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CHIEF CONSTABLE

**POLICE HEADQUARTERS**

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19<sup>th</sup> January 2023

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Dear Mrs Louise Hunt – HM Senior Coroner for Birmingham and Solihull

**Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Further Deaths – Raneem Oudeh and Khaola Saleem**

I write in response to the Prevention of future death report dated the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2022 which followed from the inquest of Raneem Oudeh and Khaola Saleem. The report identified six key areas which we are addressing below.

**General understanding of the nuances of domestic abuse and the WMP Domestic abuse policy**

West Midlands Police (WMP) is due to publish a new Domestic Abuse (DA) policy early this year. The policy has been reviewed and sent out for consultation with key stakeholders across the force. We are in the process of cross referencing the issues highlighted in this preventing future deaths report before further consultation, sign off and then publication. The new policy is in a more accessible format than the previous version, with a shorter core policy document supported by 11 'procedural guidance' documents that cover specific aspects of the policing response to DA, including a document for all key areas i.e. Response Officers and call handlers. Within the policy for the initial response is an 'initial response action checklist' that outlines key actions for staff. The launch of the revised policy will be accompanied by a tailored communication and briefing package to ensure that all staff are fully informed of the changes. Through our audit and review processes, undertaken on a quarterly basis, we will ensure that the policy is being adhered to and this is also subject to review during inspections from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS).

Since April 2021, crimes have been recorded and managed on the 'Connect' system. Connect combines the functions of several systems that were in operation in 2018, including crime recording and investigation, custody and briefing. The Connect system includes built-in mandatory question sets for officers to complete when they record a crime. These question sets help to guide officers through the process, prompting them with questions to capture and consider all of the relevant information.

WMP was a pilot force for the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) tool, which has now replaced the DASH form as the nationally recommended DA risk assessment. The DARA is considered to give an increased focus on coercive and controlling behaviour so that officers consider the offender's behaviour holistically rather than considering individual incidents in isolation. This improves the risk assessment of DA crime and drives proactive interventions against offenders.

WMP have also introduced Log Closure, Crime Services and Review and Allocation Teams. All of these functions have a role in quality checking our response to DA to ensure that all recordable offences have been recorded as crimes and that the DARA risk grade has been accurately assessed. These checks, alongside frontline supervisory activity, are designed to ensure that our response is in line with the force policy and national guidance so that we investigate offences and safeguard victims effectively.

## **Recording of key information to ensure there is one version of the truth**

In 2020, the force replaced Oasis, the old Command and Control system that was in use in 2018, with the new Control Works system. The command and control system is used across the force to record calls for service, dispatch officers and record attendance and progress at incidents. The Control works system has a risk assessment template built in for the call handler to complete. This risk assessment guides the call handler to consider various aspects of the incident and to include the relevant information to support the attending officers. Unlike the Oasis system, Control works is integrated with our intelligence system and provides a greater amount of information to inform the risk assessment process, without the need to check multiple systems. The system can include details of previous incidents and person details to aid officers in decision making. This ease of operation, better enables the call handlers to accurately capture and record key information to inform the responding officers.

The Connect system links people and locations to offences and allows for much quicker and easier research of previous domestic abuse incidents, listing all of the crimes that the individuals are linked to. The system also displays all of the previous DARA grading relating to the victim, thereby highlighting at a glance if the victim has been subject of repeat abuse. The system uses a series of 'decision trees' and 'question sets' to assist the officers when they record a crime. An 'Initial Investigation' question set is completed for each investigation by the recording officer and prompts them to record detailed information about the incident, for instance the victim's account, scene management, witness details, house to house enquiries etc. This helps to ensure that all relevant information is recorded to fully inform other staff who may subsequently deal with the investigation. Investigating officers are also directed through a separate 'investigation checklist', that is not part of Connect, to listen to the 999 call and watch any available Body Worn Video footage where relevant so that they get a better understanding of what has taken place, the demeanour of the parties and to ensure they explore all available investigative opportunities.

The log closure team was created to ensure that all offences arising out of a domestic incident log are reviewed and accurately recorded in line with Home Office Counting Rules. The Victim Services Assessment team (VSA) conduct audits in various areas of business within WMP. In March 2022 during an audit of violence against women and girls, 20 cases were dip sampled and had the initial call listened to. In 20 (100%) of the cases, the call reflected the initial report correctly. Of the 20 calls listened to a good open style of questioning was used and accurate accounts were recorded in the respective logs.

