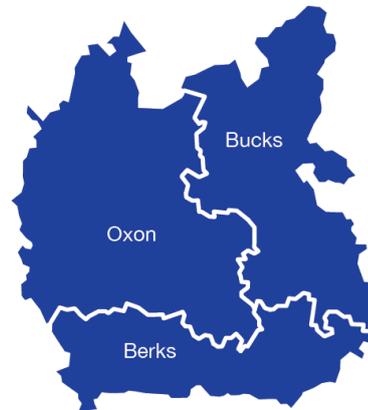


Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

Title: Topical Issues

Date: 28 January 2022

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Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

Peers voted to make misogyny a hate crime in England and Wales - a move that would enable judges to impose stronger penalties if prejudice against women is proved to be the motivation.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-60032465>

Criminal prosecution delays hit record 708 days

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-60071691>

Delays in prosecuting suspected criminals have hit a record 708 days for the average time it takes to go from offence to completion of a case. In the three months to September 2021, the average time it took to deal with a crime rose 15%, up from 620 days.

The figures are a blow to the Ministry of Justice which is battling to reduce the massive backlog of serious crimes waiting to be dealt with by judges.

The government figures show that while more cases are being listed for trial at Crown Court, they are not being dealt with fast enough to prevent the average wait for justice from increasing.

The overall backlog has fallen by around 1,000 to 59,928 outstanding Crown Court prosecutions. Judges set provisional dates for almost 6,200 new cases in the three months to September - a significant improvement. But, at the same time, 6,009 other prosecutions did not progress for a combination of reasons including postponements.

Criminal barristers say those postponements are being driven by a combination of a lack of court time, judges and available lawyers to run each prosecution.

Earlier this week, the government announced it would soon allow the lower magistrates courts to sentence some offenders for up to a year - a move to reduce the flow of less serious cases to judges in the Crown Courts.

Thames Valley Police warn farmers not to go out patrolling the streets after spike in crime

<https://www.buckinghamshirelive.com/news/buckinghamshire-news/thames-valley-police-warn-farmers-6508949>

Farmers are being urged not to go out conducting their own patrols after a spike in rural crime in Buckinghamshire.

Thames Valley Police says there has been an increase in trailer, tool, and caravan thefts across rural Aylesbury Vale in recent weeks. But those affected are being warned not to go out patrolling the streets due to safety concerns.

TVP have said they have stepped-up patrols in the problem areas and will be targeting key times of the day.

But families are being asked to take steps to make it more difficult for thieves. These include:

- Locking everything away securely. Tools can be locked inside a locker or box or secured with a chain.
- Removing keys from vehicles, including machinery, when unattended.
- Making sure all gates, as well as windows and doors, are secured.
- Getting an alarm for any shed, garage or outhouse.
- Parking or placing something in front of trailers when not in use so it cannot be moved.
- Property marking your items is advisable and some tools can be painted with your name or postcode. Forensic marking is also an option.

Thames Valley police investigate more than 1,000 coercive control crimes during pandemic

<https://www.miltonkeynes.co.uk/news/crime/thames-valley-police-investigate-more-than-1000-coercive-control-crimes-during-pandemic-3527248>

Thames Valley police investigated more than 1,000 allegations of coercive control in the first year of the coronavirus pandemic, figures show. December marked the sixth anniversary of landmark legislation introduced to make coercive or controlling behaviour a criminal offence in England and Wales. But only a "small minority of survivors" who experience such abuse will see justice done, according to charity Women's Aid.

Data published by the Office for National Statistics shows Thames Valley Police logged 1,005 allegations of coercive or controlling behaviour during 2020-21. That was up from 806 the year before – and different figures suggest most cases will never reach a courtroom.

Of the 713 cases closed by the force in Thames Valley during 2020-21, 94% were abandoned due to difficulties gathering evidence while just 37 ended with a suspect being charged or summonsed to court. Women's Aid described coercive control, which is punishable by up to five years imprisonment, as a problem "at the heart of almost all domestic abuse".

Abusers can be jailed for subjecting a partner or family member to controlling behaviour such as isolating them, exploiting them financially, depriving them of basic needs, humiliating, frightening or threatening them.

During the first year of the pandemic, 34,000 allegations were reported to forces across England and Wales, with the number of recorded crimes rising by more than a third compared to around 25,000 in 2019-20, though data for that year excludes Greater Manchester Police.

Home Office figures show more than nine in 10 investigations closed nationally in 2020-21 were dropped due to evidential difficulties, while just 4% resulted in a charge or summons being issued.

