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NEWS

Year of conquests, cuts and criticism for police and crime commissioner

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THE police and crime commissioner for the Thames Valley has spoken of cuts, criticism and priorities after one year in the job.

Anthony Stansfeld was elected to the £85,000 a year role last November after securing 13.3 per cent of the vote.

Since then he has been responsible for setting and updating a police and crime plan along with a budget and precept.

Mr Stansfeld said: "I think on the whole it's gone extremely well. We have reduced crime in Thames than we ever have before. Burglary has gone down by about 20 per cent and in Reading by 40 per cent and what happens in Reading affects us in West Berkshire. The performance shows it's going well."

As for West Berkshire he said: "Metal theft has been reduced hugely. Rural Crime is quite a problem but it has been reduced.

In West Berkshire and South Oxfordshire we have a problem with people coming in from outside the area to hare course and they're usually people involved with organised crime – it's hugely damaging to farmers."

Looking ahead, Mr Stansfeld said: "One of the issues is fraud and cyber crime, which I think has increased, but it's very much a national issue as the victim and the perpetrator don't usually live in the same place.

"Another is vulnerable people and the sexual abuse of children. It's more of an issue in urban areas but we cannot be complacent in West Berkshire."

The force is facing more than £12m of cuts next year but there is provision for 10 officers to be redeployed to the Child Abuse Investigation Unit.

"The police have taken a huge cut but we've made huge efficiencies," Mr Stansfeld said. "Thames is one of four forces not to reduce its frontline policing. We have slightly increased it as we've made improvements, cut bureaucracy and waste and combined with other forces to be more efficient.

"I do not feel any area needs to be bracing itself in the next two years. West Berkshire has considerably more police officers than before, about 30 extra officers".

Mr Stansfeld has also lent his voice to a campaign to prevent closure of West Berkshire Magistrates' Court, Newbury.

"I think the answer to that is the court will continue, largely thanks to continuous pressure from our MP and myself. But I am concerned that local cases are being sent elsewhere instead of Newbury," he said.

However, the first year had not been plain sailing for the Conservative district councillor for Kintbury.



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He came under fire over allegations that he established a "sham" office in Hungerford to boost his expenses and was ordered to repay £142 following an independent audit. Mr Stanfeld denied the claims saying that he had effectively underclaimed by £50.

He said: "I was absolutely attacked by [Mail on Sunday] and after they ran the story three times, I complained to the press complaints commission and they had to retract it because it was untrue."

Opponents to commissioners have raised issues over the politicisation of the police and a lack of accountability over such low turn outs in the elections.

"I think that's something that has passed and gone now. We can address local issues more quickly and it costs less."

Dismissing the idea that that PCCs had politicised the police, he said that they had made it a lot more localised.

He added that all PCCs had the same aim – to reduce crime.

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