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Office of the  
**Police & Crime  
Commissioner**  
West Yorkshire

My Reference: OPCC/MBW/NF

Your Reference:

22 December 2017

The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DP

Dear Home Secretary

**HMICFRS Response – 'A Progress Report on the Police Response to Domestic Abuse'**

I am writing to you in response to November's HMICFRS 'Progress Report on the Police Response to Domestic Abuse'. Domestic Abuse is one of sixteen priorities set out in my Police and Crime Plan 2016-21

In the five years since the launch of the 2012 White Ribbon campaign (my first official engagement as the then new PCC for West Yorkshire), the work done to tackle domestic abuse and to support its victims has been considerable. Our partnership (which includes the West Yorkshire Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Board), has campaigned to bring a greater awareness of the harm done through domestic abuse, to establish quality services for victims, to encourage more people to seek out support, and to trial services which address offender behaviour.

November's report highlighted three key areas in which the police approach to domestic abuse should improve at national level; achieving a consistent approach to the assessment of risk; accuracy in the identification and recording of domestic abuse; and taking the opportunity to enforce 'positive action' against perpetrators. In this response I will briefly describe some of the work done here in West Yorkshire to address these national concerns:

**Assessing Risk**

I am particularly pleased to see West Yorkshire Police's approach to identifying vulnerability and the risk of harm cited in your report as an example of good practice. Looking back on 2017, one of the key areas of progress for the police and our partners has been improving

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the assessment of risk through joint-work with Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs). This project is one component of the Police Transformation Fund supported 'Domestic Abuse: A Whole System Approach' collaboration between the seven northeast police services. Second responder cars staffed by a police officer and an IDVA have been in place in three of West Yorkshire's districts since January this year. This service usually operates on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings, and early evaluations have identified a positive impact. We are currently exploring how best to fund the extension of the service to provide partnership cars in all five West Yorkshire districts.

Further to this project, we have invested resource in training our police officers to positively identify and respond to instances of domestic abuse. West Yorkshire Police (WYP) has delivered specific College of Policing training within each district, and further provision has been made to address the correct recognition of coercive control situations.

### **Taking 'Positive Action'**

Professional standards for domestic abuse investigation and case building have been clarified and reinforced with the direction of West Yorkshire Police's Training School. This work complements improvements in the wider criminal justice system made through the Transforming Summary Justice (TSJ) programme. In the last year, domestic abuse cases in West Yorkshire have adopted TSJ processes, which has led to increased conviction and guilty plea rates at cases' first hearing (removing the requirement for a victim to attend court and provide sensitive evidence as part of a trial). I was pleased to see in your report that West Yorkshire is one of the leading areas in England and Wales in the proportion of CPS referrals for domestic abuse which then result in a charge.

Performance data from the Local Criminal Justice Board (which I chair in West Yorkshire) illustrates the scope of the effort needed to reduce domestic abuse in our area. Whilst there is the good news that 44% of all domestic abuse first hearing cases are finalised at the first opportunity (year to September 2017), there has been a small increase in the proportion (45%) of domestic abuse victims who went on to call for assistance again within twelve months. Whilst this indicator may be reflecting an increased propensity for victims to come forward to report offences, in the long-term, it is a statistic which I will be keen to see decrease.

### **Accurately Recording the Scale of Domestic Abuse**

In response to HMIC's 2014 report on Crime Data Integrity, West Yorkshire Police embarked on an intensive programme of reform to its crime recording practices. One of the early milestones of this work was prioritising the correct recording of violent and sexual crimes. As a result, the volume of Domestic Abuse incidents in West Yorkshire has increased - a trend which continues today. WYP have recorded over 4,000 more domestic incidents in 2017 than during the same period in 2016. At the same time, improved recording (combined with an increase in victims' confidence to report offences) means that the domestic abuse repeat victimisation rate stands at 47.0% in November 2017, up from 42.3% in 2016.

West Yorkshire Police's investment in establishing a Force Crime Management Unit (FCMU) is also contributing to improved crime recording. The FCMU currently handles c.800 crime incidents per month, but it is WYP's ambition that it will develop to lead on the accurate coding of crime at the first point of contact.

At the beginning of 2017, we received the 2016 PEEL Effectiveness report which praised improvements made in West Yorkshire Police's response to victims of domestic abuse. The police's efforts are complemented by the achievements of the wider West Yorkshire partnership, which during 2017 have included:

- The June launch of the West Yorkshire Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy - focusing on five key areas; partnership working, preventing violence and abuse, provision of services, support for victims, and pursuing perpetrators. The strategy was later discussed at an event in Bradford where 130 representatives from local emergency services, health care, social work, criminal justice, and the third sectors discussed how best to deliver its priorities.
- Leeds City Council have secured government funding of £463,000 to deliver a West Yorkshire-wide programme to support victims of domestic violence whose complex issues restrict their access to help. A team of staff is being established to embed specialist support throughout domestic violence services, as well as helping to develop referral protocols which will improve joint-working across the county. A quality-mark to promote consistency and best practice in response is also being developed.
- During 2016 and 2017, the OPCC has supported West Yorkshire Police's forced marriage and honour-based abuse campaigns, and through the PCC's Safer Communities Fund<sup>1</sup>, we have been able to directly support local organisations who support those with the courage to seek out victim services. For example, during 2016/17, £5,000 grants were awarded to Radio Asian Fever (Leeds), the Himmat Project (Halifax), and national charity Karma Nirvana to deliver educational and awareness raising activities in West Yorkshire on domestic and honour-based abuse themes.
- Finally, during 2016/17 I allocated £1M of funding to commission a third sector organisation to deliver a Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme for low or medium risk offenders. This project offers one-to-one and small group meetings to help perpetrators understand the causes and impact of their behaviour.

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<sup>1</sup> The Safer Communities Fund is financed through money recovered from criminals under the Proceeds of Crime Act. The December 2017 round takes the total amount of money returned to West Yorkshire communities to over £2M since 2014.

The serious impact which domestic abuse has on victims, children, and families means that the safeguarding of vulnerable people will remain a key priority for my office, our partners, and West Yorkshire Police. Concerted effort to enhance West Yorkshire Police's approach to domestic abuse means I am confident that awareness of the issue (and the correct way to respond to it) is embedded across our police service, whilst our strategic work means a robust network of partners are providing the right support to victims of domestic abuse and violence. I will continue to assess our progress towards our strategic aims during 2018 through my scrutiny of police operations, and of partners' delivery of the objectives of our Police and Crime Plan. I also look forward to reviewing your assessment of West Yorkshire Police's response to domestic abuse reviewed in the forthcoming 2017 PEEL Effectiveness report.

Yours sincerely



Mark Burns-Williamson  
Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire

Copied to:

Chief Constable Dee Collins – West Yorkshire Police