

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

29<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

**Response to HMICFRS Report: 'REVIEW OF POLICING DOMESTIC ABUSE DURING THE PANDEMIC 2021'.**

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 'REVIEW OF POLICING DOMESTIC ABUSE DURING THE PANDEMIC 2021'.

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

It is my role to ensure support services are in place for survivors of domestic abuse and I do this in partnership with our local authority. At the height of the pandemic all support services worked in partnership to provide access to support. At times services were working flexibly and across boundaries for example the Victim and Witness Hub stepped in to bridge a gap when a local service was struggling with staff off with Covid or isolating. All services embraced new ways of working.

Members of my team attended weekly meetings with Women's Aid and Refuge and the local authority to offer help and guidance to keep services running. They also developed an in-depth understanding of local need which enabled them to allocate short term funding to a wider range of charities working at the grass roots level. This relationship has continued past the life of funding and is still making a difference to the quality of support being provided.

Keeping justice moving was one of the priorities for all partners. The Local Criminal Justice Board met weekly during the height of the pandemic to ensure justice continued. Domestic abuse cases were prioritised and continued to be listed as usual. Victims and witnesses were supported during their criminal justice journey.

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 hope this response, and that of the Chief Constable, provides reassurance regarding the commitment of both myself and Cambridgeshire Constabulary in providing an effective response to deal with domestic abuse offences and the support being given to victims.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Darryl Preston', enclosed in a light grey rectangular box.

**Darryl Preston**  
**Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough**

cc PCC@hmic.gsi.gov.uk

Enc - Appendix 1 – Cambridgeshire Constabulary's response to HMICFRS report 'REVIEW OF POLICING DOMESTIC ABUSE DURING THE PANDEMIC 2021'.

**Cambridgeshire Constabulary's response to HMICFRS report 'REVIEW OF POLICING DOMESTIC ABUSE DURING THE PANDEMIC 2021'.**

**4. HMICFRS Recommendations:**

4.1 HMICFRS have made four recommendations aimed at ensuring forces continue to respond to the challenges of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic and beyond:

4.2 Recommendation 1: We recommend that if forces continue to adopt online contact methods in respect of victims of domestic abuse, they should immediately introduce an effective supervision and monitoring framework. This framework should assess the suitability of such contact methods, ensuring that victim needs are at the forefront of decisions around their use and appropriate onward action is taken in all cases.

**Force response: The Constabulary will review its current procedures in full. A supervision/monitoring framework will be implemented to ensure we effectively assess the suitability of online contact methods.**

4.3 Recommendation 2: We recommend that forces immediately review their use of a telephone-based initial response to any domestic abuse incidents and crimes and ensure that it is in accordance with the strict parameters set out by the College of Policing.

**Force response: In line with government advice and wider Covid 19 policies the Constabulary temporarily adopted the use of a telephone-based initial response to some domestic abuse incidents subject to strict criteria and close scrutiny. This was subject to review in May 2021. A return to best practice was implemented and communicated to all. In only the most exceptional of circumstances relating to the following is telephone initial contact now able to be considered.**

- **When the complainant has otherwise proved uncontactable or cannot be fully engaged and it is assessed that the only remaining way to establish this contact, assess risk and progress the matter is via a telephone meeting.**
- **When the complainant has explicitly stated that they wish the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence (DASH) assessment to be conducted over the phone and no other way (e.g. to ensure their own safety).**

4.4 Recommendation 3: We recommend that forces immediately review that capacity to provide ongoing support and safeguarding to victims of domestic abuse whose case is awaiting trial at court. This should: 1) ensure there are sufficient resources available to maintain contact with victims to keep them up to date with the progress of their case; and 2) enable the offer of access to specialist support services as well as opportunities to address concerns victims may have regarding continuing to support a prosecution through the delays.

**Force response: The capacity for the Constabulary to provide ongoing support and safeguarding to victims of domestic abuse whose cases are awaiting trial is kept under regular review by the Head of Investigation Standards Department, the Head of the Victim and Witness Hub and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner**

**(OPCC). The Constabulary experienced an increase in demand and volume of work caused by the backlog of cases as a consequence of Covid. Funding for additional coordinators was agreed and additional staff were recruited. The Constabulary's Victim and Witness Hub has sufficient Victim and Witness Care Coordinators to ensure that the victims of domestic violence and kept up to date with their cases progress.**

**The victim and witness coordinators have access to specialist support to help them support victims, including a Community Psychiatric Nurse, support workers for child victims and their families from the charity Family Action, support workers for migrant victims of exploitation and trafficking and support for Restorative Justice. This support has been maintained throughout Covid. Coordinators also support victims and witnesses to give their evidence in court, by providing a full witness care service. This is coordinated with any initial support provided to victims by a Coordinator so that, where possible, a single point of contact for victims through their criminal justice process is maintained.**

**The capacity for Cambridgeshire Constabulary to maintain support for victims of domestic abuse awaiting trial remains good.**

- 4.5 **Recommendation 4:** We recommend that all forces immediately review their use of outcome 15, outcome 16 and evidence-led prosecutions. This is to ensure that: 1) domestic abuse investigations guarantee all attempts to engage victims are explored, and that all possible lines of evidence are considered so that in all cases the best possible outcomes for victims are achieved; 2) there is regular and effective supervision of investigations that supports the above point to be achieved; and 3) the use of outcome 15 and 16 is appropriate, and the reasons for using them, including auditable evidence of victim engagements, are clearly recorded.

**Force response: The Constabulary have undertaken specific work to review the use of outcome 15 and 16, and evidence led prosecution via the Constabulary's Crime Standards Delivery Group and Domestic Abuse Scrutiny Groups. Regular audits of domestic abuse crimes are completed to identify both good practice and areas for improvement. The domestic abuse no further action (NFA) rationale has been introduced for force-wide use to improve gatekeeping decisions and ensure consideration is given to evidence led prosecutions.**