



Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

Cc: HMICFRS

Our Ref: JC/jpi

20<sup>th</sup> September 2021

*Dear Home Secretary*

### **Review of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic - 2021**

I am writing to you in response to the above HMICFRS inspection report published in June 2021, which contained 3 recommendations for all force to address.

The report recognises that the police responded proactively to prevent domestic abuse (DA) and protect victims during the COVID-19 pandemic. As evidenced in the report, many forces had fewer than usual reports of domestic abuse at the start of lockdown, but as time went on, reports returned to normal levels. This is a similar pattern to that experienced across the West Mercia force area.

The first recommendation requires forces using online contact methods to introduce an effective supervision and monitoring framework, and to review the use of a telephone based initial response to ensure it is in accordance with College of Policing Parameters. The current processes within West Mercia Police already ensure that crimes reported by digital routes are responded to in a timely manner and with supervisory oversight where appropriate. Since the commencement of the digital desk in Feb 2021, processes have been reviewed and a framework is in place to respond to victim's needs. The use of diary cars for domestic abuse victims is undergoing a review, however its use is subject to daily scrutiny.

The second recommendation is that forces immediately review their capacity to provide ongoing support and safeguarding to victims of domestic abuse whose case is awaiting trial at court. West Mercia's Witness Care Unit keep the victims updated throughout the court process, arrange pre-court visits if required and inform them of any changes with adjournments. A backlog in court cases has resulted in a 60% increase in the number of victims and witnesses supported by the unit, however DA victims are recognised as a priority and as such support levels have been maintained.

Additional MOJ funding will provide 2 additional Victim and Witness Care officers for 12 months to support the team with the ongoing demand and focus on supporting the most vulnerable (including DA Victims and Witnesses).

During 2020/21 my own office was also successful in securing over £520,000 of additional Ministry of Justice funding to support those organisations working with victims of domestic abuse and sexual abuse & violence who had been adversely impacted by the Covid pandemic. Much of this funding went towards increases of staff/resource to cope with additional demand

The final recommendation in the report is in relation to the use of outcomes 15, 16 and evidence led prosecutions. Work is ongoing to improve the use of outcomes 15 and 16 by the force. HMICFRS have previously identified West Mercia Police as an outlier for its use of outcome 16 in particular and I have used my holding to account powers on a number of occasions to scrutinise and challenge the force in its use of outcomes.

I will continue, as Commissioner, to hold the force to account around its approach to domestic abuse and I will continue to work with the force and service providers to ensure victims of domestic abuse have access to the support they need to help them cope and recover.

Best Wishes



John Champion  
**Police & Crime Commissioner**  
**West Mercia**