

Everyone's Business: Improving the Police Response to Domestic Abuse

May 2014

Background

In September 2013, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) was commissioned by the Home Secretary to inspect the police response to domestic violence and abuse in all forces across England and Wales.

The reported titled 'Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse' found that while most forces and police and crime commissioners have said that domestic abuse is a priority for their areas, this isn't being translated into operational reality.

HMIC is concerned that, despite the progress made in this area over the last decade, not all police leaders are ensuring that domestic abuse is a priority in their forces – it is often a poor relation to other policing activity.

As a result of the inspection, HMIC have developed 10 recommendations for Devon and Cornwall which are designed to tackle any risks identified in the service to victims of domestic abuse. These Force specific recommendations should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations to all forces as set out in the national report.

By September 2014, every police force in England and Wales should establish and publish an action plan that specifies in detail what steps it will take to improve its approach to domestic abuse. The action plan should be established on the basis of best practice, based on revised relevant guidance from the College of Policing.

Police & Crime Commissioners Response

I welcome the report 'Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse' and am reassured that domestic abuse is a clear priority for Devon & Cornwall Police. Devon and Cornwall Police had already completed its own internal review of safeguarding before the inspection took place, identifying many of the same issues raised by HMIC and presenting a Domestic Abuse Improvement Plan to address them.

I must also praise Devon and Cornwall Police for the good work evident across the Force and reflected in the report, and thank those working with victims for the commitment they have shown to improving the victim's experience.

However the HMIC report also identified significant specific risks in the way that Devon and Cornwall Police tackle domestic abuse, and the findings suggest that a consistent service is not provided in all cases. In particular the findings suggest that, consistent with other police forces, Devon & Cornwall Police pull out all the stops to address high risk domestic abuse and provide a prompt and high standard of response in these cases. However where the level of risk is assessed to be lower the

findings suggest inconsistency in effective risk assessment and the actions taken to protect victims.

I was also concerned at the reported lack of clarity about what constituted a repeat victim and how to identify whether a victim is vulnerable.

The Chief Constable's response below makes clear his commitment to improving and standardising service delivery in this priority area. The recommendations made within the HMIC report have been incorporated within the Domestic Abuse Improvement Plan and an action plan is being developed which will ensure that the highlighted issues are addressed. I fully support this significant endeavour to improve the experience of victims of domestic abuse in Devon & Cornwall as part of the wider safeguarding agenda.

The new surveying framework proposed by Devon and Cornwall Police to gather feedback from victims about their experience will provide a real opportunity to further develop the service provided by police and partners to better meet the needs of victims.

Tackling domestic abuse is a huge challenge and an area which requires us to work closely with partners. Against a backdrop of continued cuts it is vitally important that we work in partnership to maintain support services for victims. I am encouraged by the strong relationships with partners across the two counties and the joined-up approach to service provision. I am sure I am not alone in calling for HMIC to take a broader view of service provision in areas of service delivery where the police are heavily dependent on partners.

Not only will I be monitoring the Chief Constables delivery of the recommendations in the months ahead, but I shall be working with partners to ensure that commissioned services for victims of domestic abuse are effective, providing both support and protection.

Chief Constable's Response

National Recommendations

- a. National effort to tackle domestic abuse – central co-ordination

The Force has received contact from the national lead for domestic abuse stating that a national plan will be developed. A regional plan will be developed to compliment the national plan and address the issues raised in the report from HMIC.

- b. Action plan for each Force by September 2014 to improve performance

The Force has already instigated a Domestic Abuse Improvement Plan following the inspection. The actions in the plan are being addressed. This action plan was formally adopted by the Force in December 2013. The Force has driven activity to improve performance in this area through this plan which now incorporates all of the recommendations that were delivered by HMIC. The action plan and progress towards it are monitored on a monthly basis via the SVP Operational/Business and Executive Groups. The plan will continue to be developed together with partner agencies.

- c. Chief Constables to give full effect to their stated priority of domestic abuse and how this transfers to action.

- d. National comparable data to be collated and assessed as part of the regular data returns made by Forces.

- e. Updated APP from the College of Policing to be informed by the HMI report.
- f. College of Policing to consider urgently the risk assessment process in cases of domestic abuse.
- g. College of Policing to conduct a fundamental review of provision of training in Domestic Abuse.
- h. College of Policing to disseminate best practice of how to target and manage perpetrators of domestic abuse.
- i. Home Office to reconsider approach to Homicide reviews.
- j. PCCs to consider their approach to commissioning in the context of this report.
- k. Multi-agency inspection should occur around service provision for domestic abuse cases.

