

Katy Bourne
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**Sussex
Police & Crime
Commissioner**

Ms Zoe Billingham
HM Inspector of Constabulary
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service
6th Floor – Globe House
89 Eccleston Square
London
SW1V 1PN

24 May 2019

Dear Zoe

HMICFRS – Stalking and Harassment Inspection

I write in respect of the recently published findings for Sussex Police in the stalking and harassment inspection. I welcome the opportunity to comment on Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) report and have carefully studied its findings and recommendations.

I commissioned HMICFRS to undertake the inspection in order to provide me with independent, external scrutiny and a unique opportunity to review the progress Sussex Police has made in its response to stalking and harassment.

I am pleased that HMICFRS acknowledged "several positive changes" that have been made by Sussex Police in this area including: the use of stalking 'flags'; providing an enhanced service to 'high-risk' stalking victims through the Cyber-Crime Unit; stopping the use of Police Information Notices (PINs) for all cases of stalking and harassment; using Stalking Ambassadors and including stalking crimes in the Daily Management Meeting processes.

However, it is clear there is much more that Sussex Police can do if victims of stalking are to receive the service I firmly believe they deserve. The HMICFRS report clearly demonstrated that the Force is committed to a journey of improvement but it is also worth emphasising that Sussex Police is probably further down that path than many other police force areas in England and Wales.

The report recognised that whilst the policing response has improved, the Force does not make risk-assessments for stalking and harassment cases if they do not relate to domestic abuse. The Force is proposing changes to an existing screening form and process to identify stalking behaviours, known as an S-DASH, and I am hopeful that the introduction of this change in process in Sussex should work towards closing this gap.

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I am also reassured the report recognised that 99% of Prevention officers had received the enhanced stalking training, delivered in partnership with other agencies within the criminal justice system. These are the officers that respond to and investigate the vast majority of stalking and harassment offences and this joined-up training should contribute towards a greater understanding of the complexities involved and a more consistent response.

The report highlighted inconsistent processes for referring victims to our specialist stalking support service, Veritas Justice. The Chief Constable and I were surprised by this concern as every victim of crime in Sussex is referred to Victim Support, in the first instance, unless they specifically confirm that they do not want this support. Even though only one in 10 victims of stalking and harassment currently take up this offer of support, I am confident that the offer is always made to the victim by Sussex Police.

As always, I discussed the content of the report with the Chief Constable at our webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meeting (PAM) on 12 April 2019. The Chief Constable gave me strong assurances that both he and his senior management team remain "absolutely committed" to continuing to improve the journey and experience of victims and to holding offenders to account for these behaviours and crimes.

The Chief Constable confirmed that each of the local recommendations highlighted in the report has been used to enhance the existing Stalking and Harassment Improvement Plan and will be prioritised within the timescales set out by HMICFRS. Sussex Police will also work closely with the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council to seek to influence the national recommendations. This PAM session is archived and can be viewed on my website using the following link: www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/webcasting/

I received a positive and receptive response to the findings of the report from those present at a policy roundtable I organised last month and I have already had commitments from fellow PCCs to start their individual forces on their own journey of improvement in this area. I am due to present our collective thoughts and recommendations to Ministers shortly.

Sussex Police and I supported the National Stalking Awareness Week to raise awareness of stalking as a crime. This is important because more victims need to be able to join the dots and recognise for themselves that, if they are experiencing behaviour that is Fixated, Obsessive, Unwanted or Repeated (FOUR), they are in fact being stalked and should report this to the police. I was particularly pleased to note that the College of Policing has now adopted my FOUR acronym to describe and recognise stalking behaviour.

I will continue to closely monitor the progress of Sussex Police in this area.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katy Bourne', written in a cursive style.

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