

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

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2022

Dear Home Secretary

**Response to HMICFRS Report: 'A Joint Thematic Inspection of the Police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape – Phase Two: Post-charge'.**

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 'A Joint Thematic Inspection of the Police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape – Phase Two: Post-charge'.

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

In particular I want to highlight the mature partnership working arrangements which we have in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The county is relatively unique with a single countywide emotional support and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVA) service for survivors of rape and sexual violence. This ensures all victims of rape and sexual violence have access to equitable support wherever they live in the county.

The service is commissioned by my office, through a pooled budget arrangement, and is delivered by two providers (based north and south) in a consortium arrangement. Centrally this comes together at Sexual Assault Referral Centre where the ISVAs have an office. This model provides additional resilience with survivors receiving a service based on need rather than geography. It is also more flexible to allow it to respond to increased demand through both paid staff and volunteering.

The model earned recognition from the Home Office when they asked Cambridgeshire to be one of five areas to take part in a pilot devolution of the Rape Support Fund.

The ISVA service works closely with the Rape Investigation Team through a Memorandum of Understanding which was developed in partnership and the new Rape Engagement Project. This joint Constabulary and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner initiative seeks to secure real time feedback from victims in a safe and ethical way on both the policing practice and the support provided by the ISVA Service.

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 rape offences and the support being given to victims.

Yours sincerely



**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 'A Joint Thematic Inspection of the Police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape – Phase Two: Post-charge'.

### **Cambridgeshire Constabulary's response to HMICFRS report 'A Joint Thematic Inspection of the Police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape – Phase Two: Post-charge'.**

HMICFRS have set out 3 recommendations to police to improve how the investigation and prosecution of rape is currently handled:

1. **Recommendation:** Immediately, police and prosecutors should review and significantly improve communications with victims from the point of charge onwards. This should include:
  - Reviewing current processes, in consultation with commissioned and non-commissioned services and advocates, WCU, HMCTS and victims; and
  - Implementing changes so that communication is clear and co-ordinated, with the victim's wishes for how they are communicated with recorded and followed wherever possible.

This should build on work to progress the parallel recommendation from the first phase of this inspection, which proposed improvements to communications with rape victims when a decision to take no further action had been made.

**Force response:** The Constabulary is committed to tackling rape and serious sexual offences, this continues to be a key strategic priority for the force to ensure that we are targeting our resources to safeguard the vulnerable. In response to the learning from HMICFRS, and best practice from the Government's end-to-end rape review, the force has comprehensively reviewed its response to rape. This includes working to improve the quality of communication with victims and ensuring that our officers and staff appreciate the impact of every contact on each victim. The force has a dedicated Rape Investigation Team with specially trained officers and staff who work with partners to provide end-to-end support to prepare and protect victims during the criminal justice journey, and beyond, according to their needs. As part of this, a jointly developed Memorandum of Understanding between the Constabulary and the Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) service has recently been launched to maximise joint working and improve support. The force has also introduced a survivor feedback panel in collaboration with the Police and Crime Commissioner to actively seek and respond to the voices of victims and use this information to adapt our future approach to investigation, support, and engagement. In addition, we have recently invested in new technology to improve the rapid download of evidence from victim's mobile phones and ensure the swift return of handsets which is pivotal in ensuring victim confidence, increasing investigative success, and improving the ability to contact victims.

2. **Recommendation:** Immediately, the police and the CPS should work collaboratively to ensure that bad character is considered in all rape cases and progressed wherever it is applicable. This will help to build strong cases which focus on the behaviours of the defendant. Work to progress this recommendation should include:
  - all forces assuring themselves that officers involved in rape cases are aware of their responsibilities to research all available intelligence and information systems for information on suspects, and are doing so

- all prosecutors assuring themselves that bad character has been either provided or requested from the police in all rape cases; and
- forces and prosecutors working together to assure themselves that opportunities for use of bad character have been properly exploited in every case, with recorded rationales for decisions in place.

**Force response:** The Constabulary recognises the importance of building strong cases from the outset to maximise justice for rape victims. As per the response to recommendation one, the force has comprehensively reviewed its response to rape. This includes working to ensure investigations take a suspect focused approach from the outset. We are embedding an investigative model that recognises past offending and ensuring that there is an early and robust assessment of suspect behaviour and patterns. The force has recently invested in dedicated research and investigation support posts to provide additional, practical assistance to officers in the Rape Investigation Team as information is gathered, assessed and cases progressed to trial. We will also continue to work with the CPS to drive improvements.

3. **Recommendation:** Immediately, forces should make sure that victims of rape are given the opportunity to make a victim personal statement (VPS) at the earliest possible time, with the option of updating this statement closer to the court trial date. This should include recording any reason why the victim declines to make a VPS. This will help make sure that victims are offered appropriate and bespoke support; and will build criminal justice system understanding of why victims decline to provide a VPS, to consider if improvements to the system would encourage more victims to do so.

**Force response:** The Constabulary is committed to improving the experiences and outcomes for rape survivors and recognises how important it is that victims are offered the opportunity to make a victim personal statement. As per the response to recommendation one, the force has comprehensively reviewed its response to rape. This includes ensuring our investigations are centred around victims. We will continue working to ensure all victims are provided the appropriate opportunities and support.