

# ThamesTalk

The magazine of Thames Valley Police Federation

Spring 2026



## Memorial Unveiled To 'Hero'

**A** Police Memorial Stone has been unveiled in memory of killed Thames Valley Police officer PC Andrew Harper. His wife Lissie, colleagues and many other dignitaries – including Police Minister Sarah Jones representing the Government – attended the unveiling in Reading, which was bathed in glorious sunshine.

Lissie said: "Today, we gather to remember and honour my late husband, Andrew – a man who meant so much to so many, and everything to me.

"He was proud to serve as a police officer, but to me, he was so much more.

"He was my partner, my strength, and my first love.

"He had a kind heart, a steady presence, and a quiet courage that shaped the way he lived every single day."

PC Andrew Harper was killed on duty when

he was dragged by a fleeing car after confronting quad bike thieves in a country lane near Sulhamstead, Berkshire, in August 2019.

Three teenagers later received custodial sentences of between 13 and 16 years for PC Harper's manslaughter.

Following their conviction, his widow Lissie campaigned for tougher sentences for people who are convicted of killing emergency services workers, achieving what is known as Harper's Law in 2022.

Lissie added: "In 2019, our lives changed forever. The world lost a hero, but I lost the person I was meant to grow old with – the man I stood beside on our wedding day, promising a lifetime we never got to finish.

"There are no words for that kind of loss – but there is love.

"A love that hasn't faded, and never will.

"I will always carry him with me – in my heart,

in my memories, and in everything he taught me about strength, compassion and courage."

She concluded: "Andrew was the epitome of what a police officer should be – willing to serve and protect at all costs.

"That is why I know how important it is that Andrew is honoured with this memorial, and I am so grateful to the trust and everyone involved in making it happen.

"I hope that those who walk these streets will take a moment to pause, to pay their respects, and to know that he made our world a safer place. He deserved so much more – but we will cherish all that he gave.

"Andrew... you are missed, you are loved, and you will never be forgotten."

Leigh Matthews, Deputy Secretary of Thames

■ continued on page 2

■ continued from page 1

Valley Police Federation, said: "We are here to celebrate the life of PC Andrew Harper.

"It's so important for many reasons, but mainly to recognise the huge sacrifice that Andrew made on that fateful day."

Police Minister Sarah Jones said: "It is incredibly humbling for me to be here with you all to honour PC Andrew Harper and to unveil a memorial dedicated to his memory, which will act as a permanent tribute to an outstanding police officer who was a credit to his family, his force and his country.

"His death was a moment of profound shock and sadness beyond those who knew and loved him, across the whole country.

"PC Harper was a dedicated public servant, a man of courage who would go out of his way to help others, and someone who epitomised the very best of British policing."

TVP Chief Constable Jason Hogg recalled being the Deputy Chief Constable – and on call – the night Andrew was killed in 2019.

He said: "Like many of those here, I remember



that day with absolute clarity as the chief officer with Thames Valley Police on call that evening. I remember the shock at the information given.

"I remember standing with officers in the aftermath – that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

"What I saw that day was a policing family in deep pain.

"I saw officers who were experienced, resilient and professional, suddenly faced with the unbearable reality that one of their own was not coming home.

"And I remember watching hearts break in front of me. It was a solemn, devastating scene that left a mark on every one of us who witnessed it.



"Andrew was 28 years old. He was doing his job. He was responding to a call for help, serving the public, protecting his community.

"There was nothing extraordinary about that decision, because for police officers across this country that sense of duty is part of everyday service.

"And yet we know the risk is always there."

The Memorial Stone was commissioned by the Police Memorial Trust.

Its Chair Geraldine Winner said: "It's absolutely right that the landscape of Reading should change just a little to accommodate a permanent reminder of the life and death of PC Andrew Harper."

## Pay Proposal 'Kick In Teeth'

The Government's proposed 2.5% police pay rise is "nowhere near enough" and a "kick in the teeth" to officers, Thames Valley Police Federation has said.

Chair Aileen O'Connor was speaking after the Home Office told the Police Remuneration Review Body (PRRB) that a below-inflation police pay award of just 2.5% was "fair" if no new money was provided.

This mirrors the position of the National Police Chiefs' Council.

But the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) has called for a minimum 7% pay rise in each of the next three years to restore police pay, improve morale, and address recruitment and retention challenges.

Aileen said the below-inflation pay proposal was out of touch with the cost-of-living crisis and the dangers officers face every day.

She said: "The Home Office is quite frankly out of touch with the issues police officers face on a daily basis, and it is insulting to say that a pay rise of 2.5% is enough.

"It is nowhere near enough – this is a further kick in the teeth from the Home Office.

"In its submission to the PRRB, it states it lacks clear evidence of broad recruitment or retention issues, but this is contradicted by Home Office data and independent analysis.

"Voluntary resignations in England and Wales have risen sharply over the past decade, with more



than half of all officer leavers now leaving through resignation rather than retirement.

"Current national resignation rates are estimated at 5–6% per year; if this isn't a retention issue, I don't know what is."

Aileen continued: "A 2.5% pay deal is a real-terms pay cut. Police pay has fallen significantly in real terms since 2010, and with inflation continuing to run above 2.5%, the proposed deal would further entrench this decline rather than stabilise police pay.

"With the cost-of-living crisis very real for our police officers, as well as the increased dangers our

officers face day to day, 2.5% is simply not enough and they deserve more.

"We have just celebrated numerous examples of brave and courageous officers across the Thames Valley at our 2026 Bravery Awards.

"They have dealt with incidents involving knife-wielding individuals; put themselves in harm's way to protect the public; and run into burning buildings to save people's lives.

"But of course, celebrating their courage and bravery does not help them pay their bills or fill their cars with fuel. Our officers deserve more, much more."



## Team Detained Violent Man

The first Bravery Award winners were seven officers who courageously detained a dangerous armed man who was ramming his vehicle into cars full of families.

On 23 December 2023, Thames Valley Police officers responded to reports of a man with a knife threatening people at Chieveley Services on the M4. He was also ramming into vehicles with his Range Rover, while families with young children were in the vehicles.

When Sgt Kieran Baker, PC Richard Tarrant, PC Amber Perkins, PC Ross Maclean, PC Beth

not respond or get out of his car, so Sgt Baker discharged the Taser, but it did not take effect and the suspect continued to fight.

PC Tarrant was forced to climb into the Range Rover to detain the man. There was also a large dog in the back of the car that was loudly barking, and the man was in possession of a knife.

PC Tarrant said: "I got into the car with the suspect and fought with him to make sure he got out of the car.

"I wanted him out of that car because he could just do so much damage, and I was concerned

Meanwhile PC York and the other officers identified the witnesses and took statements from them. The families who had been targeted in the attack commented on the officers' bravery and speed of response and thanked them at the scene.

PC York said: "It was a bit of a shock to us. It was the first major critical incident I've been to. I think most of us there had under two years' service, so we had to put all our skills to use."

The suspect was detained on suspicion of conspiracy to commit grievous bodily harm, affray, dangerous driving, and threatening behaviour.

**"Every officer present saved lives that day and I am so proud of them"**

Williams, PC Oliver York and PC Jamie Bushnell arrived at the scene, the suspect drove at them with his Range Rover before suddenly stopping.

PC Tarrant recalled: "We got out of the police car, and I was still concerned that he would either reverse into us or ram us and just drive off. A great big two-tonne Range Rover could cause some damage."

The officers immediately surrounded the man's car and Sgt Baker opened the passenger door and challenged him with his Taser. The man did

that he'd run over my colleagues as well.

"I just thought that he would drive at us and kill us all. As soon as we were out on foot, it would be so easy to run us down, or crush us between the two cars.

"Then I dragged him out of the car, and we got him down on the floor, and he was fighting with us."

PC Maclean challenged the suspect again with a Taser and discharged it, after which the officers were able to handcuff the man.

The case went to court and the man received an indefinite hospital order.

When Sgt Baker heard the team were winning Federation Bravery Awards, he said: "I am proud to say members of my team were incredible that day, dealing with an armed man whose sole intention was to cause harm to the very community that we are sworn to protect.

"It is no understatement to say that we thought we could have been killed. Every officer present saved lives that day and I am so proud of them all."



## PCs Faced Machete Attack

**O**ur next winners were two young-in-service officers who tackled a drug dealer who violently attacked them with a machete.

On 12 March 2025, PC Morgan Llewellyn and PC Owain Soady-Jackson were on patrol at the Templars Square shopping centre in Cowley, Oxford, when they spotted two young men in balaclavas who were acting suspiciously.

When the suspects saw the police, they sped off on e-bikes. One of them got away, but the other went into a wall and the officers flung themselves

“My entire neck was exposed above the stab vest. He rolled onto his side, pulled it out, and went for me twice in the neck. Missed the first time, then gone again, and Morgan had to punch the knife out of his hand.

“Essentially, he saved me from being killed, because he was maybe a foot away from the carotid artery in my neck. It was a little bit scary. Morgan shouted at me: ‘He’s got a knife, get up’. With that, I jumped up, kicked him, and blew out my knee when I did it.”

PC Llewellyn said: “We continued to struggle

year into the job at the time.

PC Soady-Jackson went to hospital and was told he had torn the meniscus in his knee and that his ACL had ruptured. A year on, he is still on restricted duties and is scheduled for surgery.

The man was found in possession of £5,000, a large quantity of drugs, and a large machete. He was found guilty of possession with intent to supply a class A drug; possession with intent to supply a class B drug and possession of a bladed article.

PC Soady-Jackson said: “Obviously, my knee is a constant reminder of what happened every single

---

**“It’s really nice to get recognition, especially as an officer who was very new in service at the time”**

---

on top of him to try to detain him.

PC Soady-Jackson recalled: “It was just all instinct. Morgan was fighting his upper body, screaming at him to release his arms, get his arms back, all the training we’ve been given.

“I was doing the same, but to his lower body. We didn’t realise at the time why he had his arms tucked underneath his body, but then I saw an object coming towards me. I later found out it was a 16-inch machete. He’d pulled that out from underneath his bag.

with the man, with a large crowd around us at this point, including a family out shopping. Eventually I managed to get him into handcuffs, and a short while later I heard my colleagues come running over. A couple of members of the public said well done to us. It turns out the knife was a 16-inch Rambo knife, with a serrated edge on it. I had a small cut down my left hand and finger, so the blade scratched my hand at some point.”

That’s when PC Llewellyn said the adrenaline hit him and he was quite emotional; he was only a

day. At the time, I was stuck on how close I came to not being alive anymore. I’m very grateful to still be hobbling about.

“I’m very grateful to Morgan; we were good friends before, but even more now.”

PC Llewellyn said he was proud to receive a Federation Bravery Award, saying: “It’s really nice to get recognition, especially as an officer who was very new in service at the time. The training worked, and actually, I think that should give a lot of people confidence.”

## Dramatic Flat Fire Rescue

**O**ur third winners are six officers who saved a dozen residents, including elderly and disabled people, from a fire in a block of flats.

On 5 July 2025, Thames Valley officers were policing the protest at Kidlington Airport, when someone ran out of a block of flats along the route of the march, shouting that it was on fire.

PC Tom Mapstone and a colleague ran to help.

The officer said said: “Tom and I are on the public order team and we always carry method-of-entry equipment in our vehicles, in the unlikely event

Insp Shepherd said: “Very quickly it became clear it was a significant fire. We communicated with the people upstairs, who were trapped because of the smoke. Some of my officers went upstairs to get those occupants out.

“Then Sgt Gray forced entry to a downstairs flat, and we found a 95-year-old lady who was bedridden. We managed to force the patio doors open and carry her out. We were doing a head count, and we thought we had everyone. Then a chap went, ‘Oh, my dad’s still upstairs’, so we went back in – the smoke was pretty thick at that

and co-ordinated the Joint Emergency Services response, working with the ambulance and fire services, even while suffering from smoke inhalation.

