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Comisynydd Heddlu a Throseddau Gwent | Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent: Jane Mudd

The Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 4DF

24th September 2024

Dear Home Secretary,

Progress to Introduce a National Operating Model for Rape and other Serious Sexual Offences Investigations.

As required by statute, I am writing to you to respond to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) report entitled, 'Progress to Introduce a National Operating Model for Rape and other Serious Sexual Offences Investigations'.

I would like to take the opportunity to welcome this report, RASSO Rape and Serious Sexual Offences and VAWDASV Violence against Women and Girls, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence are strategic priorities for my office and are listed in our current Police and Crime Plan 2021-2025. This will be a priority I'll consider when developing the new Police and Crime Plan.

Due to the severity and often hidden nature of these crimes, it is vital to work closely with partners to identify and respond to both victims and offenders. Collectively we adopt a strategic approach to ensure decisive action is taken that gets to the root causes of these crimes and prevents further harm. The NOM National Operating Model sets out clear guidance to improve victim outcomes, create system-wide changes and improve the ways in which police investigate such crimes. I especially welcome the suspect-focused investigations, as for too long, emphasis has been on the victim's credibility rather than the perpetrators. I believe this is a step in the right direction to increase confidence in policing and deliver an effective service to victims.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg, a phan ddaw i law, byddwn yn ateb yn y Gymraeg – ni fydd hyn yn gohirio ein hymateb. Os hoffech dderbyn gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg o hyn ymlaen, neu os ydych wedi cael eich gwahoddi gyfweiliad neu gyfarfod ac yr hoffech ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg, anfonwch e-bost at:

Commissioner@gwent.police.uk.
Darperir gwasanaethau cyfieithu.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and where received, we will reply in Welsh - this will not delay our response. If you wish to receive correspondence in Welsh hereafter or if you have been invited to an interview or meeting and you wish to use Welsh, send email to: **Commissioner@gwent.police.uk**. Translation services will be provided.

Gwent police continue to work collaboratively to target those perpetrating these offences, to prevent and disrupt. As well as better manage approaches to RASSO overall. Soteria provides both a new approach and a new model for responding to these heinous crimes. I am fully supportive of the recommendations made, to ensure that police are compassionate and taking a victim-centred approach to meet the needs of victims and survivors of RASSO.

I continue to feel reassured by the commitment and courage of our police officers and staff, this is re-iterated by the Chief Constable in her comment below:

"I welcome this inspection report from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, which examines the progress of nine early adopter forces, including Gwent, in adopting Soteria, a programme which aims to create a victim-centred and suspect-focused approach to rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO). The report highlights positive developments such as RASSO scrutiny panels, where in Gwent has led to training on suspect-focused interviews for investigators. However, the report also highlights the challenges facing policing, such as resourcing pressures in digital forensics, analysis and investigation teams. As a force, we will continue to work closely with the Home Office, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing to implement the National Operating Model (NOM) to provide support and better outcomes for RASSO victims".

With regards to recommendations for policing included in the report, please see the updates below for more detail on the work we are undertaking in Gwent:

Recommendation 3:

By 31 January 2025, all forces should make sure personnel working on rape and other serious sexual offences receive College of Policing approved training on the investigation of word-on-word cases.

Gwent Police are in the process of adopting the Soteria training products. Our trainers in Learning and Development have undertaken the Specialist Sexual Assault Investigators Development Programme (SSAIDP) version 2 'train the trainer' course. The force will be implementing the training once the product has been released and will ensure the word-on-word aspect is sufficiently covered using some case studies.

Recommendation 5:

By 31 July 2025, chief constables should make sure their forces use the new definition of repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspects to identify and manage them.

As per Recommendation 4, the Soteria Joint Unit are working with the College of Policing, the National Police Chiefs' Council, the Victims' Commissioner and police forces to: define what a repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspect is; and create new guidance for forces on managing repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspects, including the benefits of using the potentially dangerous persons and multi-agency tasking and co-ordination processes. Dialogue with other forces is continuing.

Recommendation 7:

By 31 January 2025, all chief constables should make sure their forces prioritise identifying and disrupting rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO) suspects. Ensuring forces track, manage and respond effectively to breaches of bail and protection orders in RASSO cases; and all relevant personnel complete National Operating Model training on using criminal and civil orders to tackle RASSO.

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Gwent Police is working towards meeting this recommendation. The force is exploring how to improve frontline staff awareness of civil orders and is working with Joint Legal Services to upskill staff and progress civil orders, as a viable option for disruption and safeguarding in RASSO cases. The NOM product in relation to this recommendation will be adopted by the force. Benchmarking is already taking place and joint work with Joint Legal Services to implement a process that has been successfully utilised in Durham Constabulary.

Recommendation 9:

By 31 January 2025, chief constables should make sure their forces have good processes in place for applying to retain DNA and fingerprints to improve their use of section 63G of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

As part of a self-assessment, this has been identified as a gap for the force and forms part of the transformational plan.

Recommendation 11:

By 31 March 2025, all chief constables should make sure that, as part of adopting the National Operating Model, their forces, develop a rape and other serious sexual offences problem profile; include the National Operating Model flight deck within their strategic performance monitoring; and adopt any key performance indicators that are agreed and published by the Soteria Joint Unit.

The force has adopted all these recommendations however are reviewing and revising the governance in relation to performance monitoring of Soteria and the implementation of both the transformational and NOM plans.

Gwent Police reassure me they are confident the right processes are in place and continue to develop their response to RASSO investigation. In addition to this, our commissioned ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advisor) service assures my office that they have good working relationships with the RIT (Rape investigation Teams), holding regular monthly meetings to better support investigations of RASSO.

In terms of making improvements, my office is heavily involved in the Wales Sexual Assault Services (WSAS) programme. WSAS is a collaboration between health boards, police forces, PCCs and the third sector to deliver a new, integrated service model for sexual assault referral services across Wales. The aim is to bring together SARC/crisis workers,

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ISVA and therapeutic support to ensure the totality of services for victims of sexual abuse are improved. However, this is a large programme with many partners, so this will take time to fully achieve, but will be a particular focus for me and my team during my time in office.

Overall, I am pleased with the efforts we have made to improve our response to RASSO in Gwent. This remains the case though, as highlighted in the recommendations, there is still more that we can do. I believe we will see further improvements and, ultimately, an overall better service for victims in Gwent. In any case, we must aspire to be better and, in my role as Police and Crime Commissioner, I will continue to push for improvements in this area.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Mudd', written in a cursive style.

Jane Mudd

Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent