

Independent Residents' Panel

December 2021

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Purpose of the Independent Residents' Panel

The Independent Residents' Panel (IRP) consists of 9 independent panel members who are all volunteers representing the communities of Avon and Somerset. Their aim is:

'To act as a 'critical friend' to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and to Avon and Somerset Constabulary by providing feedback on completed complaint files to the office of the PCC and to the Constabulary's Professional Standards Department (PSD). The Independent Residents' Panel (IRP) will review complaints against the police from a local citizen's viewpoint.'

Further information can be found [on our website](#).



ATTENDANCE:

Attendees: KS, LC, DW, CH, AD, SB & PAK

Apologies: TW, PK

STRUCTURE OF THE SESSION

The Independent Residents' Panel continue to use the video conferencing platform Microsoft Teams to hold meetings given the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and most recently the Omicron variant. This meeting structure will continue into 2022, until the Panel are in a safer position to accommodate meetings in person.

7 of the 9 Panel members attended. Two of the panel's co-opted members have agreed to convert to full IRP panel members and 3 long-standing panel members have had their term extended for a further year ensuring consistency in the panel's work.

The theme of the dip sampling session was police complaints where domestic & gender abuse featured in some form within the complaint. This theme was chosen having not been subject to a previous dip sampling review.

The conditions created by the pandemic have inevitably led to increased reports of domestic abuse, as more families are forced to spend more time together with millions of individuals facing heightened insecurity and violence. It is therefore more important than ever that the police work with other public services and organisations to keep domestic abuse victims safe.

The Panel welcomed presentations from Victoria Caple, Avon & Somerset Constabulary's Head of Victim Care and from Bridie Anderson, Relationships Manager & Safelives Associate.

A total number of 24 files were reviewed in detail by Panel members prior to the meeting and discussed in depth verbally with the Head of the Constabulary's Professional Standards Department (PSD) answering questions.

ACTIONS

No.	Action	Status
Dec 18	Request from Panel to PSD regarding obtaining Complainant satisfaction/feedback (face to face, telephone or electronic survey).	KEEP IN VIEW, BM has raised this with PSD, overriding theme for 2022
Mar 21	Inclusion & Diversity training for all panel members	BM reissued mandatory Equality Act eLearning to all members to complete. BM has consulted with ASC's Head of Organisational Development regarding further training including Cultural Intelligence workshops. IRP to be borne in mind once training has been rolled out to senior leaders & staff in 2022.

PCC UPDATE Police & Crime Commissioner Mark Shelford



Mark Shelford introduced himself to the panel and allowed the opportunity for a brief Q&A session. Mark answered questions specifically around what measures he would like to see put in place to prevent crime. His priorities include boosting CID, creating a proactive Neighbourhood Policing Team that works for neighbourhoods and can focus on the crimes most important to communities, the need for better health education around drugs, and improving the relationship between police and young people.

Interim Chief of Staff, Sally Fox highlighted that prevention is not just about policing but also about engaging with our communities and our partners to repair the fractured relationship that exists between the police and the public. Legitimacy around the police complaints regime is a grave concern for the public and the work of the IRP is more important than ever to improve public confidence in policing.

One panel member emphasized how building trust and community engagement is critical. Young people in society come from a range of diverse social and economic backgrounds, some are faced with fewer opportunities than others, lack of housing and homelessness all which are drivers for offending and reoffending. It was highlighted that responding to housing and employment needs is critical. Mark agreed and explained that he is very proactive in his approach and wants to talk to communities across all of Avon & Somerset to understand the issues and how we can address them. Mark explained how important it is that the police work effectively in partnerships with other agencies. Mark is hopeful that in 2022 he can meet the panel in person.

PSD UPDATE Temporary Superintendent Jane Wigmore

LEADERSHIP TEAM UPDATE

Acting Detective Chief Inspector Adam Smith will be leaving and replaced in the New Year by Chief Inspector Sharon Baker who has been appointed on a permanent basis.

PSD REVIEW

PSD have been reviewing their practices to ensure that as a department they are fit for purpose. Part of this involves ensuring that the Assessment Team triage cases appropriately to determine what can be dealt with under Schedule 3 and what can be dealt with more expeditiously 'here and now'.



Positive Commentary from the Panel:

- “Once the email of complaint had been received it was acted upon promptly with an apology and an explanation as to how and why there was a delay, this no doubt avoided an escalation, therefore an excellent result”
- “There is no evidence of discrimination and it appears that the police were justified in stopping the vehicle and taking the action which they did. A good example of the value of BWV which supported the officers’ accounts”
- “Officer requesting Lighthouse involvement should be commended for making the judgement that independent emotional support was a good idea”
- “The assigned PC who explained the reason for keeping the phone should be commended for the way she handled the situation and connected with the individual. This helped her to see reason and enabled her to compliment the force on how she had been treated”
- “The internal emails indicate that officers take C’s welfare seriously despite the fact that he has made multiple complaints and is not always courteous in his communications with the police. All the correspondence I reviewed was very professional”



Presentation by Victoria Caple, Head of Victim Care, Safeguarding and Vulnerability Avon & Somerset Constabulary

Victoria provided an extremely useful and informative update to the Panel regarding the work that the Constabulary are doing to improve domestic abuse support for officers and staff within Avon and Somerset Police.

