



**domestic  
abuse  
commissioner**

Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales  
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11 February 2025

Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP  
Home Secretary  
2 Marsham Street  
London, SW1P 4JA

Copied to: Jess Phillips MP, Minister for Safeguarding and VAWG

Dear Home Secretary,

### **RESPONSE TO HIGH COURT RULING ON OPERATION ASSURE**

For the criminal justice system to function effectively and engender trust in the communities it serves, it is imperative that the individuals employed to maintain law and order, protect the public and prevent crime are held to the highest standards of integrity.

I am therefore deeply disappointed by today's ruling from the High Court that forces cannot dismiss officers by removing their vetting. This is a significant step backwards in progress to eradicate police perpetrators of Violence Against Women and Girls from forces, and will only serve as a barrier to this Government's aim to halve VAWG in the next decade.

My recent report on the criminal justice response to domestic abuse, [\*Shifting the scales\*](#), found that only 4% of officers accused of domestic abuse were dismissed. Police-perpetrated domestic abuse is particularly concerning when considering that, unlike civilians, individuals working within policing will have access to specialist knowledge and training which can assist them in perpetrating abuse and harm. They can also utilise their institutional power and knowledge to weaponize the criminal justice system, which severely limits a survivor's options for safety and access to justice.

Currently, failing police vetting does not constitute grounds for dismissal. This means that police officers and staff who may pose risk of harm can continue to work for the police, though they may be consigned to desk duty and not able to work with vulnerable individuals or handle evidence. This is not good enough. It is critical that police chiefs are able to remove individuals who fail police vetting from the force to ensure the safety of the public.

Failure to respond to police perpetrators of domestic abuse, as well as wider VAWG, impacts all victims and survivors, not just those who are subject to abuse by a police

officer. It can lead survivors to believe that where policing does not deal with this issue within its own ranks, it will not take seriously complaints of a similar nature made by survivors, or survivors may fear the individual investigating their case. This is a deeply concerning public safety issue; if victims do not report abuse, perpetrators are able to reoffend without fear of repercussion.

Whilst I recognise work undertaken by the National Police Chiefs Council, College of Policing and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services to strengthen vetting practices and oversee the implementation of the Centre for Women's Justice's super-complaint recommendations, far more robust measures must be implemented to ensure that police perpetrators are swiftly brought to justice. I have long called for changes which would address this discrepancy. Today's decision has made the need for these changes even more urgent.

I am therefore calling on the Home Office and the College of Policing to:

- Amend the Vetting Code of Practice and Authorized Professional Practice on vetting to introduce a statutory requirement for all officers to hold adequate vetting clearance, including requiring forces to vet officers upon transfer.
- Amend the definition of 'gross incompetence' in the Police (Performance) Regulations 2020 to include failure to hold adequate vetting clearance.
- Amend the Police (Conduct) Regulations 2020 to include a list of specified offences – including domestic abuse and VAWG-related offences – for which a conviction would constitute gross misconduct, and change the law to ensure such convictions are grounds for automatic dismissal.
- Comprehensively review all vetting requirements, to ensure officers who pose a risk to public safety are not entering forces in the first place.

I strongly support the Metropolitan Police's work to implement Operation Assure and Operation Onyx, which have served as positive first steps in rooting out perpetrators of VAWG crimes from the force. I am deeply concerned by the harm that will result from the rollback of these measures, and fear they will undermine important work by leaders in policing as well as those such as Lady Elish Angiolini and Baroness Louise Casey to hold forces to account.

I am committed to working with you alongside policing leaders to ensure that forces do not continue to harbour perpetrators of these horrific crimes, and would welcome a meeting to discuss further.

Yours sincerely,



Dame Nicole Jacobs

**Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales**