

Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

Title: Topical Issues

Date: 29 January 2021

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



1. Police probes compromised after computer records deleted

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55684320>

Police investigations have been compromised by an error that led to hundreds of thousands of records being deleted from UK-wide databases, according to a letter seen by the BBC. The National Police Chiefs' Council said 213,000 records were deleted which has resulted in a couple of "near misses" for serious crimes when trying to identify an offender, it said.

Data including fingerprint, DNA, and arrest histories was wiped from the Police National Computer (PNC) - which stores and shares criminal records information across the UK - after being inadvertently flagged for deletion.

The PNC is used in police investigations and provides real-time checks on people, vehicles and crimes, as well as whether suspects are wanted for any unsolved offences. The Home Office said the lost entries related to people who were arrested and then released without further action. But the letter from the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) says officers are aware of at least one instance where the DNA profile from a suspect in custody did not generate a match to a crime scene as expected, potentially impeding the investigation.

It says that some of the records had been marked for indefinite retention following earlier convictions for serious offences. And it reveals that a "weeding system", developed and deployed by a Home Office PNC team, started to delete records wrongly last November. The process was only brought to a halt at the start of this week.

The deletion of the records has been blamed on a coding error. This resulted in records that had been flagged for deletion being lost from the database before checks had been carried out to determine whether they could be lawfully held or not.

2. Technical issue resolved after '150,000 police records lost'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55672194>

3. Over 400,000 crime records could be affected by police computer error

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jan/15/priti-patel-under-fire-as-150000-police-records-accidentally-lost>

4. Nearly 1,000 lockdown fines handed out in Thames Valley

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19012545.nearly-1-000-lockdown-fines-handed-thames-valley/>

Between March 27 and December 20 last year, 965 fixed penalty notices were issued by the force covering everything from not wearing a mask to mass gatherings, according to data from the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC).

It also shows 32,329 fines, which can range anywhere from £60 to £10,000, were given by all forces in England and Wales under coronavirus regulations during this period. Of these, 80 per cent were given to those aged between 18 and 39.

In the Thames Valley, 771 were issued for breaches of Covid laws brought in during the first few months of the pandemic, 73 were linked to the tier system, and 97 to the national lockdown which began in November.

The total also included five fines for gatherings of more than 30 people, 12 for breaking international travel restrictions, five business breaches and two for flouting face covering rules such as on public transport.

5. Police in England and Wales face crime targets in return for 20,000 new officers

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jan/11/police-in-england-and-wales-face-targets-in-return-for-20000-new-officers>

6. Struggling Domestic Violence Charities get extra funding during the Pandemic

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/18925193.struggling-thames-valley-domestic-violence-charities-get-money-police/>

Struggling support groups for domestic violence victims have been given £124,000 to help them through the coronavirus pandemic.

Eighteen organisations in the Thames Valley area (Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire) have been given a share of the cash to help with things like PPE and emergency food, clothes and travel costs for victims.

It is the second round of emergency funding from the Ministry of Justice and divided out by Thames Valley's Police and Crime Commissioner.

7. Thames Valley Police Officers off sick with Mental Health Problems

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/18882445.hundreds-thames-valley-officers-off-work-mental-health/>

8. Thames Valley Police use of Tasers

<https://www.readingchronicle.co.uk/news/18960514.thames-valley-police-used-tasers-children-dozens-occasions-last-year/>

Police in Thames Valley recorded using Tasers on children on dozens of occasions last year, figures reveal – including one which involved someone aged under 11. Officers reported firing the electrical weapons in four of those cases.

The Children's Rights Alliance for England says the recorded increase in use of Tasers against children by police forces across England and Wales is "alarming". The children's human rights charity says "being threatened" with a Taser can be extremely frightening for a child even if the weapon is not fired, and has called for a ban on their use on young people.

Home Office figures show Thames Valley Police drew Tasers on children aged under 18 on 85 occasions in 2019-20, up from 47 the previous year.

The figure counts the number of times each officer involved in an incident used the device rather than the number of separate incidents or how many children were involved. The age recorded is that perceived by the officer.

Officers fired a Taser four times, although none of those involved under-11s. In five cases, officers did not record whether the device was fired.

When fired, Tasers are designed to temporarily incapacitate someone by giving them an electric shock. A device can be fired at someone from a distance or held against their body to stun them.

Across the 43 police forces in England and Wales, Tasers were used on children on 2,818 occasions in 2019-20, up from 1,700 the previous year.

9. Thames Valley Police aim to reduce front counter services

<https://www.bucksfreepress.co.uk/news/18985659.thames-valley-police-aim-reduce-front-counter-services/>

Thames Valley Police want the public's opinions on the force's front counter provision.

The consultation began on January 4, which will allow residents across Berks, Bucks, and Oxon to see whether they are currently needed.

TVP is currently reviewing this as part of a commitment to adapt to the different ways in which people contact the police, as well as making financial savings.

10. Burglaries down in Thames Valley

<https://www.buckinghamtoday.co.uk/news/crime/burglaries-plummet-thames-valley-3101128>

Thames Valley Police received 703 reports of burglaries in November 2020, compared to 1,144 in November 2019 – a drop of 39%, according to figures from the police crime reports database.

Insurance company Aviva warned that although some burglars may have been deterred, research finds that nearly two-thirds of burglaries happen while people are in their homes.

While burglaries represented 6.8% of all reports made to police in the area in November 2019, they represented 4.3% of offences reported during the same month last year.

Reported crime fell by 4% in Thames Valley during the period.

11. Rural Crime during the Pandemic

<https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/crime/poll-has-rural-crime-worsened-during-the-pandemic>

Almost three-quarters of people living in the countryside (74%) think rural crime is on the increase, according to a poll carried out by the Countryside Alliance (CA).

More than 8,000 people who live or work in the countryside were surveyed about the effects of crime and the policing of rural communities.

12. Police to tackle rural crime in Oxfordshire as problems rise in lockdown

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/18857824.police-tackle-rural-crime-oxfordshire-problems-rise-lockdown/>

Landowners and farmers saw a rise in rural crime since lockdown and Thames Valley Police have been asked to continue to tackle these problems. The NFU and CLA have encouraged Thames Valley Police to continue working closely with farmers and landowners when tackling all forms of rural crime.

A meeting was held before the latest lockdown, on a farm in Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire on October 29. The meeting considered the force's approach to policing, focusing on results and examining ways that farmers and landowners can work in partnership with police.

Current problems include thefts from farms, especially GPS kits, trespass and hare coursing. Also discussed were livestock worrying, when dogs chase or attack sheep and cattle, and fly-tipping which escalated during the first lockdown earlier this year.

CLA south east regional director Michael Valencia said: "We welcome the work of Thames Valley Police's rural crime team; rural areas experience complex issues and we would encourage the force to resource them accordingly using PCSOs or police constables, as well as using ANPR and other technology to catch and deter criminals.

"Many farmers and landowners have seen a rise in issues since lockdown, especially around livestock worrying linked to increased access and a lack of knowledge of the countryside among a minority of visitors.

"The CLA has been actively promoting the Countryside Code and has called on the Education Secretary to reintroduce it onto the school curriculum. We ask that the police play their part and prioritise fighting rural crimes such as dog and equipment theft, fly-tipping, hare coursing and poaching across Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire."