

## Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

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**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.

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### **Thames Valley PCC commits £900k funding to tackle youth knife crime**

<https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/uknews/thames-valley-pcc-commits-900k-funding-to-tackle-youth-knife-crime/ar-BB1jrдыr>

Thames Valley police and crime commissioner (PCC) has committed £900,000 worth of funding to tackle youth knife offending.

The PCC has used the investment to extend the Operation Deter Youth Programme, which has already seen successful trials in Milton Keynes and Slough.

The programme is a subsection of Operation Deter, a campaign by Thames Valley Police that concentrates on exerting zero tolerance towards knife crime. Particular emphasis is placed on utilising charging and remanding options for adults found possessing a knife.

A significant feature of Operation Deter Youth is the swift response time by the Youth Offending Teams.

They aim to make contact with under-18s who have been arrested for knife-aided offences within 90 minutes, thereby increasing engagement from the young individuals and improving future safeguarding opportunities.

The PCC asserts that Operation Deter Youth provides a comprehensive support system for under 18s carrying knives by offering tailored interventions within 90 minutes of a Youth Offending Team being notified of an arrest.

The PCC has supported pilot schemes of the initiative in Milton Keynes and Slough, which have shown very positive results.

For these promising outcomes to be amplified across the entire Thames Valley, Mr Barber has committed significant funding for the upcoming two years.

He has informed upper tier local authorities in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire about the funding commitment.

The Operation Deter Youth Programme consists of multiple elements, including Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) assessments, mental health support, training, education, and employment assistance.

It also provides support for conflict resolution without violence and aggression, catering to parents and carers.

### **Police officers mock footage of victim's seizure**

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/police-officers-mock-footage-of-victim-s-seizure/ar-BB1hvGag>

Police officers made "sickening" comments about an assault victim while watching body-worn video showing her groin, the BBC has learned. The woman's body was exposed when she was filmed suffering from a seizure. Three Thames Valley Police PCs later watched the footage without reason.

The policing regulator says Thames Valley Police should have reported the case for independent scrutiny. The force has now done so, following our investigation.

Last year the BBC revealed that police forces have misused body-worn video, with officers switching off cameras, deleting footage and sharing videos on WhatsApp.

The vulnerable woman was arrested and placed in leg restraints before being recorded on body-worn video while vomiting and losing consciousness. Officers watching the footage insulted her looks, used derogatory language about her genitals and discussed what they would need to be paid to sleep with her.

The student officer who reported his colleagues says the force covered up the incident, failing to inform the woman or the policing regulator about what happened

The BBC's previous findings about camera misuse were "truly shocking" and have already led to forces tightening up systems to prevent the deletion of footage, the chair of the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, Donna Jones said.

### **How many more women will die as UK police forces ignore sex offenders in their ranks?**

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/03/how-many-more-woman-will-die-as-police-forces-continue-to-ignore-red-flags-in-their-ranks>

Dame Elish Angiolini was tasked by Priti Patel, the then home secretary, to conduct an inquiry into the horrendous March 2021 abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by Metropolitan police officer Wayne Couzens. Last Thursday, two years later, her 347-page report was published. Angiolini, a former lord advocate of Scotland, praised Everard's family for "grace in their suffering", and then she issued the bluntest of warnings.

"Without a significant overhaul there is nothing to stop another Wayne Couzens operating in plain sight," she said. The rhetoric of transformation, apology and change falls easily from the lips of senior police officers. Last Thursday, for instance, Sir Mark Rowley, Met police commissioner, issued "an urgent call to action", having earlier launched Operation Onyx, "the strongest doubling down of standards for 50 years". It has reinvestigated 689 officers and revealed that 161 Met officers have criminal convictions. Yet the extent of the crisis that the Met and other police forces face is that for decades, while the outer skin is shed as a result of half-hearted reforms, the rotten flesh remains, threatening to contaminate even those who serve with the highest levels of integrity.

How many more women and girls must be abused, their requests for help ignored? (A second part of the Angiolini inquiry investigates Met police officer David Carrick, who committed 85 offences, including 48 rapes, over 17 years). How many more crimes will go undetected because of what Angiolini calls police "apathy and disinterest" overseeing "lethargic investigations" that are of "poor quality and inadequate" in a "deep-rooted culture".

Since the 1950s, the police have moved in the public eye, fairly or unfairly, from "PC Plod" to "pigs", to bent as a boomerang ("I do have a minority of officers who are corrupt, dishonest, unethical..." said Sir Paul Condon, Met police commissioner in 1997), to institutionally racist, following the killing of Stephen Lawrence, to dangerously misogynistic, adversely marking the lives of women including Bibaa Henry, Nicole Smallman and Sabina Nessa. Only last year, Dame Louise Casey, in her review of standards at the Met, said it had thrown protection of women, "out of the window" and called the force "institutionally sexist, racist and homophobic".

