



Report from the
Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys
To the
Dyfed-Powys Police and Crime Panel

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence

October 2019

Introduction

Within the 2017-21 Police and Crime Plan, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) set out his intention to safeguard the vulnerable by 'improving the response to domestic abuse and gender-based violence including physical, sexual and psychological violence'. This included committing to:

- Commission victim support services that offer emotional and practical help to victims of domestic and sexual abuse to help them cope and recover from their experience and to support them to achieve the best possible outcome through the criminal justice system,
- Continue to invest in services that support, reduce the risk and improve the safety of those experiencing domestic abuse,
- Understand the nature of scale of domestic abuse within different communities and age groups, including a focus on safeguarding older people from domestic abuse; and
- Explore prevention programmes for perpetrators of domestic abuse to help them to change their attitudes and behaviour and to develop positive non-abusive relationships.

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate progress made to date.

National Picture

In March 2014, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published their first report focussed on improving the police response to domestic abuse. This concluded that the overall police response to victims of domestic abuse was not good enough, with principal reasons being unacceptable failings in core policing activities, investigating crime, preventing crime, bringing offenders to justice and keeping victims safe.

The latest summary report was published in February 2019, utilising data from the 2017 PEEL inspections. This states that the service the police give to victims of domestic abuse has improved markedly, with victims now better supported and protected. Main findings were:

Demand has risen dramatically; Forces need to understand this complex picture better as some Forces still can't yet fully explain why demand has increased so much.

The police are prioritising their response to domestic abuse; The improvements seen will be further supported by a new domestic abuse bill, introducing measures to support and protect victims and promoted by the new

role of Domestic Abuse Commissioner. The bill also provides opportunities to address the behaviour of perpetrators.

Dyfed Powys picture

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) identified completion of Domestic Abuse Stalking and Harassment (DASH) risk assessments as an area for improvement in Dyfed Powys in 2017. Their crime data integrity inspection found that where no crime was recorded, there was no DASH assessment. The Force invited a peer review which identified similar issues. In response, the Force made changes to the supervision and quality assurance of DASH risk assessments in September 2018.

The PEEL inspection in 2018/19 graded the Force 'requires improvement' for Protecting Vulnerable People. This included a cause of concern regarding failing to risk assess all incidents of domestic abuse, resulting in opportunities to intervene and take appropriate action at the earliest opportunity being lost. The Crime Data Integrity inspection in 2018 also identified under-recording of violent crime, in particular domestic abuse, as a cause for concern.

The same report identified that the Force is good at recording reports of sexual offences, 93% of reports. Despite this, HMICFRS estimate that the Force is failing to record over 70 reported sexual offense each year. The Force had correctly recorded 91% (62 out of 68 cases) of rapes reported, with every case being investigated and every victim safeguarded. However, the timeliness of recording for rape and sexual offences was found to require improvement in order to ensure that victims benefit from early support.

The Chief Constable's response to the PCC in January 2019 sought to provide reassurance that work had already commenced on the areas for improvement, in particular the work on domestic abuse cases. There has been increased supervision in terms of incidents and audit in this area has been prioritised. An Assistant Director had also been tasked to lead a project in improving the response to domestic abuse cases holistically, including the recording function and completion of DASH assessments.

Work of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys

Oversight and independent assurance

The Commissioner maintains oversight of the Force's response to domestic abuse and sexual violence via attendance at a number of strategic groups on a quarterly basis: the Strategic Vulnerability Group, the Domestic Abuse Gold Group, the Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Group and via data provided

through the Performance and Outcomes Board. Victim satisfaction data relating to domestic abuse is discussed at the Victim and Witness Board within the Force, where the OPCC are present. This also featured at the Policing Accountability Board in August 2019, with a subsequent press release outlining the Commissioner's praise for the improvements in identifying and responding to domestic abuse but highlighting that there is still more to do in this vital area.

In January 2018, the Force identified domestic abuse as one of three core priorities for the 12 months ahead following concerns raised by inspectors, HMICFRS, about their initial risk assessments of domestic abuse incidents.

The work that followed included the introduction of a dedicated Vulnerability Desk in the force's control room, which takes emergency and non-emergency calls, to help call-takers and response officers identify and risk assess domestic abuse at the earliest opportunity, and ensure crimes are properly recorded.

The Force has invested in a bespoke training package, known as 'Domestic Abuse Matters', which is recognised at a national level and works in partnership with specialist domestic abuse services to enhance officer and staff understanding of the hidden side of domestic abuse, such as coercive control.

The Commissioner has raised concerns regarding the length of time some investigations are taking and has held detailed discussions with the Chief Officer team and the Head of Crime to scrutinise the Force's response in this important area. An Investigation Standards Gold Group has been set up to focus on ensuring officers and staff have the skills and knowledge to deliver swift, high quality investigations to victims of crime. The length of an investigation has a direct impact on victims and it is vital we keep victims engaged in the criminal justice process.

The Commissioner's office is currently working with Dyfed-Powys Police to develop an approach to assess the impact the vulnerability desk has had on victims of domestic abuse.

Lobbying of government and partner agencies

The Commissioner has identified a number of areas where services are lacking and has continually raised these issues both with Chief Executives of partner agencies and with Government officials and ministers wherever appropriate. One such area is the lack of provision of specialist therapeutic counselling for victims of sexual abuse. This is a health and social care responsibility and the PCC will continue to raise this debate with partners and officials.

Awareness and partnership working

The Commissioner chaired a series of working groups culminating in attendance at the Regional Safeguarding Board, Cysur, in 2017 where he secured agreement for the Board to act at the Executive Board representing VAWDASV within Dyfed Powys. The PCC is now represented with a seat on the Regional VAWDASV Strategic Group, which provides a governance structure to develop, approve and monitor the regional strategy under the VAWDASV (Wales) Act 2015. This group ensures that multi-agency protocols are in place to deliver against the plan and to monitor performance.

The Commissioner has worked with Community Safety Partnership leads to ensure that there is consistency of practice across the Force area in terms of commissioning arrangements, quality assurance and oversight of Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs). A set of recommendations have been accepted by the Regional Safeguarding Board and will be taken forward by the VAWDASV Regional Strategic Group. The Commissioner meets quarterly with Community Safety Partnership managers and has been granted access to all recommendations from individual DHRs to allow him to scrutinise any actions required by the Force.

The Local Criminal Justice Board, chaired by the PCC, provides a forum to bring together key partners and senior representatives of criminal justice agencies operating within Dyfed-Powys, allowing for collaboration and partnership working. The vision of the Board is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system in Dyfed Powys, including improving the experience for victims and witnesses and building confidence in the system as a whole.

The Board have selected themes they wish to focus on during 2019/20, with the October meeting focussing on VAWDASV in particular. The Board will receive a presentation from the Regional Advisor employed by Welsh Government and will discuss in detail a case study regarding an individual case which has encountered numerous challenges within the criminal justice system.

In November 2018, the PCC commissioned George Partnership Limited to undertake a Needs Assessment to help drive an evidence-led approach to future commissioning and partnership development and to understand where the PCC could best impact upon achieving support for more victims and vulnerable persons in collaboration with partners.

Relevant recommendations and responses from this work are included below:

Recommendation; Ensure the needs of all those affected by Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) are adequately met

by key statutory partners, most particularly health boards and local authorities. This includes particularly:

- Addressing the gap in therapeutic interventions for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence as a priority.
- Promoting best practice models such as integrated approaches to Independent Domestic Violence Advisory (IDVA) services and supported housing provision.

Response; The PCC is a core member of the Mid and West Wales VAWDASV Strategic Board. The PCC was instrumental in bringing partners together to achieve the first jointly commissioned IDVA service across Dyfed Powys, commencing in July 2018. Through the work of the Strategic Board, further development of commissioning approaches and models are being explored. The Director of Commissioning also sits on the Regional Collaborative Committee where opportunities for joint commissioning or alignment with Supporting People funding are explored.

The PCC has raised concerns at Ministerial level and with Chief Executives of partner agencies regarding the lack of service provision for ongoing therapeutic counselling. This is a message that the PCC will continue to prioritise.

Recommendation; The PCC is recommended to use its own commissioning processes to focus specialist victim support commissioning on VAWDASV.

Response; Existing commissioned services include a focus on these areas. The PCC is involved at strategic level in developing and delivering improvements to current service provision. The PCC's Commissioning Advisory Board acts as a review body to scrutinise the award of grant funding and tendering of services and hold service providers to account. In August 2019, the commissioned IDVA service was invited to present a service performance and delivery update to the Board, with the Sexual Abuse service provider scheduled to present in early 2020.

Recommendation; The PCC is recommended to take a leading role within VAWDASV and the Criminal Justice Board to:

- a. Facilitate an 'end to end' system review of the CJ process particularly, with links to the wider support system for those affected by VAWDASV e.g. therapeutic interventions and housing.
- b. Prioritise availability of therapeutic interventions for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence.

- c. Ensure all Criminal Justice services and those commissioned by the PCC contribute to the work of the VAWDASV Strategic Group on mapping and improving consistency in data recording.

Response; The PCC currently chairs the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) and is represented on the regional VAWDASV Strategic Board. The VAWDASV Board are currently mapping the commissioning landscape and related offender/victim pathways. A presentation from the regional VAWDASV lead is scheduled for the October LCJB meeting for members' consideration and to identify any required actions.

A number of continuous improvement events have taken place, but Dyfed Powys Police have yet to identify a definitive victim pathway. Recent work regarding domestic and sexual abuse in particular were reported to Policing Board in early September.

Engagement Activity

The Commissioner jointly hosted an event in Police Headquarters in October 2018 to celebrate Dyfed-Powys Police, along with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service (MAWWFRS) and Carmarthenshire County Council being awarded White Ribbon Accreditation. The event brought together key partners from across these organisations and was an ideal opportunity to celebrate the hard work being undertaken by partner organisations to address the issues faced by victims of both domestic abuse and sexual violence. The event culminated in a round table discussion focusing on how a partnership approach to supporting victims can be fostered across the represented organisations. The Commissioner will be calling partners together during the 2019/20 financial year to assess what progress has been made.

The Commissioner is committed to hearing the personal stories of victims and during September 2019 has met with 2 individuals in particular whose experiences of the criminal justice system have been significantly challenging. The Commissioner has sought to understand their experience and learn how services can be improved.

In November 2018, the Commissioner visited West Wales Domestic Abuse Services in Aberystwyth where he met with managers to learn about the work and support offered via the hub and out in the community. The Commissioner was also given a guided tour of the Safe House and discussed some of the challenges facing the service.

In June 2019, the Commissioner met with the SPRING Group in Aberystwyth, who are a newly formed group of individuals of all ages and backgrounds who met while doing the Recovery Toolkit Programme (a programme for survivors of

domestic abuse to aid and guide them in recovering from the traumatic effects of living in an abusive relationship). The group spoke to the Commissioner about their concerns with individual cases and the Commissioner has requested that they provide him with details so that he can follow up with the Chief Constable.

Some of the feedback included survivors feeling that there is a lack of consistency regarding how domestic abuse is dealt with by the Force and that if officers are not confident in dealing with the situation it can put victims at higher risk. The group felt that current legislation is not fit for purpose in dealing with domestic abuse and that victims are often left with trauma and mental health challenges following their experiences.

Commissioned services

The Commissioner has worked with partners to ensure that victims are provided with the best possible services in what is one of the most rural and challenging geographical areas in England and Wales. As outlined above, he instigated a developmental piece of work to improve victims' experiences of Independent Domestic Violence Advisory (IDVA) services. Previously there were five separate contracts in place across the Force area, which created a confusing pathway for victims and professionals and increased the risk of inequitable and disparate provision to victims. The PCC worked closely with the four Local Authorities across Dyfed Powys to jointly commission a single contract for the provision of IDVA services across the entire Force area. This has ensured a holistic, seamless delivery of service for victims. It has also enabled commissioners to secure additional resources for their investment, resulting in both improved services and increased value for money in challenging financial times.

The newly commissioned service ensures that IDVA provision is available within courts across the area and is working closely with Health partners to ensure victims are offered support at what is often the vital first contact with frontline health services.

Early outcomes from the service are extremely positive, with 72% of clients saying that they feel better able to cope with aspects of everyday life upon exiting the service. 76% of clients report increased feelings of safety and 77% feel better informed and empowered to act.

To further support this development, the PCC has provided additional investment into Goleudy, the initial point of contact service for victims and witnesses, to allow them to support domestic abuse victims classed as standard or medium risk according to their DASH risk assessment. This ensures that every single victim of domestic abuse, regardless of their risk, will be offered the appropriate level of support to help them cope and recover.

The Commissioner's work in this particular area was recognised in the recent edition of the national publication 'PCCs Making A Difference: Putting Victims First in Focus'.

