

Date:



22 January 2024

Dear Mr Kewley

I am writing in response to your report dated 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023, following the inquest into the death of Gracie Spinks on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021 in Derbyshire. We welcome the opportunity to update you on the changes the force has made to improve its response to stalking since 2021, and to inform you of the other actions we have taken, or propose to take, in response to your report. In doing so we again reiterate our sincere condolences to the family and friends of Miss Spinks.

In your report, you note five areas of concern. These are outlined and addressed as follows below.

1. Knowledge and understanding of stalking and how officers should investigate complaints of staking, in which consideration may be given to:

- Reviewing the current force guidance/training on stalking and considering whether further guidance/training is required in light of the issues identified during the inquest (including consideration of whether there ought to be a force policy on stalking);
- Reinforcing understanding of the existing training/guidance on stalking including consideration of further training sessions/briefings to emphasise the key issues around investigating complaints of stalking, particularly in relation to the need to investigate the stalking complaint fully in order to identify potential patterns in the suspect's alleged behaviour;
- Ensuring officers are aware of the available resources on stalking and, crucially, the importance of actually consulting the available resources on stalking when police officers are investigating stalking cases, to ensure that investigations are conducted in line with expected standards.

As a force, we are committed to improving our staff's understanding and identification of stalking and vulnerability. Since the inquest, we have reviewed and refreshed the content of our training on stalking as part of the force's vulnerability programme. This emphasises to our officers and staff the risk indicators of stalking behaviour and the importance of pursuing all reasonable lines of enquiry. A focus is also placed on the importance of broadening intelligence parameters to include multiple locations to assess cumulative risk, and that officers should undertake ongoing risk assessments throughout the course of an investigation and keep accurate records.

Derbyshire Constabulary, Headquarters, Butterley Hall, Ripley, Derbyshire, DE5 3RS  
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The force is delivering the revised mandatory stalking training to all frontline police officers and staff. This commenced on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and is expected to be completed by April 2024. The force will monitor attendance, undertake an evaluation of the training, and ensure it forms part of continued professional development (CPD) for officers and staff in the future.

During January 2024, we have also updated the force's training products which are delivered to student officers, to ensure their inputs are current and take cognisance of the learning points highlighted within your report.

A full review of the force's available resources on stalking was undertaken in December 2023, updating key points on multiple locations being assessed to identify potential patterns in a suspect's behaviour. Forcewide messages have been issued to officers and staff, raising awareness of the availability of these resources to aid and inform investigations.

To formalise the existing guidance on stalking, Derbyshire Constabulary is due to publish a new stalking policy in February 2024. The policy has been reviewed, amended and sent out for consultation with key stakeholders across Contact Management, Divisional and Crime functions across the force. We have drawn upon and used best practice from other forces to formulate the policy. The policy specifically sets out the expectations required in response to stalking, supported by a standard operating procedure that provides clarity on the working practices and processes to be followed. This will include a specific checklist for officers to consider as part of the investigation strategy, including wider crime pattern analysis, multiple offence locations and the importance of adopting an 'investigative mindset' when pursuing all reasonable lines of enquiry.

The launch of this policy will be delivered by a specific communications plan to ensure that all staff are fully informed of the changes and expectations. The policy will also be published externally on the force website.

In March 2023, we developed a quality assurance framework in respect of investigations, known as Quality Assurance Thematic Testing (QATT). Through this framework, investigations are quality assured by officers of inspecting ranks across the organisation, focusing on the quality of investigation plans, victim care, suspect management, and effective supervision.

This framework allows the force to review a cross section of investigation types, with an ability to include specific areas of focus such as stalking. Established processes within the QATT framework ensure officers and their supervisors receive feedback from the case audits, including being signposted to relevant guidance and policy where required.

QATT performance outcomes are monitored through force performance meetings, providing scrutiny and oversight at a senior level. During January 2024, all crime audits will relate to stalking investigations, providing a deeper assessment of the quality of investigations and the impact of the ongoing training being provided.

We recognise that to embed the learning from Miss Spinks' death, cultural change is needed.

The force's strategic investigation strategy has been reviewed and 2024 is focused on the key theme of 'investigative mindset' and pursuing reasonable lines of enquiry.

We are collaborating with the National Police Chiefs' Council's stalking and harassment lead Deputy Chief Constable [REDACTED], to undertake an independent peer review of the force's policies, procedures, and training material.

A tabletop exercise relating to stalking and harassment will be held in March 2024 with attendance from subject matter experts, including senior investigators and stalking advocates.

This forms part of our stalking improvement plan to better understand the victim's journey and make appropriate improvements as a result of learning shared from the exercise.

2. Risk assessments, particularly a lack of understanding about the importance of completing comprehensive risk assessments which include the initial identification of risk and also, importantly, a regular re-assessment of risk as the investigation progresses.

The force is focused on improving the consistency and quality of risk assessments. Staff in our Contact Centre undertake a regular programme of training, reinforcing the completion of Thrive risk assessments which are used identify the threat, harm, risk, investigative opportunities, vulnerability, and engagement opportunities which are present when responding to incidents.

Audits conducted by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in October 2023, have shown that in 64 of 66 cases the call handler has provided a structured, accurate and meaningful Thrive risk assessment.

Since 2021, the force has introduced a Domestic Abuse Review Team (DART) to undertake secondary risk assessments of all domestic abuse, stalking and harassment (DASH) risk assessments. Similarly, in 2022, we created a new role, a stalking coordinator, to undertake secondary risk assessments of non-domestic related stalking. The purpose of these functions is to undertake an objective assessment of the risk, considering the cumulative risk from previous incidents or reports.

During the force's 2023 PEEL Inspection, by HMICFRS, the quality and consistency of such assessments was inspected, and some areas for improvement were found. As a result, the force has immediately responded and throughout December 2023 we further trained our dedicated DART team to ensure a greater focus is placed on psychological harm and patterns of behaviour. We are currently working with Safe Lives, a nationally recognised charity within this field, who will offer further inputs in February 2024 along with an independent audit of risk assessments the following month, to independently evaluate the changes that have been made.

Further changes were implemented in December 2023 to improve the consistency and timeliness of submitting risk assessments for stalking cases. The previous form 90 risk assessment, which was used in non-domestic abuse stalking investigations, was a stand-alone form, separate to other force risk assessments. This has now been integrated into the DASH risk assessment form, known as a DASH public protection notice (PPN), meaning there is now one process for assessing both domestic and non-domestic stalking. The Control Room policy is now to no longer close incidents until such risk assessments have been completed and endorsed on the log. This is overseen by supervision from line managers.

The force has engaged other forces to identify best practice in respect of risk management of stalking. This has informed our proposal to develop a multi-agency stalking intervention panel. We are working with agencies, including the probation service, health professionals, fire service, children and adult social care, independent support services and stalking advocates to establish a multi-agency panel. The panel seeks to enhance the management and safety planning of stalking cases through considering the specific circumstance of each case, and coordinating appropriate interventions, both in terms of the safeguarding of victims and tackling perpetrator behaviour to reduce the risk of further offending. Although engagement with agencies continues, we are seeking to introduce this by June 2024.

Regular risk assessments are required to be undertaken throughout an investigation and these expectations are clearly outlined in the force's crime management policy. This is now monitored through the force's QATT framework (as described earlier).

A thematic review of stalking investigations between June 2023 and November 2023 has been undertaken. Unfortunately, this demonstrated a continuing need for improvement, and the revised training material, together with effective supervision and oversight is reinforcing this. The Thrive policy is being refreshed in January 2024 to include a greater focus on the ongoing need for 're-Thrive' assessments during an investigation, and the expectation for this to be fully documented on the crime report.

The force is evaluating the impact of the work being undertaken and the changes to policy with a further thematic audit throughout January 2024, to assess performance in this area, which shall be reviewed at the force's strategic Performance Assurance Board, chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable.

### 3. Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) recommendation to be fully considered, namely:

- To consider how stalking offence locations are recorded on Niche. There does not appear to be any guidance to suggest that all of the locations of the stalking offending are tagged to the incident individually. In this instance it may not have made any difference as the officers who received the bag did not do a search of police systems for the area. However, in future that may well be done, and it could make the difference between linking risk and suspects.