Sgt Gray, also affected by the smoke, continued to check on the welfare of colleagues and residents. Three officers required oxygen, but none ceased their efforts until all residents were safe. PC Mapstone coordinated local resources and ensured officers received water and support. PC Tebb and a colleague, unaffected by smoke, resumed their roles in the protest operation. After being cleared by paramedics, Insp Shepherd, Sgt

---

**“I’ve been here for 22 years and I think this is by far the bravest thing I’ve done”**

---

of this scenario. I never envisioned we would need it at a protest, but luckily we had it. So I got the fire extinguisher and the MOE enforcer out of the car and we called the incident in on the radio.

“Then, without even thinking, we forced entry into the first door, and thick, acrid smoke started pouring out, setting off all the other smoke alarms. We saw a disabled man, who was clearly extremely vulnerable. So we got him out quickly.”

Insp Alex Shepherd, Sgt Graham Gray, PC Alex Tebb and a colleague then arrived at the scene.

point – and got the dad out from the top.

“When you first go in, you don’t really think about it, it’s just instinct. You see people in danger and go, ‘Right, I’ll run in’. We don’t know what’s facing us, we’ll deal with it when we get there.

“But when we had to go back in – that was a conscious decision. That’s when you start thinking, ‘I’ve got a wife and kids at home, and so have all of my officers’. Fortunately, all ended up well and we managed to get them all out, saving 12 people.”

Insp Shepherd took over as commander

Gray, PC Mapstone and another colleague also returned to duty.

The fire commander said that without the officers’ swift and courageous actions, the outcome would have been significantly worse.

When he found out the team was receiving Federation Bravery awards, Insp Shepherd said: “I was very proud, because I’ve been here for 22 years and I think this is by far the bravest thing I’ve done. And it’s really nice that my officers are getting recognised, because they were fantastic.”



## Off-Duty Family Heroics

**T**he overall winners at the Thames Valley Police Federation Bravery Awards 2026 and winning the Major John Howard Bravery Award are PC Andy Kemp and his son Rhys.

PC Kemp was stabbed as he fought off armed intruders at his family home – but with help from Rhys still prevented them from getting away.

On the night of 15 May 2024, while off duty and asleep at home, dog handler PC Andy Kemp was alerted by neighbours to intruders in his garden.

"In the process of trying to detain him, I was stabbed a couple of times. Once in the arm with what we believe to be a knife, and another time on the arm with what we believe to be a screwdriver. I also got some defensive wounds to my hand with a screwdriver, and a wound on my cheek from a screwdriver.

"Then the others came back to help their mate. They stood on top of the woodpile and shouted for me to let him go.

"I said, 'He's coming with me'. I decided what-

fence and me and the dog were trying to pull him back into the garden."

The assailants then hit PC Kemp again with a crowbar, but he and PD Astle managed to restrain the man they were holding and got him to the ground. The others fled the scene.

PC Kemp's son Rhys, who was 15 at the time, ran out to help and got the dog back in the kennel. PC Kemp said he was "very, very proud" of his family, including his wife who was also at the house.

### "I'm not one for fuss, but I'm very proud. I'm also so proud of my son and my dog"

He recalled: "I had a phone call from one of my neighbours saying that there was a group of people outside with torches, looking into my work van. So I came downstairs and heard someone going over my back gate into my garden.

"Three men were trying to jimmy my garage door, so I burst out there to stop them. They ran, and I chased after them and got hold of one of them.

ever happens, he's staying with me. One of them said, 'Stab him', and then I got stabbed a couple of times. I sort of pushed him towards them, and then went to get my police dog, Astle, who was in the kennel.

"I got my dog out and I let him go, and he detained one of them by biting him just above the hip. I joined him and there was a bit of a tugging match, where they were trying to pull him over the garden

Two assailants were arrested but only one was charged. He was jailed for 18 months after he admitted to going equipped for theft, but denied and was acquitted of causing grievous bodily harm with intent.

PC Kemp said: "I'm not one for fuss, but I'm very proud. I'm also so proud of my son and my dog." PD Astle has since retired and now lives peacefully with PC Kemp.



## Violent Attacker Thwarted

**T**wo officers who saved a man's life after an attempted murder, and the detective team that ensured he was convicted of his crimes, have been honoured for excellence in policing.

At around 11.30pm on 23 July 2024, Thames Valley Police received reports that a victim in his sixties had been attacked at his home. He had sustained a serious injury to his neck and was suffering major blood loss.

It later emerged that the attacker had offered to do some work at the victim's property and the

undoubtedly saved the victim's life.

The attacker was still at large, so PC Clarke, who had no PPE on her, bravely searched the property looking for the offender. As both officers administered first aid, firearms officers found and arrested the suspect for attempted murder and possession of a knife in a public place.

Shortly after midnight, an ambulance arrived and took the victim to hospital, with PC King and PC Clarke accompanying them. The two officers remained on duty until late the following morning so they could give a full handover to CID.

we worked with the reviewing lawyer within the CPS, who was extremely helpful and helped us set priorities. It was very detailed due to the nature of the injuries and the aftermath of the attack for the victim. And the suspect was found and charged quite quickly, so we didn't have a huge amount of time. It was challenging, but it was also rewarding.

"At that point I'd only been in CID for just over a year, so having something of that magnitude was difficult, but also it's the kind of thing we all join the police for."

DCI Muldoon said: "The work that Ruby did was

### "It's the kind of thing we all join the police for"

victim had offered the man a meal and to stay the night while he was carrying out the job. The victim had fallen asleep and was woken by a sharp, stabbing pain in his neck and found he was heavily bleeding. He saw the man who was staying with him standing in the doorway with a bread knife in his hand. The victim tried to grab the knife, but the attacker fled from the address.

PC Kerry Clarke and PC Barbara King were first on the scene and found the victim bleeding to death. PC King immediately began first aid, which

The entire CID team worked to secure as much evidence as possible in the first 24 hours. DCI Dominique Muldoon led the team; Insp Harry Gehnich was the officer in charge; and Sgt Ruby Scott (a DC at the time) was the case officer.

Sgt Scott said: "It's extremely difficult to get those sorts of cases through court, so it was just a matter of trying to get every single bit of evidence that we could, because there were so many police officers involved and so many witnesses.

"It was a lot of material to compile, and then

phenomenal considering her lack of experience, and Harry's work as well in leading that."

Insp Gehnich said: "Ruby did an absolutely fantastic job. The outcome speaks volumes to the amount of work she put in. And obviously, none of that would have been possible without PC Clarke and PC King, who gave life-saving medical care. They didn't know what they were facing at all and it was quite traumatic."

In November 2024, four months after the attack, the offender was sentenced to 26 years in prison.

# Precarious Lorry Recovery

Also winning an excellence in policing award was an officer who was single-crewed when she came across a traffic incident and tried to save a man's life.

On the morning of 23 December 2024, A/Sgt Leanne Burns-Bright was in an unmarked police vehicle in Milton Keynes when she came across a lorry that had crashed into the bridge of an overpass and was halfway across the carriageway. Cars were backed up behind it.

She immediately stopped and went to assist, identifying herself as a police officer and taking control of the situation. She found that the driver of the vehicle was suffering a medical episode, gasping and slipping into unconsciousness.

A/Sgt Burns-Bright recalled: "I climbed up into the cab of the lorry and I was trying to get him to respond, but quickly realised he was deteriorating. I had to unstrap him and get him out of the cab."

"The lorry was parked precariously, so I could only get him out over the passenger side because

the driver's door wouldn't open. It was over the bridge.

"I was struggling to do that, and managed to get him halfway out when a member of the public who identified himself as a retired police officer came over to help.

"I managed to get the man on the ground, checked for breathing and then started doing CPR. An off-duty nurse and I continued doing that until the ambulance arrived."

Sadly, the man did not survive, but after the incident the man's wife made contact with A/Sgt Burns-Bright and thanked her for her actions.