The Commissioner has invested in services for victims of sexual assault for many years at a local level. In 2013, Welsh Government commissioned a review to examine the extent to which the Sexual Abuse Referral Centres (SARCs) fulfilled the requirements of Public Health Wales service specifications, victims' needs and consider any unmet gaps in provision and the interdependencies between SARCs and other services. The findings from the review formed the case for change for a multi-agency review of sexual assault services across Mid, South and West Wales, led by the National Health Service (NHS) Wales Health Collaborative. The Commissioner has been committed to this project during his term in office and has recently received the final recommendations for the delivery of acute hubs, offering forensic and medical examinations and immediate crisis support to victims.

However, the regional project has taken considerably longer than expected and the Commissioner has raised a number of concerns throughout the process. As Welsh Government Health funding is tied up in the regional project, the Commissioner has worked with Health colleagues at a local level to ensure that local frontline services are protected and that victims continue to receive vital services whilst the reconfiguration work continues. This has included investment from the PCC to protect service provision.

It is anticipated that the reconfigured acute hubs will be in place during 2020/21 and in the meantime the PCC has extended the contract with New Pathways for local provision.

The Commissioner has worked with criminal justice partners to put in place appropriate offender management pathways at all levels of risk. The Commissioner led a multi-agency bid to the Home Office to fund a voluntary domestic abuse perpetrator scheme. This particular bid was unsuccessful but the Commissioner has since been in discussions with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) to explore the potential for future co-commissioning of such schemes. HMPPS have recently announced their intention to establish a dynamic purchasing framework, which will provide a pool of competitively tendered and quality assured providers. Services procured from this pool will include the statutory domestic abuse perpetrator support schemes and the Commissioner has expressed his intention to work with HMPPS to provide similar schemes at a non-statutory, community level.

Grant funding

The PCC has provided funds for new equipment and technology to enhance the Force's cyber-crime capacity. This includes an increase in specialist capacity in examining digital devices to address the increasing demand, and use of triaging methods to prioritise devices where there is the best chance of recovering evidence. The Force are now building capability to examine phones in local hubs to improve timeliness, particularly where suspects are already in custody. This will prove essential in cases of domestic and sexual abuse where victims are at increased risk of disengaging during lengthy investigations.

The PCC's re-investment in CCTV is also helping, and evidence from the cameras has already proved invaluable in a number of investigations, while also providing reassurance to the public. A recent example discussed at Policing Board used CCTV footage to enable a victimless prosecution in a domestic abuse case where the victim was reluctant to support the investigation.

The Commissioner has awarded over £50,000 of grant funding to community organisations who raise awareness and provide support relating to domestic and sexual abuse. Below are some examples:

- £5,000 to the Lucy Faithful Foundation to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation
- £19,916 over a three year period for Seren Counselling services
- £15,000 to Threshold Domestic Abuse Services to support their early family intervention project
- £5,000 to Carmarthen Domestic Abuse Services for a men's support group
- £5,500 for Stop It Now! Wales for a programme to support families affected by online harmful sexual behaviour
- £10,000 Cwni Theatr Arad Goch for their Tempted forum theatre production based on young people's concerns around sexual exploitation

The Commissioner has also worked with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service to secure Welsh Government capital funding to purchase vulnerability kits to help safeguard victims of domestic abuse.

Conclusion

The Commissioner is making positive progress under each strand of his commitment to safeguard the vulnerable.

The Commissioner's direct engagement with victims allows him to understand the individual experiences of the service provided by the Force and other criminal justice partners. This insight allows the Commissioner to identify the

improvements required regarding how victims are treated and supported throughout their journey. Through his work with partners and his influence over commissioned services, the Commissioner is able to drive forward these improvements. His oversight of the work within the Force has helped to ensure a continual focus on achieving better outcomes for victims.

The Commissioner's financial commitment to service provision and contributions to charities based within the Dyfed-Powys Force area ensures a vital network of support services for those experiencing domestic and sexual abuse. The significant development of jointly commissioned services has received recognition at national level.

The Commissioner has proactively sought to understand the needs of victims and vulnerable people and to evaluate current service provision, acting on the recommendations received. The Commissioning Advisory Board established by the Commissioner adds a further level of scrutiny and serves to reassure that providers are delivering effective services.

The Commissioner continues to work locally with partners such as the health service and nationally with other Police and Crime Commissioners, Assembly Members, Welsh Government and Home Office to lobby for improved services for victims of domestic and sexual abuse. This work will progress further during 2019/20 as the Commissioner assumes the role of All Wales Policing Group Chair and through the Policing Partnership Board for Wales.