



By Email

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3 October 2024

Dear Mrs Connor

Inquest into the Death of Angela Mittal

Preventing Future Deaths response of the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police

Thank you for your report sent by letter dated 13 August 2024 under paragraph 7, Schedule 5, of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and Regulations 28 and 29 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013 in respect of circumstances surrounding the tragic death of Angela.

Your report contains three matters of concern which I shall address below:

Response to the Regulation 28 concerns

Whether sufficient steps have been taken to ensure that frontline staff have a clear understanding of domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour

Detective Superintendent ██████████ is the Thames Valley Police lead for Domestic Abuse and Stalking. In his written and oral evidence (particularly his statements dated 29 January 2024 and 22 May 2024), Detective Superintendent ██████████ gave an explanation of the training police officers received in 2018 regarding coercive control and how that training has evolved to the present day. I do not wish simply to repeat information of which you are already aware, but will set out in summary our current relevant training programme and future plans to raise awareness of the impact of coercive and controlling behaviour and the potential for it to lead to tragic consequences.

We are always seeking to improve our training. Changes to training practice and content can be brought about in a number of ways. The training of new recruits is mandated through the College of Policing and delivered through a number of courses, collectively known as Foundation Training. All our training inputs have been reviewed and in some cases improved by an independent domestic abuse training consultancy. I am satisfied

that our Police Constable Entry Programme, Police Constable Degree Apprenticeship and our Degree Holder Entry Programme all contain inputs covering domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour.

Beyond Foundation Training, front line officers are subject to further training inputs delivered in a variety of ways.

Thames Valley Police have commissioned the Safe Lives charity to deliver its 'DA Matters' training to all front-line officers since January 2020. This includes sessions on coercive and controlling behaviour. This training also includes an input known as 'Crime Data Integrity'. This is essentially training officers to identify and accurately record crime and to that end specific videos have been produced covering behavioural crimes such as harassment, stalking and coercive and controlling behaviour.

Front line staff are also expected to attend 2-3 'Teams In Action' training days per annum. The current training underway on these days includes communication with victims, domestic abuse risk assessments, Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPN) and Domestic Violence Disclosure Schemes (DVDS).

Contact Management staff (call takers and their supervisors) have received a number of training inputs on handling domestic abuse calls. Their input on crime data integrity focused on domestic abuse and missed crimes. The tragic death of Angela was used as a case study to reinforce the importance of identifying coercive and controlling behaviour.

It is of note that in 2019 Contact Management added the following question to the Call Handlers' question set (the list of questions asked for every domestic abuse call) to identify Coercive and Controlling Behaviour, recognising that a victim/survivor may not use that particular term but may describe behaviour amounting to Coercive and Controlling Behaviour.

"Has the victim disclosed anything that could indicate an element of control over them by the perpetrator? (If yes, record the detail as this is likely to be an indicator for Coercive Control)"

In 2024 Contact Management leaders commissioned an external training provider to develop a new training package (including Coercive Control) and asked for the circumstances of Angela's death to be included as a case study.

The training course designed for specialist domestic abuse officers has also recently been reviewed and refreshed. Inputs on coercive and controlling behaviour run throughout the programme.

All training for front line staff is in addition to the Operational Guidance products that are available to guide officers on how to identify and deal with coercive and controlling behaviour. These products can be accessed any time through an officers laptop or via mobile phone app.

I am satisfied frontline staff are equipped with sufficient training to understand domestic abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour. Thames Valley Police is committed to providing ongoing and updated training in these important areas.

I am concerned that Thames Valley Police's DASH risk assessment form (called a DOM5) does not make it sufficiently clear that the definition of "serious harm" can include psychological harm from coercive and controlling behaviour. It may be that other formulations of this document nationally do make this clear – I have looked only at the form used by Thames Valley Police.

You are right to point out that the current TVP Domestic Abuse risk assessment form (Dom5) does not define the term 'serious harm'. The College of Policing defines the risk of serious harm as follows - *'A risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic, and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible.'* This definition is included in the risk assessment model known as the DARA. I have asked Detective Superintendent [REDACTED] to include this definition on our current risk assessment form.

I heard evidence about a new tool for risk assessing domestic abuse, created by the College of Policing. Both the senior Thames Valley Police officer and the College of Policing witness gave evidence that this system is likely to result in better risk assessment for domestic abuse. As I understand it, this new tool has not been adopted by Thames Valley Police at this time, because of competing financial priorities, and an issue with compatibility with the Niche system.

It is important to note that competing financial priorities are not the issue here. The principal challenges are compatibility with our NICHE crime recording system and the delivery of training to front line police and staff. Thames Valley Police require a contractor to initiate the changes on the NICHE system. The development of Electronic Case Files was prioritised over the implementation of DARA and that project has overrun. Any solution to this must also be compatible with other processes such as our ability to refer the information captured in our domestic abuse risk assessments in a timely fashion to other agencies with responsibilities for the protection of victims/survivors and their children, such as Children's Social Care and colleagues in the health service. A change from DASH to DARA is a significant departure from the current process which has been in place for many years. It is crucial that all officers and staff who make use of DARA are fully trained in its development and use. In order to do this we will need to train thousands of officers' and staff, which will take some considerable time. It is also important to note that our partner agencies also use DASH and any change to the risk assessment model must bear this in mind as the police will be using a tool that is unfamiliar to those agencies.

There are challenges to implementing the DARA risk assessment model within our current version of the NICHE crime recording system. In the future TVP will be looking to adopt an updated NICHE safeguarding and vulnerability module when available. In the mean time I have asked Detective Superintendent [REDACTED] to explore an interim solution. This will include the replacement of the current questions in the DOM 5 with the questions contained within the DARA and include clear reference to the College of Policing definition of serious harm which can include psychological harm from coercive and controlling behaviour. This will be attached to the crime recording system in the form of a template. The DARA includes a number of questions designed to assess the level of coercive and controlling behaviour and the level of risk posed. Included in this implementation will be the training of every front line officer in its use.

The death of Angela is yet another example of the tragic consequences of domestic abuse. Thames Valley Police is determined to do all it can to learn from this devastating event and prevent future deaths in similar circumstances.

Yours sincerely



Chief Constable