

## Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

---

**Title:** Topical Issues

**Date:** 20 March 2020

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



---

**The length of time suspects could be bailed for is set to be trebled under government plans.**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51388989>

Under the proposals, officers will be told to impose bail conditions on suspects if there could be risks to victims, witnesses and the public. Time limits to keep suspects under such a restriction could be raised from 28 days to 90.

The plans would reverse changes which restricted the use of police, or pre-charge, bail in England and Wales.

Home Secretary Priti Patel has set out the proposals, which would also strengthen "release under investigation" measures to ensure suspects who are not bailed by police have their cases reviewed.

The rules on pre-charge bail were changed under Theresa May's premiership less than three years ago after concerns from some suspects - including those arrested in Operation Yewtree into historical sexual abuse - that they were being placed under bail conditions for too long.

The change prompted concerns at the number of suspects being released under investigation (RUI) without any conditions.

RUI was introduced in April 2017 in a bid to limit the time someone spends on bail to 28 days - to try to cut the number of people facing restrictions for long periods of time without being charged.

It allows suspects to leave custody after an arrest without any restrictions for an unlimited period of time while inquiries continue, rather than having to comply with bail conditions including living at a certain address, not contacting particular people, or having to regularly visit a police station.

Some 322,250 cases involved suspects being released under investigation between April 2017 and October, according to figures obtained by BBC Newsnight.

Nearly 100,000 of those cases involved suspected violent criminals and sex offenders, including people suspected of offences such as rape and murder, the figures suggested.

In April, the Centre for Women's Justice made a super complaint to the police watchdog, accusing forces of failing to use protective measures in cases of violence against women.

The plans under consultation include:

- Extending the time limit for bail from 28 days to either 60 or 90 days
- Telling police officers to use bail when there is a risk to victims, witnesses and the public
- Making sure cases where suspects are released under investigation or interviewed voluntarily are reviewed

The government said it would also give "serious consideration" to the findings of a police watchdog report on the use of bail by forces, which is expected to be published in the summer.

## **Police will team up Aspire Oxfordshire to stop prisoners reoffending**

<https://www.heraldseries.co.uk/news/18288049.thames-valley-police-team-aspire-oxfordshire/>

Police will reduce criminals reoffending by teaming up with groups in the Thames Valley to ensure they have access to employment, housing and support. In the first of its kind for Thames Valley, a one day event is being held on March 16 to bring organisations together who can support people that will be leaving prison.

It is organised by the police and crime commissioner, Anthony Stansfeld, as well as teams from Aspire Oxfordshire and Thames Valley Partnership.

Mr Stansfeld's deputy Matthew Barber said: "Collaboration is key when it comes to reducing reoffending and we wanted to organise something which would have a positive impact for people leaving prison. "We hope to secure ambitious pledges from delegates who attend the conference promoting collaboration, inclusivity, innovation and enterprise."

It is being paid for by the Violence Reduction Unit in Thames Valley that works to reduce reoffending. Chief Executive Office of Aspire Oxfordshire, Paul Roberts, said: "We believe that, from day one, everyone in the Thames Valley leaving prison should have access to employment, housing and support. We want to encourage a community-led approach that supports and enhances the investment of public sector partners."

## **National Targets for Reducing Crime to be Reintroduced**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51645526>

## Domestic abuse

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/enhanced-domestic-abuse-bill-introduced-to-parliament>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-51709638>

Domestic violence offenders in England and Wales could face compulsory lie-detector tests when released from prison under proposed new laws. Those deemed at high risk of re-offending will be given regular polygraph tests to find out if they have breached release conditions.

The long-awaited Domestic Violence Bill will also specify that controlling a victim's finances can count as abuse.

Alleged abusers will also be banned from cross-examining victims in court.

Lie-detector tests - which work by measuring changes in heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate and sweat - are not 100% accurate.

But the Home Office said it was already using the tests to monitor high-risk sex offenders and had found them to be 89% accurate.

If the Domestic Abuse Bill passes, a three-year pilot will be carried out on domestic abusers which are deemed at high-risk of causing serious harm. If successful, the scheme will be rolled out nationwide.

Around 300 offenders will take a lie detector test three months after their release and every six months after that, according to the Home Office. Those who fail the test will not be returned to prison - but they may be jailed if they refuse to take the test or attempt to "trick" it, the Home Office added. They can also be returned to prison if the tests show "their risk has escalated to level whereby they can no longer be safely managed in the community".

Information gathered from failed lie-detector tests is routinely shared with the police who use it to carry out further investigations.

