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CHIEF CONSTABLE

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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 am writing to follow up on our letter to you dated 11th November 2022, and I would now like to provide a more comprehensive update for you to your Regulation 28 Report dated 3 November 2022, arising from the inquest of Raneem Oudeh and Khaola Saleem. In your report you raised that the inquest heard evidence that the domestic abuse team within the Public Protection Unit were seriously short staffed in 2018 and the problem continues with cases not being investigated due to lack of resources in the department.

Further areas of concern raised in the inquest will be addressed in the response to the second regulation 28 notice.

Changes in PPU structure and staffing since 2018

The Public Protection Department (PPU) was restructured in 2019. One of the reasons the new structure was put in place, was because it was identified that the Domestic Abuse Teams found it difficult to manage complex investigations alongside high volume DA reports and individuals in custody with the associated statutory time constraints.

The Domestic Abuse Teams were replaced by Adult Investigation Teams and Adult Complex Investigation Teams. The Adult Complex Investigation Teams investigate the most serious and protracted cases including attempt murder, rape and honour-based violence offences. This allows the Adult Investigation Teams to focus on the volume of Domestic Abuse (DA) offences which includes assaults and harassment.

Resources

The number of staff allocated to DA investigation has increased since August 2018. The strength of the Domestic Abuse Teams in August 2018 was 308 full time equivalent officers and police staff. The police staff included our Police Staff Investigating Officers (PSIO) and police staff within the Safeguarding Teams. For the Coventry and Solihull team it was 53 officers and staff.

Now the number of police officers and staff allocated to managing DA across the West Midlands region is 441. This number includes both police officers and staff working in the Adult Investigation Teams, Safeguarding Teams and the Civil Interventions Team, who manage civil orders relating to DA. The figure can vary slightly on a weekly basis owing to individual staff movement and also includes 30 tutored students, who come into the PPU as part of their training rotations.

The staffing of the Eastern Adult Investigation Team (Previously the Coventry and Solihull team) is now 73 officers and staff. An internal audit by the Office of Police Crime Commissioner (OPCC), completed in 2022, considered that the staff have a manageable volume of work.



In comparing staff numbers in August 2018 to current levels this shows a 43% increase for DA staffing across the West Midlands, and a 37% uplift in staffing for the Eastern area which directly covers Coventry and Solihull. In addition to this, there are also officers and staff on the Adult Complex Teams who investigate the most serious DA offences as already outlined.

Review and Allocation Team

The Review and Allocation Team (R&A) was established within the PPU department restructure in 2019 and is responsible for reviewing all crime reports that go to the Adult Investigation Teams. One of the purposes of the R&A team is to ensure a consistent and high-quality approach to the initial assessment and allocation of DA offences. They also remove this function from the investigation Sergeants, affording those Sergeants greater time and focus to manage ongoing investigations and persons in custody.

The R&A team is made up of three teams that review each crime and use a bespoke template to determine the progress of the investigation. If there are further lines of investigation the report is allocated to one of the investigation teams to progress. In some cases, further information is required from the victim in order to inform the decision and the R&A team will facilitate this. The R&A team will check the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA) grading and any history of previous incidents. This is to ensure the correct risk grade has been determined before a report is filed or allocated for further investigation. In addition, the R&A team can re-grade the risk where appropriate to do so.

The decision to take further Criminal Justice action must involve consideration of the proportionality and necessity of doing so. However, the availability and capacity of staff on the PPU investigation teams is not a determining factor on whether a report may be filed and the R&A team sit independently of the DA investigation teams.

The R&A Inspector is responsible for managing the performance of the team and ensuring that appropriate filing and allocation decisions are being made. The supervisory team carry out periodic sampling of the reports to quality assure the decision making and discuss themes and issues to ensure a consistent approach. The Inspector carries this out as a quarterly review. A sample of three reports per officer are reviewed by the supervisory team who will consider templates being completed and consistency of allocations/decision making. Feedback is then given back to the teams with the findings.

Scrutiny Panel

In July 2022 a Scrutiny Panel was formed to help to quality assure our crime review processes, where external partners from the Domestic Abuse Independent Advisory Group review reports filed by the R&A team with an Inspector. The Panel's function is to advise on the appropriateness of the decision making and to promote best practice across the teams. Feedback is disseminated as appropriate and the insights used to improve wider practice. Following the inaugural meeting of the Panel, additional guidance was added to the draft R&A procedural guidance document to assist staff in better rationalising their allocation and filing decisions. The group has met again in December where a further selection of cases were reviewed and learning identified, which will be subject of feedback. The group have now agreed to meet three times during a calendar year.



