

PERFORMANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY MEETING

DATE: 25 April 2014

LOCATION: Office of the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner, Sackville House, Lewes

PRESENT: Police & Crime Commissioner Katy Bourne (KB)
Chief Executive Mark Streater (MS)
Temporary Chief Constable Giles York (GY)
Assistant Chief Constable Stuart Cundy (SC)
Policy Officer Graham Kane – minutes
Head of Public Engagement & Communications Mervin Dadd (MD)
Communications Manager Rosie Gooch
Administration Clerk Sarah Tibbott

HMIC REPORT - OVERVIEW

HMIC REPORT

HMIC recently published their report “Everyone’s business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse”. The biggest area of concern in the report is that police forces in England and Wales are still failing victims of domestic abuse despite increased efforts to improve their policing response.

A) What is your overall reaction to the findings of the report?

- GY confirmed that domestic abuse is a priority for Sussex Police and reiterated that domestic abuse remains a really challenging area because it is a crime that is often hidden throughout society.
- There is a key measure to increase the reporting of domestic abuse crimes and incidents which is reflected in both the Police & Crime Commissioner’s Police & Crime Plan and the Chief Constable’s Operational Delivery Plan.
- GY was pleased that the HMIC report highlighted areas of good practice in Sussex but acknowledged that more could be done by police and partners. GY concluded by stating that a policing response alone is not sufficient and partnership working remains essential to improve the response to victims.

HMIC REPORT - FIRST CONTACT

IDENTIFYING VICTIMS

The HMIC report identified that victims of domestic abuse are normally recognised by police forces when contact is made and responded to as a high priority. However the report also acknowledged that aspects of first contact with victims could be improved. In particular, the report highlighted that police forces do not always have a clear and consistent definition of ‘repeat’ victims.

A) What processes do call handlers in the control room take to assess the potential risk to a victim to ensure that the most appropriate response is provided?

B) How does the Sussex Police definition of 'repeat victims' compare nationally?

- GY stated that all call handlers in the Police Contact Centre are fully trained to assess the potential risk to a victim and ensure that the most appropriate response is provided. This often requires a delicate balance between providing support for the victim whilst identifying and obtaining the key facts through a robust set of questions.
- It was confirmed that the Sussex Police definition of a "repeat victim" is someone who has reported two incidents to the police within a twelve month period. This is also reflective of the Surrey definition and ensures a consistency of approach between both forces. However, it was highlighted that there is no national definition of a "repeat victim", although the College of Policing are currently leading on this particular piece of work.
- GY concluded by providing assurances that the service provided to victims in Sussex is flexible and that officers and staff are empowered to use their discretion, together with all of the information available, to make decisions in the best interests of the victims. This is particularly important because many victims will have suffered a significant number of domestic abuse incidents prior to reporting this to the police.

HMIC REPORT - INITIAL RESPONSE

VICTIM CONTACT

Since being elected, I have been concerned at the number of times that victims of domestic abuse are contacted, in isolation, by the police and partner agencies. This was also identified in the HMIC report.

A) How do Sussex Police plan to streamline their contact with victims, as recommended in the report?

- GY confirmed that the overall victim experience remains an important measure of success for Sussex Police. There is a huge amount of support available to victims which emphasises the importance of effective partnership working.
- A Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has been created in Horsham, West Sussex, which enables the police, social services, local authority and volunteer agency partners to share information available at an operational level and to work more effectively together, in terms of generating a single, holistic risk assessment.
- The Sussex Police ambition is to have one MASH, with multiple locations, (where appropriate) across each of the divisions (Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex). The introduction of MASHs forcewide is imminent, in terms of delivery, and Sussex Police continue to draw upon the experiences of other forces more advanced in this area, including benefitting from the learning of Surrey Police.

HMIC REPORT - ACTION TAKEN

TRAINING

One of the recommendations in the HMIC report is the need for better training for officers and staff which emphasises that tackling domestic abuse is part of core policing business.

