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October  
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**SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT  
QUARTER 1&2 (APR – SEP 2019)**



**Police and Crime**

**Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys**

**Scrutiny Panel**

**Dip Sampling Exercise**

**Review of 2019/20 Quarter 1&2 (Apr-Sep)**

**Support for victims of domestic-related crimes**

**Panel Members' Findings & Feedback**

**October 2019**

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## 1.0 Summary

The Quality Assurance Panel looked at a selection of 14 domestic-related cases in order to review how victims had been supported and communicated with throughout their case. Cases were selected from within the six months prior to and six months following the introduction of Dyfed-Powys Police's "Vulnerability Desk" in order to seek any insights into the impact the Desk may have had on victims' experiences.

On the whole, Panel Members considered that victims had been well supported and reasonable steps had been taken to investigate each of the crimes reviewed. However, only one case positively documented that CCTV footage had been considered but was not available to support the investigation. The Panel identified no other cases where either Body Worn Video (BWV), CCTV or victim video interview recording had been used or considered. This may be an opportunity which could be considered more in order to secure ongoing support from victims, or to be able to continue with pursuing prosecution without the victims' support. There was good evidence in every case of supervisors regularly reviewing and endorsing officers' decision making.

The majority of the cases reviewed were finalised within 31-100 days. Most of these longer investigations occurred after the introduction of the Vulnerability Desk. Only just over half of the cases had evidence of victim contracts, agreements drawn up between the officers and the victims as to how and when they would like to be updated on the progress of their case. Support services had been offered to 10 out of the 14 victims. The Panel considered that both contact agreements and support services should be offered in every case.

The Panel however wished to note that the victims' choice to withdraw their support for investigations was not necessarily a sign of police failure, as officers were unable to control the victims' decisions.

## 2.0 Outcome

The Commissioner's Quality Assurance Panel was asked to consider a selection of domestic-related cases in order to review how victims had been supported and communicated with throughout their case. Specific attention was given to whether:

- a contract of preferred contact had been agreed with the victim;
- they had then been updated on the progress of the case in line with what had been agreed;
- they had been offered support services;
- the case was finalised in a timely manner;

- opportunities to gather video evidence to increase the chance of prosecution were considered; and
- supervisors oversaw and regularly endorsed the actions being taken.

The cases were selected independently by a member of the Commissioner's team, who sought to identify domestic cases with a range of crime categories and outcomes. The purpose was to evaluate if there were any notable differences in the quality of the support for, and interaction with, victims of different crime types and if this had any bearing on the final outcome of the case. The findings of this review would contribute to the OPCC's current Deep Dive focusing on victim withdrawal.

The selection also included a comparison of cases reported before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 and comparable crimes after this date, in order to review whether there were any obvious improvements which may be attributed to the introduction of the "Vulnerability Desk".

Introduced within the force communication centre following mounting evidence from HMIC inspections and internal reviews, the Vulnerability Desk has provided closer quality assurance around domestic-related calls for service to ensure appropriate crime recording and completion of DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment) risk assessments. Any insights found as a result of the Panel's work would also contribute to the OPCC's Follow-Up Review of the Vulnerability Desk which sought to assess the impact the Desk was having on the service provided to victims.

Full details of the OPCC's scrutiny framework can be found on the Commissioner's website.

## 3.0 Situation

### 3.1 Statistics

The table below shows the selection outcomes considered as part of this review as a percentage of all outcomes applied to domestic-related crimes, within the time periods noted. Whilst it appears the rate of charges have dropped considerably, it must be noted that 8% of investigations from April to September 2019 were still ongoing, which may result in the charge rate increasing as the cases are finalised. The other most obvious differences are an apparent reduction in the volume of cases concluding as a result of evidential difficulties (outcome 15) and a rise in the volume of cases where the victim has withdrawn support, even though the suspect has been identified (outcome 16).

Outcome <sup>1</sup>	Apr – Sep 2018		Oct '18 – Mar '19		Apr – Sep 2019	
	Total	Percentage of all outcomes	Total	Percentage of all outcomes	Total	Percentage of all outcomes
<b>1a</b> Charged	327	16%	264	11%	211	8%
<b>3a</b> Adult Caution	47	2%	37	2%	33	1%
<b>14</b> Victim declines/unable to support action - named suspect not identified	65	3%	90	4%	103	4%
<b>15</b> Victim supports action but evidential difficulties	371	18%	418	17%	371	13%
<b>16</b> Victim does not (or has withdrawn) support - named suspect	1,068	51%	1,294	54%	1,610	57%
<b>Total domestic-related crimes (all outcomes)</b>	<b>2,108</b>		<b>2,390</b>		<b>2,807</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Only outcomes reviewed within this report have been listed.

### 3.2 Previous findings

The Quality Assurance Panel had not directly reviewed the specific topic of support for victims previously.

