

Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

Title: Topical Issues

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



Policing gets biggest funding boost in decade to put more Police on the beat

On Wednesday 22 January the government announced the biggest increase in funding for the police system in a decade. The amount of funding available to the policing system for 2020 to 2021 will increase by more than £1.1 billion, totaling £15.2 billion, if Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) take full advantage of flexibility to set the police precept.

This represents an almost 10% increase on the core (resource) grant provided to forces last year, enabling the police to cut crime and deliver on the people's priorities.

It builds on a number of existing government commitments to bear down on the criminals who seek to do our communities and our country harm. It will enable forces to recruit 6,000 of the 20,000 additional police officers by the end of March 2021.

It will provide £150 million in funding to fight organised crime and continue to crack down on online child abuse. Tackling serious violence will be also backed with £39 million, which includes £20 million for county lines drug dealing, which is seeing abhorrent gangs terrorising towns.

As announced by the Home Secretary on Tuesday 21 January, funding for counter-terrorism policing will total £906 million in 2020 to 2021, a year-on-year increase of £90 million.

PCCs will have access to:

- £8,702 million in government grants, which is £667 million more than the previous year
- flexibility to increase local funding in England by setting the council tax referendum limit to £10 for a typical (Band D) property.
- if all PCCs in England maximise this flexibility and ask average households to contribute less than 20 pence per week, this would generate around £248 million in additional funding for forces in England next year.

The settlement includes the £750 million announced by the Chancellor last year to enable forces to meet their officer recruitment targets.

The bulk will go directly to PCCs (£700 million). The remainder will be spent nationally on capabilities and infrastructure to support the recruitment drive.

This includes investments to improve the recruitment process including training and specialist schemes to ensure the right officers end up in the right roles.

Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner welcomes the increase in police funding

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/policing-gets-biggest-funding-boost-in-decade-to-put-more-bobbies-on-the-beat>

Police and Crime Commissioner Anthony Stansfeld released the following statement:

“The latest Government funding settlement for policing will see more than a billion pounds invested in public safety. “This includes funding to recruit 6,000 additional police officers nationwide by March 2021 and making the relevant infrastructure improvements needed to recruit the 20,000 additional officers by March 2023.

“Yesterday’s budget announcement recognises the pressures on forces such as Thames Valley and ensures that police officers will have the resources to fight crime in our communities. I am delighted that, having lobbied the Government over a long period, Thames Valley Police are now seeing the biggest increase in funding in a decade. With the support of local taxpayers, I already agreed to increase the number of police officers in last year’s budget and these officers will now be joined by 183 new recruits who will soon be embarking on their training.

“This is just the first phase of the uplift in police officers which I hope will see around 600 new officers for Thames Valley in total. This will mean that Thames Valley will have more police than when I first took office. I will continue to focus on delivering strong neighborhood policing for all communities across the Thames Valley. The additional funding announced will allow us to invest, not just in our workforce, but in the equipment and technology that the police need to fight modern crimes and protect our communities.

“The funding settlement that would give Thames Valley a maximum cash increase of £31.9m based on the Government assumption that I increase council tax on the average Band D household by less than 20p a week.

“The Chief Constable and I will discuss the operational priorities for the additional funding to ensure the money supports front-line policing and the Force’s constant efforts to reduce crime and protect victims. It is great to have the positive support from the Prime Minister and Home Secretary to help us make communities in Thames Valley even safer.”

20,000 officers aren’t enough to solve crime problems, says Britain’s most senior police chief

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/boris-johnson-police-officers-cuts-austerity-tory-crime-martin-hewitt-a9269481.html>

Thames Valley Police paid almost £750,000 to informants in the past five years

<https://www.buckinghamtoday.co.uk/news/people/thames-valley-police-paid-almost-750-000-to-informants-in-the-past-five-years-1-9217389>

A Freedom of Information (FOI) request by the University of Portsmouth journalism department has revealed that Thames Valley Police spent almost three quarters of a million pounds in the past five years on paying informants.

The precise figure of £749,853.26 makes Thames Valley the third highest spender on police informants in England, behind the Metropolitan Police and West Midlands Police. Informants are used by the police to find out information on criminal activity such as murder, burglaries and drug rings.

Police can't cope with avalanche of fraud cases

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-cant-cope-with-avalanche-of-fraud-case7>

Fraudsters in Britain “operate with impunity” because the police are not adequately equipped to investigate them, a report has concluded.

No force can cope with the rapidly increasing number of cases and they are regularly handed to “unskilled investigators”, it revealed. Millions of victims are being failed and police staff say, “they can no longer work effectively to identify criminals and help bring them to justice”.

The review, led by Sir Craig Mackey, former deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, was prompted by a Times investigation last year. An undercover reporter found that call handlers for Action Fraud, the police’s national reporting service, mocked victims as “morons” and were trained to mislead them into thinking their cases would be investigated when most were never looked at again.

