

14 March 2019

The Rt Honourable Sajid Javid MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Dear Home Secretary

RESPONSE TO 'THE POLICE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC ABUSE, AN UPDATE REPORT' PUBLISHED ON 26 FEBRUARY 2019

Improving the Police response to domestic abuse has been a priority for me ever since I have been in office. Reports of domestic abuse have considerably increased over the years and currently make up about 13.5% of recorded crime in Avon and Somerset (1 February 2018 – 31 January 2019). Agencies, particularly the Constabulary and the CPS, and communities must work together to meet the needs of the victim and their children, working efficiently and effectively to reduce harm and save lives.

The report flags the impact of the national shortage of detectives, reductions in the use of police bail, the increasing proportion of cases finalised where victims will not support a police investigation and the falling arrest rate following incidents.

In November 2018, I commissioned an assurance report on domestic abuse which reported to my Police and Crime Board in February 2019. The Constabulary shared my concern over the findings, and recognised this is an area where they were under-performing.

The findings included:

- officers not using their Body Worn Video (BWV) cameras as consistently as expected;
- officers not consistently understanding powers of arrest to take to custody, correctly assessing risk, making links and identifying repeat victimisation;
- lack of confidence from officers that the CPS will take forward evidence-led prosecutions (where the victim does not come forward), with technical issues with the CPS system accepting BWV footage that are being worked through; and
- inconsistent officer understanding of special measures which would include things like the victim not having to face the perpetrator that might support victims in a way that enables them to remain engaged through the criminal justice process.

I have asked the Constabulary to define measurements that would determine when good performance for responding to domestic abuse has been reached and to continue to report progress back to the Board.

Five improvement actions have been identified for prioritisation:

- Increase the use of body worn video footage

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- Ensure Inspectors oversee the application of 'No Further Action' outcomes
- Improve compliance with the Victim Code of Practice and in risk assessments (BRAG)
- Increase the focus on the role of the Supervisor in Detainee Investigations Team around bail decisions
- Increase the focus on the role of the Custody Sergeant similarly re bail decisions.

There are some positive signs within the Constabulary that should be highlighted:

- The Constabulary are recording more Coercive and Controlling Offences which would suggest they are recognising the crime type.
- The bringing together of the Lighthouse (victim and witness care) service with the Safeguarding Unit and integration of this with the Neighbourhood Policing directorate, alongside an introduction of pre-charge process guides, has resulted in a greater understanding and meeting of victim needs and requirements.
- The DA lead is working with the CPS to ensure that the cases of DA victims are being heard in court in a more timely way.
- The conviction rates for the South West as an area are improving.
- The Constabulary has also recently identified an out of court disposal pathway for offenders (CARA) which aims to support them in changing their behaviours, and preventing further victimisation.

In conclusion, tackling domestic abuse remains an area of focus for improvement. I hold the Chief Constable to account for delivering my Plan and monitor the Constabulary's response to domestic abuse closely under my primary priority of 'Protect the most vulnerable from harm'. I note the responsibility HMICFRS places upon the Chief Constable to offer regular feedback on progress of improvement plans in this area, and welcome that progress against the action plans will be part of the PEEL inspection regime.

This response is published on the OPCC website (<http://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/Openness/Audits-and-Inspections/Her-Majestys-Inspectorate-of-Constabulary.aspx>).

Regards



SUE MOUNTSTEVENS
Police and Crime Commissioner
for Avon & Somerset

cc. Wendy Williams, HMI
Chief Constable Andy Marsh, Avon & Somerset Constabulary

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