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27 January 2023

Dear Ms Hunt,

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

I write in response to your Prevention of Future Death Reports dated the 24th November 2022, which followed from the inquest of Raneem Oudeh and Khaola Saleem. The murders of Raneem and Khaola shocked the country. On 22 November 2022, I made the following statement at my public Strategic Policing and Crime Board:

“In August 2018, Raneem Oudeh and Khaola Saleem were brutally murdered. My thoughts are with the victims and their family. In December 2018, Raneem’s estranged husband was convicted of their double murder and jailed for life with a minimum of 32 years.

On 18 November, a Birmingham Coroner’s Court concluded, amongst other matters, that the failings of West Midlands Police “materially contributed to their deaths”; officers breached the Force’s domestic abuse policy on a number of occasions; failed to carry out effective investigations into potential offences; and failed to take sufficient steps to safeguard Raneem.

West Midlands Police have acknowledged the murders were amongst the most shocking and appalling crimes in our region in recent years and have rightly apologised and accepted that more could have been done to protect Raneem from the campaign of domestic abuse that she suffered in the months leading up to her death at the hands of the man who would go on to kill her and her mother.

Since my election in May 2021, the need to prevent and tackle violence against women and girls and domestic abuse has always been a top priority. My Police and Crime Plan makes it clear that West Midlands Police must impose bail conditions on perpetrators, rather than releasing under investigation, make full use of civil protection orders and restraining orders and make arrests for breach of non-molestation orders.

My Victims Commissioner is working tirelessly, as a powerful advocate for the rights and welfare of victims of Domestic Abuse; I have increased the number of Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advocates from 31 to 82; In December 2021, I launched the No Excuse for Abuse campaign; and

I continue to invest, to ensure that the victims of domestic abuse have access to the right support, in the right place and at the right time.

In addition to all of this, I will be working with West Midlands Police to address the particular conclusions of the Coroner and to hold West Midlands Police to account, to ensure that everything possible - has been done, is being done and will continue to be done, to ensure that there is no repetition of the failings identified in Raneem and Khaola's case and to prevent and tackle violence against women and girls and domestic abuse."

I see it as my responsibility to ensure that, with the resources available, West Midlands Police is as efficient and effective as possible in preventing and tackling domestic abuse and bringing perpetrators to justice. I welcome the response submitted by Chief Constable Craig Guildford, which sets out the improvements to operational practice relating to Domestic Abuse.

I offer the following as evidence of wider efforts to prevent and tackle Violence Against Women and Girls ('VAWG') generally, and domestic abuse specifically, focusing on my role as a Police and Crime Commissioner to: a) set the strategic direction for West Midlands Police; b) hold the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police to account; c) work collaboratively with community safety, criminal justice and victim services partners; and d) be a civic leader on matters relating to policing, crime and community safety.

### **Strategic direction and holding to account**

As set out in my Police and Crime Plan 2021-2025, which I launched on 1 November 2021, "Combatting violence against women and girls and domestic abuse is a priority". The Plan includes commitments to work with West Midlands Police to:

- Improve the training and awareness for new and existing officers on violence against women and girls and domestic abuse, to ensure a consistent high-quality response, incorporating feedback from victims;
- Extend the use of independent advocates such as Independent Domestic Violence Advocates' and Independent Sexual Violence Advocates and increase the number of these advocates with specialist training, for example to support LGBT+ victims;
- Ensure police impose bail conditions on alleged perpetrators of domestic abuse;
- Use all available civil protection orders, ensuring breaches are dealt with proportionately, including use of powers of arrest;
- Support the use of robust domestic abuse perpetrator programmes to challenge and change behaviour;
- Champion a change in legislation to record misogyny as a hate crime as recommended by Citizens UK;
- Ensure good policing plays its part in reducing vulnerability in the night-time economy;
- Increase the proportion of all VAWG crimes where an offender is brought to justice;
- Ensure that officers understand, identify, but never take advantage of vulnerability.
- Commission innovative programmes to support the holistic needs of Domestic Abuse survivors back into work through specialist advocacy and support.

Progress against these objectives is recorded via data, relevant to the following objectives:

- Reduce the number of outstanding suspects for Domestic Abuse offences awaiting investigation
- Reduce the repeat rates for Domestic Abuse offences, both in terms of repeat offenders and victims.
- Reduce the length of time Rape investigations take within West Midlands Police
- Reduce the proportion of DA cases where the suspect is released under investigation rather than being bailed with conditions
- Increase the use of civil protection orders
- Increase the proportion of breaches of civil protection orders which result in an arrest

- Increase the number of Domestic Abuse offenders who are managed through IOM/ Community Probation.
- Monitor the number of reports via the National Referral Mechanism which relate to Modern Slavery and work to build a more accurate picture of Modern Slavery within the West Midlands

Furthermore, the Police and Crime Plan commits to reducing the proportion of cases where a perpetrator has been identified, but the victim declines to support the investigation, but also increasing the "positive outcome" rate for Domestic Abuse cases, that is where an offender is charged. As the Plan sets out:

"Improving the response for victims requires action across the criminal justice system. In cases of Domestic Abuse and RASSO, where attrition is particularly high, a more sustained effort is needed. I will ensure West Midlands Police play its part via increased "outcome rates", meaning that the percentage of recorded cases that lead to a charge or some other positive outcome should increase. I want to see fewer instances where evidential problems prevent a charge being brought, and fewer instances where cases are discontinued because the victim does not support a prosecution. I will work with partners to ensure appropriate use of restraining orders in such cases."

The measures are as follows:

- Identify the reasons for and ultimately reduce the number of investigations which are discontinued due to insufficient evidence where the victim supports police action (Crime Recording Outcome 15) and where victims feel unable to support police action (Crime Recording Outcome 16)
- Increase the positive outcome rates for Domestic Abuse, Rape, and Stalking and Harassment offences above levels where they have typically been historically:
  - Domestic Abuse > 6%
  - Rape > 5%
  - Stalking and Harassment > 8%

Performance against all these measures is reported quarterly, in public reports to the Strategic Policing and Crime Board and monthly, to meetings I hold with the Chief Constable.

A variety of factors, most notably changes to recording practice, have seen rates of recorded Domestic Abuse increase in the West Midlands and elsewhere. In 2018, approximately 500 VAWG offences were recorded per 100,000 of population. This was the lowest rate in the group of police forces similar to the West Midlands. This climbed to approximately 2,400 offences per 100,000 in early 2022, which is more in line with similar increase seen in comparable areas.

Whilst crime recording standards have been maintained, it is notable that rates of recorded VAWG have since fallen to approximately 2,300 offences per 100,000 of population, a rate almost identical to that in Greater Manchester. This suggests that crime recording practices in the West Midlands are aligned to practice elsewhere, particularly given that while the number of recorded crimes pertaining to Domestic Abuse has increased significantly, the number of calls for service relating to Domestic Abuse has not.

### **Working in partnership and campaigning for change**

In order to amplify and reinforce the unacceptability of VAWG, my office has initiated and supported various publicity campaigns in order to drive positive behaviour change. These include, amongst others, the #NoExcuseForAbuse campaign, which started back in 2020 and has recently been expanded and bespoke campaigns during the recent World Cup.

I have appointed [REDACTED] as the first West Midlands Victims Commissioner, and [REDACTED] works with partners across the third sector and criminal justice, to prevent and effectively respond to these issues. This has included establishing an Ending Male Violence Against Women

and Girls Alliance, that brings together a range of stakeholders and will form part of our broader response to the new statutory Serious Violence Duty.

We have recently launched a selection process to find a partner for our refreshed Domestic Violence Perpetrator Programme, which will work to reduce domestic violence reoffending. We have also commissioned and published research, into how the cost of living crisis impacts particularly on victims of domestic abuse. My office has commissioned specialist support services for older victims of DA and victims who are LGBTQ+, and increased the number of Independent Domestic Violence Advocates and Sexual Violence Advocates in the West Midlands from 31 to 82.

As set out in Chief Constable Guildford's response, the influx of new Officers into policing since 2020 is relevant to the ability of West Midlands Police to respond to Domestic Abuse cases. Whilst the increase is welcome, it remains the case that by March 2023, West Midlands Police will have approximately 1,000 fewer Officers than it did in 2010, while forces in lower crime, lower demand areas now have more Officers than at any time in their history. That is entirely perverse and irrational. In addition, flaws in the implementation of the government's police funding formula, mean that West Midlands Police is further disadvantaged and does not receive its full funding allocation, costing our area £40m a year in lost police funding. On 14 December 2022, the government announced that West Midlands is to receive the fifth worst Police Grant Settlement in the country.

This disadvantage is compounded by ill-advised, misconceived and reckless cuts imposed on essential preventative public services and the criminal justice system, which have systematically undermined our criminal justice system and amongst other matters, led to extended backlogs in the Crown Courts, making it harder for cases to come to trial and increasing the risk of victim and witness attrition.

## **Conclusion**

West Midlands Police continues to make significant efforts to improve its response to Domestic Abuse. Improved crime recording practice has significantly increased the number of incidents coming to police attention, also suggesting greater public confidence to report and a wider sense of the unacceptability of violence in relationships. There remains much to do and constant and unremitting action is required.

West Midlands Police lacks the resources it needs, to address the demands it faces and operational practice must continue to improve. Actions to prevent Domestic Abuse, raise public awareness, and work in partnership across community safety, are in place and are progressing.

The incidence of Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic Abuse in our society remains a cause for constant serious concern and illustrates the need for a comprehensive response, nationally, regionally and locally. As Police and Crime Commissioner, I remain committed to ensuring the effective prevention and tackling of VAWG and Domestic Abuse is a top priority for West Midlands Police and partners.

Yours sincerely,



  
**Police and Crime Commissioner**