



The South Wales Police approach to  
**Violence against women and girls**  
and other forms of domestic violence

Tackling violence against women and girls is one of the highest priorities for South Wales Police. It is a strategic priority for the Chief Constable and the Police & Crime Commissioner and that is reflected in the way we approach both operational policing and work with our partners.

Immediately on being elected as Police & Crime Commissioner, Alun Michael made clear his expectation for South Wales Police to seize the opportunity offered by the statements of Welsh Government Ministers to play our part in tackling the unacceptable levels of violence against women and girls.

That sense of urgency is shared by Chief Constable Peter Vaughan and was reflected in the Police and Crime Plan for 2013, and again in 2014, and in the joint applications made to the Police Improvement Fund.

**What we've learnt**

To turn intention into action, the Commissioner and the Chief Constable jointly commissioned a Thematic Review which led to the publication of a detailed document which contains an action plan which now informs all aspects of our work. A copy is attached to this note.

There have been questions raised in some quarters as to whether emphasising violence against women and girls risks an unequal response to other forms of violence within relationships, including violence by men on men and women on men.

We wish to take this opportunity to refute that suggestion.

**Each act of violence by one person on another deserves to be treated in accordance with the harm and risk presented. But there are three factors that make tackling violence against women and girls a significant priority for the police.**

- The number of incidents is very high
- The extent of under-reporting is extremely high
- The risk of serious injury or death is disproportionately high

South Wales Police data gives a very clear picture of the prevalence of domestic abuse and sexual violence and clearly demonstrate the disproportionate impact on women and girls.

Our review found that both in scale and seriousness women were by far the biggest victims of domestic abuse sexual assault and honour-based violence recorded in South Wales.

- Domestic violence with injury – 78.6% of victims were women
- Serious sexual offences – 83.8% of victims were women
- Honour-based violence – 75.4% of victims were women

**It follows that there is a public policy imperative for the police and all other public bodies to tackle the level of violence against women and girls which historically has been higher in Wales than in some other parts of the UK. That is reflected in our joint plan.**

### **Drafting the Bill**

The Chief Constable and the Commissioner have different roles, so most comments on the Bill now before the Assembly are the responsibility of the Commissioner but have been informed by the operational experience and perspective of the Chief Constable as well as the facts of offending set out above.

It is fully understood that other considerations have to be borne in mind by Ministers and by the Assembly, but it will be helpful if the legislation spells out the same clear priority in both the title and the content of the Bill that is being pursued by South Wales Police and the Commissioner has written to the Minister and the Committee making that point.

It will be preferable if the clarity of messages from Welsh Government is maintained and reinforced in the title of the Bill. If it is felt that referring only to violence against women would be too narrow, expert legal advice sought by the Commissioner shows that the emphasis on violence against women and girls could be maintained while also dealing with equalities issues by calling it “An Act to make provision in relation to violence against women and other domestic and sexual violence”.

The work of the police will be helped if the Bill is specific about raising awareness of violence of this sort and challenging entrenched attitudes in society that tolerate, accept or encourage domestic violence and sexual abuse. There is a need to increase awareness of services available to help victims.

### **Strengthening partnerships**

The Bill does place responsibilities on local authorities, and that is welcome, not least in view of their responsibility under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act to work with the police and others to reduce offending and re-offending. However we would like to see that responsibility extended to other agencies whose input is also vital, not least the NHS and Social Housing bodies.

If a responsibility is placed on all public bodies to require an engagement that is proportionate to their general responsibilities it should ensure that they play an appropriate role in helping to reduce violence of this sort.

If the Bill is also strengthened in terms of requiring such bodies to contribute to local strategies, in terms of monitoring and in terms of training we would be happy to make a commitment to work with them to ensure that South Wales Police contribute fully to joint working.

Finally, it is our experience that our formal and informal education play a vital role in changing attitudes within society. The Commissioner has therefore submitted that the Bill should include the commitment to include education in relation to violence against women as well as about gender inequality and the place of respect and consent as essential elements in healthy relationships. When those elements have not been part of a person's upbringing and education the police often have to pick up the pieces and for that reason we welcomed the inclusion of such requirements in the White Paper and in statements by Ministers.

Again we are happy to make a police contribution, as happens to a degree through the work of Police School Liaison Officers in South Wales – funded jointly by Welsh Government and South Wales Police – but we believe that to be effective there need to be specific requirements on all schools. The Rotherham report makes specific reference to the need for these issues to be dealt with explicitly within schools and other educational contexts.

We welcome proposals to formalise and strengthen best practice around multi agency fora. South Wales Police is committed and engaged fully with the MARAC process. Between 1st April 2012 – 31st March 2013, 2,242 cases were heard at MARACs across the force area. A total of 70% of those were referrals that had originated from the police, with the other 30% of referrals coming from partner agencies. The total number of children involved in these cases was 2,869.

Given the importance of the sharing of information and actions across a number of agencies through multi-agency arrangements such as MARACs, it will help if these are put on a legislative footing. The benefits of imposing statutory requirements of this sort are already evident in respect of other public protection issues such as child protection and protection of vulnerable adults.

Statutory requirements in respect of MARACs should include a requirement for key agencies to recognise the MARAC process, to know how to identify and refer appropriate cases, and to participate in the MARAC itself.

It will be welcome if the Government recognises the importance of the role of MARAC co-ordinator and gives consideration to how the funding arrangements for these posts can be put on a sustainable footing. Current arrangements are ad hoc and often very fragile.

We also wish to make clear that, while policing is not currently a devolved responsibility, our work takes place in the context of priorities, policies and agencies which do come directly

under the aegis of Welsh Government and the Assembly. The Police play a key role in the multi-agency response to Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence and we will do all we can to reflect this priority in future versions of the Police and Crime Plan, in partnership working and in operational decisions.

**The South Wales Police Plan for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls 2014 – 2017:**

<http://www.southwalescommissioner.org.uk/en/Policy/Violence-Against-Women-and-Girls.aspx>