

10.11.21

Dear Home Secretary,

Re. The police response to violence against women and girls – final HMICFRS inspection report.

On behalf of the Mayor, Tracy Brabin, can I offer my thanks for this report and for HMICFRS's associated inspection work during 2021, investigating the important issue of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

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 election manifesto, but also because the Mayor and I speak as women who have 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.

Our conversation with communities on this topic is already underway. In August this year the Mayor invited individuals, communities, and partnership organisations across West Yorkshire to share their experience and knowledge, and this 'call for evidence' was then followed by a women and girls roundtable event held in September. This event allowed the Mayor and myself to hear more about people's experiences, and understand how we can work together to tackle sexual violence.

October has seen us promote a comprehensive public consultation on the objectives of the Mayor's draft Police and Crime Plan for West Yorkshire. Our early reflections are that violence against women and girls is currently a topic of great concern to the public. Sadly, many of those responding to our consultation feel that the criminal justice system is not protecting women and girls as it should. The low rates of successful prosecutions for incidents of domestic or sexual abuse are one such example of how women feel the odds are against them if they report a crime. Reading this feedback brings into focus the challenge we face to build a system which supports victims and their families inside and outside the criminal justice process, prevents offences occurring, and manages and rehabilitates perpetrators.

West Yorkshire is already in a strong position to take on this challenge, with our existing domestic abuse perpetrator programme ('CARA') recently extended across our districts; our developed network of IDVA and ISVA specialists available to support victims; and our flagship facility, the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC),

which provides victims and survivors with specialist medical services and advice when they need it most of all.

West Yorkshire Police also launched a *Clare's Law* online reporting tool in March this year, as well as maintaining its existing work to prevent domestic violence through the Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DVPO) Team, as well as using GPS 'Buddi Tags' to alert victims of domestic abuse to the proximity of a suspect perpetrator.

Whilst most of the recommendations arising from this report are directed at national bodies, we update you on West Yorkshire Police's response to the recommendations on the following pages.

Viewing the report as a whole, I strongly encourage decision-makers in government and the NPCC to adopt the 'relentless focus' on VAWG which this report calls for. This will require co-ordinated work amongst agencies, embracing a whole-system approach to tackle the criminal justice, victim support, and the societal challenges which influence the scope of VAWG offences. The adoption of statutory duties on appropriate agencies (which the report describes) is a positive step forward to meet this objective.

The Mayor and I are committed to building a strong criminal justice response to issues such as stalking, domestic abuse, sexual offences, honour-based abuse, misogyny, modern slavery, and safety in public spaces. We are particularly keen to work with partners in the CPS to ensure their decisions are victim-led (as well as being perceived to be so), and timely.

Alongside this, we must ensure that we have the best support available for the victims of VAWG offences. The Mayor and I will embed this commitment in our forthcoming Police and Crime Plan.

While we wait for the publishing of the Home Office/NPCC National Policing Strategy for violence against women and girls, 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,



Alison Lowe

Deputy Mayor of West Yorkshire for Policing and Crime

Update on West Yorkshire Police's Response to Selected HMICFRS Recommendations from the final inspection report on VAWG.

Recommendation 1

There should be an immediate and unequivocal commitment that the response to VAWG offences is an absolute priority for government, policing, the criminal justice system, and public-sector partnerships. This needs to be supported at a minimum by a relentless focus on these crimes; mandated responsibilities; and sufficient funding so that all partner agencies can work effectively as part of a whole-system approach to reduce and prevent the harms these offences are causing.

West Yorkshire Police (WYP) regularly update the Mayor's office on progress in their work to challenge VAWG, with a force lead appointed to coordinate the response and approach to all aspects of VAWG. West Yorkshire Police are also helping to shape the national response through proactively seconding the force lead to a national VAWG taskforce.

