

**Devon and Cornwall Police Authority Performance Management Committee
10 September 2008**

Open for the purposes of FOI
Report of ACC Debbie Simpson

Sexual Offences - Development of Rape Investigation and Performance

Recommendation(s):

- (i) To note the report.

Introduction / Summary

1. To achieve the Force Vision of attaining a position within the top 10 performing Forces in the country, the challenging target of 30% detection rate for all sexual offences has been set to ensure that we are successful.
2. Currently our performance sits at 24.1% (37/43 Forces) which is almost identical to that of previous years and will only be improved with the change in the way we handle and manage the investigation of serious sexual assaults.
3. A sexual offences strategy has been implemented for the Force that sets out a clear structure which provides leadership and accountability for developments in this area of policing at all levels. It acknowledges that in achieving our target we play only one part in the role of supporting the victims of these traumatic offences. The strategy focuses very much on partnership working with other agencies and voluntary groups to instil a confidence in the victim to support the criminal justice processes, which will bring an uplift in our performance.
4. Whilst the Force has some way to go to achieve the target, there is significant work already in existence to bring about the dramatic changes that were seen in the performance ratings for Gloucestershire Constabulary recently. In fact the policy and processes already in place set Devon and Cornwall Constabulary as national leaders in the delivery of specialist training for officers having contact with sexual assault victims. The further developments that are being achieved together with our partners are also attracting positive commendations from the Home Office team.
5. With such obvious praise and success a critical look has been undertaken within the Force to analyse why the performance does not reflect our procedural competence. An area that the ACPO lead on Rape and Sexual offences, DAC John Yates of the Metropolitan Police, recognises as a national problem is that of a "Culture of disbelief". This is an area upon which the Force is concentrating.
6. Currently 1 in 5 women are subject of rape, only 15% of these women have the confidence to report the offence to the police, and tragically only 5% successfully achieve a brought to justice outcome.
7. The current rate of withdrawal of complaints or non co-operation by rape victims within three days of reporting the offence runs at 33%. Whilst there are no satisfactory measures for analysing the causes of this trend, feedback from other agencies indicate that it is often due to the way in which the victims feel they have been dealt with on initial contact. Subsequent treatment by the investigation teams often evidences a culture of disbelief, with victims being challenged in the same way as suspects when relating the account of the offences committed against them.

8. To deliver the Force strategy and achieve improvement in victim satisfaction and confidence, comprehensive action plans are in place and being monitored both internally and externally by the HMIC, Home Office and ACPO Rape Support Programme.

Background Information

9. The Force's delivery in this performance area is managed through the continuous improvement database held by Professional Standards and Performance Department.
10. There are principally four areas against which progress is monitored (although there are specific areas within these that are required by the various inspection regimes mentioned above)
 - Corporate and structured approach to rape and sexual assault investigations
 - Quality and timely response to victims of serious sexual assault
 - Provision of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) across Devon and Cornwall
 - Efficient and effective investigation of offences and progress through the Criminal Justice System
11. To support the understanding of the problem regarding rape and sexual assault within Devon and Cornwall a problem profile was undertaken. Many of the recommendations within this document already sit within the current action plans. However it does identify that, particularly in relation to the provision of SARCs and quality and timely response to victims, the Force is not capable of achieving this effectively without the full support of partner agencies and voluntary groups.
12. To support the corporate and structured approach to sexual offences, a Multi Agency Gold Group to be chaired by ACC Simpson has been convened and an abridged version of the Profile is to be published for dissemination to its members. A Terms of Reference for the group is to be agreed and the group will work to ensure that joint funding and working practices are made available that will support an uplift in our service to victims and improvement in performance against our target.
13. The principal area in which this group will work is the delivery of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) to achieve quality and timely response to all victims. There are currently two SARC structures within the Force area which sit in Plymouth and Exeter. Work is ongoing within Cornwall to agree the location and structure of a third SARC. Additional funding is being made available by the Minister for Justice to support the set up costs of SARCs, however sustainable long term plans need to be discussed to achieve prolonged success in performance.
14. Following a recent inspection of the SARC within Plymouth the Home office team has held this structure as an example of national best practice. The referral system which has been developed is likely to be used as the national standard for administration and management of all victims whether self referred or supported through the Criminal Justice systems.
15. An area of weakness within the services provided across the Force is the provision of suitably trained and competent medical practitioners to support the examination and treatment of the victims and retrieval of forensic evidence. The Force's current contract for these services sits with MEDACS but is secondary or a subsidiary to their main contract to deliver medical advice and treatment within custody centres.
16. A significant amount of development has taken place in relation to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of investigations including the acceptance of ownership at a local level. Accountability for the investigation of rapes and serious sexual assaults sits with experienced Detective Inspectors and Detective Sergeants. To ensure that all rape offences are critically assessed incidents are monitored through Local and Force daily tasking processes. Where necessary each report is reviewed to a corporate standard to ensure that appropriate initial action

has been taken to support the victim and maximise forensic and other evidence gathering opportunities and ensure compliance with the NCRS (independently monitored by the Force crime registrar on a monthly basis).

17. Current initiatives that are being developed through Plymouth BCU (and replicated in some instances in Exeter) include:

- the deployment of a dedicated Sexual Offences Liaison Officer (SOLO) within the SARC,
- the set up of a dedicated rape investigation team to investigate all allegations, and
- a voluntary rota of specialist trained SOLOs willing to be recalled to duty, to support the victims of rape out of normal working hours.

Result analysis against current performance is taking place to document the outcome of the Plymouth initiatives and to evaluate the potential benefits for the rest of the Force.

18. On a Force-wide basis these initiatives are being supported by significant awareness training to support every member of staff in their response to a report of rape. This includes understanding by call and communication handlers, front-line staff including Station Enquiry Officers, Critical Incident Managers (CIMs), patrol and investigators.

19. This training is being augmented by the facilitation of rape awareness road shows. These are being supported by David Gee, Rape Advisor to ACPO and the Home Office, and are assisting to tackle any culture of disbelief within the Force.

20. The final area which the Force Champion seeks to develop is the improvement in management and handling of investigations through closer working ties with specially trained CPS advisers. Within the HMICPSI recommendations set out in 'Without consent' CPS have specific ownership of key actions for which there is currently non-compliance. Historic evidence clearly demonstrates that to achieve a successful brought to justice outcome there has to be clear communication and consistent and robust action in respect of charging decisions. This can be achieved through the implementation of the Police and CPS Protocol that is currently in draft form.

21. A significant amount of development has already taken place to review and implement change and with a sustained level of commitment and support by a dedicated ACPO Lead, performance in respect of the current targets will improve. The ACPO Lead for Rape has voiced concerns that additional qualitative measures should also be available to show improvement in our victim care and the provision of services that contribute to the current target. These are measures that are being monitored as the Devon and Cornwall SARCs come on line and recommendations and feedback is then included within the Action Plans to support continuous professional improvement in this area of work.

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