
BEV HUGHES

**DEPUTY MAYOR
OF GREATER
MANCHESTER**

Rt Hon Priti Patel,
Secretary of State for the Home Department
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

2nd September 2021

Dear Home Secretary

SUBJECT: A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) response to rape Phase one: From report to police or CPS decision to take no further action.

I write in response to the recent joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) response to rape. I understand this is phase one of the inspection, to examine what happens up to the decision to take no further action.

I welcome the scope of the entire inspection, to provide a focus on the victim and the impact that crimes and criminal justice proceedings can have on them. The need to maintain a focus on the victim at all times is paramount and to that end services must ensure that investigations and procedures are undertaken in a timely and effective manner.

The report highlights some concerns regarding the effective use of early investigative advice, the need for an improved understanding of data and the overall relationship between the CPS and police service. I have noted the findings of the report and will be raising this with Chief Officers locally.

The report makes a number of recommendations for policing. I shall respond to these in turn below:

Recommendation 1 - Immediately, police forces should ensure information on the protected characteristics of rape victims is accurately and consistently recorded.

The report outlines how some victims with protected characteristics face greater barriers when reporting rape. In the absence of a mandatory reporting structure to the Home Office for this data, inconsistency across the police service will continue. I would propose that guidance from the NPCC and the Home Office should be provided to ensure consistency from all forces around what data is obtained and how this data would be used to support victims.

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Recommendation 2 - Police forces and support services should work together at a local level to better understand each other's roles. A co-ordinated approach will help make sure that all available and bespoke wraparound support is offered to the victim throughout every stage of the case. The input of victims and their experiences should play a central role in shaping the support offered.

Greater Manchester Police (GMP) has a well-established partnership approach to responding to rape and serious sexual offences, working closely with local agencies to ensure an effective and meaningful service offer for victims.

In April 2021, I provided funding to launch a Crisis Worker Pilot, with the aim of this to appoint crisis workers to work alongside detectives from two local police districts. The workers will visit and support anyone aged 18 years and above who have reported nonacute rape, with the aim of expediting referrals into the Sexual Assault Referral Centre Independent Sexual Violence Advocate service.

Despite this, it is accepted that more needs to be done to ensure that victims are offered support throughout every stage of the investigation. Greater Manchester Victim Services are currently working with GMP's Criminal Justice Branch on a full review of all the touch points of the victim's journey and this will provide invaluable insights that will help shape future decisions once completed.

In addition, the ongoing review of victims' services is drawing near completion and I will ensure that this report is fed into that process.

Recommendation 3 - Police forces should collect data to record the different stages when, and reasons why, a victim may withdraw support for a case. The Home Office should review the available outcome codes so that the data gathered can help target necessary remedial action and improve victim care.

The ability to understand fully the reasoning behind the withdrawal of support is critical. We must strive towards increasing the confidence of victims in the system and ensuring that the support mechanisms available assist with that process.

There is a need to better equip the police service to be able to conduct that analysis. I understand that the current outcome code system does not inform the force at what stage of the process the victim withdrew their support. I am aware that GMP has previously undertaken a task to analyse the data to gauge findings in this regard.

As the HMICFRS report highlights, this recommendation requires direction from the Home Office to ensure that all forces are recording any new outcome codes in a consistent manner. I would support this view and ask for the Home Office to consider this and respond accordingly.

Recommendation 4 - Immediately, police forces and CPS Areas should work together at a local level to prioritise action to improve the effectiveness of case strategies and action plans, with rigorous target and review dates and a clear escalation and performance management process. The NPCC lead for adult sexual offences and the CPS lead should provide a national framework to help embed this activity.

The report rightly highlighted the need for effective case preparation strategies and action plans, avoiding the need to send case files back and forth between the police service and CPS.

GMP's Criminal Justice Branch works closely with both the CPS and Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS). Overall governance of all cases is in place at a strategic level via the Justice and

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Rehabilitation Executive and the Local Criminal Justice Board.

GMP has a specific Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) Action Plan and a Joint National Action Plan with the CPS. These are governed via a number of partnership meetings.

I understand that the North West CPS is keen to ensure action plans set by reviewing lawyers are effective and that there is a clear escalation process whereby professional challenge between the police and CPS is utilised. I would like to see this process used more and will be speaking with GMP regarding this.

Recommendation 5 - Police forces and the CPS should work together at a local level to introduce appropriate ways to build a cohesive and seamless approach. This should improve relationships, communication and understanding of the roles of each organisation. As a minimum, the following should be included:

- ***considering early investigative advice in every case and recording reasons for not seeking it;***
- ***the investigator and the reviewing prosecutor including their direct telephone and email contact details in all written communication;***
- ***in cases referred to the CPS, a face-to-face meeting (virtual or in person) between the investigator and prosecutor before deciding to take no further action; and***
- ***a clear escalation pathway available to both the police and the CPS in cases where the parties don't agree with decisions, subject to regular reviews to check effectiveness, and local results.***

There is a good working relationship between GMP and CPS North West and the Joint National Action Plan will support this moving forward. In addition, CPS representatives will attend the core meetings held around RASSO and joint training is being built on.

There is a Memorandum of Understanding which has been shared recently with forces and CPS around the early investigative advice. I would like to see an extended use of the early advice scheme and am hopeful that further joint training to officers can support that approach.

In addition, there is defined escalation process in place where appeals can be made on decisions made by the CPS. A proposal has been drafted and submitted to the CPS of an escalation process which would see better communication between police and prosecutors at an early stage to resolve minor points around action plans. Where an agreement cannot be sought, the escalation process will support line managers from both agencies working to resolve concerns.

Recommendation 6 - The police and the CPS, in consultation with commissioned and non-commissioned services and advocates, and victims, should review the current process for communicating to victims the fact that a decision to take no further action has been made. They should implement any changes needed so that these difficult messages are conveyed in a timely way that best suits the victims' needs.

The report highlighted concerns around how victims were informed of decisions where no further action was taken. The police often delivered the CPS letters where this decision had been made and the report identified that these letters varied in quality.

Locally, the subject of the appropriate method of communication has been identified at the Rape Strategy Group and an action is currently in progress whereby CPS North West has commissioned a review into the letters with victims groups. Once the content is agreed, work will be undertaken to assess and monitor feedback from victims.

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In addition, I can confirm that GMP has also been working on a revised letter for RASSO cases which includes details of the Victim Right to Review Scheme. This has looked to incorporate some of the best practice identified by Operation Bluestone in Bristol.

Recommendation 7 - Police forces should ensure investigators understand that victims are entitled to have police decisions not to charge reviewed under the Victims' Right to Review scheme and should periodically review levels of take-up.

The Victim Right to Review scheme is promoted on the GMP website and a database of every request is maintained.

I can confirm that GMP is currently working on improvements to ensure that investigators understand the Victim Right to Review process and can explain this adequately to victims. Victim Services Co-ordinators in Greater Manchester are currently in the process of finalising a booklet which will be sent to all victims who report a crime to GMP. This will encompass areas such as the Victims Code and their rights and entitlements under the code, and also will include a section on Victim Right to Review process.

Recommendation 8 - The College of Policing and NPCC lead for adult sexual offences should work together to review the current training on rape, including the Specialist Sexual Assault Investigators Development Programme (SSAIDP), to make sure that there is appropriate training available to build capability and expertise. This should promote continuous professional development and provide investigators with the right skills and knowledge to deal with reports of rape. Forces should then publish annual SSAIDP attendance figures, and information on their numbers of current qualified RASSO investigators.

At present GMP does not deliver SSAIDP. Having reviewed the course, an assessment was made by GMP that the majority of the content was already being delivered through other course provision. However, there is an ongoing action to approach the College of Policing to review this approach and I will monitor and await the outcome of that discussion.

A Continual Professional Development (CPD) programme for detectives commenced in February 2021 and the force has already delivered first response to rape and joint training with CPS on the updated early advice for RASSO cases. There will be a dedicated CPD day per annum for all officers and staff in relation to vulnerability which will allow for updates and changes in legislation.

I look forward to reviewing the subsequent phase two report, looking at cases that were charged to their conclusion, in due course.

Yours sincerely



Baroness Beverley Hughes
Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester
Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice

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