



OFFICE OF THE POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR THAMES VALLEY

PCC REPORT TO THE THAMES VALLEY POLICE AND CRIME PANEL 16th November 2018

Implications of the HM Government Consultation Paper 'Transforming the Response to Domestic Abuse'

The Home Office and the Ministry of Justice jointly launched the above consultation paper in March 2018 seeking views on a number of specific measures intended to prevent and tackle domestic abuse that had been set out in the Queen's Speech, which they would take forward through new domestic abuse legislation.

[The original, now closed, consultation paper is available at:

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/homeoffice-moj/domestic-abuse-consultation/>]

The Office of the PCC did not respond to this consultation exercise, given that it was consultation on what proposals might appear in a draft Domestic Abuse Bill (presumably subject to availability of parliamentary time compared to the likely demands of 'Brexit' business), the contents of which will then be subject to further consultation in due course. The consultation period ended on 31 May 2018. At this present time the feedback from the consultation exercise is still being analysed by HM Government.

The Government's main aim is to prevent domestic abuse by challenging the acceptability of abuse and addressing the underlying attitudes and norms that perpetuate it. Within that context, the consultation exercise asked 65 questions under 4 main themes with the central aim of prevention running through each theme, being:

- Promote awareness – to put domestic abuse at the top of everyone's agenda, and raise public and professionals' awareness
- Protect and support – to enhance the safety of victims and the support they receive
- Pursue and deter – to provide an effective response to perpetrators from initial agency response through to conviction and management of offenders, including rehabilitation
- Improve performance – to drive consistency and better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas, agencies and sectors

The consultation acknowledged that both women and men are victims of domestic abuse and sought views on how agencies can best support all of those affected. However, as a disproportionate number of victims are women, especially in the most severe cases, the Government's approach to domestic abuse is framed within the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, which the Government considers has proved effective.

The Government will seek to encourage 'zero tolerance' towards domestic abuse and to actively empower victims, communities and professionals to confront and challenge it. They also want to ensure that perpetrators are held responsible for their actions and are brought to justice in a way that properly recognises the devastating consequences of their behaviour.

To prevent domestic abuse from happening in the first place, the Government seeks to ensure that all professionals have the knowledge, tools and guidance to intervene earlier to protect victims before abuse escalates and, where possible, rehabilitate offenders to prevent reoffending.

Finally, in respect the response victims receive and the action taken to punish and rehabilitate offenders, the Government wishes to see all areas of the country match the best and put in place innovative and effective programmes to both support victims and their families and prevent domestic abuse from happening.

At a national level, police and crime commissioners have a clear role to play given their statutory responsibilities for victims, and the police, health, housing and education services all have a vital role in tackling domestic abuse. The proposal to create a Domestic Abuse Commissioner, to stand up for victims, to monitor the local provision of domestic abuse services and hold the government to account, could therefore play a key role in promoting a shift in culture and ensuring an effective multi-agency response to domestic abuse. Similarly, the focus on perpetrators is welcome, including improving the victims' experience of the criminal justice system to ensure victims come forward and support prosecution through to conclusion alongside the use of conditional cautions and improved offender management where appropriate to reduce reoffending. However, much will depend on the funding made available to all agencies by Government and the powers assigned to the new Domestic Abuse Commissioner to make things happen.

At a local Thames Valley level, my Police and Crime Plan 2017-2021 incorporates the following specific relevant 'key aims':

- Strategic Priority 1 ('Vulnerability') – 'To secure improvements in the criminal justice experience and outcomes for victims of domestic abuse in order to see an increase in the volume of domestic abuse investigations which result in prosecutions'.
- Strategic Priority 3 ('Reducing Re-offending') – 'To help identify and implement best practice in the management of perpetrators of domestic violence, particularly focussing on serial perpetrators'.

It can be seen therefore that the Government's proposals regarding the new draft Domestic Abuse Bill are consistent with the local strategic priorities and key aims I set for the Thames Valley (which were identified after consulting with Thames Valley Police and key statutory partners) and, therefore, should support their successful delivery.

Accordingly, I welcome the intentions of the Government's new legislation, as set out in the consultation paper, and look forward to the publication of the draft Domestic Abuse Bill at which point I and all affected agencies will be able to assess the implications of the proposals in greater detail.

Anthony Stansfeld

Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley

7 November 2018