

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 jobs going begging as force faces recruitment struggles

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/thames-valley-police-jobs-going-begging-as-force-faces-recruitment-struggles/ar-AA1h3uNd>

The cost of living crisis, job market saturation and the 'bad press' surrounding policing have all been blamed as factors behind recent struggles to recruit new officers at Thames Valley Police. The country's largest non-metropolitan force had one of the highest officer turnovers in England and Wales, according to a new report.

Officer recruitment is down 10 per cent from last year, according to an assessment from the Chief Constable's Management Team (CCMT), which was presented at the TVP and Crime Panel on September 15. Potential recruits have been attracted to other forces, particularly those which also now offer the Initial Police Learning and Development Programme, an entry route combining classroom and 'on the job' learning.

Thames Valley Police also lost 35 officers per month in 2022, 25 of which were resignations or transfers out, which the force labelled an 'avoidable' attrition/turnover rate. Other reasons the force cited for its sluggish intake of new officers include, job market saturation, the cost of living crisis and 'associated bad press around policing generally'.

TVP Chief Constable Jason Hogg highlighted some of the difficulties facing new recruits as he addressed 12 new police constables who started on Monday, September 18, after training at

Police Now's national academy. He said: "You are joining policing at a particularly challenging time, when public trust and confidence is lower than it has been for many years.

"Remember that every interaction you have with the public, however small, is a chance to change that." The number of candidates failing at vetting has also risen, meaning TVP's training courses are only running at 83 per cent capacity, compared to 90-10 per cent last year.

The assessment says this is due to police standards being revised after high-profile cases of police misconduct in London's Metropolitan Police. It reads: "CCMT are well sighted on the issues TVP are facing round retention of officers and staff within TVP.

"The recruitment labour market remains challenging and we are struggling to attract sufficient numbers and to retain these people, their skills and experience within the organisation. A lot of hard work has taken place over the last two to three years to achieve the Police Uplift Programme, the toll on the enabling departments should not be underestimated."

The Police Uplift Programme (PUP) was the Government's scheme to recruit an 'additional' 20,000 police officers in England and Wales between September 2019 and May 2023. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Home Secretary Suella Braverman hailed the programme a success after more than 20,000 officers were recruited between April 2020 and March 2023.

However, analysis suggests that policing cuts under the Conservatives in 2010 should also be taken into account. Under the PUP, TVP's total number of officers swelled to 5,000 – the largest in its history – as an additional 785 officers joined the force, exceeding the target of 609 officers.

TVP said PUP data also showed that it was 41st out of 43 forces for resignations alone and 38th out of 43 for overall police constable turnover including retirements/dismissals. The assessment adds: "The qualitative impact of this is a decrease in experienced officers within TVP to help us achieve our strategic aims and indicates that we are potentially not an employer of choice."

The starting salary for police officers joining TVP is £31,551, which rises to in excess of £49,044 after seven years of service. The force covers an area of over 2,200 square miles across Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, serving 2.34 million people.

Crime in England and Wales has fallen to its lowest level on record, data from the Office for National Statistics shows.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-67161967.amp>

Incidents of violent crime have dropped by 28% in the year to June 2023. The decline has been driven by a fall in criminal damage and fraud offences recorded by the police, ONS said.

A separate Crime Survey for England and Wales, which polls members of the public, suggests theft has dropped by 20% below pre-pandemic levels.

According to ONS, the number of recorded homicides fell to 602, a drop of 10% when compared to the 667 recorded the previous year. However, shoplifting offences recorded by the police have risen by 25%.

The British Retail Consortium (BRC) told the BBC that the levels of theft now cost retailers almost £1bn a year, while Dame Sharon White, the boss of John Lewis, said shoplifting had become an "epidemic" in the past year.

The Crime Survey, which interviews members of the public about their experiences, and is regarded as the best indicator of crime trends, suggests incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) are down 15% on pre-pandemic levels.

However, perceptions of ASB are at roughly the same level, with around a quarter of people saying it was problem in their area.

Police-recorded incidents of burglary were down 29% on the number recorded in the year to March 2020.

Other key findings from the ONS showed:

- Offences involving weapons had slightly risen compared to the previous year.
- Crimes involving firearms, excluding those recorded in Devon and Cornwall, rose by 13%, to a similar level seen before the pandemic.
- The biggest rise in offences was for imitation firearms, which went up 26% to 2,566 from 2,031 offences.
- In the year to June 2023, 2.10 million offences were recorded in total in the year to June, compared with 2.12 million in the previous 12 months.
- Knife possession offences jumped across England and Wales, rising to 28,211 in the year to June, while crime associated with knives recorded by police rose 3% in the last year. This remains 7% below the pre-pandemic level.

The ONS data showed the Met Police, West Midlands Police and Greater Manchester force recorded the highest levels of knife crime in the UK.

Modern slavery helpline calls surge from care staff

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67151672>

A national helpline for victims of modern slavery is reporting a steep rise in calls from overseas workers who came to the UK to help plug staffing gaps in the care sector.