A staff survey was launched and completed by 260 staff, 138 of which were, or had been victims of Domestic Abuse (DA). The feedback from victims was that ASC must deal internally with their own DA issues in order to better assist members of the public.

An internal/external campaign was launched in November 2020 highlighting the experiences of two police employees - Chief Inspector Sharon Baker and a PCSO who came forward and launched video blogs about their own experiences of DA. These blogs generated a huge response and colleagues who were also victims of DA bravely broke their silence and reached out. This led to the formation of a Survivors Network, made up of volunteers, which seeks to harness passion and enthusiasm to make change.

A number of initiatives including the creation of a Domestic Abuse (DA) Pledge has been formed. The pledge aims to create a culture when Domestic Abuse is never tolerated, minimized or excused. It focuses around 6 bold behavioural statements written in partnership with the Survivors Network and evidenced directly from the survey responses.

- You will be listened to
- You will be believed
- You will have control
- You will be supported
- Your confidentiality will be respected
- You will be helped to feel safe

The aim is to implement and embed the DA Pledge into the organisation.

Additional activity taking place internally includes widening the scope of the Compassionate Leave policy. Liaison has taken place with the HR advisory team to create suitable wording within policy to assist staff to have time off for their own safety and wellbeing alongside other victims, if necessary and needed.

New procedural guidance is being created specifically for police victims and perpetrators, to reflect the Constabulary's prioritisation when supporting victims of DA, whether it is police perpetrated DA or external perpetrators.

Funding options are also being considering for the commissioning of a dedicated Independent Domestic Violence Advisor to support staff and additionally the provision of a welfare officer for victims. Victims are often uncomfortable coming forward so an independent advocate, who works within the force already (and knows, and understands force structures) is seen to be imperative in order to gain parity for victims.

Lastly Victoria explained how consideration was being given to creating a Gold Group type structure. The Group would be responsible for reviewing anonymous DA incidents, identifying learning and ensure findings are embedded into practice. PSD would provide support in order to create a process that works effectively.

Bridie Anderson, Associate trainer for SafeLives

Bridie delivered a very engaging presentation to the panel describing the work she carries out as an Associate Trainer for SafeLives, a national Domestic Abuse (DA) charity.

Bridie was previously employed as a police officer so has first-hand experience of the challenges faced by frontline officers. Part of Bridie's role is to deliver the DA Matters Change Programme which is due to be rolled out in Avon and Somerset to first responders in Summer/Autumn 2022.

DA Matters exists because the College of Policing was asked by the HMIC to review what it provided to forces by way of Domestic Abuse training to frontline responders, following the inspection known to most as "everyone's business" in 2014. This inspection by HMIC was commissioned by the Home Secretary in 2013 to report on the effectiveness of the police approach to DA.

The College asked SafeLives to provide an external review and they found the College was providing helpful learning objectives to the 43 police forces nationally, but these objectives were used by each force differently, with training of first responders varying in terms of duration, content and quality. This was creating the potential for national inconsistency of service to families experiencing DA.

The programme was subsequently then written (with input from the College of Policing) by SafeLives to provide police forces with a sustainable programme of change which offers the opportunity for the country to provide consistency of service to families experiencing DA. The programme recognises the difficult role police responders play in

dealing with DA, given demand is often outstripping resource, takes account of 'helper conditions' that responders can develop (examples include; the development of conditions such as vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout, PTSD etc) and responds to DA experienced by those who serve.

The first part of the training is delivered to first responders with the aim to increase empathy and decrease negativity around DA. The second day focusses on the system of DA Matter Champions within the Constabulary. The mandate being to sustain the change in skills, behaviour and attitudes by challenging inappropriate language and behaviour, checking service delivery, giving feedback and congratulating great practice. DA Matters Champions also identify and act on helper conditions.



As well as delivering the DA Matters Change Programme, Bridie delivers the Officer Involved Domestic Abuse (OIDA) workshops for police officers. These bespoke day long workshops, informed by DA survivors, aim to help officers in the investigation and handling of domestic abuse cases when the victim and/or perpetrator is a police officer or member of police staff themselves.

Bridie highlighted the need for leadership to come down from the top alongside the need for people to become more comfortable with calling out inappropriate behaviour. DA Matters will bring the ability for people to challenge their peers. Mechanisms are in place such as anonymous reporting lines into PSD and there is support within the organisation. It is felt that ASC is most certainly a leader in change in this area.

HIGHLIGHTS OF CONCERNS, QUESTIONS OR ISSUES RAISED BY THE PANEL

Panel Member Feedback	PSD Response
<p><i>Following the hasty closure of this case, and the lack of a response from the complainant following that closure, was this not followed up to ensure the complainant was actually satisfied, or perhaps was being coerced not to respond further?</i></p> <p><i>Domestic abuse such as described in this case, rarely is isolated to a single event, and left unchecked can escalate, so what support was offered to the complainant to ensure her safety going forward?</i></p>	<p>Two Niche reports were assessed the following day by the Somerset Domestic Abuse Triage (DAT) meeting, referrals were made to Health and Education on each occasion, consideration was made for referral to Children’s Social Care but the threshold was not met.</p> <p>LSU are only commissioned to follow up with victims of DA Crime, as this was an incident it did not qualify for contact from LSU. The second Niche was later amended to a crime as Controlling Coercive Behaviour, but LSU were not tasked to review again for consideration of referral.</p> <p>There is no record if officers gave any safety advice to the victim. It does not appear there was any follow up after the email asking if she wanted to formally record 10 days after the incident.</p>
<p><i>If frequent domestic call outs persist between couples, perhaps to gain advantage over the other party, how can the police avoid becoming embroiled in such activity and remain unbiased and neutral?</i></p> <p><i>Do Officers get regular training in domestic call outs and what powers do they have when children are caught up in the situation?</i></p> <p><i>What signposting is available for Officers to advise for victims of domestic abuse. And are there any follow ups the police can do to help a victim or couple to move forward?</i></p> <p><i>Advice/action for PSD - perhaps letters written by Officers must always be on headed paper, dated and should always be posted and not hand delivered by a third party.</i></p>	<p>Officer training surrounds gathering evidence and impartiality in decision making for all crime types. For instance use of and training in the National Decision Making Model. Officers do not receive regular training on DA specifically, however there has been significant investment in DA Matters programme for all responders in 2022, there is also currently DASH training being piloted in Patrol. So we address training requirements through assurance work.</p> <p>The officers attending have responsibility for initial safety advice, following the DASH assessment to mitigate any immediate risk. However DA Crime victims are recognised as vulnerable and seen as victims that need an enhanced service from our LSU, each victim will have a needs assessment conducted and signposted onwards according to need. High Risk referrals will</p>

be made to specialist DA support services and their role is to offer support.

If children have been identified then their details will be captured, and a separate risk assessment in the form of a BRAG is completed. Education and CSC are notified as part of our statutory obligation.

Who are victim support and how do they get involved. Do all victims get contacted and what support is available to offer?

Due to Covid 19 the witness statement was taken over the phone. To what level of crime is this acceptable, and how do Officers then get prompted to follow up the investigation and notify the victim of an update?

Can victims say whether they would like to be updated or are they asked if they would like to be contacted with any timely updates?

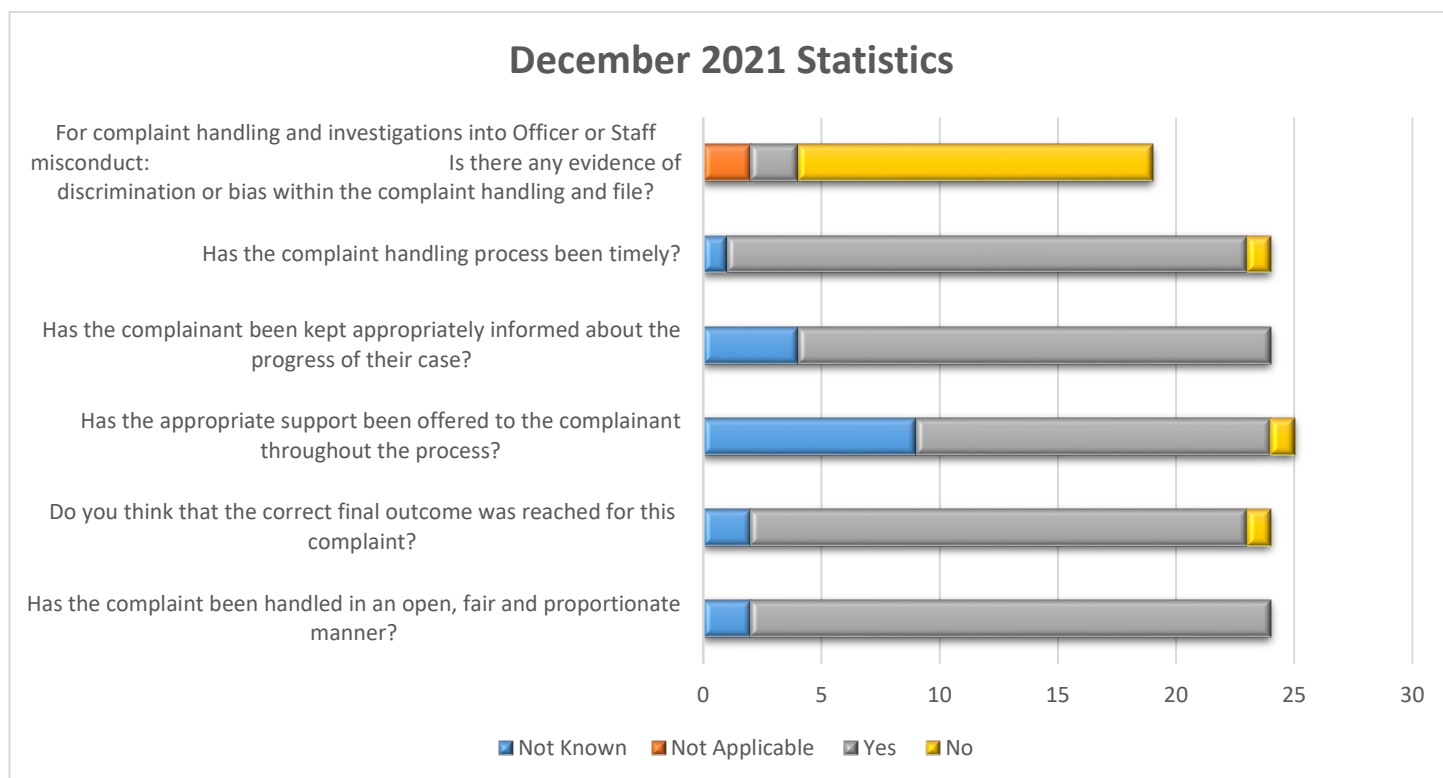
Within Avon and Somerset Police (ASP) a victim of domestic abuse (DA) will be referred to our Lighthouse Safeguarding Unit (LSU) by virtue of being an enhanced victim, under the Victims' Code.

The LSU support all victims and witnesses through any criminal justice process. Every DA incident or crime is assessed for the need for contact by the LSU. There is already a well-established route for LSU to refer victims onto external support agencies, even if a decision is made that LSU would not contact the victim, referrals would still take place, a rationale should be recorded why LSU did not make contact, this would usually be for incidents, all DA Crime would be contacted for support.

The LSU works closely with specialist commissioned organisations such as Nextlink, YouTrust and Southside, who between them, cover all five local authority areas across the force and offer comprehensive guidance and interventions for all victims of DA.

When the LSU receive a referral for any enhanced victim of crime, the allocated Victim & Witness Care Officer undertakes a Common Needs Assessment with the victim, in order to clearly understand the current situation and any needs that the victim may have – such as child or adult safeguarding concerns or risks, and crucially, whether there is any additional support required. Victim Support is just one agency that victims can be referred into to provide longer term support. Victims have 12 rights under the Victims Code. Part 6 says 'To be provided with information about the investigation and prosecution' they should be updated at significant points like at charge, or in any case every 28 days as a minimum. Their wishes as to means of contact should be recorded, this is especially relevant in DA Cases and LSU officers establish this.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS



This chart related to the six questions in the feedback form. Panel members record 'not known' when the case file does not give sufficient detail to allow a categorical yes or no answer.

Comments from Head of Professional Standards Detective Superintendent Jane Wigmore: *"I want to thank the Independent Resident's Panel for giving up their time, skills and lived experience to review complaints linked to domestic abuse and provide valuable feedback to PSD. As Head of Professional Standards, learning is critical to our policing culture and behaviours. We now have a quarterly PSD learning meeting and the feedback from the IPR is shared directly with the Analyst who can incorporate it into our wider learning piece with colleagues across the Constabulary.*

The IPR was also an opportunity to share the fantastic feedback following Quarter 4 IOPC Complaints publication revealing Avon and Somerset Constabulary performs very well against most similar forces in its initial engagement and contact with complainants and resolving complaints in a timely manner."

Comments from Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner Mark Shelford: *'It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to meet the Independent Resident's Panel at this quarterly meeting and I look forward to meeting everyone in person in the early part of 2022. As always a thank you from me for the Panel's oversight and scrutiny of the police complaints regime, their attention to detail and careful consideration of how complaints are handled.*

The work that is being carried out internally within Avon and Somerset Constabulary to support domestic abuse victims alongside the training being carried out by Safelives to educate front line responders marks really positive progress in the way we tackle and respond to domestic abuse within the police. My Office has recently secured over £100,000 additional funding for sexual violence and domestic abuse services which will help to support victims across Avon and Somerset. I hope that this extra funding into our local victim services will complement the improvements to policing to tackle these crimes."