In some cases, prosecutors and investigators may close a coercive control investigation but continue to pursue other offences linked to the case.

A spokesman for the National Police Chiefs' Council said the response to the complex problem had improved in recent years but acknowledged the need for better understanding across the justice system. He said officers sought to safeguard victims and build cases where reported incidents meet the requirements to be considered a crime but not the threshold for arrest or prosecution.

Bulletin from Police and Crime Commissioner (23 December 2021)

"PCC seeking your views on Thames Valley Police budget Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, Matthew Barber, has launched an online survey seeking views on the budget for Thames Valley Police for 2022/23.

On 16 December, the Home Office announced the funding settlement for police forces across the country for the next financial year. In Thames Valley, this means an additional £15.5m in Government grant to pay for a further increase of 244 police officers (including 13 for the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit, SEROCU) next year. The increase in officers is part of the national uplift programme that will see 20,000 additional officers across the country by March 2023. In the Thames Valley, we have already seen the positive effects of recruitment with more police officers than a decade ago and, in addition to the Home Office funded recruitment, Police & Crime Commissioner, Matthew Barber, is seeking to fund additional future growth to ensure that police officer numbers increase in-line with our population.

Despite the increase in funding from government, there continue to be cost pressures on the Force, and the public rightly expect to see improving performance in order to keep us all safe and bring criminals to justice. Alongside the funding from the Home Office, the Government has also allowed Police & Crime Commissioners to increase council tax by up to £10 (for a Band D property) in order to make additional investments in policing. This

monetary increase is called a precept. There are eight council tax bands but nationally Band D properties are used as the benchmark. In Thames Valley, that means that for less than 20p a week for the average household, more than £9m could be invested in frontline policing.

Launching the survey, Matthew Barber said: “As your Police and Crime Commissioner, I am committed to ensuring that your police precept is spent wisely and delivers best value for money. I am committed to ensuring effective spending across policing, to ensure we employ the maximum number of police officers possible. By giving us your feedback, you can help shape decisions about police funding and how Thames Valley Police can continue to work to keep us all safe.

“In previous years, the support of local tax payers through their council tax has meant that we have managed to reduce the time it takes for the police to answer non-urgent 101 calls; to significantly increase detection rates, meaning that more victims of crime receive justice and more criminals are held to account; and creating a dedicated rural crime taskforce.

“It is important that if there is any increase in council tax now, at a time when many families are struggling and costs are rising, it is focussed on frontline policing to tackle the concerns of the public. I am proud of the work done by Thames Valley Police Officers, PCSOs, staff and volunteers every single day, but with more investment, there is more that could be done.”

Earlier this year, Matthew published his Police & Criminal Justice Plan which sets out the following priorities for Thames Valley Police:

- Strong local policing – recruiting more police officers, supporting neighbourhood policing teams and focussing on local crimes such as vehicle crime, burglaries and anti-social behaviour. Ensuring that we protect victims of domestic abuse and ensure that everyone can feel safe on our streets
- Fighting organised crime – tackling county-lines drugs gangs that exploit young people and drive serious violence in our communities
- Tackling cyber crime and fraud – ensuring that the police and other agencies are equipped to protect you and your family from scams and fraud
- Improving the criminal justice system – bringing more criminals to justice, bringing more cases of domestic abuse, sexual assault and rapes to court and reducing reoffending
- Tackling illegal encampments – ensuring the police and local authorities take a firm but fair approach

Matthew added: “Final decisions on council tax and budget priorities will be made at the end of January, and by contributing your views now you can help play your part in shaping how Thames Valley Police continues to improve and tackle crime across our communities.”

The survey can be completed at <https://survey.alchemer.eu/s3/90415648/Council-Tax-Survey-2022-23>. It is open for your feedback until 5pm on Tuesday 18 January 2022.”

Impact of closure of Bracknell Police Station

<https://www.bracknellnews.co.uk/news/19826018.bracknell-crime-doubled-past-year-following-police-station-closure/>

Crime in Bracknell has doubled in the past year but authorities insist it is under control and has nothing to do with the closure of the town's police station front desk.

According to recent figures on police.uk, a record of trends the level of crime throughout the UK, the amount of crime reported in 'Bracknell town' alone has risen from 31 incidents in December 2020 to 62 in November 2021.

These include incidents of theft, public order, shop lifting, and the most prevalent crime reports being violence and sexual offences.