In 2016, Derbyshire Constabulary adopted Niche as its Crime Management System. It is used across the force for investigation and case management, safeguarding referrals, intelligence submissions, property management and custody management. To ensure we can identify patterns and trends, the system relies on data being flagged or linked. Prior to December 2023 the force had been unable to link multiple locations to a crime report, due to a lack of functionality. However, following the recommendation made by the IOPC the force has worked with Niche and other police forces to introduce this functionality, which is now available following a system upgrade. These changes took effect in November 2023 and notification of this has been communicated to the force via the Chief's Orders, a circular, on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and reiterated in January 2024, on the force intranet.

In addition, the force's command and control system, which records calls for service, dispatches officers and records attendance, is due to be replaced in July 2025. The new system will provide new capability across our telephony and command and control functions, including the ability to tag multiple locations. Its automated intelligence functions have improved capability, providing a greater amount of information to inform risk assessments, identifying more effectively repeat callers and locations without the need to search multiple systems. In the meantime, intelligence officers support call handlers, through assessing information linked to wider locations, as part of an incident's initial intelligence assessment.

### 4. Contemporaneous note taking/record keeping, particularly a lack of contemporaneous notes/insufficient detail within a crime report may impact on the ability to make properly informed risk assessments which rely on the existence of a good written record of important conversations/steps taken during an investigation.

All officers receive core training for investigation as part of the Professionalising Investigations Programme (PIP), at level 1 for volume and priority crime and level 2 for those investigating more serious and complex investigations.

This builds investigative skills, in which the importance of effective record keeping is threaded throughout. Specifically, the conducting investigations module, national decision model module and Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act (CPIA) and disclosure training inputs all

emphasise the importance of record keeping, noting the significance of rationale and actions taken for accountability.

Since the inquest, the importance of contemporaneous note taking and record keeping has formed part of key messaging, through senior management teams, to frontline staff and supervisors. This area of learning has also been incorporated into the training material that has been refreshed. Officers have access to mobile devices upon which contemporaneous notes can be made.

Building upon this, as mentioned above, the force's Improving Investigations strategy has been reviewed and refocused for 2024, in which building an 'investigative mindset' is a key priority. A series of workshops are underway throughout January and February 2024, with senior leaders as well as frontline officers and staff, to understand the capabilities required and opportunities to improve the desired behaviour.

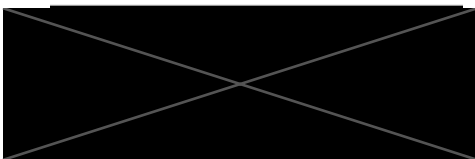
This includes a focus on behavioural change as well as process improvement. Within the delivery plan, is a focus on reinforcing the requirements to maintain robust and comprehensive record keeping, understanding the importance of note taking from both an evidential and risk management perspective. This will be governed through the Strategic Improving Investigation Board, chaired by the Head of Crime, and incorporated into the QATT framework for performance monitoring.

5. Potential weapons/dangerous items found in the community, and a concern that there appears to be an ongoing issue within Derbyshire Constabulary around the ability of some police officers/staff to deal effectively with reports of potentially dangerous weapons found in the community.

In 2021, the force issued guidance for responding to reports of found property. In October 2023, the force reviewed its policies in respect of property, realigning the earlier guidance through introducing a specific policy relating to found weapons. An audit of found property incidents between October 2023 and December 2023 has been undertaken. There is still more improvement needed to ensure revision of risk at all appropriate stages and divisional senior management teams are reinforcing expectations regarding the standards of investigations required in such cases, in accordance with the policy. The ongoing audit and performance monitoring shall remain in place until working practices are to the required standard. The Deputy Chief Constable will monitor these.

Further to the inquest we have introduced a Gold Group chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable, to review the recommendations within the Prevention of Future Deaths report, understand the issues raised and take appropriate action. This group shall remain in place to track progress against the recommendations. I hope the above response provides you with the assurance of the actions taken by the force since 2021 and its continued efforts to improve the service we provide to our communities in respect of stalking.

Yours sincerely



**Chief Constable**