

## Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

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**Title:** Topical Issues

**Date:** 28 January 2023

**Author:** Khalid Ahmed, Scrutiny Officer, Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel



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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.

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### **Police Refusing Requests For Background Checks On Violent Partner**

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/jan/06/revealed-police-refusing-requests-for-background-checks-on-violent-partners>

Police in England and Wales are leaving people at risk of domestic abuse by refusing to release information on suspected violent partners, with one force declining 95% of requests for checks.

Under Clare's law – named after Clare Wood, 36, who was murdered in 2009 by her ex-boyfriend George Appleton – people have a right to ask police whether a partner or ex-partner has a history of abusive behaviour.

Public bodies can also apply to warn people who may be in danger.

But an analysis of official data has found dramatic variations in the implementation of Clare's law, which is officially known as the domestic violence disclosure scheme, with some forces supplying information in up to 75% of cases, while others reject almost all requests.

Out of 43 forces for which data was available, the one that proportionally shared information the least – Essex police – disclosed information for only 5% of the 1,940 Clare's law applications they received in the two years to March 2023.

Six other forces reported disclosure rates below 30% over the same period.

Across England and Wales, the rate of disclosure has fallen in recent years, from 47.9% in 2019 to 38.5% in the year to March 2023, with 50,686 out of 83,790 applications under the scheme failing to result in disclosure in the last two years alone.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has separately sent warnings over Clare's law to three forces in the last three months – Thames Valley, Merseyside and Durham – after inspections highlighted problems including resourcing issues and long delays.

Another force – Wiltshire – referred itself to the Independent Office for Police Conduct and is conducting an urgent review of 3,500 Clare's law applications dating back to 2015 after identifying cases where it failed to disclose information "which could have protected those most at risk from domestic violence".

Launched by police forces in England and Wales in 2014, Clare's law includes two parts: the "right to ask", which enables victims and potential victims of domestic abuse, and their friends and families, to request information; and the "right to know", which enables police to proactively disclose information to protect a potential victim after receiving it indirectly, from, for example, partner agencies.

Before releasing information, police must be sure that the request is genuine and not malicious; that there is a pressing need for the disclosure; that it is necessary to protect the person from being the victim of a crime; and that the impact on the perpetrators' rights is necessary and proportionate.

Details that can be shared include information on convictions or allegations of assault, murder, manslaughter and false imprisonment, which may not already be in the public domain.

Experts said there were multiple reasons why police forces could have drastically different disclosure rates, including that some did not prioritise Clare's law requests, took different approaches to perpetrators' privacy rights, or applied different standards when assessing whether applications met the threshold.

Requests for information under Clare's Law about the potentially violent pasts of partners have increased dramatically in England and Wales in the past two years.

The forces identified in the Observer's analysis said they had taken steps to improve their disclosure rates since the latest figures to March 2023, were published.

**Thames Valley police, whose disclosure rate was 18.43% in the two years to March 2023, recognised that this was "lower than the national average" and that their work in this area "has not been sufficient", but that action was being taken to address this, including more officers being trained.**

## **Police & Crime Commissioner calls on MKCC to support CCTV Partnership - Press Release from PCC**

Earlier this month the Thames Valley CCTV Partnership went live, with the first control room in Milton Keynes. Building on the previous partnerships between local authorities and the police, the

vision of the new system being championed by Police & Crime Commissioner, Matthew Barber is to have a sustainable CCTV system to detect and deter crime and keep the public safe.

Already the increase in CCTV operators has seen the police able to intervene in serious crimes as they are being committed.

The work to go live with this first phase of the programme has seen a number of cameras brought back into use from the previous CCTV system run by Milton Keynes Council.

CCTV is not a statutory responsibility of either the council or the police, but both bodies have a duty to fight crime and reduce serious violence. The new Partnership will see the cameras across Thames Valley operated and monitored by the police, with financial contributions being split between both the police and council. Phase 1 also includes Slough Borough Council, with Phase 2 being implemented later this year with five councils in Oxfordshire.

Additional funding is being provided by the PCC, which would mean that over the next four years the Council would pay less than one-fifth of the costs of the new system. Despite this however, Milton Keynes City Council have stated that they have “no additional revenue budget which can be allocated to CCTV”.

