



Rape and Sexual Assault Delivery Group Report 2015/2016

Avon and Somerset Constabulary

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Foreword – Chief Constable

Listen. Believe. Respect.

We call this our Bluestone Ethos. It guides our officers when they're investigating the serious crimes of rape and sexual assault, and is the same ethos drives us to continuously seek out ways of improving our service so that people who experience sexual violence receive the best possible support.

Concern for the victim is at the heart of everything we do. Last year 3770 people contacted us, a 68% increase over two years. Some of this is due to the way we record crime but most importantly, it signifies a growing confidence amongst victims in coming forward to the police. We want that confidence to grow yet further, particularly amongst male victims who we know may have particular concerns about making a report.



In recent times we've seen a significant number of people coming forward to tell us about non-recent offences. This follows a number of high profile cases where people have suffered abuse in childhood. We understand how difficult it can be for victims who may have chosen not to talk about their experience but have shut it away and kept it private instead. In Avon and Somerset this year, we've achieved a number of convictions for non-recent offences and we'll continue to work hard to secure justice for victims as more people come forward.

None of this is work we can do alone. The force works alongside a number of partners, including the CPS, the Independent Sexual Violence Advisory Service and a number of local support organisations, including The Bridge and The Green House. And of course, victims themselves.

The voices of victims are crucial in helping us understand how we can improve our service and make it better. Collectively we will always seize on every opportunity to listen to their experiences because it's the voices of people affected by rape and sexual assault that are most important to us. Outlined within the pages of this summary report is the work delivered by the Constabulary in 2015/2016 to help continuously improve the service we provide to people affected by rape and sexual assault. If you wish to share your thoughts and comments about the work we're delivering, we would very much like to hear from you.

Please do get in touch with us.

Chief Constable Andy Marsh

Foreword – Police and Crime Commissioner

I set tackling sexual violence and abuse as a priority in my Police and Crime Plan and this delivery group is key in making my aspirations a reality. I believe passionately about listening to victims and putting them at the heart of everything we do. This is especially important for victims of rape and serious sexual offences. Victims told me that they didn't report to the police because they feared they wouldn't be believed, listened to, or taken seriously. This report says loud and clear that this is not the case and that there is a dedicated group across the Constabulary and other agencies working to improve services for each and every victim of these crimes.

I have been pleased to see increased reporting over the last few years and indeed in 2015/16. It shows me that victims feel they can report and that when they do and it is being properly recorded so it can be investigated.

This report also demonstrates that the work of the group is directed by the views of victims, local sexual violence specialists, and from the research and testaments of the innovative Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) survey.

My office has a role to play in this work by commissioning services for victims. In 2015/16 a new enhanced ISVA contract was introduced which means there is now an increased capacity and improved joint working with the police and partners to better support victims. I have also worked with NHS England to commission the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) and moving into 2016/17 I am funding a range of providers to support victims of Child Sexual Abuse.

Services including the police, partners and specialist providers are all feeling the impact of increased reporting. This presents a challenge that we can only overcome by working together. As such, the work of this group remains as important as ever and has my full support.



Police and Crime Commissioner Sue Mountstevens



Overview

Avon and Somerset Constabulary has a longstanding commitment to tackling sexual abuse and supporting victims to ensure they get the help they need when they need it.

Over recent years there have been numerous high profile investigations relating to sexual offences. Public confidence in the ability of police forces to investigate such offences has increased – a finding that is echoed locally. Newly commissioned victims services have afforded greater opportunities for victims to tell their story. The Constabulary has worked hard to ensure reports from victims are captured in a timely and efficient manner. Nationally, the increase in reports of sexual crimes continues and Avon & Somerset is no exception. It has previously been suggested sexual offences was an area of under reporting so if this gap is starting to close then this represents a positive change.

The increase in reporting does of course create challenges. The Delivery Group provides the relevant strategic framework to ensure our approach to sexual offences is both robust and effective. But what does this actually mean, how does this happen and has it worked?

To begin, the Group is multi-agency. There are representatives from different roles within the constabulary but there is also clear recognition of the need to work with partner agencies and victim services to ensure any decisions are balanced. The Group (membership includes the Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Commissioned Services) has an annual Delivery Plan which describes tangible activity relating to Victims, Staff Development, Prevention, Assurance and Communications.

This report openly reflects on what we've delivered over the year 2015/2016, and our intentions for next.

Our principles

Our approach to the investigation of sexual offences is known as the Bluestone Ethos and is built on a clear set of principles developed after listening to the views of victims and specialists.

The underlying themes are the ability of people in authority to listen and believe and this message has real resonance with our work. We aim to listen without judgement, interpretation or subjectivity.

We believe because we understand the actual number of false reports is very small and much less than commonly imagined. We respect the victims wishes – what do they want the outcome to be – we want to give victims the power to influence as the perpetrator took that power away. We challenge ourselves to fully understand how the words we choose and the actions we take sound and feel to the victim. We work as a team with a range of colleagues collaboratively around the primary focus of victim and secondary focus of perpetrator. We adopt a problem solving mind-set breaking new ground and consider innovative tactics.

Listen. Believe. Respect.

These principles provide the cornerstones for three development programmes being delivered as part of the Delivery Group Plan.

These programmes focus on three key operational roles of First Response Officer, Specially Training Officer and Senior Investigating Officer. Initial training has been delivered in some areas and this will continue as part of our day to day business next year. Victims have told us they need empathy, but they also need a consistent approach and this training will ensure both a common understanding and common standards.

Victim Voice

We feel we have a good insight into victims needs because we ask them. Through the Independent Sexual Violence Advisor, we have now surveyed almost 350 victims of serious sexual offences.

We ask victims about their satisfaction with different parts of the criminal justice process, their expectations and the impact on their confidence. We also ask victims to provide an honest appraisal of how we are doing.

Significant verbatim feedback has been captured. A great deal is positive and demonstrates how we are supportive and can achieve desired outcomes. However, victims have also told us we can and must do better. There are times when we have not met our own expectations and we have to act on this. The survey results are collated quarterly, reviewed at the Delivery Group and generate action. It was the survey that identified the need for consistency through staff development. New “Who’s Who” reference guides for victims are now being produced because victims have told us they need practical advice. The number of victims surveyed will continue to rise. The significance of our results will increase and we will continue to listen as the victims voice remains a reliable litmus test of whether we are getting it right.

Prevention and safeguarding

Of course, we would prefer we had significantly less victims in the first place. Part of our work over the last year has been to review Police and partner data sets and identify better ways of identifying emerging cohorts of possible sex offenders – an approach more widely known as predictive analytics. We have developed some analytical searches that help define this cohort on a daily basis with this intelligence passed to operational teams for consideration and action as required. The approach is at proof of concept stage but we are looking to evaluate and commission the process Force wide during 2016/17. We will also continue with our victim profiling work with partner agencies to identify cohorts of potential under reporting. Historically, one such cohort was male victims of sexual offences. This is an area where a significant amount of work has been delivered to safeguard individuals through improved awareness.

The Constabulary has held two Male Rape Conferences with key note speakers, has an active Twitter account and participated in a number of local TV and radio broadcasts as part of the “Can you keep a secret?” campaign. Similar plans for 2016/17 are well developed and include work with local councils and other blue light agencies as the message changes subtly from “blockers to reporting” to the “consequences of not doing so”. We are proud of our achievements to date and have received some positive feedback.

“The Male Rape and Sexual Assault programme has been a really strong illustration of how the police can work towards making men more confident about reporting and talking about their experiences of rape and sexual abuse. In the last two years, we have seen a significant increase in the number of men coming forward asking for counselling and we see the campaign’s extensive promotion of our services as a significant factor in raising awareness of the support that is available to male victims.” **Michelle Windle, Director, The Green House**

Assurance

It’s important the Delivery Group retains an element of self-reflection and understands the impact of its work. The constabulary has a mature approach to assurance – essentially the ongoing checking and testing of its performance – and this is replicated for sexual offences. Through audit, survey and through review of constabulary and national data sets, the Delivery Group is able to highlight areas of performance that may cause concern.

We also seek advice and support from academia to provide us with the most current thinking on our local approach. A current example is the number of crimes that have a final outcome of no further action or where victims feel no longer able to support prosecutions. We have identified national good practice and are introducing a new process to capture full decision rationale for such cases and this will provide an understanding whether we have achieved due diligence for each case.

Police Force crime data is published nationally, so our progress will remain fully transparent.

Communication

We are committed to improving our service and committed to not doing this in isolation. We are looking to develop new ways to use social media to engage with the public to share our work and encourage discussions. Aside from Twitter, during 2016/17 we will be revising our web content so that the public can access recent messaging and understand support that is available.

Feedback

We believe we have delivered and achieved much in the last twelve months but also know we still have much to do. We think this a positive position in that we still have opportunities to explore that will further improve services delivering long lasting positive outcomes.

We would like to hear from you as our work continues so please get in touch. We are passionate about the service we provide and this can only be improved through open and honest conversations.

To get in touch, contact us online via our [general enquiries form](#).

If you like you can follow us on Twitter - [@ASPBluestone](#).





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