

**Crimefighters**  
**Building Confidence in Policing**

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Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley

## CONTENTS

<b>FOREWORD FROM THE COMMISSIONER</b> .....	3
FOREWORD FROM THE CHIEF CONSTABLE.....	4
THE MISSION.....	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	5
IMPROVING PUBLIC CONTACT .....	6
<b>Reducing 101 waiting times</b> .....	6
<b>Automating feedback</b> .....	6
<b>Enabling better digital contact</b> .....	7
COMMUNITY POLICING.....	8
<b>Standardisation &amp; common purpose</b> .....	8
<b>More neighbourhood police officers</b> .....	8
<b>Improving communication with the public</b> .....	9
CRIMEFIGHTING.....	10
<b>Greater community intelligence</b> .....	10
<b>Anti-social behaviour and delivering swift justice</b> .....	10
<b>Focus on hotspot patrols and known offenders</b> .....	10
<b>Reduce emergency and mental health demand</b> .....	11
ENABLERS .....	12
<b>Opportunities for officer training and development</b> .....	12
<b>Continued recruitment of PCs, PCSOs and staff</b> .....	12
<b>Improved support for Special Constables and volunteers</b> .....	12
<b>Improved investigation structure</b> .....	12
<b>Establishing a Thames Valley CCTV Partnership</b> .....	13
DELIVERING THE VISION.....	13
<b>Contact Management Governance</b> .....	13
<b>Community Policing Governance</b> .....	13
<b>Police Constable Resourcing</b> .....	13
<b>Police Community Support Officers</b> .....	14
<b>Special Constabulary</b> .....	14
<b>Working practices</b> .....	14
<b>AIU roll out</b> .....	14

## FOREWORD FROM THE COMMISSIONER

When I was elected in 2021 I published my Police & Criminal Justice Plan, setting out my priorities on behalf of the public across Thames Valley. Principal amongst those priorities was Strong Local Policing.

As part of that plan I pledged to publish a further strategy on Neighbourhood Policing. In these pages I set out my vision for the future of local policing within Thames Valley alongside work in other areas required to build public confidence in policing.

It is a truism that policing in the UK is carried out with the consent of the people. Britain remains part of a small and exclusive club of countries that does not routinely arm its police. To many people, this point may seem rather quaint, perhaps archaic and ill suited to the modern world.

I contend that the rather old fashioned principles set out by Sir Robert Peel, or at least published under his moniker, remain fundamental to policing the communities of Thames Valley in the twenty -first century.

The way in which we seek to undertake those principles and the context in which the police operate has undoubtedly changed. The nature of crime has continued to evolve; the advent of social media; and the changing relationship between the citizen and the state all mean that we live in a world that would be unrecognisable in many ways to the "peelers" of 1829.

Nevertheless the simple fact remains that confidence in the police matters. Through the strategy set out in this document, I hope to lay the building blocks for cutting crime and also improving public confidence so communities feel safer.

**Matthew Barber, Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner**

## FOREWORD FROM THE CHIEF CONSTABLE

As the new Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, my priorities are clear: Supporting victims, fighting crime and building trust and confidence amongst our communities.

I am in no doubt that trust and confidence in Policing at a national level has been impacted by recent high profile events. The recent inspection of Thames Valley Police by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) found that the Force has an ethical and inclusive culture and treats people with dignity and respect. Despite this, we need to work harder to earn the trust and confidence of all our local communities. We should be impatient to improve and demonstrate to the public our professionalism, values and the commitment that we are on their side.

A core part of building trust and confidence in the Police is the prioritisation of Neighbourhood Policing. Our vision for Neighbourhood Policing is to have local officers, visible in their local communities, focused on preventing crime and targeting prolific offenders responsible for Neighbourhood crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB). The Police are not the sole agency responsible for preventing crime and we will work closely with local partners in developing innovative solutions to problems.

I believe our communities are safer when officers are confident in using their powers and I expect our Neighbourhood Teams to be proactive in investigating crimes impacting the community and arresting offenders.

There will be focused efforts in improving the recruitment of Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) and encouraging local people to volunteer as Special Constables, working closely with their local Neighbourhood Teams to fight crime and protect our communities.

I am grateful for the leadership of the Police and Crime Commissioner and to the public in increasing investment in Neighbourhood Officers and this Crimefighters plan will be front and centre in building trust and confidence in our communities.

**Jason Hogg, Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police**

## THE MISSION

Justified or not, confidence in policing has undoubtedly been damaged in recent years. Our mission may not be simple but it is clear: to fight crime and build confidence in policing across Thames Valley.

Headline issues, often, but not always, from other forces around the country can certainly colour the public's perception about the way they are policed. These are important matters that need to be, and are being, addressed by Thames Valley Police. The much bigger contributor to public confidence, however, is our own experiences and those of our friends and loved ones.

Whilst fashions and buzzwords come and go, the simple fact remains that policing will be judged by how safe we feel in our own communities.

***"To fight crime by building public confidence, seeking to prevent and deter crime wherever possible and seek justice for victims."***

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this strategy is to give the public the confidence to support the police within their communities; to give the police the organisational confidence to become more proactive and focus on preventing crime; and to give our communities the confidence to live without the fear of crime.

Ambitious yet achievable goals, concrete steps towards which are further described within this strategy.

There are some pressing issues that policing generally, not just Thames Valley Police, need to address. There are challenges of dealing with the increasing demand of a growing population. These are combined with the pressures of protected learning time for new police officers recruited through the Police Education Qualifications Framework (PEQF). Together, these issues often seem to set the police's organisation priorities against the needs of the public. The need to manage demand can create a situation that seems to push the public further away from the police. The focus on high harm incidents means that many offences are now dealt with as volume crimes - the very name suggesting a level of acceptance and toleration of offending.

In such a climate, confidence in policing has fallen. The solution to the challenge is in fact to embrace the Peelian Principles of community engagement and crime prevention.

By improving the ways in which the public can contact the police - and importantly the ways in which the police report back to the public - we can begin not just to increase confidence and improve crime reporting, but crucially to give the public the courage and confidence to report their concerns more widely.

The Force needs the courage to restructure to put community policing at the heart of its operations. This means setting out a clear purpose, structure and methodology for community policing. This will only be effective by pro-actively preventing crime, and therefore reducing the demand on response areas of policing. Reducing crime in our communities, and robustly dealing with those who do break the law, will further build public confidence. Giving communities the confidence to live without the fear of crime is better for us all, socially, economically and personally. This further breaks down barriers between the police and the public, giving more confidence to report incidents and crime in the future, trusting that the police really are the crimefighters the public expect.

## IMPROVING PUBLIC CONTACT

Most people will hope to have little or no contact with the police in their lifetimes. They will generally only deal with policing when something has gone wrong, in their lives, the lives of their loved ones, or in their communities. First impressions count and therefore the initial and ongoing contact with the police is crucial in delivering public confidence.

### **Reducing 101 waiting times**

There is a short term imperative to reduce the currently unacceptable waiting times when contacting the police on 101. Performance is significantly below the current target for the average time to answer calls. Whilst this is by definition a non-emergency number the work underway to improve the response must develop a long term solution. Significant fluctuations in the response over time will simply continue to damage confidence, and failure will have a real impact. Many victims of crime will become frustrated, some may resort to using 999 in order to achieve a better response. Sadly some victims may simply not report their crimes, and even more often the public will be less likely to report intelligence or incidents where they have not themselves been victims.

Improvements to IT systems, business process changes, including consideration of challenging Home Office and HMICFRS orthodoxy, along with investment in people and premises will all be part of the solution.

Improvements in the 101 service must be sustained and delivered alongside innovation in new ways of contacting the police. All of this must be with the intention of encouraging the public to report, rather than simply reducing demand. In the past, the message from the police has often been about putting people off from making contact. There is certainly merit in the public understanding the correct use of 999, and being directed to the most appropriate method of contact, however, the overriding message to the public must be: report, report, report.

If the public have the courage to contact the police, they must have the confidence that their contact will be valued and appropriately actioned.

### **Automating feedback**

Around 20% of all calls to 101 are about updates to crimes already reported. If these are dealt with differently, it would not just mean less pressure on call handlers but - more importantly - a better experience for the public. Whilst policing as a universal organisation will always provide its services by telephone, the possibility of automating feedback on progress is a potential game changer.

Being able to log in online to check on the progress of your crime would mean less waiting, quicker updates and the opportunity of more effective two way communication.

The concept is not new, but by seeking to start simply and build functionality over time, Thames Valley can be in the vanguard of improving feedback to the public.

## **Enabling better digital contact**

Not only do most people not have much contact with the police, the vast majority do not want to do so. This is why attempts to use stand alone mobile phone apps for policing are flawed. We download apps for things we want, not as a "just in case". When the public do need to contact the police it is at least important, if not urgent, and downloading new software is the last thing on anyone's mind.

The current alternative to using the 101 telephone service is known as Single Online Home (SOH). A national system with undeniable benefits of being web based (and therefore universal) and common across the majority of police forces. Being part of this national programme brings benefits, however there is scope to improve digital contact using other technologies to compliment, rather than replace, the web based system.

The use of native messaging that many of us use instinctively provides the possibility of a completely different way of talking to the police. Facebook Messenger (36 million users) and WhatsApp (over 40 million users) provide the opportunity to reach more than three-quarters of the population.

Once the systems are developed that allow webchat functionality to improve interactions between the police and the public, applying the same principles to a different platform becomes relatively simple. In implementing the use of new technologies there will be a need to re-evaluate the way risk is managed to maintain high levels of public confidence.

Integration with native messaging apps opens up the possibility of live chat, using automation to triage initial contacts, speeding up the response for the public and providing the police with much richer information. Information such as images, videos, location data can all be ingested onto police systems maintaining evidential quality.

As now with SOH, contact management staff at the end of the new messaging platform will ensure the public receive the same response as they would if contacting the Force by telephone on 101.

Over time the use of these technologies is likely to grow and provide an even wider range of services, but early adoption of improved digital contact is likely to see a significant increase in contact with the police. Traditionally this would be seen as a challenge, and undoubtedly it must be adequately planned for. It would however be a welcome sign of confidence in policing if the public demonstrate their courage to reach out with information or to ask for help.

It then falls to the Force to ensure proactive community policing in order to respond to those calls from the public.

## COMMUNITY POLICING

Now is the time to revive true Community Policing. Capitalising on the record number of police officers in Thames Valley; giving a clear focus and recognising the benefits of prioritising community policing.

### **Standardisation & common purpose**

There are already significant resources in place across the Force under the current neighbourhood policing model, but how those resources are deployed varies significantly between local police areas (LPAs).

There is an urgent need to clarify the common purpose of community policing. Engagement is key, but for some it becomes an end in itself. This common purpose should drive activity around the overall mission set out in this document.

Thames Valley is a large and diverse place. The crime types that most affect our individual communities will of course vary, however that should not impact the simple fact that every community deserves the highest quality policing Thames Valley Police can provide.

Similarly, the problems encountered by community policing teams will be very different from one end of the force area to another, but the methodology used to approach such problems should be consistent. Within the large organisation that is Thames Valley Police there is a need to properly share best practice and standardisation should go alongside innovation in enabling that.

### **More neighbourhood police officers**

There has been significant pressure on Incident and Crime Response teams as the Force has emerged from the pandemic. Crime levels are returning closer to levels seen prior to COVID-19. This, combined with the pressures of protected learning time for new officers joining the Force through PEQF, has meant an increased draw on neighbourhood policing resources which has had a significant impact. Combined with the uplift recruitment itself, which has seen many PCSOs join as constables, this has meant few officers dedicated to neighbourhood policing roles. Only by refocussing the Force, with the support of the public, can we ever seek to get ahead of the criminals and genuinely build safer communities.

Short term options need to be explored to deploy newly recruited officers directly to community policing, as well as a longer term need to review the establishment figures within community policing. The Force Review provides an opportunity to look afresh at the required resources from the bottom up and hardwire the principles of community policing into future structures.

This does not just relate to police officers, but crucially to PCSOs. Recruitment is more challenging for these non-police officer roles and so options, such as the trajectory of recruitment to full establishment and supervisory PCSO rank, should be explored in order to make the role more attractive in terms of recruitment and retention. By valuing community policing within the wider organisation we should seek to keep people within their own local geographies for longer. Local knowledge



and connections really matter, and whilst career progression should be encouraged we should seek to provide progression that also supports the needs of the public.

### **Improving communication with the public**

There are certainly lessons to be learned from other forces and public sector partners to improve the use of social media to effectively communicate with our communities. Much of this is about simply sending out a broad message to inform the public of police activity or incidents.

*Visibility* is often considered the pinnacle of community policing. It is indeed important that officers are physically present in order to build that public confidence. Whilst what we do in the online world can never replace the need for warranted officers doing the tough job of policing, we should recognise that a growing number of us live a significant proportion of our lives through the prism of social media. Ensuring that the real work of the police in the physical world is accurately portrayed in the online space is important to providing reassurance and building confidence.

The key to excellent communications with the public runs much deeper though. It is about a golden thread running from the call to 101 all the way to the PCSO at the school gate. The most effective communication is a conversation, it is two way. From that first contact online it may be an accurate and timely, yet automated, response. Or it might be the knock at the door or telephone call from the local team to the someone who called 101 to report something suspicious.

Community policing is about crimefighting. So the attendance by officers at the school fete or community event is not just about showing a visible presence. The common purpose for community policing should make it clear that engagement at these events is to understand local concerns, to find out what is going on in the community, and to spot the early signs of trouble.

There is a great opportunity to improve communications with key stakeholders such as parish councils and residents' groups through professional, centrally resourced, reporting. Smarter targeted communication with residents based on geography and crime types can mean a closer link between the public and the police.

Improved communication will demonstrate the link, clearly to the public, between the information that they provide through crime reports or intelligence, all the way through to action being taken leading to future crime prevention and a safer community being built.

## CRIMEFIGHTING

Crimefighting is not just about bringing to justice those who have transgressed our laws - vitally important though that is. It is about crime prevention. A significant amount of police time is taken up with issues that are not crimes. Some of this work, often life saving, will always be inevitable. The Force needs to be more robust however in protecting its workforce from having to deal with excessive workloads that do not relate to the core purpose of fighting and preventing crime.

### **Greater community intelligence**

As has been clear throughout this document, increasing confidence in policing will give the public the courage to report, not just crimes that they have been the victim of, but also wider concerns and intelligence. Whether this is reported through 101, a digital channel, or in person to one of the growing number of community police officers, intelligence is vital. If we are to truly move to a model of crime prevention the police need to seek out, listen to and act upon these wider concerns. In many cases the outcome may be to work in partnership with others, such as the local authority or a community group to tackle issues, such as anti-social behaviour, that left unchecked could escalate into more serious criminality.

### **Anti-social behaviour and delivering swift justice**

Too often anti-social behaviour is seen as low level and unimportant; not scoring highly enough on any harm matrix. Nevertheless, persistent anti-social behaviour can blight communities, create a climate of fear and soon lead to much more serious crime. Through the funding I provide and the strong participation by the police in Community Safety Partnerships we have the opportunity to use a wide range of tools, beyond just police powers, to tackle anti-social behaviour.

We have seen through Operation Deter, Thames Valley's no-nonsense approach to tackling knife crime, that it is not just possible to deliver swift justice, but also that it has significant impact in improving public confidence and providing a deterrent. The same approach can be taken in dealing with anti-social behaviour and other areas of neighbourhood crime. Acting swiftly, embracing new opportunities being developed for reparative justice, and clearly communicating positive outcomes must be part of the approach taken to restore confidence.

### **Focus on hotspot patrols and known offenders**

Although a great deal of evidence has been gathered to demonstrate the efficacy of hotspot policing, it remains a matter of common sense for many, that proactive policing targeted at known hotspots will help to prevent crime. The same is also true around known offenders. The police will, of course, always continue to act impartially and proportionately, but the public rightly expect that officers will focus their efforts where it is likely to have the greatest impact on reducing crime. As a pilot area for the Government's new Serious Violence Prevention Orders, Thames Valley is leading the way in this work. Significant work has also been done with other public bodies to bring together data from across the public sector to identify where resources should best be targeted. This cooperation will be further strengthened through the Serious Violence Duty. Visible patrolling, on foot and in vehicles should be part of any effective community policing strategy, not simply as a tool for generic

community reassurance, but when correctly deployed as an effective method preventing crime, gathering intelligence and ensuring safer communities.

### **Reduce emergency and mental health demand**

The mental health challenges facing the police are easy to over simplify. There are plenty of welfare cases where the police simply should not be involved and individuals in crisis should rightly be supported by other agencies. It is impossible however to avoid the notable overlap where a crime or immediate threat to life exists. Nevertheless, even in these circumstances, the Force has a responsibility to the public to ensure police resources are available to fight crime.

The Right Care Right Person model, pioneered by Humberside Police, presents a blueprint for tackling this challenge between the police and the NHS. It now has support from across Government, including the Department of Health and Social Care and the Home Office.

Similar partnership working with local authorities to deal more effectively with the causes of young people in care being reported missing has demonstrated some successes and justifies robust conversations with other organisations. The police have their role to play in the wider public sector but they cannot be the service of last resort where other agencies should be stepping up to take the lead.

Currently much of the pressure of dealing with mental health and other inappropriate demand is felt by Incident and Crime Response teams, already under pressure in dealing with genuine crime-related emergencies.

Alleviating some of this pressure, combined with the determinedly proactive work of the newly reinvigorated community policing teams, will further reduce avoidable emergency calls to the police when things have gone wrong.

This is why community policing is so essential to the future model of Thames Valley Police.

## ENABLERS

This strategy encompasses a wide range of organisational activity within Thames Valley Police and is ambitious within its own terms. There are, however, a number of other areas of work vital to the success of this project and the wider organisation.

### **Opportunities for officer training and development**

Pressure on training has been significant due to the dual pressures of police officer recruitment and the impositions of restrictions during the pandemic. The coming years provide an opportunity, indeed a need, to rebalance training. Training is important in its own right to develop the skills needed within the workforce, but also to provide a route of progression and advancement for individuals.

### **Continued recruitment of PCs, PCSOs and staff**

Thames Valley has more police officers than ever before, with more than 5,000 officers at the start of 2023/24. This provides a fantastic opportunity and a solid base on which to build. We have planned for future growth to ensure we at least keep pace with the growth in our population over the coming years. The continuation of IPLDP+ entry (or any future PEQF equivalent) will be key not just to ensuring we secure the number of new recruits required, but will deliver a diversity of applicants. Efforts must continue to retain those experienced officers currently in service, for example by maximising the South East Allowance payment. Recruitment of staff and PCSOs remains significantly harder than that of police constables, but is no less important. Consideration should be given to options for changing the structure of PCSO ranks and supervision to make recruitment and retention more attractive. We also need to be realistic about the timescales for recruiting and training PCSOs and look to accelerate PC recruitment to neighbourhood teams in order to provide the strongest possible proactive policing at the earliest opportunity.

### **Improved support for Special Constables and volunteers**

Special Constables, alongside our other volunteers, offer a unique set of skills alongside unrivalled enthusiasm and dedication. They deserve increased support from the Force, properly utilising their abilities by offering increased levels of training commensurate with the amount of time provided to policing. This will not just ensure the benefits of the Special Constabulary are maximised but it will help to recruit and maintain Specials in order to increase numbers to around 10% of the size of the regular force.

### **Improved investigation structure**

The Assessment and Investigation Unit (AIU) first launched in Berkshire and now rolling out across Thames Valley is showing strong early successes in providing a better response to the public whilst reducing pressure on response officers.

For Community Policing to be truly proactive it will need to manage some investigative caseload in order to deal with local offenders and deliver for their communities.

Whatever the operational details of any investigative structure it must build on the lessons learnt from previous work and ensure that victims are at the heart of this

work. Thames Valley must improve the investigation of neighbourhood crimes and anti-social behaviour in order to deliver public confidence.

### **Establishing a Thames Valley CCTV Partnership**

Work is already underway to establish a Thames Valley-wide partnership to manage public space CCTV. This ambitious plan seeks to bring CCTV under the control of Thames Valley Police with the Force (in most if not all cases) owning, maintaining and operating the public space CCTV in each local authority area. Whilst financial contributions will still be sought from local authorities on a partnership basis, this model will require significant investment from the police. The benefits however are also significant. Not just better coverage, but easier access for officers investigating crimes and overall better value for the public purse by providing more cost effective monitoring in a small number of designated control hubs.

## **DELIVERING THE VISION**

I am setting out this Crimefighters strategy as Police and Crime Commissioner to make clear my priorities for Thames Valley Police. It will however fall to the Force to deliver on this vision and I will hold the Chief Constable to account for that delivery.

### **Contact Management Governance**

The Force has already launched the Contact Management 101 programme (CM101) which sets a clear timetable for the reduction of 101 waiting times and the delivery of improved victim updates, a Citizen Portal and the launch of full digital chat by 2024/25. The first stage of implementing Robotic Process Automation to improve victim updates is already in place.

### **Community Policing Governance**

The majority of the operational activity relating to this strategy falls under the Local Policing portfolio and the Assistant Chief Constable for Local Policing is establishing a new governance board for Community Policing and will report regularly to the OPCC on delivery against this strategy. This will include looking at the wider brand of community policing, taking in schools officers and priority crime teams as well as geographical neighbourhood policing teams. This board will define the clear operational mission for community policing and will define clear outcomes.

### **Police Constable Resourcing**

Thames Valley Police now has more than 5,000 officers, more than ever before, and the first step in reprioritising community policing will be to **double the size of community policing teams**. 150 police constables will be added to dedicated community policing teams over the coming year (2023/24) as the start of this repositioning of the Force. These posts are being funded through local council tax precept, using funding for other currently vacant posts and in the case of four officers in Windsor and Maidenhead, thanks to ring-fenced funding provided by the local authority. This will include 10 dedicated mental health officers, in line with this strategy, and a further 20 officers deployed to neighbourhood policing teams immediately. The growth will continue through the current year with a further 20

posted between April and December 2023, followed by a further 40 around December and the remainder by early 2024. This is in addition to gradually reducing the abstractions to support response teams which has been so challenging over recent months. Overall recruitment to Thames Valley Police will continue at high levels over 2023/24 with further growth planned.

### **Police Community Support Officers**

Thames Valley Police will continue to prioritise PCSO recruitment and ensure the Force are as near to establishment as possible. The Force has approved - in principle - the introduction of PCSO supervisors which will be put in place as soon as possible.

### **Special Constabulary**

The 2023/24 budget includes £600,000 to implement the Citizens in Policing strategy that has been approved by the Chief Constables Management Team (CCMT). The first year will see the establishment of a dedicated Superintendent post and supporting team. Recruitment of Special Constables is expected to develop over the full 5 years of the strategy in order to achieve a Special Constabulary that will be 10% of the size of the regular Force (approximately 500 Special Constables).

### **Working practices**

A key priority will be to ensure that the Force has consistent working practices across community policing. This includes the approach to prevention, problem solving, hotspots, engagement and investigation. Neighbourhood teams will carry a caseload and be expected to investigate. The Force will use the Crimefighters brand to adopt a fighting crime culture in neighbourhood policing, tackling crime and ASB issues at a local level.

### **AIU roll out**

Building on the successful pilot in Berkshire the Force are now in a position to roll out Assessment and Investigation Units across Thames Valley from April 2023, being up and running by June 2023.

**April 2023<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> Matthew Barber<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub> Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner**

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