Urging the Council to plan for future investment, Matthew Barber said, “This is about a partnership. I recognise the importance of CCTV to residents and so I am investing millions of pounds over the coming years to ensure that we have a system that is fit for the future. Yet at a time I am increasing investment, the council seems to be pulling away from this important project despite its legal obligations for community safety and reducing violence.”

“Over the last two years I have increased funding for community safety that I provide directly to the Council by 29% in addition to supporting a number of other projects that have brought in extra cash to Milton Keynes. It is disappointing to see the lack of commitment to CCTV, which is valued by residents.”

The Police & Crime Commissioner has written to the Council setting out proposals that would mean the Council is not required to make any significant contribution until 2027/28 and has urged the Cabinet to plan ahead to provide future funding.

### **Thames Valley Police receives 56 sexual misconduct complaints in one year**

<https://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/crime/thames-valley-police-receives-56-sexual-misconduct-complaints-in-one-year-4466325>

### **Police phone glitch means people are having major problems reporting crimes in Milton Keynes at the moment**

<https://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/crime/police-phone-glitch-means-people-are-having-major-problems-reporting-crimes-in-milton-keynes-at-the-moment-4472173>

## **MP welcomes funding boost to pay for more police officers on the streets of Milton Keynes**

<https://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/crime/mp-welcomes-funding-boost-to-pay-for-more-police-officers-on-the-streets-of-milton-keynes-4469791>

City MP Iain Stewart has welcomed extra police funding totalling £584.6m for Thames Valley Police, the force that serves Milton Keynes. The funding is an increase of £38.9m - 7.1% - and part of a total of £843 million package to better protect the public.

It will help ensure that crime is effectively tackled by the police and people are kept safe in Milton Keynes, says the Tory MP, who has not specified how many extra officers will be provided for the city.

Previously opposition councillors in Milton Keynes have queried Conservative's figures about police officers, accusing them of "not telling the truth".

Early last year, the Conservative Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Barber made a public statement claiming the city had benefitted from an additional 61 police officers over the past two years, while the local Conservative party said there were 92. However, weeks later MK's ruling Labour and Lib Dem councillors claimed TVP had admitted at a public meeting that only two additional officers had been recruited to cover Milton Keynes.

And they said a Freedom of Information request had revealed that since March 2019 - the date of the last general election - Milton Keynes has gained just 19 more officers.

The councillors argued that the number of police officers on city streets seemed to be falling. The FOI figures showed in January 2022 there were actually five fewer officers in Milton Keynes compared with January 2021.

## **Inspection finds Thames Valley Police need to do more for vulnerable people**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-berkshire-67630983>

A police force needs to improve how it protects vulnerable people, an inspection has found.

Thames Valley Police was inspected by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services in July. Out of eight areas of the force's policing, it graded one good, two adequate, four requires improvement and one inadequate.

The inspectorate also said was pleased with the force's response to the concerns it had raised.

His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary Roy Wilsher said: "I am satisfied with some aspects of the performance of Thames Valley Police in keeping people safe, reducing crime and providing victims with an effective service.

"But there are areas in which the force needs to improve.

"The force has nine multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH) due to the size of the force area, and I am concerned about some of the processes within these hubs."

The hubs assess and manage the risk to individuals who have been identified as a vulnerable adults or children, many having suffered domestic abuse. In some cases the report found that some of the hubs' staffing levels were not sufficient to deal with demand.

This meant there were often queues of referrals and delays in putting in place strategies to protect vulnerable people from harm.

The inspection also found other areas that require improvement were: investigating crime, responding to the public, managing offenders and leadership and force management.

### **TVP promises action plan over race stats**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce9p4d6xvl0o>

### **Sharp rise in religious hate crimes in Thames Valley**

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24016955.sharp-rise-religious-hate-crimes-thames-valley/?ref=eb&nid=2328&u=ce369a0801e44b5ba58c479b91df97b5&date=301223>

### **Half of police forces not investigating crime properly**

### **Police taskforce in Thames Valley cracks down on rural crime**

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/23990327.police-taskforce-thames-valley-cracks-rural-crime/>

### **Thames Valley Police welcome new spiking laws**

<https://www.witneygazette.co.uk/news/24003368.thames-valley-police-welcome-new-spiking-laws/>