Notable workstreams and achievements at present include:

- Misogyny and misandry will be recorded against all recorded crimes where a victim believes the crime was motivated by hostility to their gender from December 2021.
- Prioritising Stalking and Harassment through a renewed problem profile of these offences, and focusing on Stalking and Harassment Protection Orders to target perpetrator behaviour.
- Discussing VAWG and Hate issues through *Pol-Ed*, WYP's educational programme which supports schools' PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic) curriculum.
- An investment in an additional 65 Investigators and 15 Sergeants to the Safeguarding team, in addition to investment in the Paedophile Online Investigation Team (POLIT), and Domestic Abuse Teams, which includes Domestic Abuse IOM Officers to target perpetrator behaviour.
- The force has commenced an ambitious training programme, including a Specialist Child Abuse Investigation Development Programme (SCAIDP), and a Rape and Serious Sexual Assault Investigators Development Programme (SSAIDP).
- Through a strong partnership with the Mayoral Combined Authority, WYP have helped to secure £870,658 investment through the Safer Streets Fund 3 & Public Space bid (£655,281) and the Safety of Women at Night Fund bid (£215,377).
- Establishing a multi-agency response under Operation Jeanhaven to 'spiking' crimes. This approach is supported by health services, Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), and other key partners including pubs, clubs, and bars and across Leeds and West Yorkshire.

Recommendation 4

All chief constables should immediately review and ensure that there are consistently high standards in their forces' responses to violence against women and girls and should be supported in doing so by national standards and data.

4.1 By March 2022, chief constables should establish and publish an action plan that specifies in detail what steps the force will take to improve and standardise its approach to responding to violence against women and girls offences, with the aim of ensuring policies, processes and practices are effective, actively monitored and managed, and meeting national standards.

An overarching West Yorkshire Police strategy is being finalised that will coordinate the police response to Violence Against Women and Girls. This will not only reflect HMICFRS' and the NPCC's strategic intent, but key areas of the new West Yorkshire Police and Crime Plan and the Mayor's own election pledges.

It is intended that West Yorkshire Police will formally launch their Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy in December this year, and the document will focus on three key objectives:

- Pursuit of perpetrators
- Creating safe spaces (private, public & online)
- Increasing trust and confidence in policing

Recommendation 5 - Immediate review of use of outcomes 15 and 16 in violence against women and girls offences.

An unacceptably high number of domestic abuse, rape and other violence against women and girls cases are closed by the police using outcome codes 15 [insufficient evidence] and 16 [victim does not support prosecution]. These numbers vary between forces, and there are significant gaps in the data and information gathered about these outcomes.

West Yorkshire Police have invested in a dedicated Rape and Serious Sexual Assault team (RaSSO Gatekeepers), Domestic Violence Protection Notice/Order team, and civil caseworkers, to enhance their approach to securing protective measures and managing perpetrator behaviour.

WYP adopt a Fast-Track approach to the prioritisation of Domestic Abuse, Rape and Serious Sexual Assault cases to secure charges at the earliest opportunity, and additionally have worked to prevent offences through the use of electronic tags to monitor Domestic Abuse perpetrators, as well as supporting the WY Domestic Abuse perpetrator programme (CARA).

WYP are carrying out work to better understand when and why victims withdraw support for a case. Achieving the right outcome for victims and ensuring perpetrators who pose a risk are brought to justice are key priorities for 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.

- A Sexual Violence Forum, which sees a wider stakeholder group that includes West Yorkshire Police and representatives from the Crown Prosecution Service (Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Legal Manager), SARC, Witness Services (Leeds and Bradford Crown Court), ISVAs from Victim Support, and voluntary sector agencies. The aim of this group is to bring agencies together who work with victims/survivors of sexual violence as they progress through the criminal justice process. The intention is to improve the experience and support for victims and survivors, no matter how long they remain within the criminal justice process, and no matter the outcome of the investigation.
- An internal audit to identify why and when victims withdraw support for a prosecution, to identify any lessons learned 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.