Valley Police will come from council tax bills in 2023-24 – a real-terms rise of £12.99 million (5 per cent) from the £232 million paid in 2022-23, and the highest figure since local, comparable records began in 2015-16.

In total, Thames Valley will receive £536 million next year – up from £527 million the year before. The Government will supply the additional £291 million.

Across England and Wales, total funding has risen in real terms from £15 billion last year to a record £15.4 billion in 2023-24. Of this, £10.1 billion will come from central government, while £5.3 billion will be provided through council tax.

The National Police Chiefs' Council said the recent increase in investment has enabled them to recruit an extra 20,000 police officers and tackle 'the most pressing concerns for our communities, such as burglary and serious violence'.

However, a spokesperson warned 'policing faces significant inflationary pressure due to the impact of increased costs of supplies and services'.

They added: "Continued investment will be needed to ensure that the core services that the public expect are maintained."

The Home Office said it is 'dedicated to giving the police the resources they need to tackle crime'.

Councils failing to tackle anti-social behaviour, watchdog says

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-66512729>

Councils are frequently failing to use their powers to tackle anti-social behaviour, a watchdog has found.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman cited cases including a victim being told a neighbour's 13-hour long party did not warrant action. The watchdog said it upheld three-quarters of the cases it had investigated in the past year and found fault in how the council had acted.

Councils said they took a "balanced and proportionate" approach to complaints.

A report published by the ombudsman highlighted issues including long delays responding to complaints, referring people to the police instead of taking action and failing to liaise properly with other agencies.

It said out of the 63 cases it had investigated in the last year - ranging from low-level issues such as dog-fouling and inconsiderate parking to more serious harassment and intimidation - 51 were upheld.

In one case a resident complained to the council about a neighbour's party with loud music which lasted more than 13 hours. Despite another party a few weeks later, he was told by the council that its policy would only consider taking action if he recorded six incidents within 25 days.

The ombudsman said the council's policy was too inflexible and recommended it was reviewed.

John, not his real name, told the BBC he had been experiencing escalating problems with his neighbours since last November, which he had repeatedly reported to his council in south-east London.

He said it started with relatively minor issues like smoking, drug-taking and loud music in the building, but had grown in severity to him and his wife witnessing violence and racist abuse.

On one occasion he said he was personally threatened by the neighbours for reporting them.

Despite providing evidence including footage, John said he felt like the issues had not been taken seriously enough by the council and he was frustrated by how slow they had been to take action.

After giving written warnings to the tenants, John said he was told the council had applied for a court order to repossess the property but he was then told this had not happened yet.

John said he also felt the council had tried to pass him on to the police, but they had said there was not enough evidence to convict.

He said he and his wife now felt so uncomfortable in their own home they stayed with family at weekends when they could.

Councils have a range of powers to tackle anti-social behaviour, including community protection notices for issues like noise and litter. Failure to comply with a notice to stop the behaviour is a criminal offence.

They can also apply to the courts for an injunction to stop individuals engaging in certain behaviour - and if they fail to do so the council can apply to issue a warrant for their arrest.

However, the ombudsman found councils were either not using these powers or did not fully understand them.

The Local Government Association, which represents councils, said anti-social behaviour could have "a devastating impact" and councils were committed to working with partners and communities to protect residents from offenders.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has pledged to crack down on anti-social behaviour, setting out an action plan earlier this year. It included increasing the use of hotspot policing, forcing people who vandalise public spaces to repair the damage they cause and extending powers to disperse groups to councils.

Anti-social behaviour hotspot in Thame transformed after council makeover

<https://www.bucksherald.co.uk/news/crime/anti-social-behaviour-hotspot-in-thame-transformed-after-council-makeover-4258600>

More than 150 face long waits for justice in Thames Valley

<https://www.bracknellnews.co.uk/news/23642384.150-face-long-waits-justice-thames-valley/>

A legal charity has condemned the delays in criminal justice as "unacceptable".

Criminal courts have faced mounting pressures in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, which saw trials put on hold during lockdowns. Figures from the Ministry of Justice show 172 criminal cases had been unresolved for two years or more in Thames Valley as of March 2023.

For comparison, 106 cases had been outstanding for two years or longer at the same point in 2022, while 11 had done so as of March 2019.

The most common type of offence involving a long wait was for violence against the person, which was responsible for 34 cases.

In Thames Valley, the median waiting time across unresolved cases was 178 days.