New broom after new broom has allegedly swept away "the rotten apples" among the boys (and far fewer girls) in blue only for the toxicity to bubble up again because, as the Women's Equality party told Priti Patel in a note in 2021: "It's not one bad apple. It's the whole fucking orchard." It may not be the whole orchard but what is clear is that the reformers need better tools to restore public faith and find a convincing response to the question, "Who guards the guards?"

Couzens wasn't 'just' a flasher, he was a killer in training on a trajectory that could and should have been halted

Angiolini has made 16 recommendations. They could make a difference (but who will be in charge of monitoring progress?). Her report charts Couzens's almost 20-year history of sexual offending, working in three police forces. She describes his "unmanaged indebtedness, predilection for extreme pornography and a vile sexualised expression of his sense of humour"; a cornucopia of red flags, almost all ignored.

Her recommendations include improved recruitment and vetting, better police training on violence against women and girls (again), and taking the sexual offence of indecent exposure far more seriously. Couzens had exposed himself masturbating only days before killing Sarah Everard.

Women's organisations have been calling for many of the proposals for years, especially the need for police to better understand risk. Currently, risk is too often interpreted as imminent physical danger and even then women are disregarded. Only last week, Marcus Osborne was jailed for life for killing his former partner Katie Higton and her boyfriend, Steven Harnett. Higton, 27, had repeatedly warned West Yorkshire Police that Osborne had threatened to slit her throat.

If prevention of injury and loss of life is the aim, "low" risk is the red flag that should trigger action and rarely does. Couzens wasn't "just" a flasher, he was a killer in training on a trajectory that could and should have been halted.

In 2020, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and the Centre for Women's Justice, a tiny charity that has been a major catalyst in exposing police conduct, brought a super-complaint against the police. The Independent Office for Police Conduct and others investigated and agreed there were "systemic deficiencies in the police response to cases of police- perpetrated domestic abuse... misconduct hearings are not always being carried out when they should be, or conducted appropriately."

Here is the crunch. The police themselves. As a result of Operation Onyx, 51 Met officers were dismissed "or would have been if they hadn't resigned or retired" (on full pension). How is that accountability? Why aren't there prosecutions? The Casey review found one officer responsible for 24 instances of behaviour linked to sexual misconduct, each considered separately, the pattern missed and he remained in post.

Accountability is absent; there are few real consequences. At the top, senior officers should be prosecuted and punished with loss of pension and jail terms if change fails to happen; while, for other ranks, there should be a statutory responsibility to report the kind of behaviour that earned Couzens the nickname "the Rapist".

In 1968 American psychologists, Bibb Latané and John Darley, researched what they eventually called, "the bystander effect". They described why numbers of people stand by rather than help an individual in crisis. Now, bystanding includes those who fail to speak out against bullying, racism and misogyny. As long as our police forces fail to root out perpetrators, bystanders and the apathetic, they don't deserve the public's trust or its taxes.

### **The Angiolini Inquiry**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65e06493b8da630f42c862e5/HC\\_530 - The Angiolini Inquiry Part 1 Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65e06493b8da630f42c862e5/HC_530_-_The_Angiolini_Inquiry_Part_1_Report.pdf)

### **Not enough progress after Casey review**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-68487514>

London's deputy mayor for policing and crime said "not enough" progress had been made to change the Metropolitan Police's culture and standards.

The London Assembly's police and crime committee has met to discuss changes made since Baroness Casey's review. Her 2023 report condemned the force as institutionally racist.

The meeting comes just days after Lady Angiolini's review of how the Met handled the case of Sarah Everard, who was murdered by serving officer Wayne Couzens. Her review found that Couzens, who has been jailed for life, "should never have been a police officer".

The review's 16 recommendations included for a new team to reform how the Met dealt with misconduct cases and an immediate overhaul of vetting. It recommended independent progress reviews after two and five years.

### **Police force faces 'challenge' after trust survey**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9w9ngv1z4ro>

The PCC has said officers face a "challenge" after a survey suggested only 60% of people feel they can trust the force. Thames Valley PCC Matthew Barber said the force needed to "rapidly improve" people's perception of it by increasing police visibility in the community, bringing up charge rates, and holding officers to "the highest account".

Thames Valley Police's (TVP) Trust & Confidence Snapshot Survey also showed just 53% of respondents felt TVP treated everyone fairly, and only half thought police listened to the concerns of local people.

The survey also showed 87% of people were willing to contact police if they were a victim of crime or were worried about something, and that 78% of respondents felt safe in their area.

But Mr Barber said he wanted to see "all of these numbers" higher. TVP and the PCC have announced plans to increase engagement with communities to try and build trust and confidence in policing, as well as committing to an annual survey to help understand public attitudes.

