



8 November 2021

I welcome the HMICFRS report: '*Police response to violence against women and girls: Final inspection report*', published on 17 September 2021, in which Cheshire was one of the four fieldwork forces that contributed to the report.

The report praises the Constabulary for its online community engagement work, and how it supports university students to stay safe from harm. It recognises the best practice that is happening in the innovative Harm Reduction Unit, where the local probation service and health professionals work with the Constabulary to manage the risks associated with stalkers and serial domestic abusers.

Cheshire Constabulary has piloted a vulnerability and safeguarding team (VAST) in the control room, where dedicated officers review calls from vulnerable victims and call them where appropriate to make immediate referrals for support, as well as giving the attending officer more information to deal with the case more effectively. The report also examines how best Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) are being used, and I have been assured Cheshire's performance in this area is good.

However, women and girls continue to fear and experience various types of sexual violence and intimidation. This is happening in public spaces, but I do not lose sight of the prevalence of domestic offences that happen at a victim's or offender's home. We know that many victims still do not report their experience and that many cases still do not proceed through the criminal justice system. All partners must work hard to earn their trust. I invest in specialist interventions which offer perpetrators the opportunity to change their behaviour and feel the full force of the law if they do not.

I have discussed the contents of the report with the Chief Constable and there has been good progress made against the recommendations which are detailed below. Crucially a Violence and Intimidation against Women and Girls (VIAWG) strategy has been created with an associated action plan which is being rapidly implemented.

I will closely scrutinise the Constabulary in the delivery of the strategy and monitor the impact of changes it makes in its approach to VIAWG.

It is essential that more perpetrators are held to account for their offending, but tackling violence against women and girls over the long term is about much more than enforcement alone. I will be working with partners to ensure they play their part to ensure our approach is victim-centred. This includes working with the local Criminal Justice Board to expedite cases through the courts to ensure justice is delivered for victims.

John Dwyer

Police & Crime Commissioner for Cheshire

Progress against the HMICFRS recommendations for Police.

Recommendation

All police forces should ensure information on the protected characteristics of victims is accurately and consistently recorded.

Discussions are underway to understand root of issue, whether this be police system or officers/staff not capturing the data in discussion with victims.

Recommendation

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.

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.

Since the inspection the Constabulary has established its VIAWG strategy and delivery plan. The Constabulary is running a Gold Group to ensure that rapid progress is made.

The use of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme.

In order to improve consistency and oversight, the administration of DVDS will now be done centrally by the Strategic Public Protection Unit (SPPU). The SPPU will also ensure that policies and procedures are maintained, and that training and awareness is rolled out to all officers in line with our overall communications strategy.

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).

“Our Behaviour” is a separate strand of our VIAWG Strategy. The Delivery Plan that we have established will ensure that our officers and staff have the right skills and knowledge to respond to and investigate these offences to the highest possible standard.

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

The “Prevention and Engagement” strand of our VIAWG strategy and delivery plan will ensure that through our Harm Reduction Unit, we continue to identify perpetrators of harmful behaviour and administer evidence-based treatment and interventions.

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

The “Safety in Public” strand of our VIAWG strategy and delivery will ensure that we work closely with our community safety partners to identify and protect those most at risk of violence.

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

A communications strategy is being developed in support of our VIAWG strategy and this features as a standing agenda item at the VIAWG Gold Group. A number of guidance

articles have been pushed out via the intranet and weekly orders and a suite of “7 minute” briefings have been developed.

Recommendation

Immediate review of use of outcomes 15 and 16 in violence against women and girls offences

A range of performance metrics are being developed as part of the Gold Strategy. This includes outcome rates for VIAWG which already feature in our “Raising the Bar” performance framework. This represents an additional layer of oversight and scrutiny. As well as featuring in our Monthly Force Performance Day and Quarterly Performance Review Meetings chaired by members of the senior leadership team respectively, a weekly performance meeting has also been established to provide focus on these and other important indicators.