**Katy Bourne** OBE
Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner

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Mr Roy Wilsher OBE QFSM
HM Inspector of Constabulary
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service
6th Floor – Globe House
89 Eccleston Square
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17 December 2021

Dear Roy

**HMICFRS – Police response to violence against women and girls**

I write in respect of the recently published findings in the 'Police response to violence against women and girls' (VAWG) inspection report. 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 am pleased that the inspection report recognised that all forces [inspected] understood the importance of tackling VAWG. I understood fully the clear message contained within the report that a whole-system approach is required to end the epidemic of VAWG.

Sussex Police has developed a range of different prevention activities in partnership with multi-agency statutory and non-statutory partners, and third sector organisations who provide domestic abuse support services. These activities help to coordinate and deliver bespoke services and safeguarding arrangements for victims, whilst simultaneously demonstrating effective offender management through a whole-system approach.

As you may already be aware, I was successful in securing funding of nearly £1million [£976,782] from the Government's latest Safer Streets Fund to tackle VAWG and support education, awareness and behaviour change programmes across Sussex. Further information about this funding award can be viewed through the following link:
https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/news/pcc-welcomes-safer-streets-funding/

Sussex Police has also undertaken a strategic analysis around VAWG to identify where these offences are most prevalent in public spaces, which has been used to direct and target resources and patrol activity, particularly around the night-time economy. In addition, this information and intelligence has been used to understand better where further policing support is required and any gaps that may exist in terms of service delivery.

I share HMICFRS' concerns about the "considerable inconsistencies" around what data is collected by police forces in relation to VAWG offences and how this data is used. The Force attributed this to a lack of a national definition in respect of VAWG offences, with a VAWG Strategy [including a definition of these offences] still awaited from the National Police Chiefs' Council. I am reassured that Sussex Police is developing its own strategy in the interim, taking a common-sense approach to the data collected by incorporating all crimes where there is any violence against women and girls involved.

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I am pleased to confirm that the Force has invested in technological solutions [Microsoft Power BI] which can collate information and data from a range of different systems to develop a clearer understanding of those individuals who are most at risk from harm and to target those perpetrators who pose the greatest risk of harm to victims. Last month, Sussex Police won a Management Consultancy Association Award for 'Data Analytics and Innovation in the Public Sector' in recognition of the ground-breaking and innovative use of data analytics in Sussex.

Sussex Police look at any potential gaps in the information recorded about the protected characteristics of victims through the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) to understand better whether there is any reticence to report and how trust and confidence in the police can be improved amongst these diverse communities through the provision of a more inclusive service.

The Force will also use the data captured through a StreetSafe tool – a pilot service for women and girls to anonymously tell the police about public places they have felt to be unsafe because of behaviours or environmental issues – as part of this analytical work moving forward. The Force [and partners] have already received information from this tool about faulty street lighting and signage, requests for enhancements to existing CCTV and remedial attention required to overgrown hedges, shrubs and other wooded areas. Further information about the tool can be viewed through the following link: https://www.police.uk/streetsafe

I am reassured to note that Sussex Police is managing and addressing the "significant" increase in the recorded levels of online VAWG, highlighted in the inspection report, through a more sophisticated use of digital devices, and a redesigning of call handling and crime recording processes to improve the identification of offences that use the internet.

Sussex Police has recently commissioned an urgent review into the processes in place to respond to any requests received for information as part of the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) with a view to providing a more efficient and effective response locally by looking at where any delays exist in the process to streamline this and to improve the service that is provided to members of the public. This work will include assessing the contribution of relevant partner agencies in the process too.

I am reassured to note that Sussex Police know who the high-harm serial offenders of VAWG offences are in Sussex. The Force was recognised to be in a much better position than it was previously around this area, including the development of an innovative and overarching database [comprising data from multiple sources] to look at offenders across a range of different offences. This platform provides a 'live time' list of all high-harm perpetrators of domestic abuse, sexual abuse and stalking who can be proactively targeted for other offences [rather than just domestic or sexual violence] to remove them from the communities of Sussex faster.

Following publication of the HMICFRS report, an internal review by Sussex Police has found that the use of protective powers against perpetrators of VAWG could be improved. This was recognised to include addressing the gap that exists between each of the police force areas in England and Wales not being automatically notified by the courts when any ancillary orders are granted. I was reassured by the Chief Constable that proactive action is taken by the Force whenever any of these orders are breached in Sussex and that this action is treated as a priority, utilising Single Points of Contacts (SPOCs) from across the Force. This includes obtaining ancillary orders at the earliest possible opportunity and prioritising any breaches until an arrest is made.

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As always, I discussed the content of the inspection report with the Chief Constable at our webcast monthly Performance & Accountability Meeting on 22 October 2021. Strong assurances were provided that a wide range of targeted prevention activity exists in Sussex in respect of VAWG. This work will be further supported by the Safer Streets funding and will enable the Force to continue to deliver new initiatives and build on existing practice to deliver a lasting response to VAWG. I was also reassured to note that plans are in place to ensure that each of the five recommendations set out in the report for the police service are progressed within the prescribed timescales. This session is archived and can be viewed on my website using the following link: https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/watch-live/

Earlier this month [6 December 2021] I launched a unique campaign to encourage men how to recognise sexual harassment and misogynistic behaviour and give them the confidence and skills to safely call it out when they witness it – demonstrating a proactive shift from 'bystander to upstander'. The "Do the Right Thing" campaign has the backing of local celebrities including musician Norman Cook [Fatboy Slim], actor John Simm, cricketer Tymal Mills and author Peter James. Further information about the campaign can be viewed through the following link: https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/about/news/do-the-right-thing-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls/

I am confident that Sussex Police is doing everything within its powers to prevent further harm to victims and communities, address offender behaviour and maximise opportunities to secure criminal justice outcomes.

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

Yours sincerely

Katy Bourne

PS. I look forward to catching up soon!

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