



Violence against women and girls

Themes, learning and next steps following police forces' reviews of police-perpetrated violence against women and girls

October 2022

© College of Policing Limited (2022)

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence v1.1 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit college.police.uk/non-commercial-college-licence

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned. This publication may contain public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0 at nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

This publication is available for download at college.police.uk

If you have any enquiries regarding this publication, please contact us at contactus@college.police.uk

This document has been created with the intention of making the content accessible to the widest range of people, regardless of disability or impairment. To enquire about having this document provided in an alternative format, please contact us at contactus@college.police.uk

Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction	5
Area of focus: Supporting victims of police-perpetrated VAWG	9
Area of focus: Raising awareness and encouraging reporting	11
Area of focus: Upskilling investigators	13
Area of focus: Avoiding unnecessary delays in cases being criminally investigated	16
Area of focus: Data quality	18
Area of focus: Inviting external scrutiny of case handling	20



Foreword

Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth, National Police Chiefs' Council lead for Violence Against Women and Girls

In December 2021, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing published our **national framework**

for delivery on policing violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Underpinning this was an acknowledgement that trust and confidence in policing needs to be rebuilt, which requires a focus on the standards and conduct of police officers and staff. We know that women and girls will not report crime against them unless they trust policing.

I set out key actions in the VAWG framework and said that we would 'respond unequivocally to allegations of police-perpetrated abuse, learning from mistakes and best practice'.

At the end of 2021, police forces were required to conduct an urgent review of all open cases, ensuring that they were investigated fully and thoroughly. We also asked them to share their learning on themes, problems and good practice over subsequent months. This has helped us to identify national themes, understand the extent of the challenge in tackling VAWG misconduct and recommend appropriate action in response.

Every force conducted a review. Having analysed their findings, we can see that while there are examples of positive changes (which we share here), there is also inconsistency. Immediate improvements are required to ensure that police forces are robustly and systematically responding to reports of police-perpetrated VAWG. We outline these as next steps.

It is imperative that policing is ruthless in removing any officer who undermines the integrity of a force, in order to rebuild the confidence that the public should rightly have in us.

Strong leadership is needed to challenge the pockets of culture in policing that do not hold our values, that quieten victims and that discourage people from speaking up.

Further external assessments of police misconduct are expected over coming weeks, including:

- the thematic inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) of vetting and counter corruption arrangements in forces
- the findings from the government's independent inquiry led by Lady Elish Angiolini
- Baroness Louise Casey's independent review into culture and standards at the Metropolitan Police Service

These reports will provide further independent assessment and recommendations for policing.

In December 2022, we will be publishing the first of our performance reports, which will give a broader picture of police progress against the national VAWG framework. This will include a national assessment of the scale and nature of police-perpetrated VAWG, including misconduct and complaints data, the formal outcomes of misconduct and complaints, and the timeliness of investigations. I remain absolutely committed to reporting on our progress and performance openly and publicly, enabling scrutiny and driving change.



Chief Constable Andy Marsh QPM, Chief Executive Officer, College of Policing

In order for the public to have trust in the policing response to VAWG in society as a whole, it is essential that we show that we can tackle it effectively in forces. When the College published the findings of the super-complaint into police-perpetrated domestic abuse, we were clear that forces had some way to go to get their own houses in order.

This framework builds on the work of the super-complaint and commits the College, the NPCC and policing more widely to taking important steps to restore and build the confidence of our communities.

Where these appalling crimes have previously been dealt with by officers with no specialist training, our work should ensure that forces can give their officers and staff the right skills, through the right training, to enable them to investigate crimes more effectively and to get justice for victims.

We know that we don't have all the answers, but pockets of excellent work exist across the country. By collating promising practice across forces, and by reviewing them for learning and consistency, we can ensure that the best ideas are delivered everywhere. Our £1.7 million Evaluation Accelerator Fund will significantly boost this capability, allowing us to identify possible interventions, including to tackle misconduct.

The College will also be commissioning new research where appropriate to bridge gaps in evidence and to support forces in improving their response to VAWG.

No officer engaged in abusive or inappropriate behaviour should think that they can hide in policing, or that their behaviour will be tolerated. Through the efforts set out in this framework and elsewhere, we will find them and ensure they are subject to the strictest sanctions, as set out in our new misconduct guidelines. By being an exemplar of the highest standards, we will make the progress needed to deliver the improvements that the public so urgently want and need.

Introduction

The NPCC and the College of Policing acknowledge that to build trust and confidence in the police response to VAWG, the service must respond unequivocally to allegations of police-perpetrated abuse. That is why action one of the **Policing violence against women and girls: National framework for delivery** required forces to complete an urgent review of all current allegations of sexual misconduct, domestic abuse and other VAWG-related offences against officers and staff.

How policing deals with officers and staff accused of VAWG remains, quite rightly, under the microscope. In June 2022, the College of Policing, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) and HMICFRS published their **joint response to the Centre for Women's Justice's super-complaint on police-perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA)**. The report concluded that the way police forces are responding to PPDA cases is a feature of policing that is significantly harming the public interest. It found cases where forces were not always doing enough to ensure that PPDA was properly and impartially investigated.

Policing is already taking steps to improve how it roots out those who do not uphold the high standards that the public expects. At a national level, the College has **updated guidance on outcomes in misconduct proceedings**. This will ensure that those chairing disciplinary proceedings understand that the outcome in proven cases involving VAWG is likely to be severe, given that there will always be a high degree of culpability. The College is also currently **reviewing the policing Code of Ethics** to provide everyone in policing with the national support and guidance to behave ethically and professionally. At a local level, forces have accepted the findings of the PPDA super-complaint and are implementing the recommendations. Forces are trialling innovative approaches to responding to police-perpetrated VAWG, listening to the experiences of victims of sexual misconduct within their own workforce, and encouraging officers and staff at all levels to feel confident in reporting and calling out inappropriate behaviour.

While we have identified some innovative areas and highlighted forthcoming plans in this review, we know there is still much to do

in order to gain the confidence of victims (both within and outside policing), to give staff the confidence to challenge and root out misogynistic and sexist behaviour, and to conduct investigations that are victim-centred. Strong policing leadership is required to drive the changes needed and to ensure that officers and staff are confident they will be listened to and supported when complaints are made.

This report seeks to share learning on the themes, problems and good practice that forces identified. We have identified six areas of focus through our analysis of the reviews conducted by forces. We have been influenced by work already underway nationally and locally to improve the response to police-perpetrated VAWG. We know these six areas do not represent every theme or problem related to police-perpetrated VAWG. The areas of focus discussed in this report represent those where improved national consistency could bring the most benefit to victims and the public.

The NPCC and the College will work with forces and other stakeholders to take this forward.

Supporting victims of police-perpetrated VAWG



Key learning

Victims of police-perpetrated VAWG cases require bespoke support services to address their specific concerns and needs. This is not consistently provided across police forces in England and Wales.

Next steps

Chief constables should **immediately** act to ensure that there are effective support services within forces to support police victims of VAWG. This should include acting on the recommendations from the joint response to the Centre for Women's Justice's super-complaint on PPDA.

Raising awareness and encouraging reporting



Key learning

Police forces must continue to encourage police officers and staff, members of the public and partners to report concerns about police-perpetrated VAWG or any other inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour.

Next steps

Chief constables should continue to encourage their workforce to call out and report police-perpetrated VAWG or any other inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour. They should **immediately** promote the existing Crimestoppers national [police integrity line](#), which provides an anonymous reporting route for those who work in policing.

The NPCC will work with Crimestoppers and partners to expand the police integrity line to the public by **Spring 2023**. This will allow members of the public to report allegations of police misconduct anonymously.

Upskilling investigators



Key learning

Investigators working on parallel criminal and misconduct investigations need to work together and share information effectively. All investigators require a good level of knowledge of current good practice. This is not happening consistently across England and Wales.

Next steps

Chief constables should **immediately** act to ensure that their Professional Standards Department (PSD) investigators maintain a working knowledge of current criminal investigation practice, as well as the impact of police-perpetrated VAWG, through using specially trained rape and sexual assault investigators. They should also ensure effective joint working between PSD and criminal investigation teams.

Avoiding unnecessary delays in cases being criminally investigated



Key learning

Some misconduct investigations may be unnecessarily delayed because forces do not accurately assess the potential for disciplinary action to prejudice criminal proceedings.

Next steps

Chief constables will **immediately** start reviewing live cases regularly to ensure that statutory guidance¹ is followed when it is necessary to delay any investigation or proceedings, balancing the safety of criminal proceedings and public confidence.

Data quality



Key learning

Data collected locally about police misconduct is not recorded in a detailed and consistent manner, making it more difficult to provide accurate and timely insight into police-perpetrated VAWG.

Next steps

The NPCC and the College will work in collaboration with the software providers of the case management system used by all 43 forces and its national user group, so that a user guide and specific training are available to ensure that officers and staff have the necessary skills to input and analyse police complaint and misconduct data. **Spring 2023.**

Inviting external scrutiny of case handling



Key learning

Inviting external scrutiny of case handling may improve trust and confidence, support a learning culture and ensure appropriate decision making.

Next steps

The College and the IOPC, together with the NPCC, will review a variety of force approaches to raising trust and confidence in the police response to VAWG allegations involving police suspects. This work will include a review of the effectiveness of external scrutiny panels. **Spring 2023.**

1 IOPC. (2020). Chapter 15, 'Suspending and resuming handling'. In: [Statutory guidance on the police complaints system](#) [internet].

Area of focus: Supporting victims of police-perpetrated VAWG



It is not clear how many police workforce members are themselves victims of police-perpetrated VAWG. However, we do know that a significant number of police-perpetrated VAWG cases involve officers and staff who are accused of abusing women who work in policing.

Police victims may experience particular challenges that require specialist support services. For example, women who work in policing may be concerned that reporting a colleague for a VAWG incident will result in them feeling ostracised at work or will affect their career prospects. The PPDA super-complaint found that forces were not routinely and properly considering these concerns. It recommended that forces review the support services available to their staff. All 43 English and Welsh chief constables have accepted these recommendations. Forces will take action where support provisions need to be strengthened locally.

Many forces recognise the need for bespoke policies and practice to support police victims. Forces reported innovative practice in relation to case handling, processes for updating victims, signposting internal and external support services, and facilitating confidential reporting.

Case study: Setting up bespoke services for police victims in Avon and Somerset

Avon and Somerset Constabulary recognised that while police victims of the most serious offences are well supported by internal and external agencies, women who experience other VAWG-related offences and behaviours may not have the support they need.

To identify what support women in the force required, Avon and Somerset held a number of focus groups with over 70 officers and staff. The focus groups identified specific blockers that prevent officers and staff from reporting sexual misconduct, as well as gaps in existing support provision. The learning from these focus groups

led to the development of a bespoke sexual misconduct liaison officer to improve confidence in internal reporting. This project is being supported by LimeCulture, one of the biggest national providers of training in this area.

Case study: Independent support for police victims in Nottinghamshire

Nottinghamshire Police have entered into a contract with a registered charity that, as a pilot, is providing a dedicated Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) to give direct support to individuals employed by the force who are enduring domestic abuse. The IDVA is employed and line managed by the registered charity, who also provide for the case management, while vetting clearance is provided by Nottinghamshire Police. The Employer's IDVA Service accepts both direct referrals from members of Nottinghamshire Police and referrals via line managers with the employee's consent. The IDVA then provides support either over the telephone or at a time, date and venue that is mutually convenient. Among other things, the IDVA will provide confidential, practical and impartial advice on issues relating to domestic abuse, child matters, safety, housing, legal options and financial support. Where an individual is referred to a multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC), the IDVA themselves or a more local IDVA will attend. The IDVA also discusses the support options available to Nottinghamshire Police and will liaise directly with line managers and Human Resources to agree an action plan to support employees. The IDVA acts as a point of contact for all aspects of the criminal justice system process, from investigation to prosecution and ancillary court orders.