Screening process

Alongside the R&A process, all DA crime reports that are allocated to the Adult Investigation Teams are screened to determine whether an immediate arrest of the suspect is required, considering the risk posed by the suspect and Code G of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. This process takes place every morning to screen all relevant reports from the previous 24 hours.

Suspects who are not arrested are monitored through local tracking documents to ensure that enquiries continue to be made to locate and detain them. There is management scrutiny of the tracking documents and intervention with the relevant Neighbourhood Policing Unit (NPU) if the number of outstanding suspects goes above the agreed threshold levels with that NPU. This threshold level is different in each NPU given their size and the volume of DA reports that are recorded for the geographical location. Overall DA suspect management is subjected to scrutiny by the PPU senior management and a Force wide monthly performance panel review process.

Initial Investigative Reviews

The Adult Investigation Team Sergeants review the crime reports sent to them by the R&A Team each shift to ensure that reports are triaged and allocated expeditiously. The Sergeants complete a written review, set investigative actions and allocate the reports to individual officers and staff on their teams.

The Sergeants' reviews, action setting and allocations are subject to a quarterly audit by the relevant Detective Chief Inspector as well as a further quarterly review led by the PPU Policy Manager who undertakes a full review of a dip sample of crimes to assess the quality of the supervisory input. This has led to an improvement in utilising a supervisor template, linked to THRIVE+, for all supervisors.

Periodic reviews

The Adult Investigation Team Sergeants are responsible for completing periodic reviews of ongoing investigations at least every 28 days. The CONNECT system, which is used to manage investigations, generates a task reminder to help manage this process. Where possible reviews are completed as part of a discussion with the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the investigation to monitor what progress has been made and set further investigative actions where required. The Sergeants also review and manage all investigations when a suspect is in custody.

The Sergeants must continually assess whether there is a likelihood that an investigation will meet the current Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) charging test. If it is met, the matter will be referred to the CPS to determine whether charges are appropriate or, in certain circumstances, the suspect may be offered an Out of Court Disposal (O OCD). O OCDs are available in certain circumstances in standard and medium risk cases (taken from the DARA), where the victim is supportive of this outcome and the suspect has admitted their involvement. The O OCD may require the suspect to undertake a DA perpetrator programme and/or to address underlining contributory factors such as drug/alcohol misuse.



In circumstances where the Sergeant deems that the test is not met and there is no likelihood that it will be met after proportionate enquiries, the Sergeant will file the report. The Sergeants follow an investigation and filing checklist to assist them in this determination. The checklist includes consideration as to whether an Evidence Led Prosecution can be made. A quarterly audit is undertaken of filed matters. In addition, there is consideration of utilising civil orders including Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs) to protect the victim.

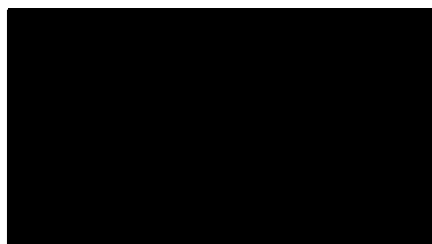
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and PPU meeting

In 2022 a scrutiny panel was established, consisting of a CPS lawyer and a senior police manager in PPU, to review five instances where a decision has been made to take no further action by the police and five instances where a CPS prosecutor has made the decision to take no further action in order to identify any points of learning and best practice. The investigation team Inspectors also review decisions to take no further action by their Sergeants on a monthly basis as part of general team management.

Conclusion

The management of DA reports requires input from a number of different Force departments, working effectively together. DA reports are given particular scrutiny and priority because of the inherent vulnerability and risk that they involve. Each point in the process is subject of supervisory scrutiny in order to maximise the quality of the policing response and a monthly DA Performance meeting is chaired by the DA Superintendent lead to monitor and manage performance at a departmental level.

I hope that the above information offers reassurance that DA investigation in the West Midlands Police PPU is effectively managed and resourced and that decisions to file reports of DA are made in a proper manner with an appropriate level of scrutiny. The force is committed to ensuring that victims of DA receive a high quality of service and understands that this requires the allocation of sufficient suitably trained staff.



[Redacted name]

Chief Constable