When she heard she had won an award, A/Sgt Burns-Bright said: "It was a very sad incident, but I'm really honoured to be recognised for it."

Thames Valley Police Federation Chair Aileen O'Connor said: "As the first member of the emergency services on the scene, Leanne acted quickly and decisively in the face of adversity, doing everything possible to try to save the man's life.

"Our thoughts remain with the man's family."



# Special Type Of Dedication

Our first Special of the Year is a Special Constable who works tirelessly to support his colleagues and bring offenders to justice.

SC Ben Gill, who previously served as a Special Sergeant before choosing to focus on roads policing, contributed an incredible 553 hours across 76 duties, making him the highest contributor within the Buckinghamshire LCU Special Constabulary.

He was instrumental in supporting the tasking, priority crime and neighbourhood policing teams with key operations. SC Gill, who achieved all this alongside his full-time job in tech consulting, has now moved to roads policing in Taplow, but the initiatives he spearheaded continue.

SC Gill explained how he finds the time: "It's a mixture of having an incredibly supportive wife who understands my passion for community service and is supportive of me volunteering, and also a supportive employer."

He said he was driven to be a Special constable because "it's about being able to make a difference".

He continued: "It's very easy to sit back and criticise organisations like the police, but until you actually do it, you don't really understand it. I joined during Covid – it was an opportunity to serve the community and also remain active."

While a Special Sergeant, SC Gill took owner-



ship of the Outstanding Warrants operation. He explained: "I heard from regular officers that there was a backlog of suspects who had warrants out for their arrests. And I thought: we've got a great team of Specials who can relieve some of that pressure on our regular colleagues and whittle down that backlog.

"So I organised, alongside some others, the creation of this regular operation to locate individuals who had Outstanding Warrants, and to bring them

to custody so that they could be presented before the courts."

SC Gill was also instrumental in the Winter Burglary Campaign. He said: "Each year there is a heightened focus on preventing burglaries during the winter months. I did quite a lot of hours as part of that campaign, which is not just responding to burglaries as they happen, but also trying to prevent burglaries from happening by being visible and providing education to the public."

# Incredible Custody Officers

Winning Team of the Year are Thames Valley Police's resilient and dedicated custody officers – who work across six busy custody suites.

This award honours their unwavering commitment, integrity and courage in performing one of the most challenging and vital roles in policing.

Over 33,000 people pass through Thames Valley's custody suites every year.

Representing all TVP's custody officers at the Awards Ceremony were A/Insp Patrick Hunter, Sgt James Wiggs and two colleagues.

The transformation has derived tangible improvements, including reduced waiting times, and improved efficiency and detainee care. Staff now have closer working relationships with local policing, strengthening collaboration and outcomes.

These achievements have created a culture and environment that others want to be part of, and people are now asking to join the custody teams.

Every day, Thames Valley's custody officers make critical decisions that balance risk with safeguarding vulnerable individuals, and ensure compliance with legislation and policy so that

bury. He said: "I think custody is often overlooked as part of the process of an investigation. It's a really important part, and we do a lot of good work engaging with detainees and speaking to officers.

"The detention officers work really hard and it can be busy, demanding and non-stop. We're a gateway for everyone who comes through. So it's nice to see lots of different officers, get to know them, help them, coach them. And we make a difference to the detainees as well. Sometimes we're the only people who really speak to them and give them time.

**"Custody is often overlooked as part of the process of an investigation. It's a really important part, and we do a lot of good work"**

Over the past year, Thames Valley's custody command has undergone a period of significant change. Staff have listened and responded positively, and have embraced new ways of working, following feedback from HMICFRS and local policing colleagues.

A recent Health and Safety Executive inspection highlighted excellent practices in search scrutiny and health and safety compliance, further demonstrating that Thames Valley Police custody command is a leading force in this area.

justice is delivered for victims. These decisions are made while treating every person with dignity and respect, even when faced with violence, aggression and abuse.

Custody officers also provide leadership to detention officers and work collaboratively with partners to support individuals who may be at the lowest point in their lives. Their professionalism and tolerance underpins public confidence in policing and the criminal justice system.