It found that only one in 200 officers was dedicated to investigating fraud even though there were almost four million incidents a year in England and Wales, more than a third of all crimes. Sir Craig’s review supported this newspaper’s findings and said that the police response to fraud needed “radical change”. It found that:

- The growth in fraud means that it should be seen as a “national threat”.
- Action Fraud is failing to answer a third of calls and has “disturbing” problems including high staff turnover and absenteeism.
- There have been “unacceptable delays” because forces are making excuses to avoid taking on investigations.
- Police computer systems that should collate reports with matching details are so poor that staff have had to record crimes on makeshift spreadsheets.
- Fraud has been spelt “fraud” for a year on one page of the Action Fraud website despite complaints from victims. The change has not been made because of worries that the outsourced firm running the website may charge to edit it.

As much as £60 million could now be redirected to fraud policing as part of a national overhaul. It could fund 400 new officers and staff in regional fraud squads and a recruitment drive for experts from the private sector.

Victims of fraud must contact Action Fraud. The service is overseen by City of London police, but its call centre and computer systems have been outsourced to private companies. If call handlers deem cases to be crimes they are passed to crime reviewers at the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB), who decide which should be sent on to police forces for investigation.

After the Times investigation four managers left Action Fraud and the police launched Sir Craig's inquiry. He described how staff were trained to decide during calls whether cases should be filed as "crime reports" or as less serious "information reports", which are rarely looked at again.

Sir Craig found there were "disturbing trends" in the work of Action Fraud, which is "lagging behind industry standards" and that "immediate steps should be taken to boost staffing levels". Victims wait too long to be answered and too many hang up. Staff cannot cope with the number of calls and frequently misclassify reports.

Action Fraud takes an average of four minutes and 37 seconds to answer calls, compared with a standard of 35 seconds in commercial call centres, the report said. At Action Fraud 33 per cent of calls are abandoned, compared with 14 per cent in the private sector. When cases were passed on correctly, he wrote, "the capacity to investigate in police forces is at best stretched and sometimes non-existent".

Plans for regional police squads dedicated to investigating fraud have already been drafted, Sir Craig disclosed. They are to be submitted to the Treasury for approval by the end of the 2021-22 financial year. He suggested the teams should be led by a chief officer dedicated to fraud and include financial experts recruited from the banking sector as part of "modern" teams that could deal with the demand and complexity of fraud investigations.

This would require forces being allowed to offer better pay terms than are usually allowed. "It is time to pioneer flexible employment terms to bring new blood into the police service," he wrote.

Action Fraud needs an urgent and significant increase in staff of up to 50 call handlers, the report said, because "the capacity to answer calls has not kept up with increased volumes of reporting". About 50 more staff are also needed at the NFIB, which is under "considerable strain" and able to review only about half of 19,000 crimes with viable lines of inquiry that it receives every month.

Sir Craig wrote that an integral part of the NFIB's computer system, which matches crimes having similar features such as the same bank account, is "malfunctioning". This means "larger networks of offenders are in effect beyond the reach of law enforcement".

There are backlogs of tens of thousands of cases. Staff have resorted to trying to group cases manually in a spreadsheet and say they feel that "they can no longer work effectively to identify criminals and help bring them to justice". Thousands of cases sent by other agencies have not been investigated.

Sir Craig found that the computer system needed urgent repair and that “the future of fraud investigation in the UK is dependent on it”. He wrote that the lack of staff and the computer problems have created a “perfect storm”. Describing police forces’ performance on fraud when the cases are passed on to them, he wrote that it was “rarely” a priority and officers “lack the skills to investigate complex cases”.

“There is a mismatch between the scale of fraud offences and the capacity and capability of forces to investigate them,” he said. “Cases are routinely assigned to unskilled investigators; and, worse still, no force has the capacity to manage the workload.”

City of London police said that they would work with the City of London Corporation, the National Economic Crime Centre and Home Office to address his recommendations.

Other articles on fraud

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-must-reboot-the-system-for-tackling-fraud>

Tiny Band of Police left to deal with Fraud Crime

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/less-than-1-of-police-officers-target-fraud>

Only about one in 14 crimes reported to police lead to a suspect being charged, official statistics have shown.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51221054>

Covering the year up to September 2019, the Home Office figures for England and Wales mark a new low, having fallen from about one in seven in 2015. It comes as knife crime recorded by police rose by 7% to an all-time high and robberies increased by 12%.

But homicides - including murder and manslaughter - fell by 6% to 617 deaths, and fatal stabbings fell 20%. The proportion of crimes leading to a prosecution in England and Wales has been in continuous decline since 2015, when the figures were first compiled this way.

Between September 2015 and September 2018, it had fallen from 14% to 8.4%, and it has now dropped again to 7.3% - about one in 14 cases. In addition, 1.4% of crimes led to a caution, 2.3% led to an informal warning and 0.1% were "taken into consideration" - meaning an offender admitted them as part of another investigation.

Yvette Cooper, chair of the Commons Home Affairs Select Committee, said the fall in prosecutions was "extremely concerning". "The public need to have confidence that the criminal justice system is finding, prosecuting and convicting criminals - so it is a serious problem that fewer crimes are being solved or dealt with," she said.

She said MPs had previously warned that police forces were "badly overstretched" and that without additional funding, there would be "serious consequences for public safety".

Rape had the lowest rate of charges at just 1.4%, while for thefts it was 5.4% and for robberies it was 7.2%.

Voluntary and community organisations awarded over £160,000 from Thames Valley PCC to support policing and crime priorities

<https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/news-and-events/thamesvalley-pcc-news/2020/01/voluntary-and-community-organisations-awarded-over-%C2%A3160,000-to-support-policing-and-crime-priorities/>

Domestic violence prevention work 'should focus on offenders'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51177628>

The government is being urged to set up domestic violence prevention programmes targeting offenders as well as victims. Dozens of charities, police forces and experts are backing the call for such schemes in England and Wales, after a pilot project reportedly led to a sustained reduction in abuse.

The pilot scheme, Drive, worked with 506 prolific domestic violence perpetrators, aged 17 to 81. The Home Office said future legislation would promote perpetrator programmes.

Drive, which operated in Essex, West Sussex and south Wales from 2016 to 2019, involved one-to-one counselling sessions with offenders - most of whom were white men while nearly half were involved in ongoing legal proceedings in the criminal or civil courts.

They were given help on building relationships, controlling their impulses and developing empathy and understanding of the impact of abuse.

Agencies offered support with alcohol, drug and mental health problems, and offenders were closely monitored by police and probation for the 10 months they were on the scheme.

The University of Bristol analysed results from the project in what it said was the "largest evaluation" of perpetrator intervention to be carried out in the UK.

It found that Drive had led to a drop in incidents of abuse to a "greater degree" than in cases where only victims were given help, with improvements sustained for more than 12 months after the scheme ended.

Police data for one sample of perpetrators showed domestic abuse offending had reduced by 30% in the six months after the scheme compared to the six months before.

A control group, made up of offenders who had not taken part in the project, were reported to be committing crimes at the same rate as before.

According to statistics from the ONS, two million adults, including 1.3 million women, aged 16 to 59 experienced domestic abuse in the year up to March 2018 - an increase of 23% from the previous year.

The Home Office has appointed the first ever domestic abuse commissioner and is preparing to reintroduce a bill to strengthen provision for victims.

Thames Valley PCC to bid for new tasers

<https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/news-and-events/thamesvalley-pcc-news/2020/01/pcc-for-thames-valley-set-to-bid-for-280-new-tasers-as-part-of-home-office-funding/>

Rape convictions: Justice system near 'breaking point'

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-50812810>

Knife possession offences in England and Wales reach record high

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51136699>

The number of people cautioned or convicted for carrying knives in England and Wales has reached record levels, Ministry of Justice data shows. There were 14,135 offences in the year to September 2019 - the most since the data was first compiled in 2007.

When possession offences involving other weapons were added, the total was almost 22,300 - the most since 2009. This week it was reported Boris Johnson will lead a new cabinet committee looking at ways to tackle the crime.

It comes after data released by the Office for National Statistics in October revealed police-recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument hit a record high in the year to June - up 7% on the previous 12 months to 44,076.

The latest MoJ figures show that for most offenders (71%) this was their first crime of this kind. According to the report, offenders are now more likely to be handed an immediate jail sentence for knife and weapon offences, and for longer.

In the year to September 38% of knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in an immediate custodial sentence compared with 23% for the same period in 2009.

The average length of prison sentences also rose over the same period, from six to eight months, the document said.

BBC home affairs correspondent Danny Shaw said the record number of knife possession offences could reflect a greater use of police stop-and-search powers, as well as a rise in the number of people carrying knives.

Police and Crime Commissioners to receive an extra £35m for Violence Reduction Units

<https://www.itv.com/news/2019-12-29/police-commissioners-to-receive-extra-35m-for-violence-reduction-units/>

Extinction Rebellion: Counter-terrorism police list group as 'extremist' in guide

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51071959>

Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley funds community engagement events across Milton Keynes

<https://www.mkfm.com/news/local-news/police-and-crime-commissioner-for-thames-valley-funds-community-engagement-events-across-milton-keynes/>

The events will bring communities together to understand shared concerns around violent crime when they start next month (February).

Residents, statutory agencies, community and faith groups will come together at the events. They will look at ways of reducing violent crime and how local communities can be involved in supporting young people towards positive pathways.

Smart motorways are ‘death traps’ and should be stopped, top cop says

<https://metro.co.uk/2020/01/29/smart-motorways-death-traps-stopped-top-cop-says-12143122/>

Thames Valley Police record number of sex crimes against Children

<https://www.getreading.co.uk/news/reading-berkshire-news/concerning-record-number-sex-crimes-17635506>

A record number of child sex abuse crimes have been reported to Thames Valley Police.

There were 2,052 reports made to the force about sexual crimes against children in the 12 months to June 2019 – the highest number since records began in 2002. The figure has more than doubled in the last six years alone, rising by nearly 120 per cent from 952 cases in the year to June 2013. There were 1,955 such crimes recorded in the year to June 2018.

The crimes include rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation and grooming of children under the age of 16. Four in every five victims were girls. The increase may be due to an actual rise in abuse, but it may also be linked to more victims feeling able to come forward, and better recording practices by police.