

Oversight workshops on violence against women and girls

Sharing of positive practice

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Background

The IOPC Oversight team held a series of workshops for complaint handlers in professional standards departments (PSDs) and local policing bodies (LPBs) on violence against women and girls (VAWG). There were seven online workshops from May to July 2026, aimed at improving the handling of VAWG cases and to convene practitioners to share what is working well, what the barriers are and to share positive initiatives.

Please continue to refer to your [toolkit](#) for more resources and guidance.
Remember to complete the key contacts page and also think about your personal action plan.

This document summarises the initiatives shared during the workshops. It is intended to support learning and encourage discussion about positive practice. The examples have not been tested or validated by the IOPC. We hope that sharing them will help forces and local policing bodies learn from one another and identify opportunities to improve practice. If you have positive practice in your force area that you think would be useful to share, please contact us.

If you would like more information about any of the initiatives featured in this document, we can put you in touch with the relevant contacts. Please contact the IOPC Oversight team at oversight@policeconduct.gov.uk.

Op Illuminate – South Yorkshire Police

Improving support for police victim-survivors

South Yorkshire Police introduced Operation Illuminate to strengthen its response to VAWG, particularly where victim-survivors are police officers or staff. The force identified that police victim-survivors were not always receiving the same standard of support as non-police victims, with concerns including inconsistent safeguarding, limited welfare support and insufficiently robust investigations.

Operation Illuminate is a nine-point plan designed to address those gaps by improving support for police victim-survivors, reinforcing that police-perpetrated VAWG will not be tolerated, and reducing the barriers that may prevent police officers and staff from reporting abuse or harmful behaviour.

The plan focuses on effective safeguarding, meaningful welfare provision and robust investigations. It:

- sets clear expectations for call handlers and operational staff
- provides welfare support officers for police victim-survivors
- ensures Professional Standards Department staff are appropriately trained to investigate these cases, and
- considers the victim-survivor's needs both in the workplace and while off duty

Memorandum of understanding – Dorset and Wiltshire Police

External force investigations of police perpetrated domestic abuse

Dorset Police and Wiltshire Police have established a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to provide greater independence in the investigation of police-perpetrated domestic abuse (PPDA) and other VAWG-related cases. Developed in response to the Centre for Women's Justice [super-complaint recommendations](#), the MOU gives victim-survivors the option for their case to be referred to another force for external investigation.

This approach recognises the challenges smaller forces can face in creating sufficient distance and perceived independence when investigating allegations involving police. By working together, the forces are seeking to strengthen trust and confidence in the handling of these cases, while ensuring decisions remain victim-led and informed by [Operation Soteria](#) principles.

At Dorset Police, potential cases are reviewed initially by a duty superintendent, who considers whether referral to the external force is appropriate and the timing of that referral. This process is intended to avoid any impact on immediate evidential opportunities, including the 'golden hour', while ensuring PSD involvement from the outset.

Dorset Police has also supported the MOU through internal communications, including a campaign explaining why the arrangement was introduced and reinforcing expected standards of behaviour. The messaging focuses on integrity, professional standards and the need for officers and staff to understand clearly what is expected of them.

The forces have worked through some practical challenges in embedding the MOU into frontline delivery. These include agreeing responsibility for suspect welfare, particularly where there may be a risk of self-harm, and ensuring clarity around investigative roles. To manage this, a professional meeting is held at the outset so that risks, investigation structure, arrest responsibilities, welfare arrangements, victim contact under the Victims' Code, and crime data integrity requirements are clearly understood.

Although the number of cases handled through the arrangement is still in its infancy, Dorset Police and Wiltshire Police continue to learn from the process. The forces recognise that demand is a challenge for all forces. However, they see external investigations as an important way to improve independence, transparency, and victim-survivor confidence in VAWG case handling.

Women in Policing network - West Midlands Police

Supporting police victim-survivors to report abuse

West Midlands Police has developed its Women in Policing Network as a practical and responsive way of supporting its approach to violence against women and girls, including police-perpetrated domestic abuse and sexual harassment. The network was launched in January 2025 in response to the [Angiolini recommendations](#), with the aim of creating a quick, effective and supportive route for police victim-survivors and those raising concerns.

The network is designed to encourage police victim-survivors of harassment and abuse to come forward, while also supporting the force's wider zero-tolerance approach to identifying and removing individuals who are not fit to serve. A group of volunteers across the force were upskilled in sexual harassment, PPDA and VAWG. This created a wider support structure that can help identify risks, provide appropriate support and offer police victim-survivors one consistent person to speak to.

This approach provides a confidential and safe reporting mechanism, supported by a more informed and visible network of trained people. Around 30 volunteers initially came forward and attended training, helping to build capacity and confidence across the organisation.

Early data indicates that reports of sexual harassment and PPDA have increased. While this may be due to a range of factors, the network may be contributing to greater confidence in reporting, by providing a supportive environment and clearer routes for raising concerns.