A number of high-profile cases in recent years have "inevitably damaged people's confidence" in the police, Mr Barber said.

But he said trust can be rebuilt by officers "getting the basics right" as well as by making sure "we have the right people in policing".

"It's about knowing the police will respond to urgent calls for help, it's about knowing the police are... investigating crimes and reducing crimes being prevented," he said.

"Having the police more visible in the community, really knowing those issues that are going on, really makes a big difference."

### **Thames Valley PCC criticises force over gender description of defendant**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-68268552>

### **No action in over 9 in 10 complaints against Thames Valley officers**

[https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24095227.no-action-9-10-complaints-thames-valley-](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24095227.no-action-9-10-complaints-thames-valley-officers/?ref=eb&nid=2328&u=ce369a0801e44b5ba58c479b91df97b5&date=0502)

[officers/?ref=eb&nid=2328&u=ce369a0801e44b5ba58c479b91df97b5&date=0502](https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24095227.no-action-9-10-complaints-thames-valley-officers/?ref=eb&nid=2328&u=ce369a0801e44b5ba58c479b91df97b5&date=0502)  
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More than nine in 10 allegations made against Thames Valley Police officers last year resulted in no misconduct action, new figures show.

Across England and Wales, the proportion of allegations not seeing further action remained unchanged from the year before at 89 per cent, which experts said shows a lack of police accountability.

Home Office figures show 3,783 misconduct allegations were made against Thames Valley Police officers and handled under the formal complaints process in the year to March 2023 – slightly up from 3,757 the year before.

Of these, 3,753 were either not investigated, or investigated not subject to special procedures, with 3,459 (92 per cent) resulting in no further action.

There were just 10 allegations leading to misconduct proceedings, while 110 were withdrawn.

The figures cover the total number of allegations rather than the number of complaints – one complaint could contain several allegations of misconduct.

They do not cover any complaints handled outside the formal process, where it was felt a detailed enquiry was not needed.

There were 86,160 complaint allegations involving police officers in the country last year – fewer than 87,768 the year before.

Nationally, there was a 33 per cent rise in the number of “recordable conduct matter” allegations, from 1,802 in 2021-22 to 2,402 last year.

These are complaints where it is alleged a police officer's conduct resulted in a death or serious injury.

The figures show 76 “recordable conduct matter” allegations were made against Thames Valley Police officers, with 43 referred to misconduct proceedings, while no action was required in 12 of them.

There were 5,363 allegations of “conduct matter” made against police forces nationally, 113 of which were in Thames Valley. These are allegations indicating an officer may have committed a criminal offence or behaved in a way that would justify disciplinary proceedings.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct, which investigates the most serious police misconduct allegations, said not all complaints relate to alleged misconduct, but could simply be an expression of dissatisfaction, with no further action required.

## **Thames Valley Police tackling rural crime in South East**

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24144848.thames-valley-police-tackling-rural-crime-south-east/?ref=eb&nid=2328&u=ce369a0801e44b5ba58c479b91df97b5&date=270224>

Thames Valley Police is teaming up with other forces in South East England to clamp down on rural crime. The forces from Hampshire and Isle of Wight, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and Thames Valley have formed the South East Partnership Against Rural Crime (SEPARC) to combat criminals who prey on isolated countryside locations.

To kick off the initiative, a range of operations have been organised running from today, February 26, until Friday, March 1. These operations are aimed at disrupting and deterring individuals involved in wildlife, environmental, heritage and agricultural criminal activities.

This week's operations include disrupting offenders in tandem with the National Rural Crime Team, providing security guidance at service stations, and stopping suspicious cars on the strategic road network.

Matthew Barber, Thames Valley police and crime commissioner, said: "Rural crime has a significant impact and can leave our most isolated communities feeling particularly vulnerable.

"The launch of SEPARC will establish cross-border collaboration between police forces across the South East in tackling the most serious and organised rural crime.

"The creation of SEPARC reinforces Thames Valley Police's commitment to protecting our rural communities and will further strengthen the impact of our Rural Crime Taskforce in pursuing offenders."

Assistant chief constable and lead for rural crime Howard Hodges, of Sussex Police, said: "We will continue to work together with our neighbouring forces to share information and intelligence, to ensure we can prevent, detect and respond to rural crime wherever possible.

"We will also engage with residents, businesses and visitors in our rural areas to offer crime prevention advice.

"We cannot be everywhere all the time, and that's why we need the public to remain vigilant and report any suspicious activity to us. In an emergency, always dial 999."

Superintendent Pete Steenhuis from Kent Police, shared his forces commitment to tackle rural crime and support victims, while inspector Darren Bengé from Surrey Police highlighted the national relevance of the issue.

### **Thames Valley burglaries only solved in 1/4 of cases**

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/24125889.thames-valley-burglaries-solved-1-4-cases/>