A) What training is currently provided to officers and staff relating to domestic abuse?

B) What assurances can you provide that more robust training will be implemented following the recommendations in the report?

D) What assurances can you provide that a proactive leadership and culture is in place within Sussex Police to ensure that domestic abuse is seen as a priority and acted on as such?

- The training for domestic abuse across Sussex Police is delivered departmentally which means that it is not coordinated in terms of one, consistent training package being delivered to all officers and staff.
- SC highlighted that there are three distinct elements required to develop the training available in Sussex. This includes the creation of a national training package (by the College of Policing), in-house training (based on a "training needs analysis") and access to external training providers.
- It was emphasised that successful training should involve building on good practice, sharing this across the organisation and developing a better understanding regarding the longer-term effects of domestic abuse. Incorporating each of the above elements will better contribute towards continued professional development in Sussex. KB was reassured that there is a plan in place to improve the training provided.

Action: KB to be kept updated regarding this progress

HASANOVIC JURY INQUEST OUTCOME

The recent inquest into the tragic murder of Mrs Cassandra Hasanovic in 2008 highlighted a number of "serious failings" that had contributed to her death. In particular, HM Senior Coroner highlighted concerns around the general policing of domestic abuse cases by Sussex Police and explained that there is a risk that future deaths will occur unless action is taken.

A) How are Sussex Police responding to these findings?

B) What changes to processes have been made by Sussex Police as a direct result of Mrs Hasanovic's murder?

C) How will you measure the success of these changes implemented?

D) How do Sussex Police monitor the conclusions from domestic homicide reviews to ensure that any recommendations are acted upon?

- SC stated that a Gold Group has been set up within Sussex Police to respond to the findings of the Hasanovic Jury Inquest, and the specific issues identified by HM Senior Coroner, in particular.
- It was highlighted that as a direct result of Mrs Hasanovic's murder, Sussex Police have introduced a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) which is a forum where the police and partner agencies can share information about high-risk domestic abuse cases. This contributes to a more joined up approach.
- SC also confirmed that more work still needs to be done, including reviewing how Sussex Police share information with other forces, creating a single point of contact for victims and improving the level of training available to officers and staff.
- The success of these changes will be measured through an increase in victim confidence (in terms of victims feeling better supported from initial contact through to final outcomes), an increased level of reporting and through improved working arrangements with the criminal justice system (to develop efficiencies and reduce attrition rates).
- Sussex Police have a dedicated "Review and Contingency Forum" to consider the recommendations made by HM Senior Coroner, in partnership with all of those agencies involved in the case. This Forum is assessing the recommendations; tasking actions out (as appropriate) and monitoring the progress made. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) highlighted that further improvements could be made to this Forum, and as a result the first "Safeguarding Board" between Sussex and Surrey will meet in May 2014.

BODY WORN VIDEO

Investing in technology that assists officers attending incidents of domestic abuse is vital. Sussex Police has already invested in over 450 body worn video cameras which is recognised by HMIC as good practice.

A) How are the body worn video cameras assisting officers to secure vital evidence?

B) Has the use of body worn video cameras led to more convictions of domestic abuse in Sussex, thus proving that officers are recording the right evidence?

C) What other technology are Sussex Police looking at to enable officers to secure evidence and share it effectively with the Crown Prosecution Service?

- Body worn video cameras are available to nearly all officers responding to victims of domestic abuse and assist officers to secure vital evidence. This includes the immediate capturing of the most powerful and raw evidence available which can be used to convict offenders faster. It was also highlighted that this evidence contributes to a greater number of successful outcomes in court because more offenders plead guilty following the initial charge.
- The availability of this evidence has also resulted in a reduction in the number of complaints because the body worn video cameras accurately capture the actions of officers which cannot be challenged.

- Sussex Police are also working with the Crown Prosecution Service to analyse the evidence captured through this technology which has enabled some “victimless prosecutions” to take place. However, it was emphasised that each case would be carefully assessed on its own merits before a decision is made.

Action: KB would like to know whether the use of body worn video cameras has led to more convictions of domestic abuse in Sussex

HMIC REPORT - WORKING WITH PARTNERS

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Tackling domestic abuse effectively requires police forces to work with a number of statutory, voluntary and community service partners. The HMIC report recommended that there should be a multi-agency inspection of these services to consider how they work with the police to provide advice, assistance and support to victims of domestic abuse.

A) What information do Sussex Police share with other forces and partner services in respect of suspected victims of domestic abuse?

B) How are high-risk domestic abuse cases managed and reviewed by Sussex Police and partner agencies?

- GY stated that Sussex Police work effectively with a range of statutory and voluntary partners to tackle domestic abuse and give support to victims throughout the process.
- High-risk domestic abuse cases are managed through MARACs which meet frequently to share information and create a coordinated response (see Hasanovic Jury Inquest Outcome for more information). It was highlighted that these conferences are often chaired by Sussex Police but it was also emphasised that different agencies will take the lead depending on the dynamics of each individual case.

HMIC REPORT - MANAGEMENT OF RISK

RISK ASSESSMENT

The HMIC report questioned the Sussex Police process of re-grading the risk assessment forms and expressed concern that victims may not be receiving the right level of support as a result of how they are being assessed.

A) What assurances can you provide that Sussex Police are completing and grading the risk assessment forms in line with the National Decision Model framework?

B) How are you reviewing this process in light of the concerns expressed by HMIC?

C) What steps are Sussex Police taking to raise the awareness of Clare’s Law in Sussex?

- Sussex Police use the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment and Honour Based Violence (DASH) Risk Assessment to complete and grade their forms in line with the National Decision Model framework.
- The risk assessment forms are reviewed by dedicated officers and staff who are highly skilled and knowledgeable. GY was confident that where any risk assessment forms have been re-graded, this has been done for the right reasons, making the most appropriate assessment of all risks involved.
- Clare's Law was introduced across England and Wales on 8 March 2014 to provide individuals with the opportunity to find out from the police service if their partner has a history of domestic abuse. Sussex Police have received 14 requests for information under Clare's Law to date. SC highlighted that Clare's Law is a balancing act between sharing information and safeguarding individuals.

Action: KB would like to know whether a family member can invoke Clare's Law

VICTIM FOCUS

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION NOTICES AND ORDERS

Following an ACPO review for the Home Secretary into what additional powers the criminal justice system might need to control perpetrators, Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPN) and Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPO) will go live in Sussex on 17 June 2014.

A) For the benefit of the viewers, can you briefly outline the purpose of the DVPNs and the DVPOs?

B) What impact will these notices and orders have on Sussex Police?

C) How will these contribute towards improved attrition rates in Sussex?

- Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPN) and Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPO) will go live in Sussex on 17 June 2014 (in time for the World Cup).
- DVPNs will be issued by the police to provide immediate emergency protection to victims of domestic abuse and will include certain prohibitions and restrictions. Within 48 hours of a DVPN being issued there will be an application to the Magistrates Court for a DVPO. This will reflect the DVPN restrictions and will last for up to 28 days.
- Successful pilot schemes have occurred in Wiltshire, Greater Manchester Police and West Mercia. For the 15 month pilot period, over 480 notices were issued, of which 414 orders were granted by courts. It is worth emphasising that only 1% of the notices/orders were breached during the three pilots.
- GY highlighted that this is a powerful tool which needs to be used in the right circumstances. It will have a direct impact on Sussex Police, in terms of cost and officer time, because the Force will have to pay for every DVPO that goes to court and make representation themselves. It is anticipated that this will cost Sussex Police circa £300,000 a year. Additional work with criminal justice system partners is currently being completed to look at making this process more cost effective.

- It is hoped that investment in this area will contribute towards improved attrition rates in Sussex because the conditions of the DVPOs will provide victims with more time and space to consider their options. The time restrictions imposed by the DVPNs should also contribute to a faster and more efficient response from police and partners.