Within this context, it is vital that police leaders understand the experiences of the women working in their organisations. Work is already underway to better understand the experiences of women in policing nationally and much work is being driven at a force level. The College is currently undertaking behaviour change work focused on sexism and misogyny in policing. The College has conducted a

literature review and focus group activity with officers and staff to identify sexist and misogynistic behaviours that are pervasive in policing. Their work is informing the development of initiatives to change these behaviours. Many forces have conducted local surveys of their workforce's experience of sexism and misogyny. The NPCC and the College will be publishing combined analysis of these local surveys in its December performance report.

Next steps for policing

Chief constables should **immediately** act to ensure that there are effective support services within forces to support police victims of VAWG. This should include acting on the recommendations from the joint response to the Centre for Women's Justice's super-complaint on PPDA.

Area of focus: Raising awareness and encouraging reporting



The [Code of Ethics](#), the policing [Standards of professional behaviour](#) and the [Police staff handbook](#) require those who work in policing to challenge inappropriate behaviour. Forces have been emphasising this in local communications designed to help their workforce feel confident and able to challenge behaviour directly and report it appropriately.

Many forces have conducted awareness campaigns designed to challenge VAWG behaviours and encourage reporting. These campaigns involve multimedia promotion activity, including the use of posters, videos and social media posts. Some forces reported that their awareness activity has resulted in a higher number of police-perpetrated VAWG referrals into their PSD.

The NPCC is developing e-learning on workplace sexual harassment to complement training already being delivered locally by some forces.

The online learning model helps learners to become an 'upstander' to sexual harassment. It sets out three ways police employees can challenge sexual harassment:

- intervening when they witness inappropriate behaviour
- supporting victims of sexual harassment
- reporting sexual harassment to the appropriate person

The e-learning also provides managers with guidance about how to support officers and staff who report sexual harassment.

It is encouraging that there was already evidence of upstander behaviour in several of the cases that forces reviewed. However, forces must be far more proactive in encouraging and facilitating their workforces to call out and report inappropriate behaviour. This is a leadership matter, and chief constables must ensure that officers and staff have the confidence to call out and report any inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour.

Some police workforce members may feel more confident reporting things anonymously. All police forces have anonymous reporting lines that officers and staff can use to report concerns.

People working in policing can also raise concerns through the IOPC whistleblowing service.

The College and the NPCC are working with Crimestoppers on the [police integrity line](#). The police integrity line gives officers and staff further confidence that they can report concerns completely anonymously.

Case study: Prevent officer in Durham

Durham Constabulary has employed a 'prevent officer' in their PSD. Their work has focused on embedding a better working culture by giving police officers and police staff the confidence to report and challenge any inappropriate behaviour. The force is doing this through the 'if you see something, say something' messaging.

Durham's prevent officer is also working with stakeholders outside of policing to encourage reporting of abuse of position for a sexual

purpose (APSP). The officer held a conference with colleagues from the prison and probation service, adult and child services, local mental health teams, NHS, ambulance service and domestic violence services. The conference allowed partners to build relationships, to discuss the signs of APSP to look out for, and to determine how to report it.

Police forces must urgently improve their focus on encouraging and enabling those outside policing to report police-perpetrated VAWG. The more information that police forces have, the better they will be able to respond to allegations against individuals of concern.

Next steps for policing

Chief constables should continue to encourage their workforce to call out and report police-perpetrated VAWG or any other inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour. They should **immediately** promote the existing Crimestoppers national [police integrity line](#), which provides an anonymous reporting route for those who work in policing.

The NPCC will work with Crimestoppers and partners to expand the police integrity line to the public by **Spring 2023**. This will allow members of the public to report allegations of police misconduct anonymously.

Area of focus: Upskilling investigators



Sometimes there will be two separate investigations into an allegation of police-perpetrated VAWG:

- a criminal investigation run by investigators in local criminal investigation departments or specialist units for rape, sexual offences or domestic abuse
- a misconduct or gross misconduct investigation run by a force's PSD

Organising investigations this way can ensure that investigators with the right skills are working on the right part of a force's response to an allegation of police-perpetrated VAWG. It also allows for the sharing of evidence. However, it is imperative that both sets of investigators have a working knowledge of the other's area of business to work effectively together.

The PPDA super-complaint found several examples where the relationship between the criminal and gross misconduct investigations had undermined the PSD's ability to pursue disciplinary outcomes. It found instances where PSD investigators failed to consider, or were not aware of, information obtained by criminal investigators. Equally problematic is when initial response officers or criminal investigators fail to capture evidence efficiently and effectively, or undermine the case with unnecessary comments on police databases or body-worn video.

The PPDA super-complaint investigation found encouraging practice when PSDs were directly involved in criminal investigations. It also found good practice when PSDs played an active role in monitoring and communicating with those conducting parallel criminal investigations. It said that the thoroughness of both criminal and misconduct or gross misconduct investigations were improved. It also found that 'risks around ineffective information sharing and updates between teams' were eliminated when PSDs led both the criminal and misconduct investigation.

While every force will have a different model of dealing with PPDA dependent on their structure, capacity and capability, PSDs must ensure that they are aware of all information throughout an investigation.

Case study: Joining up investigations in Thames Valley

In response to the PPDA super-complaint, Thames Valley Police (TVP) adopted a new approach to investigating domestic abuse cases involving police suspects. TVP's PSD is now responsible for the overall investigation in PPDA cases and all decision making in relation to police suspects. TVP's Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit retains responsibility for victim liaison, including victim engagement,

care and safeguarding. Investigators from both teams meet as soon as practicable once an allegation comes to light. At this meeting, they agree on immediate actions to ensure the victim's safety and to secure vital evidence. They also agree an investigation plan to support the smooth running of the investigation going forward.

To support the implementation of the new approach, TVP has recruited three new detective constables and a detective sergeant with experience of dealing with domestic abuse investigations to work in their PSD.

TVP expect that PSD taking ownership of PPDA will improve victim confidence, as well as the number of cases progressing to disciplinary proceedings and criminal prosecutions. TVP report early indications that the approach is resulting in more cases progressing to disciplinary proceedings. The force will be conducting a formal review of its approach after 12 months.

Case study: Domestic Abuse and Sexual Offences team, Metropolitan Police Service

In February 2022, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) established a Domestic Abuse and Sexual Offences (DASO) team within their Directorate of Professional Standards. This team has a specific remit to investigate misconduct committed by police officers and staff. The team will undertake criminal investigations for on-duty conduct and will keep in close liaison with those investigating off-duty criminal conduct, either within the MPS or external forces. The DASO team is led by an experienced detective superintendent and detective chief inspector with a team of over 30 investigators, most of whom have come from a safeguarding investigation background with experience in this type of criminality.

The team have forged strong links with specialist survivor groups across London to raise awareness of their work to encourage reporting. Through wide-ranging campaigns over the last year, the number of misconduct cases of police-perpetrated domestic abuse and sexual offending has grown by over 80%. Under the leadership

of the new commissioner, the team will have further resource uplift and new innovative partnerships to encourage further reporting, both from members of the public and internally.

Professional standards investigators are expected to be working towards, or to have, **Professionalising Investigation Programme level 2** (PIP2) accreditation. Accepting that a proportion of PSD teams' workloads are VAWG-related, forces may wish to consider further upskilling to work on criminal investigations involving these offences, particularly taking the opportunity to join the Operation Soteria Bluestone national learning network events.