A/Insp Hunter works out of Abingdon and Ban-

"Some of them are really sad, and this is a low point in their lives, but you can talk to them and say, 'Actually there is light at the end of the tunnel. It will get better'.

"You can give them support and signpost them to places, and some of them are genuinely grateful for what you've done for them."

A/Insp Hunter added: "It may be that they've had a negative experience being arrested, but when they're in custody, we are impartial. We talk to them and we help them where we can."

# 'Innovative And Inspirational'

**W**inning the Women In Policing Award is an officer who has championed women in the force and driven groundbreaking projects of change over her 30-year career.

Ch Supt Emma Garside is Head of Custody and Criminal Justice at TVP and has recently retired after 30 years' of service.

Her colleagues describe her as inspirational, always making time for her teams and dedicated to ensuring others achieve their potential.

Ch Supt Garside has always been innovative in her thinking and approach. Among her achievements have been delivering groundbreaking work on the IRIS Team at Oxford when she was a Sergeant, and establishing the Safer Schools Initiative as an Inspector in Oxfordshire BCU. She also embedded the Youth Witness Protocol and Specialist Domestic Violence Courts.

In 2021, Ch Supt Garside led the first all-

female command for an LPA at West Oxon & Cherwell.

She said: "In some ways it's sad that this should be seen as unusual, and I'm pleased that more and more women are now choosing policing as a career. We all brought our own unique skill set and personalities to our roles and complemented each other. This is important on any team.

"We don't want to be clones of each other, and I pride myself on always being true to who I am as a person. I hope I was able to demonstrate to other female officers that it is possible to progress your career and have children. It's not easy, but it has definitely been worth it."

When asked what she has enjoyed most about her time in policing, Ch Supt Garside said: "Making a positive difference for others and being part of an amazing blue light family who, day in and day out, try their very best to serve the public and see justice done."



# Historic Sapling Gives Hope

**A**n officer who spearheaded an initiative to plant a 'Tree of Hope' to raise awareness of violence against women and girls, has won the Inspiration Award.

In September 2024, PC Katie Mitchell heard on the radio that the National Trust was inviting individuals, communities and organisations to apply for one of 49 saplings from the Sycamore Gap tree, which stood next to Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland for over 120 years before it was illegally felled.

PC Mitchell has been a PC in Thames Valley Police for nearly 22 years, and in 2015 she became a sexual offences liaison officer. She has since helped design the rape and sexual offences, domestic abuse, harassment and stalking sections of the foundation training course. She is a VAWG champion in the force, and a Domestic Abuse Matters trainer.

PC Mitchell thought it would be perfect to plant a sapling at Sulhamstead, the Thames Valley Police training HQ that is set within 60 acres of countryside, woodland and farmland in Berkshire.

She applied to the National Trust, writing: "This tree symbolised strength and resilience – standing tall and enduring through the ages, much like the spirit of those who have faced abuse and violence..."

"The tree's legacy reflects our commitment at TVP to support and empower those affected



by violence, embodying the strength to make a difference daily."

PC Mitchell recalled: "I just thought to have such an iconic tree here, a tree of hope, intertwined with what we're doing with violence against women and girls. And then I thought about the sheer number of people who come through Sulhamstead training and will see the tree as a visual reinforcement of why we do what we do."

When she heard she had been successful in securing a sapling for Thames Valley Police, out of a huge 500 applications, PC Mitchell burst out crying. She said: "I was speechless, which is quite something for me. It was lovely."

It was the only sapling given to a police force.



On 25 November 2025, White Ribbon Day - a national day to raise awareness about gender-based violence and domestic abuse - the sapling was planted in the picnic area by the canteen at Sulhamstead. It is clearly visible to all and is now included in the museum tour at the training centre.

When PC Mitchell heard she was receiving a Federation Award for her work on raising awareness of violence against women and girls, she said: "I've been frontline for a huge part of my career and you see people getting these awards, so I worry people are just going to go, 'Oh, it's just a tree, for goodness' sake'.

"But I really want people to understand how important it is."