## **Work load of supervising sergeants**

In our response dated the 28<sup>th</sup> December 2022, we detailed the work of the Review and Allocation Team (R&A) that was set up in the Public Protection Unit (PPU) department restructure in February 2019. The R&A team removes a significant proportion of the inbox management work that used to be completed by the Domestic Abuse Team supervisors, alongside their other duties. The R&A team currently manage 40-50% of the DA crime that in 2018, the investigation supervisors would have had to review and process.

The restructure also took away complex work that would have been investigated by the Domestic Abuse supervisors in 2018. Rapes, other penetrative sexual offences and honour-based abuse matters are now dealt with by the Adult Complex teams. These offences, by their nature, take a significant amount of time to review and manage effectively. One of the main aims and benefits of the restructure was to separate these offences from the volume of DA reports so that the supervisors were not managing these complex investigations alongside a significant number of other reports and persons in custody.

Nevertheless, the number of Detective Sergeants on the Adult Investigation Teams has been maintained when compared with those on the Domestic Abuse Teams in 2018. Who were not solely managing safeguarding staff, with 36 Sergeants now compared to 37 then. This allows for a daily division of responsibility between the team Sergeants in each area, with one generally managing persons in custody, another reviewing the new recorded offences and, where available, a third reviewing ongoing investigations. The Connect system facilitates the investigative reviews with a designated review section, supervisor review reminder tasks every 28 days for ongoing investigations, and a supervisors' DARA review template. For more complex investigations an action and tasking facility allows for individual investigative enquiries to be allocated and monitored. The process is further supported by manager review tasks that generate every 3 months on each report and ensure appropriate scrutiny by the first line supervisor's manager, normally an Inspector, for protracted investigations.

The new DA policy gives guidance to supervisors on what actions are expected for DA investigations and includes the investigative checklist that has already been mentioned. Whilst DA investigation remains a busy and complex area of work, the new structure, additional resourcing, improved IT and daily organisation means that the demand is managed in a controlled and safe manner.

**Training, Officers not being aware of key concepts in the WMP domestic abuse policy and/or having specialist training with no accurate list of training received by officers and auditing of its effectiveness**

We are continually seeking to improving officer's awareness of DA and vulnerability. It is a thread that runs through our training with new and current officers. During 2018 and 2019 approximately 900 Response officers were given the one-day DA Matters training course delivered by Safe Lives, who are a nationally recognised DA training provider recommended by the College of Policing. We continue to seek funding for further training by Safe Lives, which we are hoping to deliver to all frontline uniformed staff and investigation staff who deal with DA.

A vulnerability training course was also rolled out for all WMP operational staff in 2021, as part of the Operation Sentinel vulnerability programme, to raise awareness of what constitutes vulnerability and what action should be taken to protect vulnerable people. The programme works through a series of modules and will be completed by every officer.

As part of the Policing Education Qualification Framework (PEQF) curriculum DA is covered in various places throughout Year 1 & 2 of a student officer's journey. It is covered in detail through the Vulnerability & Risk section as well as the PPU section. The key topic areas covered are:

- Defining 'vulnerability' in the context of operational policing
- The personal aspect of vulnerability and trauma
- Influences of risk factors on those who are vulnerable
- Importance of vulnerable people being appropriately supported by the police
- National drivers for providing a professional and ethical service to individuals who are, or may be, vulnerable, have suffered harm or be at risk of harm
- Understanding the breadth of abuse incidents
- Identify a potential public protection incident when acting as a first responder to an unrelated incident
- Take appropriate initial actions when responding to a public protection incident

Since 2019 WMP have recruited over 2000 new officers under the Police Education Qualification Framework and Degree Holder Entry Programme. The new recruits undertake a 2 or 3 year student officer programme; during which time they complete a number of rotations through Response, Neighbourhood and Investigative departments. This includes a mandatory 10-week tutored period on an investigative department and at least one further investigation rotation lasting between 12 weeks and 12 months, and in some cases two further investigation rotations. In each rotation, one third of the students are posted into the PPU, normally onto the Adult Investigation Teams, where they gain a good understanding of investigating DA offences. They are then able to take this learning with them when they rotate back into uniform roles.