West Midlands Police is now broadening its communication strategy to promote the network more widely. Information about the network is also provided to all new starters as part of their induction. Volunteers will receive periodic inputs and training, and the force intends to advertise for more supporters to grow the network.

Approach to VAWG investigations - Northumbria Police

Reporting networks, misconduct assessments and supporting victim-survivors

Northumbria Police PSD outlined several steps it is taking to strengthen its response to violence against women and girls, focusing on clearer reporting routes, robust misconduct assessments, and tailored support for victim-survivors, including those working within policing.

Reporting and raising concerns

The force has developed dedicated reporting networks in response to the [Angiolini recommendations](#), using the Women's Network to provide reporting advocates. This includes representatives from the Men's Network so that male reporters can also be supported. Bespoke training is being provided by PSD staff and PPDA leads to strengthen understanding and confidence in these routes for reporting.

Assessment and misconduct response

Where appropriate, Northumbria Police is progressing relevant VAWG investigations through the misconduct regime, recognising that this offers both protection and a stronger framework for handling concerns. Supervisors are expected to treat all VAWG reports seriously, identify any relevant issues and escalate them effectively.

At the Regulation 23 stage, where an assessor disagrees with an investigator's view on whether a matter should be escalated or de-escalated, the force has a quality assessment process involving an independent review stage.

Support for PPDA victim-survivors

All PPDA cases, whether involving public or police victim-survivors, are offered independent domestic violence adviser (IDVA) support, and this is not limited to high-risk cases. Local authorities providing IDVA services have been supportive of this approach. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner also helps to reach and inform third sector charities locally. The force also signposts to wider support routes, including [WeProtect](#), an instant victim referral service available nationally through an app, and [Hub of Hope](#), a national mental health support directory.

Internal support and safeguarding

Internally, support is provided through the Women's Network reporting advocates and the Family Support Network for families affected by conduct investigations. The Police Federation provides support for police victim-survivors, as well as those under investigation. A dedicated Welfare Support Officer is offered to all subjects and police victim-survivors involved in misconduct investigations. Where a safeguarding or support need is identified, the force's position is that police victim-survivors should

not be moved out of role or department as a result of reporting abuse. Instead, where a workplace move is needed, the police suspect should be relocated.

Learning and continuous improvement

Northumbria Police is seeking direct feedback from people who have reported VAWG behaviour through individual survey meetings with a learning and prevention inspector. The force is also exploring an AI solution to improve the quality and timeliness of 28-day updates.

Police perpetrated support service – South Wales Police

Support and advocacy for victim-survivors

South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner provided details of their police perpetrated VAWG support service, which provides emotional support and advocacy for victim-survivors of police perpetrated VAWG in the South Wales, Gwent and Dyfed-Powys force areas. The service recognises that victim-survivors of police perpetrated domestic abuse face increased and unique challenges, due to the power imbalance caused by the profession of the perpetrator, and the additional challenges for police-victims. The service is open to all genders. Independent police perpetrated domestic violence advisor (IPPVA) specialists will provide emotional and practical support, including through the criminal, civil, and police investigation processes. The impartial and confidential service is delivered by a partnership of Vale Domestic Abuse Services and Cyfannol Women's Aid.

Blue Bell – Bedfordshire Police

Safeguarding and culture change programme

Blue Bell is Bedfordshire Police's internal workforce safeguarding and culture change programme. It was established in 2021 to support officers and staff who experience or witness sexual misconduct, harassment, abuse of position, misogyny or other sexually inappropriate workplace behaviour. The initiative was developed to improve confidence in reporting concerns, provide independent support to those affected, and strengthen organisational culture and professional standards.

The programme operates through a network of trained Blue Bell ambassadors and peer supporters who provide confidential advice, welfare support, signposting and ongoing engagement throughout any misconduct, professional standards or criminal justice process. Staff can access support regardless of rank, role or whether they choose to make a formal report.

Uniquely, Blue Bell operates outside of the Professional Standards Command allowing officers and staff to have options when reporting or requiring support.

Blue Bell forms part of Bedfordshire Police's broader commitment to workforce wellbeing, legitimacy and the VAWG agenda. It aims to create an environment where inappropriate behaviour is challenged, victims and witnesses are supported, and staff have confidence that concerns will be taken seriously and acted upon.

The programme is supported by a multi-disciplinary governance structure involving senior leaders from crime, public protection, victim services, organisational development and operational policing.

Blue Bell has attracted national interest and was recognised as an innovative approach for improving staff confidence, supporting victims of workplace misconduct and driving sustainable cultural change.

Sharing positive practice

If you have examples of positive complaint handling practice that may support wider learning, please email oversight@policeconduct.gov.uk. Suitable examples will be considered for wider circulation.

Thank you for your continued commitment to improving complaint handling and supporting learning across policing.

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