Next steps for policing

Chief constables should **immediately** act to ensure that their PSD investigators maintain a working knowledge of current criminal investigation practice, as well as the impact of police-perpetrated VAWG, through using specially trained rape and sexual assault investigators. They should also ensure effective joint working between PSD and criminal investigation teams.

Area of focus: Avoiding unnecessary delays in cases being criminally investigated



Several factors can have an impact on the timeliness of an investigation into police-perpetrated VAWG. Capability (as referenced above) and capacity of PSD teams must be a priority for chief constables, to ensure that they are able to respond in a timely and effective way. PSD investigators often work on multiple complex investigations at once. Gathering and assessing all the necessary evidence can take time, especially when investigators have to manage competing demands.

In such a challenging working environment, it is important that unnecessary delays are eliminated to give all investigators the best chance of progressing their investigations as quickly as possible.

It was clear from the force reviews that where many of the misconduct cases are taking an especially long time, this was because of paused investigations or decisions to delay commencing an investigation to avoid prejudicing criminal proceedings.

Statutory guidance on professional standards, performance and integrity in policing says that 'the presumption is that action for misconduct should be taken prior to, or in parallel with, any criminal proceedings'. **Statutory guidance on the police complaints system** says that investigations or other procedures should only be suspended when there is a 'specific' and 'significant' identified prejudice. It says forces must consider if 'measures can be put in place to reduce or remove the risk of prejudice' before deciding to suspend an investigation.

Any decision to delay the start of, or pause, a misconduct investigation or proceedings must be made with the oversight of the appropriate authority,² as it can cause lengthy delays, particularly due to backlogs in the criminal justice system.

Case study: Avoiding unnecessary investigation delays in South Wales

Where employees of South Wales Police are under investigation for criminal offences, the senior management team of the force's PSD, including the appropriate authority and decision maker, review all cases on a weekly basis. There is a dedicated PSD investigator linked to the criminal investigation, who ensures that they are able to continue any misconduct investigation alongside the criminal investigation and captures the evidence required for the misconduct process at the earliest opportunity. This process allows for the appropriate authority to be in a position to resume misconduct investigations or proceedings at the earliest opportunity, thereby minimising any delays.

² See **The Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020** for legislation relating to appropriate authorities.

Next steps for policing

Chief constables will **immediately** start reviewing live cases regularly to ensure that statutory guidance³ is followed when it is necessary to delay any investigation or proceedings, balancing the safety of criminal proceedings and public confidence.

Area of focus: Data quality



The NPCC and the College is collecting data from forces on police-perpetrated VAWG, which will enable it to report on policing performance, in line with its **outcomes and performance framework**. In December 2022, the NPCC and the College will be publishing the first set of data measuring how effectively policing is responding to VAWG, including allegations of police-perpetrated violence and abuse.

We have identified two main issues with the way that misconduct data is logged on the case management system.

Firstly, up-to-date records are not always kept on the right systems. It is common practice in some forces for decision-making records to be held separately to the case management system. Subsequently, the case management system is only updated after an investigation is concluded. This may lead to forces not being able to easily access up-to-date information about their open police-perpetrated VAWG cases. This retrospective transfer of data also doesn't allow the decision maker to ensure that their decisions are accurately recorded on the case management system. This may be inhibiting forces' understanding of their response to the police-perpetrated VAWG risk in their force and may affect their efforts to be transparent with the public.

3 IOPC. (2020). Chapter 15, 'Suspending and resuming handling'. In: **Statutory guidance on the police complaints system** [internet].

Secondly, some officers and staff may not always have the appropriate training required to ensure that they log information about police complaints and conduct matters correctly. There is [guidance on capturing data about police complaints](#), and the NPCC has worked with stakeholders to produce guidance notes on flagging complaint and conduct data relating to VAWG. We understand that these guidance documents are not always fully understood or referred to by those logging data in force. Officers and staff may therefore require additional training to log information on police complaints and conduct matters correctly.