Many said they had paid huge sums to the people who brought them over after visa rules changed last year. Unseen UK said more than 700 care staff used its helpline in 2022.

In 2021 its helpline was contacted about 15 cases of modern slavery in the care sector, involving 63 potential victims. By 2022 there were 106 cases, involving 708 potential victims. In 2023 the figures have continued to rise.

Nearly one in five potential modern-slavery victims identified by the charity in 2022 worked in the care sector.

The report, published says some workers are being charged thousands of pounds for travel to the UK and sponsorship certificates. The cost of sponsorship is a few hundred pounds, which is met by most care companies - but the charity says a few unscrupulous employers and agents are charging workers as much as £25,000, adding interest and deducting the debt from their wages.

"It becomes evident that workers are in a cycle where they will never be able to pay off the debt," says the report.

In February 2022, the government made care work a "shortage" occupation, allowing more people to be recruited from abroad to work in care homes or home care, aiming to tackle a record 164,000 social-care vacancies in England in 2021/22.

Vacancies have since fallen slightly, largely as a result of nearly 70,000 people arriving in the UK to work in care, according to Skills for Care.

Care providers have told BBC News some overseas staff are emailing them or arriving at their offices asking if they can take them on because the company that brought them to the UK is either giving them no work or not enough for them to survive.

The government says overseas care workers in the UK should be paid at least the required minimum salary and has published a recruitment code of practice.

Thames Valley Police make 98 arrests during week of drug busts targeting county lines

<https://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/crime/thames-valley-police-make-98-arrests-during-week-of-drug-busts-targeting-county-lines-4379257>

Thames Valley Police has released the results from its week of action disrupting county line drug dealing.

Between 9 to 15 October, police officers arrested 98 people, they searched homes in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and Buckinghamshire.

During County Lines Intensification Week, officers visited homes where they suspected vulnerable people were being exploited for crime operations.

Thames Valley Police obtained warrants to raid homes all across the policing area to break up Organised Crime Group (OCG) strongholds.

County lines refer to drug dealing where gangs use phones to arrange the movement of contraband from big cities into rural areas.

Police intelligence suggests that OCGs often use children and vulnerable people who may have addiction or mental health issues, to distribute their drugs.

Thames Valley Police says this often involves vulnerable victims being groomed, coerced, and intimidated.

Out of the 90 arrests, 40 people were charged. Thames Valley Police identified 30 people involved in drug crime that needed safeguarding, and believes it has identified 40 homes that were being run by OCGs.

Also police officers took £67,000 and 121 mobile phones that they believe were linked to criminal activity. Thames Valley Police says new information obtained during the raids will help its continued operations.

The police force has also provided residents with signs and symptoms which could help identify a young person:

- Travelling alone, particularly in school hours, late at night or frequently
- Looking lost or in unfamiliar surroundings
- Anxious, frightened, angry or displaying other behaviours that make you worried about them
- In possession of more than one phone
- Carrying lots of cash

Rise in vehicle thefts says Thames Valley Police figures

<https://www.heraldseries.co.uk/news/23872299.rise-vehicle-thefts-says-thames-valley-police-figures/>

More people had a car stolen in the Thames Valley area this year than a year ago, new figures show. A motoring group has called the rise in vehicle crimes "worrying for everyone".

New figures from the Home Office show Thames Valley Police recorded 4,018 crimes of 'theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle' in the year to June, up 23 per cent from 3,255 thefts the year before. This was also a rise from the same period five years ago when 2,799 such crimes were registered in the area.

The AA said the jump in car thefts is a cause for concern. Gus Park, managing director for AA insurance services, said: "These figures are in danger of getting out of control, which if left to spiral further will have big cost implications in terms of the impact to wider society, let alone the price policyholders pay.

"We urge police chiefs and crime commissioners across the country to create an action plan to crack the case."

Mr Park further suggested drivers should avoid "giving miscreants an easy win", advising them to use steering wheel locks and parking in a garage when possible.

Across England and Wales, there were 132,000 vehicle thefts in the year to June, up 13 per cent from 116,000 the year before.

The charge rate remains low for car thefts with 2 per cent of crimes in Thames Valley resulting in a charge in the past year.

Meanwhile, 75 per cent of cases were closed without the force identifying a suspect.

Superintendent Matthew Moscrop, part of the National Police Chiefs' Council team on vehicle theft, said police chiefs are working to clamp down on the sale of technology used to break into vehicles and to close routes for selling them once they are stolen.

He said: "Intelligence suggests a large proportion of vehicle theft can be attributed to organised crime groups and there have been a number of successful operations around the country which have led to the discovery of not only stolen vehicles but also ammunition and drugs."

"Tackling vehicle crime needs approaching from several different angles, and we can only achieve this through working closely with our partners in both Government and industry," he added.

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However perceptions of ASB are at roughly the same level, with around a quarter of people saying it was problem in their area.

Police-recorded incidents of burglary were down 29% on the number recorded in the year to March 2020.

In August, Home Secretary Suella Braverman said police must investigate every theft and pursue "every reasonable line of inquiry", after data showed just 4.4% of all theft offences resulted in someone being charged.

