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26 July 2021

Kit Malthouse MP
Minister for Crime and Policing
Ministry of Justice
Sent by email

Dear Kit

Every victim of domestic abuse must have confidence in the police to listen to and investigate their response. This is critically important when an accusation of domestic abuse is made against a serving police officer or member of staff. We rightly expect police officers to act with integrity, investigating complaints without fear or favour. If police cannot effectively deal with domestic abuse within their own ranks, we cannot expect the public to have confidence that they will respond effectively to complaints from members of the public.

Shamefully, a raft of evidence shows that, in far too many cases police are falling short. Complaints against police officers and staff are not being properly investigated and victims are being left vulnerable and without justice.

Action needs to be taken now to protect victims and ensure that accusations of domestic abuse by serving police officers and staff are fully investigated, and where appropriate, prosecuted effectively.

Evidence of unacceptable practice

We have recently seen a raft of evidence that demonstrates that police officers are not sufficiently investigating complaints against their own officers and staff.

The BBC [recently reported](#) that UK police forces have received more than 800 allegations of domestic abuse against officers and staff over the last five years. However, only 5% of these cases were prosecuted. The report includes case studies where serving police officers made complaints of domestic abuse against colleagues. One victim felt their police force sympathised with the perpetrator and that the abuse was further perpetrated through colleagues who would 'check on' her. A further victim resigned over their treatment, feeling that police officers are unwilling to investigate one another and where perpetrators become untouchable.

[The Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#) revealed further horrific case studies as well as a comment from Deputy Chief Constable Nev Kemp who had conducted an audit of how his own force was performing in this area and concluded that “not everything was as good as it could or should be.”

These investigations are further triangulated in the [super-complaint from the Centre for Women’s Justice](#) on force response to police perpetrated domestic abuse. This complaint, currently under investigation, raises serious concerns about the way policing systems operate where police officers are accused of domestic abuse. Noting that whilst some cases are dealt with properly, there is a risk of policing systems being abused. The complaint presents evidence of failures in investigation, improper manipulation of police processes and of accused officers’ links with others in the force amongst other serious problems.

As PCC for Northumbria, the Victims’ Commissioner came across this very phenomenon. When a domestic abuse complaint was made against a serving officer, the culture focussed on the officer’s needs above the victim’s. This would include moving the officer to less stressful duties and supporting them through a presumed marriage breakdown. Whilst this may be a supportive approach from an employer, it is not consistent with a forceful investigation for the victim. Indeed, victims will often find that many officers will know each other within forces and feel that they have nowhere to turn for support. This situation must be rectified.

Action required

The Government has rightly focussed on tackling domestic abuse. However, this issue risks undermining the progress that is being made and destroying confidence in policing.

No perpetrator should be above the law, but we can see many cases where police abuses have been protected by their colleagues, the complainant not taken seriously, and nobody brought to justice. This is unacceptable. We are now at a stage where it is clear that police forces are not going to do anything about it themselves and new rules are required on how it should be tackled.

There is a clear response: in instances of complaints of domestic abuse against police officers, these should - as a matter of practice - immediately be sent to an adjacent force where a proper, independent investigation is possible. By working with officers from a neighbouring force, logistical issues such as travel can be managed. Moreover, there will be links in place with nearby victims’ services. This reform will bring a level of independence and reassurance to the victim that their complaint will be effectively investigated.

This solution is the only way to give confidence to the public that complaints against police, who are by its nature in a collective, centralised, hierarchical and brotherly organisation, will be investigated well. It is imperative that an independent investigation is carried out into the allegation.

We are aware that reducing domestic abuse is a priority for the Home Office and am sure that you agree this is a necessary reform for achieving your goals. We look forward to your response on this essential reform.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V Baird', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Jacobs', with a cursive, flowing script.

Nicole Jacobs
Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales