

18/04/2024  
REF CON-36089 FOI 742

Sent via email: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

**RE: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST – FOI 742**

Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) office have now completed the search for the information which you requested on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

**Your request:**

I understand the Victims and Prisoners Bill will introduce a new statutory requirement on commissioners of victims' services, known as the 'duty to collaborate'. This will require Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and local authorities to work together when commissioning support services for victims of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and other serious violence.

Unfortunately in Bristol there are currently no female only abuse support services. Even the services which say online or in their charitable objectives they are 'by women for women' and/or for survivors dealing with the aftermath of domestic, sexual abuse and coercive control - have said there aren't any and they are in fact mixed sex. Female survivors of male abuse who need single sex services are currently left with no accessible support at all. Some have contacted 'female' abuse support organisations to ask for help on police advice and then found the service is mixed sex.

Please advise:

- 1- how the commissioner is collaborating with councils and ICB to develop single sex services for female victims of abuse currently excluded from help, before the Victim's Bill comes into force. If not, please advise.
- 2- what other plans the commissioner/ police have to fulfil their statutory duty to ensure there are accessible single sex services for female victims of male abuse. If none, please advise.
- 4- if the commissioner or police know of any single sex abuse services in your area for female abuse survivors (all the ones online we have checked are mixed sex), please advise
- 5- what action the commissioner and force will take to ensure police officers only refer female abuse survivors to female only services if this is what they request, or advise victims when no accessible abuse support is available locally.

## Our response:

### **1. how the commissioner is collaborating with councils and ICB to develop single sex services for female victims of abuse currently excluded from help, before the Victim's Bill comes into force. If not, please advise.**

Services Commissioned with funding received under the PCC's grant agreement with the Ministry of Justice do not have a specific or explicit condition nor do we have a statutory duty for the provision of single sex services. PCCs must have due regard for the specific need for victims in their local area and commission provision accordingly. As part of this, PCCs would be expected to follow guidance under the Equality Act 2010, whereby providers have the ability to restrict use of spaces on the basis of sex and gender resignation where this is justified.

As such, where we are recommissioning victim services at present, you will see we have undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment (see p.57 of our Commissioning Plan for narrative on the protected characteristic 'Sex' available on the [OPCC website](#)). You may wish to note that this includes the Avon and Somerset Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) Service.

The specific services you are interested in are not clear from your request. However in order to assist we list below the possible services of relevance that the OPCC jointly commissions (with lead commissioners identified):

- Avon and Somerset Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) with NHS England (lead) and Avon and Somerset Constabulary
- Avon and Somerset Specialist Sexual Violence Therapies with NHSE England (lead) , Bristol City Council, Bristol North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care Board and Somerset Integrated Care Board.
- Local specialist domestic abuse services receive some contributions from the OPCC into pooled budgets but are commissioned by Local Authorities (Bristol, Somerset, North Somerset, BANES and South Gloucestershire).

Details of services funded by the OPCC are on our [website](#).

The OPCC eagerly anticipates more detail on the Victims and Prisoners Bill collaborative duty with ICBs and local authorities from government.

### **2. what other plans the commissioner/ police have to fulfil their statutory duty to ensure there are accessible single sex services for female victims of male abuse. If none, please advise.**

As above, Services Commissioned with funding received under the PCC's grant agreement with the Ministry of Justice do not have a specific or explicit condition nor do we have a statutory duty for the provision of single sex services. PCCs must have due regard for the specific need for victims in their local area and commission provision accordingly. As part of this, PCCs would be expected to follow guidance under the Equality Act of 2010, whereby providers have the ability to restrict use of spaces on the basis of sex and gender resignation where this is justified.

**3. If the commissioner or police know of any single sex abuse services in your area for female abuse survivors (all the ones online we have checked are mixed sex), please advise**

The OPCC does not directly oversee, hold or maintain a list of single-sex services or referral criteria for services in the Avon and Somerset area. There are many independent organisations that provide support to victims of abuse, tailored to their specific needs.

To assist the Lighthouse directory maintained by Avon and Somerset Constabulary provides information on various support services available locally. You can access the directory using the following link: <https://www.lighthousevictimcare.org/support-services/>

**4. What action the commissioner and force will take to ensure police officers only refer female abuse survivors to female only services if this is what they request, or advise victims when no accessible abuse support is available locally**

To obtain information regarding the operational measures taken by Avon and Somerset Constabulary concerning the referral criteria for female victims, I recommend directing your inquiry to the Constabulary directly. They will be better equipped to provide you with accurate and comprehensive information on this matter.

You can submit a formal request to the Constabulary through their designated Freedom of Information (FOI) request here: <https://www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/about/freedom-of-information/freedom-of-information-foi-request/>.

If you have any queries about this letter then please contact me, quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are unhappy about how your request has been handled and wish to make a complaint or request a review of the decision then you should write to:

The Chief Of Staff  
Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner's Office  
Valley Road  
Portishead  
Bristol  
BS20 8JJ

Please note, Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner's office provides you with the right to request a re-examination of your case under its review procedure. The appeals document is attached for your reference.

If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner's office. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: <http://ico.org.uk/>.



**AVON &  
SOMERSET**  
POLICE & CRIME  
COMMISSIONER

Yours sincerely,

*Freedom of Information Officer*

**Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioners Office**



📍 Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner, Valley Road, Portishead, Bristol. BS20 8JJ

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