Nationally, 6,073 cases were facing two-year delays – a significant rise from 3,949 the year before, and nearly ten times the 626 as of March 2019.

In June, the House of Commons' Public Accounts Committee warned key court reforms – aimed at speeding up the time cases can be processed – had been delayed significantly.

It warned these setbacks were undermining public confidence in the justice system.

Thames and Chiltern lead prosecutor welcomes new national approach to prosecuting adult rape cases

<https://www.cps.gov.uk/thames-and-chiltern/news/thames-and-chiltern-lead-prosecutor-welcomes-new-national-approach>

A new national approach to prosecuting adult rape cases has been welcomed by the Crown Prosecution Service's lead prosecutor for Thames Valley, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

The Crown Prosecution Service's new operating model aims to drive up the number of rape cases taken to court and improve victim experiences by setting an improved and standardised approach to how adult rape cases are handled by CPS lawyers.

Among its commitments, the new model will see CPS prosecutors providing early advice to the police in rape and sexual assault cases within 21 days. This is to help build stronger cases by focusing investigations towards the behaviour of the suspect, their conduct and actions; to make decisions on third party material at the outset so that requests for personal data are limited; and to consider and overcome any assumptions or misconceptions about rape and how victims or perpetrators behave that may be present in a case.

The CPS locally has also been improving its support to victims of rape.

The CPS operating model will build on the work of the nine CPS Areas which have been working as part of Operation Soteria (a police and CPS programme to develop new operating models for the investigation and prosecution of rape in England and Wales), and the CPS and police's Joint National Action Plan initiated in January 2021.

2,000 police in England and Wales may face sack in vetting revamp

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jul/05/2000-police-in-england-and-wales-may-face-sack-in-vetting-revamp>

At least 2,000 police officers in England and Wales face losing their jobs under government plans to overhaul the misconduct system, Home Office sources have confirmed.

Ministers will make dismissing failing or disgraced officers easier after police chiefs including the Met commissioner, Sir Mark Rowley, said the present system was "bizarre and over-regulated".

At present, officers who fail to maintain their vetting status can continue to work, but under the proposals they will face automatic dismissal. The proposals could lead to misconduct panels being chaired by chief constables rather than independent legally qualified chairmen and women, whom police chiefs have accused of being too lenient. The system can lead to officers being sacked for serious misconduct only to be reinstated on appeal.

Power could be transferred to chief constables, enabling them to root out officers whose standards fall short or bring shame on the organisation, under changes the Home Office is expected to announce.

The home secretary, Suella Braverman, and the crime and policing minister, Chris Philp, are said to be working on the overhaul, which the Home Office is expected to announce in the coming weeks.

Police forces are trying to regain public trust after scandals including the murder of Sarah Everard by Wayne Couzens, a Metropolitan police officer, and the case of David Carrick, a firearms officer jailed this year for more than 80 sexual offences.

They are two cases among many to have cast doubt on the effectiveness of the misconduct system and exposed weakness in the vetting process.

In January, the Home Office ordered a review into the effectiveness of removing officers deemed unfit to serve after the “atrocious behaviour” of Carrick. He was jailed for a minimum of 30 years after admitting more than 80 sexual offences, including 48 rapes, during his two decades in the force.

Rowley, who took charge of the Met last September, has called for an overhaul of the disciplinary system and said Braverman had been “really helpful” after he identified weaknesses in police regulations.

Police to stop attending mental health incidents unless there is significant safety risk or crime

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2023/07/26/police-to-stop-attending-mental-health-incidents-unless-there-is-significant-safety-risk-or-crime/>

Police forces across England will, in future, stop attending mental health-related incidents unless there is a significant risk to safety or a crime being committed, and refer cases to health or social care services instead.

The plan, announced by the government, police leaders and NHS England, constitutes the start of a national rollout of a model – known as right care right person (RCRP) – pioneered by Humberside Constabulary in 2021.

Best practice body the College of Policing has said that RCRP led to a large reduction in the deployment of police resources to mental health or welfare incidents from January 2019 to October 2022 in that area.

The approach would involve police only attending mental health-related incidents:

- to investigate a crime that has occurred or is occurring; or
- to protect people, when there is a real and immediate risk to the life of a person, or of a person being subject to or at risk of serious harm.

The policy will be backed by a toolkit guiding police call handlers in being able to appropriately triage divert mental health calls to the correct service.

