

Police and Crime Commissioner for Durham

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**Priti Patel MP**

**Home Secretary**

**Home Office**

**2 Marsham Street**

**London**

**SW1P 4DF**

**Police and Crime Commissioner: Joy Allen**

**Monitoring Officer: Stephen White**

 **19 October 2021**

 Dear Home Secretary,

**HMICFRS Inspection Report: Police response to violence against women and girls - Final inspection report.**

This letter constitutes the response to the above inspection from myself, Joy Allen, Durham Police and Crime Commissioner, in order to fulfil my responsibilities with regard to Section 55 of the Police Act 1996. The reply to HMICFRS will also be published on my website.

In turn, here are position statements showing what the Constabulary is doing to meet the recommendations and areas for improvement which relates to Chief Constables, of which I am in support:

**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.**

At this time there is no further development of Red Sigma until the Force have completed a review which will commence in October 2021 and end in December 2021. The Force have the capability to capture most protected characteristics via Red Sigma. From a Control Room perspective THRIVE caters for identifying vulnerability if a protected characteristic is a relevant factor in that vulnerability or the commission of the crime.

There are ongoing discussions between various parties, the Chief Information Officer, Red Sigma Information Management Lead, Strategic Hate Crime Lead, and the Operational Hate Crime Lead. Discussion points include, ensuring that any person data fields match across Red Sigma, mapping against the requirements and National Standards such as Workforce Data standards and ONS. These discussions also focus around ensuring all wider guidance is being considered.

**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.**

**This should include (but is not limited to) improving and standardising:**

**- the use of police powers to protect women, including arrest of perpetrators, use of pre-charge bail, the applications for orders (where appropriate) and processes for responding to breaches of non-molestation and other orders;**

**- the use of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme;**

**- the capability of generalist and specialist staff to respond to violence against women and girls offences effectively, including consistent understanding of newer offences (such as coercive control);**

**- the identification and management of high-harm violent offenders against women and girls (in partnership with other organisations);**

**- the identification and protection of the most at-risk victims of violence against women and girls offences (in partnership with other organisations); and**

**- internal and public communications related to violence against women and girls to ensure that messages raise awareness of the risk and emphasise the seriousness of the issues**

Durham Constabulary’s Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Action Plan was implemented December 2021; this action plan sets out actions against Building Trust & Confidence, Relentless Focus on Pursuing Perpetrators and Creating Safer Spaces. In addition, the Force’s commitment to tacking VAWG is laid out in their 2021 Force Management Statement, something which I know will be replicated in the 2022 submission.

The force has used the VAWG National Toolkit to identify relevant police powers to protect women and girls; this includes arrest powers, pre-charge bail and use of all relevant civil orders. Moreover, the Durham Constabulary Safer Street 4 funding aims to disrupt/prevent VAWG offences in a multitude of ways, including, improved use of civil orders via a working group created to look specifically at Durham Constabulary’s use of civil orders.

As a key strand of tackling VAWG, Domestic Abuse training is being implemented to all frontline staff within Durham Constabulary to further enhance and upskill staff; this will include identification of offences, such as Control and Coercion. The force has also engaged in awareness raising around the use of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme and have instigated continuous professional development sessions for detectives in response to Operation Soteria findings.

There are other processes and procedures which the force also places at the forefront of tackling VAWG. For example, victims who are identified as being “at risk” are discussed at the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference to ensure they are safeguarded by all relevant partners. In contrast, high harm and violent offenders are managed through multi-agency public protection arrangements where a plan to manage the risk is put in place, this also takes into account potential victims and an associated safeguarding plan.

In terms of external communication plans, Durham Constabulary VAWG media strategy covers the Home Office “Enough” campaign and will continue to highlight the importance of tackling VAWG. An external marketing company are currently working with police and partners under Safer Street 3 funding to deliver a media campaign outlining the current initiatives regarding our approach to tackling VAWG. This will include a “Super VAWG Pact” meeting with police, partners and the public which will be used to further inform our response phase. Internally, Durham Constabulary’s VAWG strategy includes training awareness sessions, IT improvements to ensure all staff are aware of VAWG offences and the relevant police powers, enhanced supervisory oversight and improvements on initial response within Force Control Room.

**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’s VAWG Force Action Plan has commenced, and relevant plan owners identified; this is overseen by the Tactical Lead at Detective Chief Inspector level and reports are siphoned into the Vulnerability Gold Group, Investigations Gold Group, Crime Practitioners Group and Operational Policing Performance, chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable.

Oversight of the force response, which includes the use of outcomes, is discussed within Domestic and Sexual Violence Executive Group to ensure all relevant partner agencies discuss a whole-system approach to responding to VAWG. Additionally, a VAWG Performance Dashboard is being developed to ensure Durham Constabulary have an effective response to VAWG on a local and national level.

I am also copying this letter to Andy Cooke, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services.

Yours sincerely,



**Joy Allen**

**Police and Crime Commissioner for Darlington and Durham**

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*The Police and Crime Commissioner for Durham is an accredited Living Wage Employer with the Living Wage Foundation*

