

Experience Changes How You See Systems

Reflections on 10,969 Days in Policing and What They Taught Me About Reform

Reflections on operational experience, safeguarding and system reform.

This week I did some unexpected maths.

I joined the police on 21 September 1991.

I retired on 2 October 2021.

In total, I spent 10,969 days as a police officer.

By 9 May 2027, I will have spent the same number of days not being one.

That “non-police” time includes my childhood, my twenties before joining, and now this second professional chapter.

The numbers made me pause.



My original fingerprint card, 1991 — presented to me on retirement.

What 10,969 Days Show You

Thirty years in policing, much of it in serious sexual crime and child protection, gives you a particular vantage point.

You see systems at their best.

You also see them when they are fragmented, slow or unintentionally harmful.

You see what happens when:

- Children have to repeat their account multiple times.
- Agencies operate in silos.
- Decision-making lacks coordination.
- Leadership hesitates at critical moments.

And you see what happens when professionals align around a shared purpose.

Over time, one thing becomes very clear:

Most harm caused by systems is not intentional.

It is structural.

It sits in process gaps, cultural inconsistencies and unclear accountability.



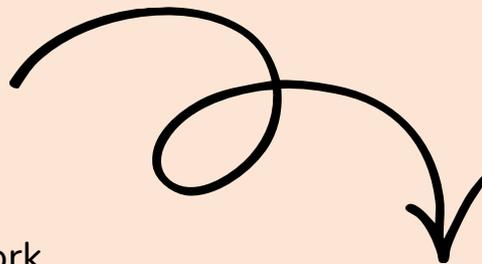
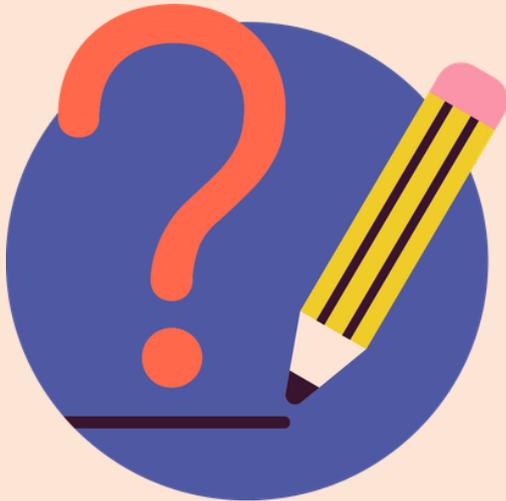
The Shift From Operational to Strategic

When I retired in 2021, I didn't leave the purpose behind.

But I did change my seat at the table.

Operational policing is about response.

Strategic reform is about design.



Today, through TICCS, my work focuses on:

- Bairns' Hoose implementation
- Safeguarding governance
- Trauma-informed system development
- Multi-agency alignment

This is slower work.

Less visible work.

But arguably more preventative work.

Because if we design systems well, fewer children experience avoidable harm in the first place.



Why Bairns' Hoose Is System Design

There is sometimes a misconception that Bairns' Hoose is about buildings. It isn't.

It is about coordinated response.

It is about reducing re-traumatisation through:

- Joint investigative interviews
- Integrated therapeutic support
- Clear governance
- Shared data understanding
- Child-centred environments.



It is system redesign in practice.
And it requires more than goodwill.

It requires:

- Clarity of standards
- Operational realism
- Strong leadership
- Measured implementation

Those are lessons that 10,969 days in policing taught me very clearly.

The Second 10,969 Days

By May 2027, the balance shifts.

Equal days in policing.

Equal days outside it.

That feels symbolic.

Not because the first chapter closes — but because the experience compounds.

The first 10,969 days built operational depth.

The other 10,969 days are about using that depth intentionally.

Not reacting to system failures.

Designing systems that reduce them.

Leadership evolves.

But purpose doesn't have to.

And if there is one thing three decades in child protection teaches you, it is this:

Children experience our systems exactly as we design them.

So we must design them carefully.

Helen Pasquale

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