

21.10.21

Dear Home Secretary,

Re. A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape (Phase 1 report)

This HMICFRS joint inspection is the first of two reports that considers the response, decision-making and effectiveness of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) response to incidents of rape. The phase 1 report focused on the extremely important period between the victim first reporting the rape and the police or CPS deciding to take no further action.

I stand with the many people who are deeply concerned about the disparity between the number of reported rapes and the number of subsequent convictions - nationwide as well as here in West Yorkshire. I appreciate this joint inspection's objective to explore this issue and seek better outcomes for the victims of serious sexual assault.

The report makes 13 recommendations, and West Yorkshire Police have updated me on their work under the four recommendations which are most relevant to their work and that of their colleagues in the CPS; I detail this information on pages 3 and 4 of this letter.

The Mayor and myself are committed to building a strong criminal justice response to crimes such as rape which predominantly (but not exclusively) impact on women and girls. Alongside this, we must ensure that we also have the best support available for the victims of these offences.

The current national dialogue on the safety of women and girls resonates firmly here in West Yorkshire, firstly as a topic of which forms a key pledge at the heart of Mayor Brabin's mayoral manifesto, but also as the Mayor and myself both have our own lived experience of VAWG. This perspective is something which helps us engage women and girls in our policing priorities in West Yorkshire, and informs our work of holding the force to account for its performance on VAWG.

In August this year, the Mayor invited communities and partnership organisations across West Yorkshire to share their experience and knowledge to start the conversation on how we can collectively help improve safety for women and girls. This was followed by a women and girls roundtable event in September, which

allowed the Mayor and myself to hear more about people's experiences and understand how we can work better together to tackle sexual violence.

Our work on this key aspect of the Mayor's ambitions for her first term in office will develop over the coming six months as we lead up to the publishing of her first Police and Crime Plan for West Yorkshire. Working to improve the safety of women and girls has been established as a cross-cutting theme across all four of our proposed Police and Crime Plan priorities, which we currently have open for public consultation.

It is crucial that we take a partnership approach in order to succeed across this complex subject area, and so we will continue to monitor and evaluate the police's, our partner's, and the Mayoral Combined Authority's own response to this important topic in the months ahead.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alison Lowe', written in a cursive style.

Alison Lowe

Deputy Mayor of West Yorkshire for Policing and Crime

Update on West Yorkshire Police's Response to Selected HMICFRS Recommendations from the Joint Inspection.
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Recommendation 3: Police forces should collect data to record the different stages when, and reasons why, a victim may withdraw support for a case.

Work is ongoing to better understand when and why victims withdraw support for a case. Achieving the right outcome for our victims and ensuring perpetrators who pose a risk are brought to justice are key priorities for West Yorkshire Police (WYP). Current work to better understand this matter includes:

- Internal WYP, Partnership and Victim-focussed workshops.
- Creation of a Rape and Serious Sexual Assault Improvement Group, including representatives from local ISVA Services (Independent Sexual Violence Adviser), the five West Yorkshire Police districts, and the dedicated WYP Rape and Serious Sexual Assault (RaSSO) Gatekeeper team.
- An internal audit to identify why and when victims withdraw support for a prosecution, to identify any lessons learnt which can be translated into new policy and training.
- A review of the support pathways available for victims to ensure appropriate referrals are made at the right time to meet victims' needs.

Recommendation 4: Immediately, police forces and CPS Areas should work together at a local level to prioritise action to improve the effectiveness of case strategies and action plans, with rigorous target and review dates and a clear escalation and performance management process.

West Yorkshire Police have a strong and ever improving relationship with the local CPS through the RaSSO Gatekeeper Team. A robust management process of outstanding Action Plans for Rape and Serious Sexual Assault cases means we perform well in this area, not only against our peers but nationally too.

This approach is being enhanced even further through the CPS working directly with the RaSSO Gatekeeper Team to support advice clinics within each police district. This means legal advice and early investigative advice can be sought face-to-face, which will expedite our investigations greatly.

It is recognised that we need to increase the number of cases submitted to the CPS, whilst at the same time reduce those requiring additional work (Action Plans). This aspect of our work is covered in the RaSSO Action Plan, which will seek to drive change and improve performance in our work with the CPS.

Recommendation 6: The police and the CPS, in consultation with commissioned and non-commissioned services and advocates, and victims, should review the current process for communicating to victims the fact that a decision to take no further action has been made. They should implement any changes needed so that these difficult messages are conveyed in a timely way that best suits the victims' needs.

This is a live workstream in the RaSSO Action Plan, and so further work is ongoing. The strong relationships with partners that have already been established are being strengthened to allow a co-ordinated approach to this sensitive issue, and to ensure an approach which fully supports the victim.

West Yorkshire Police holds a Rape and Serious Sexual Assault Improvement Group with local ISVA services to enhance our joint-services to victims. Specially Trained Officers (STO) are deployed to initial reports of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences to ensure victims receive specialist support and advice at the earliest opportunity, in addition to this, WYP with partners are considering how they can improve the process used to inform and support victims when the police are not going to take further action.

Training has (and continues) to be delivered to WYP officers and staff on the Victims' Right to Review scheme to ensure investigators understand their responsibilities, and also ensure that victims are aware that they are entitled to have police decisions not to charge reviewed. The Force has a victim and witness policy to ensure that the victims of crime are provided with caring support tailored to their needs.

Finally, to promote organisational improvement, 50 investigations that include (but are not exclusive to) Rape and Serious Sexual Assault incidents are also reviewed each month in line with the HMICFRS Victim Service Assessment to evaluate how well victims are supported during an investigation. Areas of good practice or areas for improvement are shared across West Yorkshire Police through a well-established monthly governance group that focuses on victim support and investigative quality.

Recommendation 7: Police forces should ensure investigators understand that victims are entitled to have police decisions not to charge reviewed under the Victims' Right to Review scheme and should periodically review levels of take-up.

The Force's approach to this is currently under review, as is analytical data to establish if we can track when and how the Right to Review is communicated. An evaluation is to take place in mid-November to establish the current position.