



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

16 April 2020

Dear Zoe,

HMICFRS and HMCPST – Joint Inspection: Evidence Led Domestic Abuse

I write in respect of the recently published findings for Sussex Police in the joint Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPST) 'Evidence led domestic abuse' inspection report. I welcome the opportunity to comment on report and have carefully studied its findings and recommendations.

I am pleased that the inspection report recognised that police officers and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) prosecutors have a good knowledge of evidence led prosecutions and understand that cases can still proceed without the support of the victim.

However, I share the concerns of HMICFRS and HMCPST that neither the police nor the CPS can currently isolate and identify evidence led prosecutions, or categorise those cases where an evidence led approach may be more effective, separate to the identification of all domestic abuse cases. This is because there are no mechanisms in place to quality assure evidence led cases to ensure that they are being used effectively and appropriately and means that the opportunity to learn lessons and share good practice between organisations is lost.

A 'Domestic Abuse Scrutiny Panel' has been established in Sussex, comprising of representatives from the CSP, to ensure that improvements are made to investigative standards and to understand better the learning from internal reviews. These outcomes are achieved by identifying themes, trends and patterns of working practices that could be improved upon and challenging Force and partner performance across these areas. The Panel also provides a forum where learning, best practice and problem solving can be shared.

I am satisfied that through the Scrutiny Panel, the Force has reviewed its investigative standards to ensure that investigations and decisions to take no further action in cases of domestic abuse are as robust as the supervisory oversight in place for other domestic abuse cases. This includes holding practitioners to account for their decision making against standard operating procedures and ensuring that supervisors quality assure evidence prior to CPS submission through mandated supervisory reviews and pre-charge checklists.



I am confident that domestic abuse training is delivered to all appropriate staff, both frontline police officers and investigators, in Sussex to ensure that they are trained appropriately in how to handle domestic abuse cases. This includes: 'Domestic Abuse Matters' training; a Protecting Vulnerable People course and a mandated National Centre for Applied Learning Technologies (NCALT) training package. I am also reassured that all new student officers receive extended classroom-based training and NCALT packages around the areas of: abusive relationships; initial response; man in distress; missing daughter; family disturbance and hidden in plain sight. This comprehensive training has contributed to an improved level of knowledge and understanding about domestic abuse across the Force.

The report also acknowledged that some police forces have invested in additional training for officers who are appointed 'Domestic Abuse Champions'. I am pleased to confirm that Sussex Police is one such force to have already introduced more than 270 Domestic Abuse Mentors to provide advice and guidance for officers responding to domestic abuse cases. These Mentors have proved to be an invaluable resource in Sussex and, as well as rebranding these individuals as Champions, their focus for the next 12 months will be to increase the awareness of different thematic areas, including evidence led investigations. I will continue to work with Sussex Police to ensure that these individuals are utilised to maximum effect by raising the awareness of this role further still.

The rollout of more than 1,700 Body Worn Video (BWV) cameras across the Force has ensured that all frontline police officers and staff are now equipped with personal-issue cameras in Sussex. These devices are an established way of capturing and securing real-time evidence in an accessible digital format. The BWV footage gathered also acts as an independent witness to support evidence led prosecutions, particularly in cases of domestic abuse where victims may be reluctant to proceed. In addition, an 'Investigating Domestic Abuse' electronic-handbook has been developed that will shortly be made available to officers through their smartphones. The e-Handbook will provide a comprehensive tool to assist officers with conducting evidence based investigations at the scenes of crimes.

I am also reassured to note that Sussex Police is working hard to address each of the six recommendations contained within the report. I plan to discuss the content of the report with the Chief Constable at one of our webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meetings in the near future. In particular, I will seek assurances that the progress made by the Force in each of these areas will address the recommendations in the report.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katy Bourne'.

Katy Bourne OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner