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## TREW'S LAW: AUTOMATIC REVIEW OF CONVICTIONS LINKED TO IMPRISONED POLICE OFFICERS

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### Summary

When a police officer is imprisoned for a serious criminal offence, there is a material risk that their past casework led to unsafe convictions.

In England and Wales, there is no statutory duty to conduct an automatic review of an imprisoned police officer's past cases. Existing mechanisms can prevent a convicted officer from returning to policing, but there is no corresponding requirement to identify and re-examine convictions in which they played a material role.

The result is a reactive system that places an unjust burden on individuals – often from over-policed and marginalised communities – to uncover police wrongdoing and connect it to their case, often decades later.

The Ridgewell scandal shows the devastating consequences of this approach. Detective Sergeant Derek Ridgewell, a corrupt and racist British Transport Police officer, was imprisoned in 1980, yet no automatic review of his earlier casework followed. More than 40 years later, 13 convictions involving Ridgewell were quashed by the Court of Appeal. Collectively, those individuals spent 623 years wrongfully convicted. This briefing proposes **Trew's Law**: a statutory duty to trigger an independent review of an imprisoned police officer's casework, with prompt notification and disclosure to affected individuals.

Our research suggests this reform is necessary and proportionate. Based on our dataset, the trigger would apply to around 21 imprisoned officers a year, making it straightforward to administer and tightly targeted on the highest-risk cases.

### Recommendations for policy

Parliament should enact Trew's Law: a statutory duty to trigger an independent review of past convictions when a serving or former police officer is sentenced to immediate imprisonment.

- 1. A statutory trigger:** Require an automatic review when a serving or former police officer receives an immediate custodial sentence.
- 2. Identification and triage:** Require police forces and the CPS to identify all finalised cases in which the imprisoned officer played a material role, including giving witness evidence or handling disclosure.
- 3. Independent oversight:** Establish independent oversight for all decisions regarding risk, disclosure, and notification to mitigate institutional bias.
- 4. Proactive notification and disclosure:** Require affected individuals to be notified and given disclosure where a material risk to conviction safety is identified, enabling timely access to legal advice.
- 5. Transparency:** Require annual Home Office reporting on the number of officers imprisoned, cases reviewed, and notifications issued.



'Families of Saliah Mehmet and Basil Peterkin with Winston Trew and Matt Foot.' Photo credit Jess Hurd

## What we did

This briefing draws on new legal and empirical research on whether current safeguards reliably identify unsafe convictions linked to imprisoned police officers. We (1) analysed the legal and policy framework for post-conviction safeguards and disclosure; (2) submitted Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to examine what is recorded centrally about police officer imprisonment and resulting reviews; and (3) compiled a database of serving and former police officers sentenced to immediate imprisonment between January 2023 and January 2026 using publicly available Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and other verified sources, to assess the scale and feasibility of an automatic review mechanism.

## What we found

There is no reliable national data on how many police officers are imprisoned each year. Even at force level, basic data is often inaccessible. For example, British Transport Police could not readily identify how many officers were convicted or imprisoned over the last decade because nearly three-quarters (74%) of misconduct records on its data system were incomplete.

We therefore compiled our own dataset using publicly available CPS, IOPC and verified media reports. We identified at least 64 serving or former officers sentenced to immediate imprisonment between 2023 and 2026 - an average of 21 a year across 23 forces.

The current system is discretionary and opaque. The IOPC lacks a specific policy to review an officer's past casework following imprisonment. While such reviews may occasionally occur within the narrow scope of its own investigations, they remain entirely discretionary and are not a mandatory response to a custodial sentence.

CPS guidance recognises that a review of past convictions may be needed where a witness, including a police officer, is later "discredited", but it is not a statutory duty and is not centrally monitored. There is no legal requirement to identify affected cases, notify individuals, or disclose material enabling them to seek legal advice, even where an officer is imprisoned for serious dishonesty, corruption or perverting the course of justice.

## Why this matters

The Ridgewell scandal shows what happens when the state fails to connect a police officer's imprisonment to their earlier casework. Detective

Sergeant Derek Ridgewell was imprisoned for serious dishonesty in 1980, yet no review of his earlier investigations followed.

Over four decades later, as of March 2026, 13 convictions linked to Ridgewell have been quashed by the Court of Appeal following CCRC referrals. Several convictions were quashed posthumously, after people lived and died with the stigma of criminal convictions later found unsafe.

In quashing the convictions of the 'Oval Four', the Court of Appeal recorded its "profound regret that it has taken so long for this injustice to be remedied". British Transport Police apologised to Ridgewell's victims, calling the failure to review his past cases after his 1980 conviction "simply inexcusable". Taken together, these 13 people spent 623 years wrongfully convicted. These exonerations did not result from any routine state-led safeguard. They were achieved through the extraordinary persistence of Ridgewell's victims, most notably Winston Trew, whose decades of campaigning and research give this proposed duty its name.

## A guarantee of non-recurrence

Trew's Law applies the transitional justice principle of non-recurrence: the state must not only acknowledge serious wrongdoing but implement structural reforms to prevent it happening again. Imprisonment does not automatically mean earlier convictions are unsafe. But it is a clear, objective indicator of serious misconduct that should trigger a mandatory process of identification, triage and independent oversight.

Where risk is identified, affected individuals should be notified and given disclosure. This shifts responsibility from victims to the state to identify affected cases and act on potentially unsafe convictions.

### Further information

Read full evidence paper, animation, APPEAL campaign materials, and supporting resources.

