

Surrey PCC Response to HMICFRS Report: “Review of Policing Domestic Abuse During the Pandemic - 2021”

I welcome the HMICFRS report on policing domestic abuse during the pandemic. Protecting women and girls from violence is at the heart of my priorities and the recommendations made, if implemented nationally, will help improve services for victims of abuse.

I have asked the Chief Constable for his response, particular in relation to the recommendations made in the report. His response is as follows:

I welcome the HMICFRS’s 2021 Review of policing Domestic Abuse (DA) during the pandemic. The review assessed how the police responded to the unique challenges of Covid-19 to the policing of domestic abuse. Surrey Police has taken what has been deemed by HMICFRS in July 2021 as a proactive approach to adopting a VAWG strategy to encompass our approach to DA. This recognises the engendered nature of the crime and has been subject to a HMICFRS inspection on the week of the 28th June. This response covers the three recommendation areas.

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. The 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.***
- ***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.***

Surrey Police introduced new digital reporting channels a year ago. This was always intended and was not a response to Covid. We were one of the initial forces to implement this, a change that European legislation required in 2020, but with a deadline that was extended due to Covid. These digital channels are monitored 24/7 in the same way as 999 and 101 calls in that they are routed to a call handler in the call centre where they are reviewed and awarded a priority grade. These details are recorded on an ICAD in the same way as other reports.

In Surrey we have not moved away from victims of domestic abuse receiving a physical deployment of officers irrelevant of grading (i.e. we do not phone victims and try and resolve incidents by phone nor complete DASH forms in this way in the way some forces did in an interim way). Unlike other crime types Domestic Abuse ICADS in Surrey are reviewed, monitored and dispatched by Control Room staff irrelevant of the assigned grading. This means that Grades 1, 2 and 3 DA incidents are allocated from

one place by staff who have a strategic view of all demand and resourcing levels in the force.

Throughout COVID the physical attendance of Surrey Police to meet victims of DA has remained as predominantly Neighbourhood Response Team officers. We have found that some victims preferred to report crime by digital means especially where they might have been confined with the perpetrator in the same space during Covid. Equally some who are vulnerable do not like to use telephones and this creates a barrier to reporting. Since introducing digital reporting there has been an increase in total incidents reported to Surrey Police.

Surrey Police uses on-line tools to engage, inform and build confidence in the public including the use of initiatives such as Surrey Facebook live and the Chief Constable public survey on VAWG. This was considered as good practice by HMICFRS.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that forces immediately review their capacity to provide ongoing support and safeguarding to victims of domestic abuse whose case is awaiting trial at court. This should:

- **ensure there are sufficient resources available to maintain contact with victims to keep them up to date with the progress of their case; and**
- **enable the offer of access to specialist support services as well as opportunities to address concerns victims may**

All high-risk victims of DA are referred directly to Outreach services for contact and an offer of support. For all standard and medium risk victims of DA, officers can also offer a referral to the same outreach services with consent (funded outreach provision is not determined by risk) and there is an automated process in place for daily referrals into the Victim and Witness Care Unit (VWCU). Where contact is not successful, the VWCU proactively make the OIC (officer in the case) aware and the OIC will remain the single point of contact for the victim up until the point of charge. Where contact is successful, staff will undertake an initial needs assessment with victims to identify any support needs. Where contact is successful, but support declined, the OIC will remain the single point of contact for the victim up until the point of charge. This may include intervention and support from the DA Caseworkers embedded in the DA teams. These are a new addition to improve engagement with DA victims.

Where support needs are identified, and support requested, the case will be assigned to a Caseworker or Volunteer who will undertake a further detailed needs assessment with the victim and provide a tailored support package to meet those needs. This can include practical and emotional support, including signposting to specialist support agencies where necessary, providing crime prevention items or offering a listening ear. This support can also extend to family members such as children who have witnessed Domestic Abuse or been affected by DA within the home setting. We also offer Digital Safety Advice through the Cyber Crime Unit for High Risk and Stalking victims.

All DA Caseworkers and Volunteers are DASH trained so that they can make continual and real time assessments of risk to victims. There are local escalation processes in place in the VWCU where safeguarding concerns are identified. The PCC has commissioned 2 stalking IDVAs, with one IDVA embedded within the Victim and Witness Care Unit for non-intimate victims and another post in the local DA Outreach services for victims of intimate partner/ex-partner stalking. The IDVAs will receive dedicated training from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust (SLT) who will also offer consultancy support to enable staff and other partners to have a better understanding of stalking; equipping them to follow best practice in supporting victims, whether or not they are accessing the criminal justice system, and ultimately help to improve safety and minimise the impact of stalking. SLT will provide training and support to embed specialist stalking support IDVAs building a sustainable model which is responsive to local needs. In addition, Surrey has introduced A&E based IDVAs in all Surrey hospitals to increase support and engagement.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that all forces immediately review their use of outcome 15, outcome 16 and evidence-led prosecutions. This is to ensure that:

- 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.***
- there is regular and effective supervision of investigations that supports the above point to be achieved; and***
- the use of outcomes 15 and 16 is appropriate, and the reasons for using them, including auditable evidence of victim engagement, are clearly recorded.***

From July 2021, Surrey Police has introduced dedicated DA Teams across Surrey investigating all intimate partner DA. As part of our HMICFRS inspection we recognise that one of the most important moments for victim's engagement is the time between report and first arrest and we are working on ways to improve contact throughout this period. This includes DA caseworkers and embedded outreach workers in the teams.

As part of our PEEL assessment, Surrey Police conduct quarterly reviews of the application of outcome 15 and 16. These are supported by regular qualitative reviews by the PPSU team. In addition, each Division chairs a regular DA NFA panel, sharing learning centrally. As collaborated forces Surrey and Sussex, have created a local Evidence Led Prosecution MG3 template to improve file submissions to the CPS supported by local training and oversight. We work with the local authority and OPCC to jointly commission outreach services for victims and work with them to engage victims of DA. As part of the VAWG strategy, we recognise that there are male victims, female perpetrators and that some victims from LGBTQ+ community or black and minority ethnic groups experience DA in different ways to others. Through our VAWG strategy, we have three specific victim improvement groups working with these communities to help us build a more informed and tailored service and increase our engagement.

As part of our HMICFRS VAWG inspection we have shown the work we are undertaking to build an engagement focused process to capture and clearly record the rationale for victims withdrawing their support from an investigation. Surrey Police are not mandating the taking of statements for these cases. Instead the policy will require officers to visit the victim with the objective of seeking engagement, understanding, and having a trauma informed approach. The rationale of the withdrawal may lead to an Evidence Led Prosecution and if appropriate, may be recorded on a statement, or if not documented elsewhere. This approach is being assessed by a survivor steering group for views. This links to a training plan under the VAWG strategy to focus on understanding of controlling and coercive behaviour (CCB) and promoting ways to increase curiosity to this crime. A linked area to this is our approach to DA related suicide where we are promoting the use of ELP to consider offences that may be charged in the absence of the deceased victim.

It has been clear to me in my first few months in post that Surrey is working hard to protect and support victims of Domestic Abuse. The Chief Constable has provided a full response to the recommendations made and I am confident that Surrey Police has either already addressed the recommendations made or is well positioned to complete the required actions. My office works closely with Surrey Police and other partners to deliver a county wide strategy against domestic abuse, as well as commissioning high quality support services.

**Lisa Townsend, Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey
July 2021**