



**Extract from the draft minutes of the PCC's Accountability and Performance Panel held on Tuesday 15 December 2015 in relation to item 3, Serious Sexual Offences (AP15/80)**

PRESENT:

**Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner**

Liz Hollingworth (Business Administration and Policy Officer), Christopher Jackson (Chief Executive), Tim Passmore (PCC) and Claire Swallow (Deputy Chief Executive).

Chris Bland (Chief Finance Officer for the PCC and Chief Constable).

**Suffolk Constabulary**

Rachel Kearton (Assistant Chief Constable), Steve Jupp (Deputy Chief Constable) and Gareth Wilson (Temporary Chief Constable).

PUBLIC AGENDA

3. SERIOUS SEXUAL OFFENCES

- 3.1 The Panel considered a comprehensive position paper regarding the Constabulary's performance in respect of the recording, investigation and resolution of serious sexual offences (SSO). The Temporary Deputy Chief Constable (T/DCC) said he had taken personal responsibility for overseeing the Constabulary's response to SSO.
- 3.2 The PCC reminded attendees that his decision to increase the council tax precept in 2015 had funded twelve additional staff for the Protecting Vulnerable People (PVP) Directorate to enhance the Constabulary's capacity to respond to crimes against vulnerable people.
- 3.3 The Deputy Chief Executive advised the Panel that the primary reason for considering this issue was that there needed to a full briefing about the position in respect of the increase in serious sexual offences and the PCC needed to be satisfied that the Constabulary's performance in addressing this area was acceptable.
- 3.4 The number of rape and serious sexual offences reported to the police has been increasing since October 2012. The increase has been consistent across all 43 forces in England and Wales and has accelerated over the last 18-24 months. There appears to be no sign of abatement. Suffolk saw an increase of 61% between April and October 2015 against the same period in 2014. Comparison with the three year average shows an increase of 103%. Such changes in the nature of reporting have presented significant challenges.

- 3.5 The paper highlighted one of the conclusions of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Rape Monitoring Group in its report of October 2015.
- "Historically, success in police rape investigations has been judged by the proportion of cases where charges have been authorised. In the past, this has been referred to nationally as the summons rate and forces have been compared and judged by this data. While charging, and more vitally, convicting offenders is an extremely important outcome and is the focus of investigators, it should not be regarded as the only successful outcome for survivors of these crimes".*
- 3.6 The T/Chief Constable confirmed that the department was able to manage the current workload levels, however a report on expected demand and resourcing would be sent to the PCC to inform future precept decisions.
- 3.7 The T/DCC said that in addition to the increased resource in the past year, there had been an emphasis on changing the culture across the Constabulary to increase protection of vulnerable people, develop specialist skillsets and engage more with partners.
- 3.8 When considering the issue of quality of investigations the T/DCC said his professional judgement was that investigations were not flawed and the report provided evidence to support this.
- The College of Police issues an accreditation following an assessment of skills across the Constabulary. Individual officers are trained on national courses with the next investigatory training courses being undertaken in January and February 2016.
  - The T/DCC said he was responsible for holding two Detective Chief Inspectors and Detective Superintendent (PVP) to account on SSO. There was a high level of management leadership and the T/DCC assessed progress against the action plan.
  - The data provided in the report on successful prosecutions also supported the conclusion that investigations were not flawed.
  - Workforce competence was monitored to ensure that there was sufficient expertise within the Crime Investigations Department and PVP departments. Dedicated and specialist experience was still necessary but additional training was being undertaken to ensure the combined team was omni-competent and therefore able to flexibly deal with all areas of demand including SSO.
  - Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) had reported positively on the reduction in workload and changing culture in the workforce.
  - Additionally, no concerns had been raised in relation to investigations from the Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB), the Chief of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) or via feedback directly from court hearings.
  - The report showed that although Suffolk had a low rate of cases referred to CPS as a percentage of the total number of rape allegations the charge rate for those submitted was the highest of the MSG. Similarly the conviction rates for Suffolk were the highest. This indicates that it is possible that the evidential bar for SSO cases to be referred for prosecution was very high.
- 3.9 The T/DCC was confident that there would be an up-lift in performance and would continue to report on this at Accountability and Performance Panel meetings.
- 3.10 The Chief Executive asked whether there was excessive workforce churn in investigation which would undermine the investment being made. The T/DCC said that, as junior officers preferred to stay in response roles, recruitment into investigation roles was difficult. There was some turnover which had the positive impact of officers with investigation skills moving into other areas of the organisation but he was confident the PVP department was not losing skills at an excessive rate.

- 3.11 The Deputy Chief Executive reminded the Panel that when considering the matter of serious sexual offences it was also vital to be satisfied that victims received good levels of support that were tailored to their needs. When asked what support there was for victims if the case did not proceed through investigation or to court, the T/DCC said that it was important that the wishes of the victim were central to investigation and prosecution, bearing in mind safeguarding responsibilities. Victims were referred to services provided by partners if they did not want to proceed with investigation or if the case could not proceed for evidential reasons.
- 3.12 Where a victim did not want to report to the police, but was however receiving assistance from the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), evidential samples could be retained to ensure the victim could engage with the police at a later date.
- 3.13 The Deputy Chief Executive asked the Constabulary to provide feedback on domestic abuse and serious sexual offences in north Suffolk as she was concerned there appeared to be discrepancies between police data and the demand seen by service providers. The T/DCC said he would investigate the reasons for this.
- Action: The T/DCC to provide a response on the discrepancy between Constabulary data on domestic abuse cases in North Suffolk and demand experienced by DA service providers.**
- 3.14 After consideration of the Constabulary's report and the additional information provided during the debate, the Panel concluded that:
- It was satisfied that, as reported by the Constabulary, that the increases in reports were in line with the increases in reports experienced by other forces.
  - In respect of investigations, there have been no issues highlighted by any partners in the criminal justice areas whether through the Local Criminal Justice Board or directly from other partners.
  - That the Constabulary's capacity was adequate to satisfy current demands.
  - If demand continued to rise the Constabulary may submit a bid for additional investigative resources.
  - That there was adequate capability and experience within the Constabulary to investigate reports and that the Constabulary was accredited by the College of Policing.
  - The perceived high evidential bar required in order to proceed to court was noted. It was also noted that this was being reviewed.
  - The current suite of performance measures, including those for Serious Sexual Offences, would naturally be reconsidered when the Police and Crime Plan is next reviewed.
- 3.15 The PCC said it would helpful to list the agencies involved with the oversight of investigation of complex abuse against children (section 7.11 of the report). The T/Chief Constable assured the PCC the Constabulary was working with the relevant organisations.
- 3.16 The PCC said he had noted the full page advert about rape and sexual consent in the East Anglian Daily Times. The T/DCC said that this was a Christmas campaign focussing on education and prevention and he would promote continual co-ordination of communication between the Constabulary and OPCC.