The students are subject of on-going assessment throughout the period of the qualification, comprising both academic assessment by our partner university and work-based assessment, either by their police tutor or a police work based assessor. The students must pass these assessments in order to progress with the programme and ultimately to be accredited as a substantive police officer.

The Learning and Development (L&D) department have increased their resource to drive some fundamental changes to the way they plan and deliver evaluation into the effectiveness of training. This change will see a move from doing basic Level 1 & 2 evaluation (review of environment on the day and trainer delivery etc), to level 3 type evaluation giving better benchmarking data and more robust consideration of how the learning and its impact can be measured. They are setting up a commissioning governance process which will also allow for a more robust tracking and escalation of evaluation outcomes. The number of research officers that undertake evaluation work has also been increased to three, which will not only increase evaluation capacity, but also allow L&D to move forward into analysing behavioural and organisational impact as a result of the learning solutions implemented by WMP. The evaluation of two courses is currently being piloted using the benefits and evaluation calculator with a plan to extend the use of this methodology to further courses. The benefits and evaluation calculator provide a template that captures both tangible and intangible benefits provided by the learning solution.

Training is provided across a number of different platforms, from classroom based delivered by L&D, College learn on line, continued professional development (CPD) sessions, work based and others. **An absence of a College of Policing specialist course on Domestic Abuse**

All officers receive core training for investigation through the national Professionalising Investigations Programme (PIP) at level 1 for volume and priority crime and level 2 for those investigating more serious and complex crime. There is a national curriculum, which builds on the core skills, for investigating specific crime types including domestic abuse, and supporting resources from the College including: DA Matters for first responders (FR) with a focus on controlling and coercive behaviour and evidencing such cases; DA Matters for Champions/mentors which builds on the FR with enhanced knowledge of the dynamics of DA and risk; Coercive Control video and classroom course; and domestic abuse risk identification, assessment and management training.

Domestic abuse is embedded in other linked programmes including Vulnerability and Risk, Public Protection learning programme, Rape and Sexual offences investigation skills.

The College is currently working with National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) to identify the underuse of legislation for 'behavioural 'type offences such as controlling and coercive behaviour in relationships, with a view to improving investigation and prosecution of such cases and will develop a programme to support forces in this aspect.

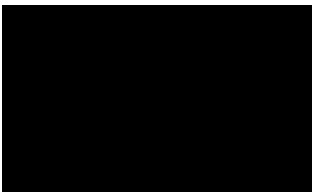
**WMP use of DVPN (Domestic violence protection notice) and DVPO (Domestic violence protection orders)- Evidence at the inquest that out of 40,000 – 50,000 domestic abuse incidents each year only 400-430 DVPNs or DVPOs were obtained**

Within the calendar year of 2022 there were 66,001 recorded DA crimes within WMP. From this 33,445 were within the offence category, violence against the person which are likely to be offences which could meet the DVPN criteria. Due to crime recording in line with home office counting rules there are also multiple crimes often recorded against one victim. It is important to note that a DVPN is not always suitable, for example when the perpetrator has been charged with an offence or on police bail.

In February 2019 WMP created a team of one supervisor and three staff members to focus on DVPN's. This team work alongside the DA teams to identify and support them with opportunities for DVPN's. WMP currently have an improvement plan in place with the objective to increase our number of DVPNs across the department. We recognise the value of civil orders and the benefit they can have on victims of DA. The civil orders team are working with DA investigators to identify opportunities to increase our use of the orders. This includes training and awareness, as well as working across the teams to support applications. An improvement plan has been created and is tracked through the PPU management team. Also, this is tracked through department quarterly performance reviews and performance panel meetings to senior leaders. DVPN/Os are one of a range of other civil interventions that can be used to safeguard victims.

Further to the inquest WMP has conducted a review of the issues raised within the PFD's and conducted a series of workshops with the key departments namely, PPU, Response, Contact and L&D. The focus of the workshops has been to understand the issues raised and set recommendations that can have SMART actions that will improve and address the concerns identified. There are now nine key recommendations supported by 27 actions which will be tracked through the Vulnerability and Improvement Board, chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) Crime to ensure progress. I hope that the above response provides you with assurance of the steps taken by the force since 2018 in responding to reports of DA and its continued search for ways to improve the service we offer to our communities.

Yours sincerely



**Chief Constable**