



RESPONSE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER OF WILTSHIRE AND SWINDON TO: CRIMINAL JUSTICE JOINT INSPECTION EVIDENCE LED DOMESTIC ABUSE PROSECUTIONS - HMCPSI AND HMICFRS (23 January 2020)

Chief Constable's comments

The Chief Constable of Wiltshire is committed to improving the force response to domestic abuse and the areas highlighted by this HMICFRS report. The Chief Constable of Wiltshire is committed to improving the force response to domestic abuse and the areas highlighted by this HMICFRS report. Wiltshire Police were graded as good by HMICFRS in the last PEEL vulnerability inspection, however the force continues to strive to achieve outstanding in this area.

Recommendations	Wiltshire response
<p>Recommendation Police supervisors and Crown Prosecution Service legal managers should maximise opportunities to share examples of good work and successful outcomes with their teams.</p> <p>Recommendation Police forces with domestic abuse champions should raise awareness of the role and seek to utilise them to maximum effect.</p> <p>Recommendation By 31 December 2020, the Home Office should commission a detailed review of cases involving the defence under section 45(1) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The review should establish whether there is sufficient justification to amend the law.</p> <p>Recommendation The police should review training plans in order to ensure that all appropriate staff, both frontline officers and investigators, are trained how to handle domestic abuse cases.</p>	<p>The Force identified two years ago that the number of victims who decided not to support a criminal prosecution in domestic abuse related investigation was rising and, since this time, work has been undertaken to understand the reasons for this and how our service can be improved, including how evidence led investigations can be enhanced. The Force notes the report recommendations and the Assistant Chief Constable (Crime and Justice) will monitor associated activity in accordance with existing governance arrangements.</p> <p>A summary of activity already completed which relate to the HMICFRS recommendations includes:</p> <p>In 2018 an audit was conducted into cases which had been closed where victims chose not to engage, this was in order to understand whether the force DA policy was being adhered to, whether robust supervision was given to domestic abuse cases, and whether evidence led prosecutions were being considered. The audit report led to a number of recommendations being adopted by the Force.</p>

Recommendation

Police forces should ensure that training, messaging and guidance is clear that evidence led cases should benefit from the same quality of investigation, early gathering of evidence and supervisory oversight as other domestic abuse cases, particularly in cases where the victim does not support police action. Domestic abuse champions should reinforce this message.

In March 2020 a repeat of the audit is being undertaken to understand what progress has been made since 2018 and to identify further areas for improvements.

In 2019 the Force delivered a one day training course for PIP level 1 staff and front line supervisors. The course was facilitated by a former district Crown Prosecutor of the CPS and highlighted the unique legal issues experienced in evidence led prosecutions and provided a toolkit for investigators to utilise.

In 2018/19 the Force launched the 'First impressions' campaign, this was an online training product outlining the impact of staffs attitudes and behaviour on victims and how this can effect a victims decision to support a prosecution. The training provided information about why victims may not engage and why victims may stay in the relationship due to factors such as coercive and controlling behaviour, financial dependency, child custody issues and fear. A video of a survivor's experience of positive and negative experiences of the Police was also included.

All new Police officer and investigators receive training on the College of Policing 13 strands of vulnerability; this includes a module on Domestic Abuse that includes a visit from a survivor of abuse and specific focus on Coercive control including the "Leaving" video and "Coercive Control" video. The training in Domestic Abuse also includes case study based learning and an introduction to the Domestic Abuse Policy. This training package is being refreshed in Spring 2020 to incorporate greater focus on evidence led prosecutions.

In 2019, as a result of a recommendation of the 2018 audit, the Force updated its Domestic abuse policy with a number of changes including raising the authority level (from Sergeant to Inspector) required to close a Domestic Abuse investigation where a decision is being made not to interview the suspect.

Police and Crime Commissioner's comments

I welcome the joint inspection report undertaken by HMICFRS and HMCPSI on evidence led domestic abuse prosecutions. As the Chief Constable has stated, Wiltshire Police was graded 'good' at protecting vulnerable people in the 2018/19 assessment and I have ensured that the force has the means and resolve to identify where harm is likely to occur, including hidden harm and forms of exploitation that may exist in local communities.

My Police and Crime Plan Update (2019) has once again a strong focus on protecting the most vulnerable people in society. This remains a key priority. I continue to work collaboratively with a range of partners to ensure effective outcomes. Wiltshire Police works closely with both Wiltshire Council, Swindon Borough Council in addition to the NHS and criminal justice agencies to protect the most vulnerable people in our county.

In January 2019 I supported a multi-agency Conference in Swindon on domestic abuse. The purpose of the conference was to endeavour stopping domestic abuse once and for all by improving help for victims and working with the perpetrators. I linked with a number of county-wide agencies all involved in protecting and supporting people affected by mental and physical domestic abuse.

I also fund a number of support services throughout Wiltshire and Swindon that work in this important area and will continue to support those services in every way I can. Combatting domestic abuse has to be tackled in partnership and amongst others, I support both Swindon Women's Aid and Splitz Support Services who both play a valuable role in shaping strategy and policy, as well as offering practical valuable support services in this area of crime. I am delighted to be able to commission a number of valuable support services across the county to protect domestic abuse victims and survivors both in the community and in refuge or places of safety.

I am continually heartened by the level of collaboration in the county focused on protecting victims and how we all can keep improving services to those affected. A good example is the excellent work of the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) across Swindon and Wiltshire, the community services that work on an outreach basis with families affected and the support services based in health settings to improve access for people.

At a recent Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel meeting I reported that although domestic abuse crimes in Wiltshire are calculating a year on year percentage increase, the most recent 12 months has begun to show some signs of stabilisation. The Force Detective Inspector and tactical lead for domestic abuse has a number of plans and strategies to combat this crime type. As the Chief Constable eludes, the DI has developed a comprehensive plan that has been implemented together with agreement on a new Force DA Policy and such changes have been communicated to all police and staff.

I also updated Panel members that the specialist domestic abuse court group had taken charge of governance for the adoption of the joint CPS police best practice framework to ensure effective multiagency working for the victims' journey through the criminal justice system.

I am reassured to see the level of scrutiny and focus Wiltshire Police is providing to stop abusive and controlling behaviour and enforce and deter offenders.

I will continue to champion the work to identify and investigate instances of domestic abuse as I seek to improve on the previous PEEL inspection that graded the Force as good, as we strive to continually improve in this area of policing and aim for an improved score.

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