Other key findings from the ONS showed:

Offences involving weapons had slightly risen compared to the previous year.

Crimes involving firearms, excluding those recorded in Devon and Cornwall, rose by 13%, to a similar level seen before the pandemic.

The biggest rise in offences was for imitation firearms, which went up 26% to 2,566 from 2,031 offences.

In the year to June 2023, 2.10 million offences were recorded in total in the year to June, compared with 2.12 million in the previous 12 months.

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The ONS data showed the Met Police, West Midlands Police and Greater Manchester force recorded the highest levels of knife crime in the UK.

"This could suggest that improvements to recording practices are beginning to have less impact on trends in these offences," the ONS said.

Billy Gazard of the ONS said: "Our latest data shows crime continues to fall and is down 10% compared with 12 months ago.

"This decline in crimes against people and households has been driven by falls in criminal damage and fraud offences.

"While falls in criminal damage and fraud reported to Action Fraud (the public-facing reporting body) were also reflected in police-recorded crime, police figures also showed increases in crimes against businesses, such as shoplifti

Rise In Shoplifting Crimes Recorded in Thames Valley

<https://www.bracknellnews.co.uk/news/23869910.shoplifting-crimes-recorded-thames-valley/>

There was a rise in the number of shoplifting crimes recorded in Thames Valley last year, new figures show. It comes as the Association of Convenience Stores said the new data only represents "a fraction" of the "unprecedented" level of theft retailers are facing.

Office for National Statistics figures show about 12,200 shoplifting offences were recorded by Thames Valley Police in the year to June – up from 10,000 in 2022.

It follows trends across England and Wales where reports of shoplifting increased 25%, from 293,000 offences in 2021-22 to 365,200 last year.

However, it was below the 368,700 shoplifting crimes recorded in 2019, before the pandemic.

James Lowman, Association of Convenience Stores chief executive, said: "Convenience retailers are facing unprecedented levels of theft against their businesses at the hands of prolific offenders who are targeting stores repeatedly without fear of reproach."

He added: "These incidents take a huge toll on retailers and their colleagues, so it's crucial that every incident reported to the police gets investigated."

He said the ONS figures show a rise in reported shoplifting to police, but only represent "a fraction" of what is happening.

"The vast majority of theft still goes unreported, as retailers are frustrated at the lack of response and follow up activity from their local police forces," he added.

Overall theft offences have increased 10% from the previous year, with 1.7 million crimes recorded in the year to June.

The ONS said this rise was predominantly the result of increases in theft offences against businesses, such as shoplifting.

In Thames Valley, police recorded about 60,300 theft offences in 2022-23. It was a rise from 52,600 the year before.

Paddy Lillis, Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers general secretary, added: "Shoplifting is not a victimless crime, theft from shops has long been a major flashpoint for violence and abuse against shopworkers."

He said: "Having to deal with repeated and persistent shoplifters can cause issues beyond the theft itself like anxiety, fear and in some cases physical harm to retail workers."

The overall number of crimes recorded by police in England and Wales in the year to June 2023 stood at 6.7 million, compared with 6.5 million in the previous 12 months.

The latest increase across has mainly been driven by the increase in shoplifting, together with a jump in fraud offences against businesses – more of which is being reported due to action by industry bodies, the ONS added.

Thames Valley Police recorded 183,700 total crimes in the year to June – up from 177,100 in 2021-22.

Year-long waits for justice in fraud cases in Thames Valley

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23832173.year-long-waits-justice-fraud-cases-thames-valley/>

Potential victims of serious fraud are waiting more than a year for cases to be concluded in Thames Valley, figures show.

The Law Society has said the complexity of fraud cases combined with backlogs across the legal system could be behind the long waits. Figures from the Ministry of Justice show the median wait for 70 outstanding fraud cases in Thames Valley was 61 weeks.

Across England, the median waiting time for outstanding cases is 44 weeks – the longest of any major crime category.

In addition, 312 cases have been outstanding for two years or more – including 24 in Thames Valley. In 2019, there were just 68 such cases across the country.

For England as a whole, serious fraud cases took just over a year to be completed after a charge was first raised – having taken less than six months at the same point in 2019.

In June 2019, the median wait for outstanding serious fraud cases in England was 14 weeks – while in Thames Valley this was 13 weeks.

Fraud has been under greater scrutiny in recent years, as figures suggest the number of offences has increased over the past decade. The National Fraud Intelligence Bureau registered more than a million cases of fraud in the year to March.

However, given only the most serious cases reach the Crown Court, it is difficult to tell whether this is contributing to a backlog in cases. Minor cases are instead generally dealt with by magistrates.

A Ministry of Justice spokesperson said: "People who break the law must face justice, and more criminal cases are now reaching the Crown Court than at any point over the last two years."

"We are letting our courts run at full throttle – lifting the cap on the number of days courts can sit for a third year, recruiting more judges, and investing more in our courts, including in Magistrates' courts where more than 90 per cent of criminal cases are dealt with," they added.