Devon and Cornwall Recommendations

- 1. The Force should analyse training needs and develop a training plan for all staff involved with domestic abuse from first report to resolution.**
 - The force has a Domestic Abuse training plan which is being delivered. Work has commenced with all call centre staff (CMCU) in DA and DASH risk assessment. This training includes E Learning and Face to Face sessions with staff, specific to the points raised in the HMIC report.
 - The E Learning has also started to be rolled out to all front line staff. To date 44% of front line staff have received this training.
 - Training delivery will be monitored through relevant performance boards in the Force to ensure that all relevant staff are appropriately trained.
 - Additional sessions have also been organised with Laura Richards the National lead regarding DASH. These sessions will include an input on stalking and harassment.
 - The Force is also working with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and is looking at a relevant partner agency such as Women's Aid to come to the Force and independently identify the Forces training needs around domestic abuse. This initiative is currently being scoped, with the intention of developing a training programme for the short, medium and long term.

- 2. The Force should publish a single definition for 'repeat' and 'vulnerable' victims with supporting guidance for staff.**
 - The Force now has one clear definition of repeat victimisation. This is written into policy and practice.
 - This definition has been published to all staff via internal communications.
 - An audit process has also been established in the Force to reinforce the definition and a checklist and guidance has been distributed to all first line supervisors.
 - Repeat victims are being flagged in the Force control centre in order for attending officers to be briefed prior to attendance. This warning will enable them to take this into consideration when completing the DASH Risk Assessment.

- 3. The Force should promote minimum standards in relation to domestic abuse to include completion of the DASH form in all reported incidents.**

- 4. The Force should set and promote minimum standards for supervision of domestic abuse incidents, from initial report in the control room to initial attendance and subsequent investigation.**

- The Force has issued minimum standards to all sections of staff from all areas of the business including call handlers, response officers, investigators, and custody staff.
- Work has also been undertaken to improve this with a circulation to all Detective Inspectors throughout the Force of a breakdown as to what is expected to be undertaken/considered for each DA crime.
- All officers that attend DA incidents have to complete a mandatory DA Investigation Pack (which if completed correctly) produces a first class initial investigation. This investigation pack has been compiled from national best practice.
- In addition to this in April 2014, all front line supervisors will be required to complete dip samples of DA crimes that their staff have been involved in. This will ensure that the Force can identify good and bad practice as well as educating the supervisors what a good initial investigation should look like.
- NCALT E Learning (already 44% completion rate by front line staff and their supervisors) is being used to back this up.
- DASH compliance is also being monitored. This Force is auditing DASH compliance down to individual officer level.
- An internal communications plan is also being delivered.
- Progress in all areas of investigation and DASH completion is reviewed monthly through operational groups.
- Performance is also monitored at a strategic level by ACC Crime and Criminal Justice.

5. The Force should clarify and standardise the role and responsibilities of dedicated public protection staff and local investigation teams in dealing with domestic abuse investigations and keeping victims updated.

- The Force Public Protection Unit is undergoing significant changes to existing practices across DA investigations.
- Dedicated investigation teams (Sexual Offence and Domestic Abuse Investigation teams or SODAITS) are being set up.
- These teams will be responsible for delivering a consistent standard of investigation to all victims of domestic abuse from standard through to high.
- Four teams have already been established and a further three will be set up by May 2014.
- These teams will be operational in each geographic area and public protection staff will be responsible for all risk management of victims. Standard operating procedures have been set up to ensure that there is corporacy across the Force area.

6. The Force should review the SODAIT pilot structure as soon as possible and ensure a corporate, well-led way of working which delivers consistent service to victims of domestic abuse.

- This forms part of the Safeguarding review that is currently taking place in the Force. Continued work with SODAIT ensures that the PPU link in with the planning to ensure there are clear and beneficial processes for safeguarding victims across all three risk areas.
- The main changes in the process will start in May 2014 and a review will take place within a six month period to ensure that the concept is delivering performance.

- 7. The Force should ensure that where domestic abuse perpetrators are released from prison, victims are informed of this and a risk assessment is completed, together with a revised safety plan where appropriate.**
 - In many cases victims are already informed of the release of prisoners particularly in high risk cases.
 - There is ongoing work to find an effective process for this to happen in all cases between Prison Service, Probation and Police.
 - Consideration has already commenced. The Force Public Protection Unit is working with other Forces and the Northern 8 Universities to see whether MAPPA is a way forward.
- 8. The Force should evaluate the DASSP programme to establish whether it is making victims safer and if so extend the programme to include as many high-risk perpetrators, who are suitable, as possible.**
 - An evaluation is being progressed.
- 9. Qualitative data should be sought to understand whether the service being delivered by the Force to domestic abuse victims is making them safer.**
 - A new surveying framework to gather qualitative feedback from victims and the evaluation of the safeguarding vulnerable people pilot are both designed to provide qualitative information.
- 10. The Force should ensure that corporate learning is disseminated throughout the organisation in order that all staff are aware of changes and why these changes have been made.**
 - Corporate learning is disseminated via a coordinated internal communications plan.
 - Key messages are being delivered to all staff in the organisation monthly and there is a strong link in with the learning and development department in the Force.
 - Proposals are being considered by COG to embed a new “learning the lessons” process.