Others have already identified that the quality of police complaints and misconduct data needs to improve. The PPDA super-complaint report identified that 'weaknesses in data recording and collection methods' inhibited the investigation's ability to provide robust estimates of the scale of PPDA and its associated criminal and misconduct outcomes. A number of known [data limitations](#) with Home Office statistics on police misconduct have been identified, and plans have been put in place to address these.

Case study: Improving data quality in South Wales

South Wales Police has launched Operation Delphi, a programme of work designed to improve how it captures and analyses data about allegations of police misconduct. It has upskilled relevant supervisors so they can dip-sample data to assure compliance with recording standards. Supervisors working in its PSD are now expected to provide regular scrutiny on the core datasets.

South Wales Police has also developed a template specific to VAWG cases, which was designed to improve consistency in case handling and data collection. Included in this template is an analytics and debrief section, which seeks to identify core elements within the case to help data analysis. Investigators are encouraged to log detailed information, including how the case was initially detected and elements of offender and victim profiling. These templates have recently been shared with forces.

The force will work with software developers to create matching fields for the core data. This will allow the enhanced analytics and debrief information to be logged and extracted by South Wales Police for scrutiny, oversight and potentially proactive monitoring.

Next steps for policing

The NPCC and the College will work in collaboration with the software providers of the case management system used by all 43 forces and its national user group, so that a user guide and specific training are available to ensure that officers and staff have the necessary skills to input and analyse police complaint and misconduct data. Spring 2023.

Area of focus: Inviting external scrutiny of case handling



Many police-perpetrated VAWG cases will receive external oversight by the IOPC. Forces must refer cases involving allegations of abuse of position for a sexual purpose, serious sexual offences, serious assaults, serious stalking and any offences aggravated by discrimination on the basis of sex to the IOPC.⁴ The IOPC can decide whether and how cases referred to them are investigated. It can **independently investigate** or direct local investigations in cases referred to it as appropriate.⁵ External oversight of misconduct cases is also provided by criminal, civil and coronial courts, as well as police and crime commissioners.⁶

Forces can choose to invite other external scrutiny of cases that are not referred to the IOPC or where the IOPC has determined they

4 For a full explanation of what must be referred to the IOPC, see: IOPC. (2020). **Statutory guidance on the police complaints system** [internet].

5 Under the **Police Reform Act 2002**, Schedule 3, paragraphs 14 and 15.

6 This includes the equivalents of police and crime commissioners for the Metropolitan Police Service, Greater Manchester Police, West Yorkshire Police and the City of London Police.

can be handled locally. Local oversight of this nature usually involves specialist scrutiny panels. The PPDA super-complaint highlighted newly established scrutiny panels in Sussex Police and Hampshire Constabulary as **innovative practice**. Both have panels comprising of representatives from local commissioned domestic abuse services and are chaired by a senior leader within the force, such as a superintendent. The panels are designed to ensure that cases are being managed appropriately and to drive continuous improvement by identifying potential learning from the cases they discuss.

Case study: Inviting external scrutiny of case handling in West Yorkshire

West Yorkshire Police has established a VAWG-specific scrutiny panel. This panel involves safeguarding professionals from inside and outside of the force. The panel considers finalised cases. It provides feedback on the handling of cases from start to finish to identify any lessons learned. The panel helps West Yorkshire Police assure itself that their officers and staff are fairly assessing allegations, that investigations are to a high standard and that the right conclusions are being reached. The panel also plays a role in the continuing professional development of West Yorkshire Police's workforce, by providing officers and staff with feedback. Above all, the panel is helping West Yorkshire Police to give confidence to both suspects and victims that fair, reasonable and proportionate investigations are taking place.

Next steps for policing

The College and the IOPC, together with the NPCC, will review a variety of force approaches to raising trust and confidence in the police response to VAWG allegations involving police suspects. This work will include a review of the effectiveness of external scrutiny panels. **Spring 2023.**