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10 November 2021

Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys response to Police response to violence against women and girls

This inspection report comes at a time when violence against women and girls is nationally at the forefront of many discussions, and rightly so.

I welcome the focus by HMCFRS on this matter at this stage, but we must acknowledge that violence against women and girls (VAWG) has been a priority for myself, Dyfed-Powys Police and policing in Wales for some time now.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) remains a priority for Dyfed Powys as governed by my existing Police and Crime Plan, the Force Control Strategy and Chief Constable's priorities. I can confirm that it will also feature strongly in my new Police and Crime Plan, soon to be published.

I am in regular discussions with my Welsh Police and Crime Commissioner colleagues in relation to Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse (VAWDASV) and how we can maximise our effectiveness in Wales. We have agreed to work with Welsh Government on a VAWDASV Blueprint for Wales. Together, we have also lobbied the Home Office with regards to a missed opportunity in the Policing Bill: As drafted, the Policing Bill does not explicitly include domestic violence and abuse and sexual violence and therefore misses the opportunity to increase the protection given to victims and survivors of these forms of violence and abuse.

VAWG has long been a priority for the Criminal Justice Board in Wales, and features as a golden thread across all the priorities in the current work programme. In addition to this, victims of rape and sexual offence are a specific work stream within the victims and witness priority. My Local Criminal Justice Board delivery plan mirrors this and focuses on provision of remote evidence sites and court facilities for victims of VAWDASV.

Dyfed-Powys Police continue to develop the Vulnerability Hub, which provides specialist support to officers dealing with domestic violence incidents and helps to improve the service to victims. Recent activity includes a grant-funded specialist role within the Hub to improve the management of domestic abuse perpetrators.

Dyfed-Powys Police continue to make significant progress in reducing the number of investigations open for longer than 12 months.

Dyfed-Powys Police's End-to-End project continues to focus on putting victims at the heart of everything by understanding demand, improving processes and influencing culture to enable them to be efficient and effective.

My office has recently secured additional funds of over £600,000 from the Ministry of Justice to increase the support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence in the Dyfed-Powys area. The funding will help support victims who have experienced Domestic Abuse or Sexual Violence at any point in their life. The extra specialist independent support that will now be available will be provided by a wide range of

community based support organisations, following an increase in the demand for support. Nine additional roles will be created and specialist training for local professionals will also be provided, with the aim of building capacity within domestic abuse refuges such as schools and pupil referral units, to enable children to access early interventions by adults they trust in a safe space. I am proud to say that this additional funding brings the total investment in victim services to over £1.7million during 2021/22, combining Ministry of Justice and core funding from my office. I continue to fund numerous support services for people affected by domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault across the force area.

My office has also recently submitted a bid to the Home Office's Safety of Women at Night Fund to provide innovative approaches to creating safe spaces for women in our communities, particularly the night-time economy and recognising our student and transient holiday populations. The outcome of this submission is expected in November.

Work will continue to promote the Dyfed-Powys Victim Engagement Forum, managed by my team, to ensure feedback is sought directly from victims in terms of the service delivered by Dyfed-Powys Police. There are many publicised opportunities for victims to join the Forum, including via our Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) services and recently through the Victims' Commissioner's Office where an email was distributed to victims from the local area who responded to the Victims' Commissioner's annual 'Victims' Survey'. Victim Engagement Forum members recently fed back on their experience of the impact of COVID-19 on victim support services, and will soon be asked to provide feedback on Dyfed-Powys Police's leaflet which provides victims of sexual offences with specialist guidance and advice.

Additionally, work is underway to explore the situation locally in terms of how safe women and girls feel on a local level, and what steps I can take to ensure trust and confidence in the police. A public consultation will launch in November 2021.

My team are currently working alongside Dyfed-Powys Police to jointly promote the new Street Safe tool that is being piloted at the moment. It is available on all Police Forces' websites and is a service for members of the public to anonymously tell Dyfed-Powys Police about public places where they have felt unsafe, because of environmental issues, e.g. street lighting, abandoned buildings or vandalism and/or because of some behaviours, e.g. being followed or verbally abused.

Given the specific HMICFRS report finding that the "Use of protective powers (such as Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs), Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) and Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs)), is inconsistent, and this is unexplained", consideration will be given as to whether it would be appropriate and suitable for members of my Quality Assurance Panel to scrutinise Dyfed-Powys Police's use of protective powers.

Along the same vein, scrutiny activity recently undertaken by HMICFRS, The College of Policing and the Independent Office for Police Conduct has led to the recommendation that Chief Constables should review, and if necessary refresh their

policy on DVPNs and DVPOs to ensure there is clear governance and communication to prioritise their effective use. I have sought detailed evidence from Dyfed-Powys Police with regard to each of the recommendations contained within the HMICFRS report and am reassured by the actions taken to date and those planned for the future. I will be seeking ongoing assurance of the delivery of key outputs relating to this.

Specifically in relation to the implementation of the findings and recommendations set out within the HMICFRS report on the Police response to violence against women and girls, I have sought reassurance from the Chief Constable regarding current and ongoing work in respect of the report's recommendations. I have been advised that a Force Strategy is under development for the management of the report's recommendations.

Dyfed-Powys Police's head of Vulnerability is leading on this piece of work, and the recommendations will be monitored and discussed at Dyfed-Powys Police's Strategic Vulnerability Board. My Director of Commissioning and Policy and Engagement Advisor both sit on the Strategic Vulnerability Board, and will keep me up-to-date in terms of progress reported against the recommendations. They will also be able to put questions to the Board on my behalf.

The Chief Constable has provided specific information as to the Force's actions against each of the recommendations:

Recommendation 3 - Structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support.

3.2 By March 2022, all police forces should ensure information on the protected characteristics of victims is accurately and consistently recorded.

There is currently work ongoing nationally to support compliance of this recommendation, as this data is not mandated for collection at this time. The action however will be considered at our next Strategic Crime Recording User Group SCRUG meeting in force, for consideration to be given around ICT development needs in force to ensure we are in a position to capture the required data by March next year.

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.

A performance framework for VAWG is currently being created which will enable the force to benchmark against how it is currently performing in this critical area of

business. The framework will take into consideration national good practice and guidance, e.g. Compliance with Safeguarding Procedures under the Wales Protection Procedures, progress and compliance with the Joint National Action Plan for Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) and the National Vulnerability action plan, and our service to victims of Domestic Abuse. The force will also put measures in place to provide assurance around their outcome 15 & 16's.

The Performance framework will feature at Force Performance Events with the first review of VAWG taking place on 9 November at the Force Performance Board chaired by the Chief Constable.

All VAWG-related policies and guidance documents within the Vulnerability Portfolio will be reviewed to ensure they incorporate the best practice advocated by the College of Policing, e.g. Rape, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Modern Day Slavery, Child & Adult Protection. This review has been underway for some time and is almost concluded.

Internal structures are in place to identify best practice and legislation across the Vulnerability portfolio through the 'Portfolio Leads Meeting' which reports directly to the Strategic Vulnerability Group.

The force is also currently undertaking an internal review of their response to Child Protection with a review of those children who are subject to sexual abuse including CSE. A Terms of Reference has been agreed based on a recent review undertaken by South Wales Police, and a report will be completed by December 2021 with specific recommendations therein.

A further review of practice is underway in respect of the management of level one Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) Offenders who are managed by police. A workshop with practitioners is being held later this month, which will lead to the creation of Dyfed-Powys Police guidance, framed against the Authorised Professional Practice (APP) guidance from the College of Policing, and in conjunction with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) guidance around managing Level one offenders, which comes following the outcomes of the recent Peel Inspection.

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

5.2 By December 2022, the NPCC VAWG National Delivery Lead should develop and disseminate to forces a process for consistent and robust monitoring of outcomes 15 and 16 violence against women and girls cases. This should require, as a minimum, inspector-level sign-off of these cases and that evidence on the rationale for these closure codes is recorded and auditable.

The force is awaiting National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) guidance, expected in six weeks' time, at which point they will ensure full compliance with the guidance issued to forces.

However, in the interim the Chief Constable has confirmed that the force regularly audits outcome 15 & 16 crimes for Domestic Abuse (DA) and RASSO offences, which include external audits by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). All Rape Crimes are reviewed by a Detective Inspector designated as the Senior Investigating Officer prior to the outcome being applied, and all Outcome 16 DA offences receive a mandatory review by an Inspector, with the new Central and Local Incident Hubs being created through the end-to-end project providing additional oversight of crime finalisation as of 7 November.

I will continue to scrutinise progress updates from the Chief Constable and her senior management team. In addition to this, my Quality and Assurance Advisor attends a monthly meeting with Dyfed-Powys Police's HMICFRS Team, where regular updates are provided in terms of progress made against recommendations.

With regard to the issues which now present as a result of the tragic murder of Sarah Everard, HMICFRS' recommendations of course require strong leadership to reaffirm the exacting standards held by the Police Service in the UK and to demonstrate a commitment to tackle violent crime, particularly when used against women. As a result, and in addition to the Governance arrangements already outlined for the recommendations, the Chief Constable will be appointing a Chief Officer Lead for this area of work to ensure it has the adequate level of support and scrutiny moving forward.

The Chief Constable has also written directly to Sir Tom Winsor advising that it would be advantageous for the Government to provide continued funding, not only for policing, but for other public sectors, to make real change in all aspects of life in order to deliver the principles of the Government's Tackling VAWG Strategy.

I am confident that Dyfed-Powys Police recognises the importance of both implementing HMICFRS' recommendations and of the continued focus of policing in this area. I trust that the above provides reassurance regarding the commitment of Dyfed-Powys Police to address the recommendations, as well as my ongoing scrutiny and oversight of this area.