According to councillor John Harrison, a record high of police officers have been recruited both in the local area and the UK in general. This comes as part of the Conservative Government's commitment to boost police numbers nationwide by 20,000.

He said: "I am pleased to see resources being focused on recruiting front line police officers rather than spending money on buildings."

Over the past three years, the crime levels in Bracknell town were seen to be steadily decreasing. However, despite the boosts to the areas police force, January 2021 saw the first increase of crime in a number of months, and the numbers have steadily increased as the year progressed.

Domestic abuse victims in England and Wales to be given more time to report assaults

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/domestic-abuse-victims-in-england-and-wales-to-be-given-more-time-to-report-assaults>

Under the changes, victims of domestic abuse will be allowed more time to report incidents of common assault or battery against them. Currently, prosecutions must commence within six months of the offence.

Instead, this requirement will be moved to six months from the date the incident is formally reported to the police – with an overall time limit of two years from the offence to bring a prosecution. Domestic abuse is often reported late relative to other crimes; so this will ensure victims have enough time to seek justice and that perpetrators answer for their actions.

Meanwhile, taking non-consensual photographs or video recordings of breastfeeding mothers will be made a specific offence punishable by up to two years in prison. It covers situations where the motive is to obtain sexual gratification, or to cause humiliation, distress or alarm. Similar legislation introduced by the Government in 2019 that criminalised "upskirting" has led to more than 30 prosecutions since it became law.

Ministers are changing the law to protect mums from being harassed no matter where they choose to breastfeed.

Policing to receive up to £1.1 billion extra to cut crime

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/policing-to-receive-up-to-11-billion-extra-to-cut-crime>

The 2022/23 funding package represents a 7% cash increase on last year and means policing will receive up to £16.9 billion in total in 2022/23.

Policing will receive a funding boost of up to £1.1 billion next year to drive down crime and deliver safer streets for all, Home Secretary Priti Patel announced today (Thursday 16 December).

The 2022/23 funding package represents an inflation-busting 7% cash increase on last year and means policing will receive up to £16.9 billion in total in 2022/23.

The boost in resources will help support the delivery of the Beating Crime Plan, which set out the government's mission to deliver fewer victims, safer neighbourhoods, and a more secure country. In particular, the plan focuses on driving down homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime – to ensure that everyone can benefit from the security that a safe home, street and country provides.

The additional funding will allow police forces to continue the work already being done to target criminals, which has seen:

- a 14% fall in overall crime (excluding fraud and computer misuse) between June 2019 and June 2021
- 11,053 additional officers hired across England and Wales – 55% of the target of 20,000 extra police officers by March 2023
- over 1,500 county lines closed, over 7,400 arrests, £4.3m in drugs seized and more than 4,000 vulnerable people safeguarded, thanks to our investment in shutting down county lines since 2019.
- almost 16,000 knives and other dangerous weapons removed from the streets last year thanks to police use of stop and search powers.
- 300,000 at risk young people reached through Violence Reduction Units, set up across the country thanks to £105.5m in funding. This forms part of the £242m we've invested since 2019 to zone in on serious violence and homicide hotspots.

Within the total package, forces will also be given £550 million more from government grants, including funding for hiring the 20,000 extra officers promised by the government by the end of March 2023. The successful recruitment campaign has already seen more than 11,000 additional police officers join up and make a difference in communities across England and Wales.

Funding to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) is increasing by up to an additional £796 million, assuming full take-up of precept flexibility. PCCs will have up to £10 of precept flexibility per Band D property in each of the next three years to use according to their local needs.

The settlement includes more money to enable the police to tackle Serious Organised Crime, support rape victims and protect our national security, with Counter Terrorism police funding increasing to over £1 billion for the first time.

From the total settlement, £1.4 billion will be spent to deliver on national priorities, including taking down more county lines, reducing violent crime, child sexual abuse and exploitation, fraud and modern slavery.

Oxford spikings: nearly 20 incidents reported to Thames Valley Police

<https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/19742668.oxford-spikings-nearly-20-incidents-reported-thames-valley-police/>

In Oxford there were nearly 20 spiking incidents reported to police during a 12 month period between 2020 and 2021, an Oxford Mail investigation has revealed.

The data comes as three women in the county have told of their experiences of being allegedly spiked through their drink and via needles.

‘Spiking’ refers to when someone is given alcohol or drugs without their knowledge, usually in a drink. A person may be spiked for the intent of stealing from the victim, assaulting them sexually or physically or as an attempted joke.