Campaigners say action to help the nearly two million victims of domestic abuse in the UK each year, two thirds of whom are women, is long overdue.

There will also be a ban on perpetrators cross-examining their victims during family court proceedings and a legal duty on councils to find safe accommodation for domestic abuse victims and their children.

Charity Women's Aid said this could be a "life-saving" move, but only if it was accompanied by guaranteed funding for specialist women's services - including for "marginalised" groups in society, which it estimates will cost about £173m a year.

While welcoming many of the initiatives, children's charities warned that some families with children risked "falling through the cracks in support".

The legislation will also enshrine a new definition of domestic abuse in law that recognises economic abuse - when a perpetrator controls a victim's finances - as a specific type of the crime.

Court protection orders banning perpetrators from contacting a victim or forcing them to take part in alcohol or drug treatment programmes may also be introduced.

Support for migrant domestic abuse victims will also be reviewed, while ministers will consider what more can be done to stop the so-called "rough sex" defence being used by perpetrators in court.

## **Homicide rise linked to fall in police numbers, Home Office says**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51754289>

The fall in police numbers is "likely" to be a "contributory factor" in the rise in murder and manslaughter cases since 2014, an official study suggests.

Police numbers in England and Wales fell by 21,000 from 2010-18 - and community support officers by 6,000. And the rate of murders and manslaughters soared by 39% in the three years to March 2018.

Evidence suggests "more police officers means fewer homicides... if all else is equal", the Home Office report says. But the study also highlights increases in drugs- and terror-related cases as key reasons for the rise.

Clear-up rates for most crimes, notably robbery, have fallen sharply in England and Wales since 2014 and the 80-page report suggests the rise in homicides could also be due to violent incidents that escalate or offenders progressing from less serious crimes.

- Number of suspects charged by police hits new low
- Gang murder investigations blocked by 'wall of silence'

The report says: "There has been much speculation about the role of declining police resources in the recent rise in homicide. "Given the lack of robust UK-based studies, this review cannot add much to that debate. "However, if the elasticities from the robust US studies are transferrable to the UK context, then police numbers are likely to be a contributory factor, rather than the driving factor."

The government is promising to hire an extra 20,000 police officers by 2023, at a cost of £1.1bn. There are currently 123,171 police officers in England and Wales, down from 143,000 in 2010.

## **Organised criminal gangs are being blamed for the continued rise of large fly-tipping incidents across England.**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-50660138>

Experts said fake companies hired out buildings to dump clients' waste, costing local authorities almost £60m in clean-up costs since 2012.

Parts of London and Manchester have been hardest hit by a growing "crisis" in illegal waste removal services.

Gangs will pose as legitimate waste disposal businesses, advertising their services on the internet for a cost, she added.

The BBC Shared Data Unit found:

- Large-scale fly-tipping - defined as tipper lorry load or more in size - has more than doubled in six years
- Last year, councils faced a £12.8m bill to clear more than 36,200 large tips
- That accounted for more than a fifth of the overall cost of clearing fly-tips

It said criminals were using lock-cutting tools to break into private land and tip vast quantities of waste that can cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to clear.

Bogus waste companies also try to rent buildings or land and dump lorry loads of rubbish.

In some instances, they go to great lengths to disguise their activities, compacting the waste into plastic wrapping, then taking it to open land and building it into haystack shapes.

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs said waste crime was becoming more organised, involving "networks of career criminals", and tackling this type of illegal activity was complex.

In 2019, local authorities were given the power to issue penalties of up to £400 to householders who pass waste to an unlicensed carrier and whose waste is then found fly-tipped.

Earlier this year, Sir James Bevan, chief executive of the Environment Agency, said organised crime gangs linked to slavery, drugs and firearms were exploiting the waste industry in massive fraud and fly-tipping schemes.

The agency is responsible for clearing larger scale fly-tips on public land, though it bills the cost to the local authority.

An agency spokesman told the BBC: "Waste crime is an unacceptable blight on our environment, estimated to cost the UK economy at least £600m a year and put communities at risk.

"We are determined to bring waste criminals to justice, which is why anyone found guilty could face jail time or a hefty fine. In the last year, we closed down over 900 illegal waste sites, brought forward 113 prosecutions and launched a Joint Unit on Waste Crime to bring down the most serious and organised criminal groups."

The joint unit brings together police forces, the National Crime Agency, the Environment Agency, HMRC and Natural Resources Wales.

**Police send warning to residents over 'Amazon Prime' scam**

<https://www.bracknellnews.co.uk/news/18246606.police-send-warning-bracknell-wokingham-residents-amazon-prime-scam/>

## **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.