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8th October 2024

Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys response to:

An inspection report on progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations in early adopter police forces

I welcome this inspection report and its recommendations. Operation Soteria Bluestone is an area of policing which I maintain a keen oversight of, regularly meeting with the Detective Chief Inspector with overall responsibility for the implementation of the national operating model (NOM).

The inspection report was discussed at a meeting of my Policing Board on 24th September 2024, prior to which, the Chief Constable was asked to provide me with a written response to the report. Importantly, the Chief Constable was also asked to highlight to me any specific concerns or best practice in relation to the key areas considered by the inspection. A comprehensive response was received, enabling me in turn, to provide this detailed response.

Five of the fourteen recommendations included specific asks of chief constables and police forces, the response to each of which is provided below.

Recommendation 3

By 31 January 2025, all forces should make sure personnel working on rape and other serious sexual offences receive College of Policing approved training on the investigation of word-on-word cases.

Dyfed-Powys Police (DPP) are awaiting the College of Policing's 'word-on-word' training package.

Earlier this year, DPP provided training to detectives who investigate rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO) which covered both 'word-on-word' cases and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance which states that suspects can be convicted even where there is little or no corroboration.

The Chief Constable was able to provide an example which demonstrates the effectiveness of this training: A police officer sought a charging decision on the threshold test from a CPS lawyer. The lawyer queried police evidence stating that it was 'one word against another'. The officer had the confidence to challenge the CPS lawyer, highlighting that there is no such thing as 'word-on-word'.

It is reassuring to see that DPP continues to deliver such important training whilst awaiting the publication of the College of Policing's package.

DPP has however acknowledged a gap in structured continual professional development for RASSO investigators, which has also been identified by the Home Office Joint Unit (HOJU) as an area of improvement for the Force. Nonetheless, it is positive that all detectives have been on the RASSO Investigation Development Programme (RISDP) and all frontline officers will be trained in the new RASSO First Responder course between September and December 2024.

Furthermore, Professionalising Investigation Programme (Level 2) trained detectives will attend the new Sexual Assault Investigation Development Programme (SAIDP2) from September 2025 onwards, and all RASSO investigators will have to undertake SSAIDP before 2029.

Recommendation 5

By 31 July 2025, chief constables should make sure their forces use the new definition of repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspects to identify and manage them.

Recommendation 4 calls for the publication of definitions of repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspects, and accompanying guidance on the management of these suspects by the College of Policing and Soteria Joint Unit. Upon receipt of these, DPP will be able to progress recommendation 5. The Force will review and amend internal policies and guidance to reflect the national definitions and guidance.

It is now commonplace that representatives of my Office are asked to review changes to DPP policies and guidance. We will therefore be able to closely monitor progress against recommendation 5.

In relation to the identification and management of repeat RASSO perpetrators, DPP has acknowledged that they do not currently have a consistent process in place. The HMICFRS inspection report refers to the utilisation of Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordination (MATAAC), which is utilised by several police forces for domestic abuse perpetrators. Whilst DPP has not yet established a MATAAC process for domestic abuse, plans are in place under Op Soteria for the creation of a process whereby repeat RASSO perpetrators will be managed.

This process, included within the Op Soteria Implementation Plan due to receive formal sign off from the Assistant Chief Constable, will initially focus on interdepartmental work before seeking a multi-agency problem solving approach.

Recommendation 7

By 31 January 2025, all chief constables should make sure their forces prioritise identifying and disrupting rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO) suspects. This includes making sure that:

- **forces track, manage and respond effectively to breaches of bail and protection orders in RASSO cases; and**
- **all relevant personnel complete National Operating Model training on using criminal and civil orders to tackle RASSO.**

In March 2024, DPP introduced a central Bluestone Team to help improve the way they engage with and support adult victims of rape. A process is being developed in conjunction with the Bluestone Team, which will see repeat perpetrators discussed at a monthly forum whereby a problem-solving approach will be applied to manage the risk. Currently, DPP utilises Local Policing Area tasking processes to escalate RASSO suspects.

DPP has recruited a Civil Order Co-ordinator who assists with identifying RASSO suspects suitable for civil order application. Through the development of a database of civil order applications, the Co-ordinator is also able to maintain enhanced oversight and management of all civil orders and any subsequent breaches. Representatives from my Office receive regular updates from the Civil Order Co-ordinator on the work being undertaken and progress within the role.

