



8<sup>th</sup> September 2021

In response to the report published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire Service (HMICFRS) 'A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape – Phase one: From report to police or CPS decision to take no further action' published on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2021 I have sought reassurance from the Chief Constable that the recommendations in the report are being progressed. Representatives from my office attend Constabulary governance meetings where progress against the recommendations will be monitored.

Under my scrutiny, the Constabulary will be held to account in delivering justice for victims as detailed in my Police and Crime Plan and I will be focusing on rape investigations and improving outcomes for victims. Support services for victims of rape and sexual assault are jointly commissioned with an alliance of funding partners, including my office, Cheshire's four local authorities and NHS England. The service, RASASC (Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre), supported more than 1,785 people in 2020/21. It is available to victims of recent and non-recent offences and provides services to those under 13.

## **Recommendations**

1. Immediately, police forces should ensure information on the protected characteristics of rape victims is accurately and consistently recorded.

*The Constabulary has made a significant investment in its new Digital Intelligence and Analytics Team with a view to improving the quality of our data across all thematic areas including Rape and ensuring that the data is more accessible to those who need it. We are considering a number of options including using secondary responders to ensure that protected characteristics data are captured and recorded.*

2. Police forces and support services should work together at a local level to better understand each other's roles.

*A co-ordinated approach will help make sure that all available and bespoke wrap-around support is offered to the victim throughout every stage of the case. The input of victims and their experiences should play a central role in shaping the support offered.*

*The Constabulary has involved Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) in recent practitioner Continuous Professional Development (CPD) sessions and our ISVA are involved in a strategic rape working group aimed at identifying and implementing service improvement initiatives. Regionally, funding has been secured to develop the sexual violence support website.*

*Find Specialist Support in The North West - Sexual Violence Support*

3. Police forces should collect data to record the different stages when, and reasons why, a victim may withdraw support for a case. The Home Office should review the available outcome codes so that the data gathered can help target necessary remedial action and improve victim care.

*We are working on data capture with our ISVA. Internally, we have set up a working group with our Niche Business Systems Management Unit to explore improvement opportunities.*

4. Immediately, police forces and CPS Areas should work together at a local level to prioritise action to improve the effectiveness of case strategies and action plans, with rigorous targets and review dates and a clear escalation and performance management process. The NPCC lead for adult sexual offences and the CPS lead should provide a national framework to help embed this activity.

*This is already in place and working effectively in Cheshire. To ensure continuous improvement, a joint performance meeting has been established to examine Rape, Domestic Abuse, Child Neglect and general case progression.*

5. Police forces and the CPS should work together at a local level to introduce appropriate ways to build a cohesive and seamless approach. This should improve relationships, communication and understanding of the roles of each organisation. As a minimum, the following should be included:- Considering early investigative advice in every case and recording reasons for not seeking it;- the investigator and the reviewing prosecutor including their direct telephone and email contact details in all written communication;- in cases referred to the CPS, a face-to-face meeting (virtual or in person) between the investigator and prosecutor before deciding to take no further action; and a clear escalation pathway available to both the police and the CPS in cases where the parties don't agree with decisions, subject to regular reviews to check effectiveness, and local results.

*The Constabulary complies with these points. As above, a joint performance meeting has been established to improve communication / understanding and to ensure that compliance is maintained.*

6. The police and the CPS, in consultation with commissioned and non-commissioned services and advocates, and victims, should review the current process for communicating to victims the fact that a decision to take no further action has been made. They should implement any changes needed so that these difficult messages are conveyed in a timely way that best suits the victims' needs.

*We are satisfied that this is in place however we are exploring ways to improve and formalise our processes.*

7. Police forces should ensure investigators understand that victims are entitled to have police decisions not to charge reviewed under the Victims' Right to Review scheme and should periodically review levels of take-up.

*This is already in place and included in our victim's booklet. We will ensure that CPD and training materials are updated to reflect this.*

8. Forces should publish annual Specialist Sexual Assault Investigator Development Programme (SSAIDP) attendance figures, and information on their numbers of current qualified Rape and Serious Sexual Offence (RASSO) investigators.

*We are reviewing our Detectives accreditation and will provide refresher courses if there are any gaps (for Detectives accredited prior to 2016).*

I understand that this is Phase 1 of the HMICFRS's inspection report and look forward to receiving Phase 2 as part of the continued focus on this vital area to improve outcomes for victims.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Dwyer', with a large circular flourish on the left side.

John Dwyer  
Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire