



Matthew Barber

Police & Crime Commissioner
for Thames Valley

Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner Response to *HMICFRS State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2025-26*

HMICFRS Report:

[State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2025–26 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

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Introduction

As Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, I welcome His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary's annual assessment of policing in England and Wales.

The report provides a balanced assessment of policing's current position, recognising both the resilience and professionalism of police officers and staff, whilst highlighting the growing pressures created by increasing demand, workforce challenges, financial constraints and rising public expectations.

Many of the themes identified by HMICFRS mirror those set out within my Police and Crime Plan and reflected in my Annual Report for 2025-26. Across Thames Valley, we continue to focus on strengthening neighbourhood policing, supporting victims, preventing crime, embracing innovation and maintaining public confidence through effective local accountability.

Reform, Modernisation and Local Accountability

I welcome HMICFRS's assessment that policing has a significant opportunity to modernise and strengthen its ability to serve the public.

National coordination, investment in technology, improved productivity and stronger specialist capabilities all have the potential to enhance policing's effectiveness and help forces respond to increasingly complex threats. However, structural reform alone will not resolve many of the challenges facing policing. Sustainable funding, effective collaboration and investment in frontline capability remain equally important if reform is to deliver lasting benefits for the public.

However, I also welcome HMICFRS's recognition that reform must preserve operational independence, local accountability and public confidence. Reform should be evidence-led, properly funded and delivered in a way that protects local responsiveness and ensures communities remain connected to the policing services they rely upon.



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The people of Thames Valley rightly expect decisions affecting local policing to remain grounded in local needs and priorities. Strong local accountability remains fundamental to public trust and confidence in policing.

Neighbourhood Policing and Prevention

I was pleased to see HMICFRS identify neighbourhood policing and prevention as among the strongest areas of performance nationally.

Visible neighbourhood policing remains central to my Police and Crime Plan. Over the past year we have continued to invest in neighbourhood policing, anti-social behaviour reduction, rural crime prevention and community-based problem solving.

Across Thames Valley, all local policing areas now benefit from dedicated Safer Streets activity, whilst continued investment through my Community and Crime Prevention Fund and Partnership Fund is helping local organisations and partners tackle the root causes of crime and vulnerability before greater harm occurs.

Crime prevention, early intervention and neighbourhood engagement remain among the most effective tools available to policing and its partners.

Victims, Investigations and Safeguarding

The report highlights continuing national concerns regarding investigations, safeguarding and outcomes for victims. These findings reflect areas where HMICFRS has consistently challenged forces to improve and where public expectations are rightly high.

Supporting victims remains one of my highest priorities. Despite ongoing financial pressures, I have maintained investment in specialist victim support services across Thames Valley, including support for victims of domestic abuse, sexual violence and other serious offences.

I will continue to hold the Chief Constable to account for investigation standards, victim care and safeguarding performance through regular performance scrutiny, public accountability arrangements and close monitoring of improvement activity.

Victims should rightly expect a service that is timely, professional and focused on delivering positive outcomes.

Workforce, Wellbeing and Leadership

HMICFRS is right to recognise that policing's greatest strength remains its workforce.

Police officers, staff and volunteers across Thames Valley continue to demonstrate professionalism, dedication and resilience in increasingly demanding circumstances.

I welcome the report's focus on wellbeing, leadership and workforce development. Supporting frontline officers and staff, investing in leadership and ensuring policing



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remains an attractive career are all essential if forces are to meet future challenges successfully.

I was particularly pleased to see Thames Valley Police recognised by HMICFRS as one of the strongest performing forces nationally for attracting, developing and retaining a diverse and inclusive workforce. This reflects significant effort to strengthen leadership, build capability and better reflect the communities we serve.

Innovation and Productivity

The report rightly identifies technology and innovation as critical enablers of future policing.

Thames Valley Police has consistently sought to embrace innovation in ways that improve public service whilst reducing unnecessary bureaucracy. I was pleased to see HMICFRS highlight Thames Valley Police's AI-enabled "Bobbi" chatbot as an example of national good practice.

Alongside wider investments in digital policing, data capabilities and technology-enabled services, innovation will play an increasingly important role in helping officers and staff spend more time protecting communities, preventing crime and supporting victims.

Innovation must always be accompanied by appropriate safeguards, transparency and public confidence, but when used responsibly it can deliver significant benefits both for the public and for policing.

Funding and Long-Term Sustainability

HMICFRS rightly acknowledges the financial pressures facing policing nationally. While reform, innovation and productivity improvements have an important role to play, they cannot be viewed as substitutes for a fair and sustainable funding settlement that reflects operational demand, rising public expectations and the need for long-term planning.

Sustainable funding remains essential if forces are to maintain operational performance whilst investing in the people, technology and infrastructure needed for the future.

I continue to support fair and sustainable funding arrangements that reflect demand and allow forces to plan effectively for the long term. Reform, innovation and productivity improvements all have an important role to play, but lasting improvement must be supported by sufficient resources and long-term financial certainty.

Conclusion

The HMICFRS report presents a constructive assessment of both the strengths and challenges facing policing.



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I welcome the report's recognition of the dedication of those working across policing, its support for neighbourhood policing and prevention, and its focus on improving outcomes for victims and vulnerable people.

Thames Valley Police is well placed to respond to these challenges through continued investment in neighbourhood policing, support for victims, crime prevention, innovation and workforce development.

I will continue to work with the Chief Constable, partners and local communities to ensure Thames Valley remains one of the safest places in the country to live, work and visit, whilst holding the force to account on behalf of the public it serves. The report also serves as a reminder that public confidence remains policing's most important asset. As policing continues to evolve, maintaining strong local relationships, visible neighbourhood policing and effective accountability will remain fundamental to securing public trust.

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