Recognised as good practice by members of the HOJU, DPP drives Op Soteria progress through 6 Pillar leads of a suitable rank who can affect change. The Pillar two lead is responsible for ensuring that the NOM training on using criminal and civil orders to tackle RASSO is completed by all relevant personnel. As such, the training will form part of the Pillar two Implementation Plan.

Recommendation 9

By 31 January 2025, chief constables should make sure their forces have good processes in place for applying to retain DNA and fingerprints to improve their use of [section 63G of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984](#).

DPP has a process in place for the application of DNA and fingerprint retention to the Biometrics Commissioner via the Force Intelligence Bureau (FIB). However, the Force recognises the requirement to increase staff and supervisors' knowledge in relation to its use.

Detective Inspectors are notified by the Police National Computer when case records are to be destroyed, however DPP acknowledges that earlier consideration is required. The Force has identified this as an area of improvement. The Head of Forensics and the Detective Chief Inspector

leading on Op Soteria are due to review the current process, develop communications for officers' awareness, and plan to utilise the Criminal Investigation Department's monthly briefing sessions to upskill investigators.

Recommendation 11

By 31 March 2025, all chief constables should make sure that, as part of adopting the National Operating Model, their forces:

- **develop a rape and other serious sexual offences problem profile;**
- **include the National Operating Model flight deck within their strategic performance monitoring; and**
- **adopt any key performance indicators that are agreed and published by the Soteria Joint Unit.**

DPP publishes an annual Rape Problem Profile. The 2024 Rape Problem Profile, aligning with HMICFRS recommendations, will include data from third party organisations such as New Pathways; a service I commission to provide vital support services for victims of sexual abuse. The 2025 Rape Problem Profile will also be expanded to include 'Other Serious Sexual Assaults'.

Documents within the strategic layer of the NOM are already being utilised by the Force. For example, the 'Procedural Justice to Victims of Sexual Assault' guidance was utilised to develop DPP's Bluestone Team who have assisted considerably in promoting the importance of procedural justice to victims.

Between March 2024 and August 2024, the Bluestone Team reviewed and took action on 26% (65 cases) of recorded rape offences. In relation to 2023 and 2024 data, the Force is pleased to report that victim engagement from the Bluestone Team resulted in a 6% increase in victims supporting the criminal justice process, a 23% increase in victims accepting a referral for support from an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA), and a 24% increase in victims who also support the criminal justice process accepting an ISVA referral.

The HOJU have expressed an interest in the positive work of the Force's Bluestone Team, and DPP's benefits analysis report (currently being drafted) is likely to be shared by the HOJU at a national level. To receive such recognition nationally is outstanding.

The NOM flight deck has also been shared with the Force's Review Team who will consider the guidance as part of the 'investigations' element of the ongoing Force Review.

DPP recognises the importance of the key performance indicators (KPIs) published by the Soteria Joint Unit, which have been shared with the Force's Service Improvement Unit for inclusion in a performance dashboard for senior leaders. Whilst awaiting the development of the performance dashboard, several of the KPIs and assurance mechanisms mentioned within the NOM are being implemented locally, such as the Rape Scrutiny Panels, victim engagement surveys and the monitoring of investigator numbers.

Good practice identified

It is evident from the above recommendation responses that DPP is taking positive strides in the implementation of the NOM.

DPP has provided details of additional processes and practices they have put in place which have been recognised by the HOJU, and it would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to highlight further areas of good work:

- DPP has introduced a Project Manager role specifically for Op Soteria. Given the size of the transformational change needed, this function is key to lead change and deliver success.
- The Force has developed a 'Rape Subject Profile' which is produced by FIB for all rape investigations with a named subject. The HOJU specifically noted that this is a significant transformation in DPP being suspect focused.
- A Procedural Justice approach to victim engagement has been deemed a strength of DPPs, with the HOJU recognising the Force's excellent partnership work with New Pathways and officers' relationship with ISVAs as key strengths.

Continued oversight

I am reassured that DPP have been able to provide such positive examples of good practice and that they are also aware of the areas in which improvements are still required.

The Force is putting processes in place towards improvement, and I will continue to monitor progress in the introduction of the NOM.