

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

1st September 2021

Dear Home Secretary

Response to HMICFRS Interim report: ‘Inspection into how effectively the police engage with women and girls’

Under Section 55(5) of the Police Act 1996, as Police and Crime Commissioner I am pleased to provide my formal response to the report by HMICFRS entitled ‘Interim Report: Inspection into how effectively the police engage with women and girls’.

Both the Chief Constable and I welcome the publication of the report.

A report from the Chief Constable in respect of Cambridgeshire Constabulary’s response to the recommendations made by HMICFRS is attached at Appendix 1. I would also like to take this opportunity to expand on the content of the Constabulary’s response. Firstly, I would like to reassure you that Cambridgeshire Constabulary has always dealt with violence against women and girls positively.

The Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy highlights the importance of using every tool we have to prevent such incidents happening. The Constabulary continue to strengthen their provision in respect of violence against women and girls related offences. This underlines the determination and commitment of both the Chief Constable and I to reducing such violence.

I want to continue working in partnership with colleagues across the county to look at what we can do to prevent these crimes happening in the first place. The Constabulary does have comprehensive Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference processes in place, well attended Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Panels, along with Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, all of which contribute to disrupting adult offenders. By way of innovation, and with the help of Home Office funding, the Constabulary is one of the first to have an Adolescent to Parent Violence Independent Domestic Violence Adviser, and will also be one of only four areas with a Multi-Agency Stalking Programme in place.

The Constabulary’s response provides information on the support provided through Cambridgeshire’s Victim and Witness Hub. In addition, there is outreach provision which provides a crucial referral relationship between the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the third sector. The Hub also provide an abundance and range of specialist posts within the

Independent Domestic Violence Advisers service, and a comprehensive end to end support service for survivors of Sexual Violence. The Sexual Assault Referral Centre also provide support to victims of rape and sexual violence and offer the opportunity for a forensic examination if appropriate.

I hope this response, and that of the Chief Constable, provides reassurance regarding both Cambridgeshire Constabulary and my commitment to providing an effective and supportive response to victims.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Darryl Preston', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Darryl Preston
Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

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Appendix 1 – Cambridgeshire Constabulary’s response to HMICFRS report ‘Interim Report: Inspection into how effectively the police engage with women and girls’

1. HMICFRS Recommendations:

1.1. HMICFRS have set out 3 overarching recommendations in this interim report and some specific steps they consider necessary to achieve these.

1.2. 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 and clear 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.

- The Home Office should add the policing VAWG to the SPR. This will give a clear signal that the government sees VAWG as a priority and that sufficient capabilities are in place to tackle it. It would also help chief constables and police and crime commissioners (PCCs) to balance national and local priorities.
- The Home Office should make sure that VAWG is a priority for the ministerially chaired crime and policing performance board. It should introduce a new Home Secretary-led board to provide clear governance for the VAWG strategy and for the urgent improvements needed.
- The Home Office and other government departments should consider proposing a statutory duty on all appropriate partner agencies to collectively take action to prevent the harm caused by VAWG.
- In doing this, consideration should be given to whether this could be included in any existing duties and how those for safeguarding children will interact and complement the changes.
- The Home Office should agree with other government departments the measures and actions that each partner agency needs to implement both at a national and local level to encourage joint responsibility in tackling VAWG. This may need a new statutory framework.
- The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and the Home Office should jointly appoint a full-time national policing coordinator to lead on all police activity related to VAWG. The lead should act as a point of contact for each police force, work closely with the College of Policing to make sure best practice is identified and communicated, ensure progress is monitored, act as the 'voice of policing' at cross-sector national discussions, and regularly report to the Home Secretary.
- The Home Office and other government departments should agree sustained, multi-year funding to support collaboration between agencies, where they have joint responsibilities.
- The College of Policing and the NPCC should establish mechanisms and processes to allow rapid and consistent sharing of evidence, information and evaluation on new and effective ways of working in response to VAWG offences, and methods that improve VAWG investigation. This should include input from partner agencies

and assess specific actions or skills which could be used to develop a minimum standard for VAWG crimes, to improve the consistency and quality of outcomes for victims.

- If this minimum standard is established (and depending on whether and how other agencies need to act), the Home Secretary should consider whether it is appropriate to use her power under section 53A of the Police Act 1996 to require police forces to adopt the procedures and practices it sets out.
- As per the recommendation in the government's 2021 report *'The end-to-end rape review report on findings and actions'*, the Home Office should implement a 'score card' for measuring improvements in performance in the criminal justice system for all crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls. This should be developed with input from victim representatives.

Force response: The Constabulary is committed to tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) offences. High-harm crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls, including domestic abuse; child sexual abuse and exploitation; modern slavery and human trafficking; and serious sex offences continue to be key strategic priorities for the force to ensure that we are targeting our resources to safeguard the vulnerable. The Constabulary has made significant improvements into how we respond to and investigate VAWG offences. These improvements have included: the introduction of Vulnerability Focus Desks and Domestic Abuse Early Intervention Desks with dedicated police officers and staff that provide frontline responders with fast-time information and safeguarding advice; stronger governance to ensure that crimes are being investigated to a suitable standard and quality with appropriate victim engagement and support; enhanced continual professional development training on best practice and new legislation; and working in county-wide partnerships to intervene early and prevent VAWG offences from occurring, continuing or escalating.

The short- and medium-term steps set out by HMICFRS to achieve this recommendation are addressed to the Home Office, the NPCC and the College of Policing in the first instance. The Constabulary will await further information on progress against these to inform our ongoing work to tackle VAWG offences.

- 1.3. **Recommendation 2:** The relentless pursuit and disruption of adult perpetrators should be a national priority for the police, and their capability and capacity to do this should be enhanced.
 - The Home Office and the NPCC should review police capability and capacity to relentlessly pursue and disrupt the perpetrators of VAWG offences and enhance these, as necessary.
 - The NPCC and the Home Office should review whether the '4Ps' approach used for counter-terrorism and serious and organised crime should be adopted for policing VAWG.

- The Home Office should carry out an urgent review of the role of the detective constable. This should establish appropriate incentives, progression and support for both officer and staff investigators to encourage this career path. It should include specific recommendations to make sure there is adequate capacity and capability in every force to thoroughly and effectively investigate VAWG offences.
- The Home Office, together with the Ministry of Justice, should improve the evidence it has about perpetrators. This includes considering how to consistently evaluate the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes and use models to plot a perpetrator's progress through the system more effectively.

Force response: The Constabulary is committed to ensuring that perpetrators are appropriately pursued and challenged. The force has specialist Child Abuse, Adult Abuse and Rape Investigation Teams with specially trained officers and staff. The capacity and capability of these teams is regularly reviewed to ensure investigations are suitably managed and progressed, and that high-harm perpetrators are brought to justice as swiftly as possible. Scrutiny panels, in particular for serious sex offences, provide open and transparent scrutiny of offences where a decision to take no further action has been taken by the police or Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to identify lessons to be learnt. The force also actively participates in county-wide partnerships and multi-agency initiatives to protect victims and help prevent offending. As well as engaging in new perpetrator programmes, supported by government funding, with a focus on reducing reoffending in VAWG offences.

The short- and medium-term steps set out by HMICFRS to achieve this recommendation are addressed to the Home Office and the NPCC in the first instance. The Constabulary will await further information on progress against these to inform our ongoing work to tackle VAWG offences.

- 1.4. Recommendation 3: Structures and funding should be put in place to make sure victims receive tailored and consistent support.
- The Home Office and other government departments should provide funding so that an independent advisor/advocate is available to support victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence as they go through the criminal justice system (and should consider this for victims of other crimes that disproportionately affect women). This support should be designed in consultation with the victim and should continue after a perpetrator is released from prison.
 - All police forces should ensure information on the protected characteristics of victims is accurately and consistently recorded.
 - The Home Office and the NPCC should introduce a single national survey to measure victim satisfaction. This should allow for both local and national quality assurance, as well as the identification of any emerging issues, risks or variables that need further action to resolve. Police forces and partner agencies should have clear responsibilities in supporting victims through every stage of the case. The victim's voice should play a central role in shaping this, and their individual needs should be understood and addressed throughout.

Force response: The Constabulary is committed to providing a high standard of professional and compassionate care, in particular to victims and witnesses, and those who are vulnerable. The Victim and Witness Hub provides emotional and practical support to victims or witnesses to a crime in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, to help them cope and recover from the impact of crime. It offers support to victims from the time of the offence, through any subsequent police investigation or court proceedings and beyond, according to the needs of the individual. Independent Domestic Abuse Advisers (IDVAs) and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) also provide tailored support to the individual needs of victims and survivors.

With reference to ensuring information on the protected characteristics of victims is accurately and consistently recorded, the Constabulary has conducted analysis to review the recording of protected characteristics. This is subject to ongoing scrutiny and oversight to ensure that the force can identify and address any gaps in its knowledge surrounding disproportionality.