## 4.0 Consequences

### 4.1 Summary of cases reviewed

Crime type	Outcome	Case no.
Stalking	1a – Charged	1, 2
	3a - Adult caution	5, 6
Harassment	15 – Victim supports action but evidential difficulties	10, 11
Common assault	1a – Charged	3, 4
	16 – Suspect identified but victim does not (or has withdrawn) support	14
Rape of female over 16	14 – Victim declines / unable to support action. Suspect NOT identified	7, 8
	15 – Victim supports action but evidential difficulties	9
	16 – Suspect identified but victim does not (or has withdrawn) support	12, 13

### 4.2 Summary of findings from this review

In addition to providing their views on how victims had been supported within the 14 cases considered, Panel Members were asked to measure a set of criteria for each case, the results of which can be seen in the table below.

Criteria	Number of cases	Comments
Case finalised within 1-5 days	3	
Case finalised within 6-30 days	3	
Case finalised within 31-100 days	7	Delays noted included: outcome changed, availability of suspects and officers and indecisiveness of victim.
Case finalised within >100 days	1	A complex and lengthy investigation with a victim with serious mental health issues and requiring multi-agency involvement.

Victim contract created	8	One declined, one opted out and another was a mental health ward inpatient and unable to engage fully.
Victim updates in line with contract	13	Many updates were not applicable due to there being no contract, or a lack of victim engagement (they opted out). One case where the victim had been updated on numerous occasions but there was no evidence that the victim had been informed of the final outcome.
Support services offered	10	One case where the victim was an inpatient at a mental health ward did not appear to have had the usual victim support services offered but there were multiple agencies involved in their care and the Panel considered the police had done all they could.
BWV activated / CCTV considered for victimless prosecution	1	One case made reference to CCTV not being available, but it had been considered.
Video recorded interview conducted with victim	0	The victim within one case declined.
Cases regularly endorsed by supervisor	14	

When comparing similar crimes with the same outcome from before and after the introduction of the Vulnerability Desk, the Panel identified only slight differences in the victim experience. Four of the compared pairs showed that investigations took longer post-Desk introduction, which may have been due to incidents being identified as more complex than previously recognised (Dyfed-Powys Police has reported an ongoing improvement in the detection of "crimes within crimes"). The level of support provided and contact arrangements remained relatively comparable.

#### 4.3 Best practice

- The Panel considered that the Police's internal scrutiny of outcome application was very good within the 14 cases reviewed.
- It was felt that in the main, victims were well supported and were offered support from both the Police and other external agencies.
- The Panel noted that actions and rationales within the majority of cases were well documented and in the majority of cases the reasons for victim withdrawal was captured where appropriate.



- It was felt that officers were giving significant time to investigating the incidents and empathy was shown towards the victims.
- The Panel also wished to note that the victims' choice to withdraw their support for investigations was not necessarily a sign of police failure, as officers were unable to control the victims' decisions.

#### **4.4 Areas for learning**

- Every effort should be made to secure a contact agreement with the victim to agree how and when they wish to be updated on the progress of the case. This should be coupled with the offer of referral to relevant support services in every case.
- It was felt that one of the cases had been incorrectly recorded as an outcome 15 (victim supports action but evidential difficulties). The Panel felt that outcome 16 (victim does not (or has withdrawn) support) would have been more appropriate on this occasion. Members considered there may be some confusion about the appropriate application of outcomes which may require clarification internally. They did not however consider this to be detrimental to the delivery of support for victims.
- It appeared that there was a reliance on the police to prompt and encourage a response from other agencies to support victims. Whilst the Panel praised the service for ensuring victims receive the appropriate support, they expressed concern that this was, or could become, overly time consuming and therefore have a negative impact on the service's primary functions.
- It was noted in one particular case that there were delays due to officer abstractions such as officers being re-rostered. This did cause delays for the victim and subsequently raised a query about cases being handed over to colleagues to progress.
- In one case it was felt that the victim's expectations were raised by not being told until late into the investigation that part of the incident could not be investigated due to it happening abroad. It was felt that this should have been explained to the victim sooner.

## 5.0 Actions

Number	Observation
1	Members considered that a question to prompt officers to explain why a victim withdrew would ensure a detailed and clear rationale is always provided and easily retrievable. This, combined with a structured method of capturing feedback from support services, could provide vital insights for the Force to understand if officers or other agencies could do more to secure victims' support throughout an investigation.
2	Every effort should be made to secure a contact agreement with the victim to agree how and when they wish to be updated on the progress of the case. This should be coupled with the offer of referral to relevant support services in every case.
3	Members recognised the conflict between the time spent recording information and investigating the crime, however urged that evidence of rationale for decisions be thoroughly documented, for example capturing a victim's wish to withdraw support within their statement as was done within case 13.
4	BWV / CCTV / video interview footage should be considered to encourage victims' support.

## 6.0 Review

It has been provisionally agreed with the Domestic Abuse leadership team within Dyfed-Powys Police that the Commissioner's Office repeat this exercise in six months' time to assess the ongoing impact of the Vulnerability Desk and the further proposed development of the Secondary Risk Assessment Unit.

Also, the Quality Assurance Panel Members have requested that they be given the opportunity to further review the use, storage and retrieval of BWV at their next meeting, due to their ongoing concern of the limited availability of footage.