There is no set timeframe for its rollout, with the plan stating that police forces should determine this following engagement with health, social care and other relevant partners.

The RCRP threshold will apply to police attendance at all mental health-related incidents.

After having attended, officers would continue to fulfil their statutory power under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 (MHA) to remove a person – generally from a public place – to a place of safety, for a mental health assessment, if they appear to have a mental disorder, are in “immediate need of care or control” and detention appears necessary to protect them or others.

Local arrangements governing police attendance at cases under section 135 of the MHA will continue to apply, said the RCRP plan.

Section 135 empowers a magistrate to issue a warrant, on the application of an approved mental health professional (AMHP), enabling a police officer to remove a person with a mental disorder to a place of safety for assessment. The AMHP's application must show that there is reasonable cause to suspect that the person has been, or is being, ill-treated, neglected or kept "otherwise than under proper control", or is unable to care for themselves, in the premises in question.

However, while the two powers would continue to apply, the RCRP plan sets a target for officers to be able to hand over people removed to health services within one hour.

The Metropolitan Police has estimated that its officers spend, on average, 14.2 hours in A&E and 8.5 hours in health-based places of safety, waiting for people to be assessed after they have been detained under sections 135 or 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 (MHA).

Unveiling the plan today, the National Police Chiefs' Council estimated that the implementation of RCRP would save one million police officer hours a year.

However, the news has sparked concern among health and social care leaders, echoing warnings issued last month by the AMHP Leads Network when the Met announced its implementation of the policy.

The Local Government Association said RCRP was being rolled out too quickly. "Councils recognise that the police may not always be the most appropriate service to respond to a mental health crisis and so it is good that this is being clarified through this national agreement," said LGA community wellbeing board chair David Fothergill.

"However, we are concerned that this is being rolled out too quickly, with inadequate local engagement and partnership working meaning that other agencies risk being unable to pick up any increases in demand for their services."

He also raised concerns about social care's capacity to respond to mental health calls diverted by the police, adding: "Mental health services are funded via councils social care budgets which are already under considerable pressure. To deliver the best care possible for those experiencing a mental health crisis, alternative community services need to be fully funded across the country."

After the Met's announcement last month, the AMHP Leads Network said it was "concerned at the speed at which the Met is unilaterally intending to act" and that the experience from the areas that had rolled out RCRP was that there was a "risk of misinterpretation of the policy" due to "poor knowledge by call agents of the nuances of the law, agreements and duties".

Co-op warns rising crime could create 'no-go' areas for shops

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-66323140>

The Co-op has warned some communities could become "no-go" areas for shops due to soaring levels of retail crime. The convenience store operator said crime in its outlets had hit record levels, increasing by more than one third over the past year.

There were about 1,000 cases of crime, shoplifting and anti-social behaviour in its shops every day in the six months to June, the chain said. But it cited figures indicating police did not attend most retail crimes.

The Co-op said a Freedom of Information request had shown many police forces did not prioritise retail crime, with, on average, 71% of serious retail crime not responded to by police.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) said forces were doing "everything possible to tackle offenders and support retailers in reducing shoplifting and attacks on retail staff".

But the Co-op called for an "urgent change" from the police and "for all forces to target repeat and prolific offenders to reverse the existing environment in many cities where criminal gangs operate, exempt from consequences".

The Co-op figures show 175,000 instances of retail crime in the first six months of this year - a rise of 35% on the same time last year.

Earlier this year, data analysed by the BBC showed shoplifting offences had returned to pre-pandemic levels as the cost of living rose.

The figures showed that police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland recorded nearly 33,000 incidents of shoplifting in March - 30.9% more than March 2022.

In an effort to clamp down on such theft, some stores have been limiting the number of items on shelves, others fit the likes of steaks and cheese with security tags and replace coffee with dummy jars. The Co-op said it believed dummy packaging would only become a more "prevalent and familiar sight" in retailing.

The chain also uses interactive and remote monitored CCTV in store, issues body-worn cameras and communication headsets for store staff, and employs covert and non-covert guards.

There were stores in many big cities where "the viability of the stores is being put at risk because of the activities of criminal gangs".

The bill for security and the toll taken on staff who were afraid to come to work drove up the amount it cost to "operate safely" in those stores meaning they were not making any money.

Thames Valley Police records thousands of online fraud cases involving items advertised on social media

<https://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/crime/thames-valley-police-records-thousands-of-online-fraud-cases-involving-items-advertised-on-social-media-4266988>