



**domestic  
abuse  
commissioner**

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales  
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Dear Home Secretary,

Thank you for the strong public leadership that you have shown over the past few weeks following the tragic murder of Sarah Everard. I strongly welcome your decision to reopen the public survey to inform the Government's new Violence Against Women and Girls strategy. Sarah's death has served as a poignant reminder of the fear and concerns that so many women have regarding their personal safety and the threat of male violence. This intervention has provided a vital opportunity for the public to share their views and concerns directly with the Government during this time. I also strongly welcome the Government's decision to instruct police forces to collect data on violent offences committed against a person based on their gender and sex. This is a vital step forward in helping to ensure that we have a more complete picture of the extensive nature of violence against women and girls.

Despite the concerted work of the Home Office to improve the public policy response to domestic abuse over the last couple of years, there remains a persistent lack of confidence among women to report domestic abuse and sexual assault to the police, limiting our ability to bring dangerous, serial perpetrators to justice. I am deeply concerned that the fact that a serving police officer has been charged with the murder of Sarah Everard will further exacerbate the lack of confidence women have in the police response when they report crimes of this nature.

As you will be aware, over the last couple of years there has been a notable decline in the number of offences prosecuted by the CPS related to domestic abuse, despite there being no reduction in prevalence. Between April 2014 and March 2020, the annual number of domestic abuse flagged cases referred to the CPS by police fell by 37%, with similar declines in prosecutions (34%) and convictions (31%). In the year ending March 2020, only 9% of domestic abuse related crimes recorded by the police led to a charge or summons. The CPS convicted 47,534 domestic abuse cases, compared to 758,491 domestic abuse related police recorded offences.

Between April 2014 and March 2020, the annual number of prosecutions in rape flagged cases fell by 55% and the annual number of convictions fell by 44%. In the year ending March 2020, only 1.4% of rape flagged cases recorded by the police led to a charge or summons. The CPS convicted just 1,439 cases involving rape compared to 55,257 police recorded rape offences. I hope that the Government's forthcoming end to end rape review will address these institutional barriers within the

criminal justice system to reporting and successfully prosecuting rape cases. Whilst there is a clear need for wider reform in all elements of the criminal justice system, a focus on the police, as the first point of contact for most victims and survivors, is pivotal.

Over the last decade there have been a number of important reviews from HMICFRS on the police response to domestic abuse, including the 2014 *Everyone's business* report and subsequent Peel reports. Furthermore, there are some brilliant examples of leadership such as the Assistant Commissioner for the Metropolitan police, Louisa Rolfe, and Deputy Chief Constable for Avon and Somerset Police, Sarah Crew. It is clear however, that more systemic change to ensure a more consistent, robust response from all police officers to the concerns raised by women is urgently needed. Despite the fantastic leadership shown by AC Louisa Rolfe and others, I too often hear horrendous examples of when the police have failed women.

I was very pleased to see your announcement on 22 March on plans to commission a thematic review of violence against women and girls in policing. As part of this work, I am calling on the Government to include a wide scale review into the police handling of domestic abuse cases with the aim of ensuring that the police response matches the severity and prevalence of domestic abuse in order to rebuild the trust of women to report cases. The Government should consider the use of peer inspectors to help conduct the review. I would strongly welcome, as part of this review, and examination of:

- forces' policies on how perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse in the force are managed;
- the identification, recording and investigation of domestic abuse cases, including a review on the use of outcome 16 (where a victim is recorded as not supporting or withdrawing support for police action), the relationship between reported and recorded crime, the mapping of serial perpetrators and partnership working with specialist organisations and other statutory agencies; and
- the centring the voices and experiences of women as witnesses and victims in domestic abuse cases, including a focus on the intersectionality of race, disability and gender in women's experiences of reporting crimes to the police.

In addition to the longer-term work of the commission there are a number of other measures which I believe could be put in place relatively swiftly to help improve the police response to domestic abuse and address the embedded culture of misogyny within the police. Together, this would help to build the confidence of women to report incidences of domestic abuse and sexual assault.

Firstly, there is a clear need for stronger recognition of the importance of dedicated resources and skills within police forces to prevent and tackle domestic abuse. The recruitment of 20,000 new officers could be used as an opportunity to target candidates who are already working in professions (such as social care or in specialist third sector organisations) who will bring a pre-existing skill and understanding of domestic abuse. In order to expand and mainstream expertise and leadership on domestic abuse across forces, I would welcome measures to mandate experience in public protection, specifically working with victims and witnesses of domestic abuse and sexual assault, in order to progress to NPCC rank.

Stronger multi-agency working should be fostered by ensuring that every police force has a specialist unit that is embedded in the local multi-agency trust, which would

include a stronger emphasis on the role of IDVAs/ISVAs to support a greater number of people reporting DA and sexual assault to the police. We would also recommend the expansion of the Violence Reduction Units to include domestic abuse to help ensure that there is a more holistic 'public health' approach within the police to tackle domestic abuse and its root causes. I would also encourage new recruits to spend time meeting with or shadowing the specialist domestic abuse sector, in order to build their understanding of domestic abuse and encourage better multi-agency working.

Finally, it is essential that specific measures are taken to help rebuilt trust among women in the most marginalised communities. These should include creating a firewall between the police and immigration enforcement to foster confidence among migrant survivors in coming forward to the police, as recommended by HMICFRS. This should be accompanied by rolling specialist training on the challenges faced by Black and minoritised women in their interactions with the police as a result of both their gender and race, as well as training to help better flag honour-based abuse.

I am concerned that without the wide-ranging review into police handling of domestic abuse and further measures outlined in this letter that a failure to rebuild the confidence of women in the work of the police will undermine the ambition of the Government's Domestic Abuse Bill and forthcoming Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these measures in further detail and stand ready to lend my full support, in my role as the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, in delivering on the Government's ambitions to tackling all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Jacobs', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nicole Jacobs  
Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales