

Oversight workshop on violence against women and girls

Summary report

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1. Background

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains a significant area of public concern and a key priority across policing and the wider criminal justice system. The quality of complaint handling in cases involving allegations of violence against women and girls is critical to maintaining public confidence, ensuring accountability and supporting organisational learning. The IOPC has an important role in understanding how complaint handling approaches are being applied in practice and identifying opportunities to support continuous improvement.

Between May and July 2026, our Oversight team held a series of workshops for professional standards department (PSD) complaint handlers and local policing bodies (LPB) reviewers/complaint handlers to improve police handling of cases involving violence against women and girls. The workshops were an opportunity to embed and explore the guidance provided in our [Focus](#) publication dedicated to VAWG. The aim of the workshops was to:

- ensure national guidance and legal requirements are consistently followed
- set expectations and drive-up standards in the handling of complaint and conduct matters involving VAWG, and
- to foster a learning and improvement environment, through the sharing of positive practice, open discussions and an opportunity to ask questions

The workshops provided an opportunity to bring policing stakeholders together to share experiences, to reflect on their confidence in applying existing guidance and to identify areas where additional support or clarification may be beneficial.

Attendees were invited to provide feedback through a survey to assess the usefulness of the sessions, the relevance of the content and their confidence in applying the learning in their own roles.

This report summarises the workshop approach, stakeholder feedback, key insights and recommended next steps. The findings will inform future oversight activity, support ongoing engagement with policing stakeholders and shape the development of resources and guidance aimed at improving handling of complaints relating to violence against women and girls.

2. Objectives

Our workshop objectives were to:

- embed the key messages from [Focus 23 – Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
- ensure national guidance and legal requirements are consistently followed
- set expectations and drive-up standards in the handling of complaint and conduct matters involving VAWG
- foster a learning and improvement environment, through the sharing of positive practice, open discussions and an opportunity to ask questions
- improve public trust and confidence in the police response to VAWG
- continue the conversations around VAWG and demonstrate the IOPCs commitment to working with forces on a topic of high-priority policing

3. Workshop approach

7	28	45	43	236
workshops	hours of content	police forces	local policing bodies	attendees

We delivered seven online workshops aimed at complaint handlers in PSDs and LPBs, alongside police force VAWG leads.

Workshop	Dates	Guest speaker	Attendance
Heads of PSD	6 May 2026	None – facilitated discussion	28
North West	28 May 2026	South Yorkshire Police – Op Illuminate	38
Midlands	10 June 2026	West Midlands Police – Women in Policing network	33
North East	16 June 2026	Northumbria Police – approach to VAWG investigations	34
Wales and South West	23 June 2026	Dorset Police – external force investigations	27
South East (and London)	2 July 2026	South Yorkshire Police – Op Illuminate	30
South and London	8 July 2026	Dorset Police – external force investigations	46

Attendees were provided with a [toolkit](#) before the session containing useful links and resources, case study pre-reading, and a personal action plan for recording key take-away messages/learning from the session.

The workshops were split into two halves covering:

1. complaints made by members of the public about the police handling of crimes involving VAWG
2. reports made about acts of police perpetrated VAWG

Participants worked through a detailed case study in each section, focusing on good complaints handling, safeguarding and support, victim-centred approaches, avoiding victim-blaming language and recognising red flags / missed opportunities. The case studies were designed to be interactive and encourage participants to think about the

process in their force, what gaps or barriers there might be, and to share positive practice.

Each session included a presentation from a police force guest speaker, sharing information about a positive practice in their police force.

“I think reading the case studies really hit home on the gaps in our systems and I feel motivated to improve them”

4. Feedback survey results

At the end of each session, attendees were asked to complete a short survey to tell us how their knowledge and understanding of handling VAWG matters had improved and whether their forces were likely to implement any changes as a result of the workshops. We also asked for feedback around the format and length of the workshops.

There were 54 individual responses across all the sessions, (approximately a quarter of attendees). Out of the 54 responses, 9 were from the Heads of PSD session.

Of the respondents, 33 out of 54 (61 per cent) stated that before the workshop, their understanding of handling complaints/conduct matters involving VAWG was fairly or very good. After the workshop, this level significantly increased to 98 per cent (53 out of 54 respondents).

Overall, the content of the workshop was well received. The majority of the respondents (over 90 per cent in all areas) stated that all elements of the content were fairly/very valuable.

Feedback on the delivery of the workshop was overwhelmingly positive, with high levels of satisfaction across all aspects of delivery. Many attendees described the workshop as informative, useful, thought-provoking and professionally delivered, with several calling for similar workshops on other thematic topics.

“Please continue to run more workshops like this, (e.g. on key themes/thematic strands) they are an incredibly helpful resource for complaints handlers and OPCC [Office of Police and Crime Commissioner] staff to refer to!”

The workshop had a good, reported impact, with most participants intending to adopt best practice, improve victim-centred approaches, review language and processes, and influence wider organisational learning and improvement in the handling of VAWG-related complaints and conduct matters. Of those who were not likely to change practices, three participants explained that the practices or discussions were less relevant to them in their role or their force.

“I am planning to include VAWG Complaints in the next PSD CPD event, I will include focus on how to avoid victim-blaming language and [will] review our welfare support to victim-survivors of PPDA”

5. Key insights gained

The survey feedback provides strong evidence that the VAWG workshops successfully increased knowledge, promoted best practice and encouraged change within PSDs and OPCCs. The participants particularly valued the focus on victim-centred practice and safeguarding. Feedback suggests the workshops will contribute to improved handling of VAWG-related complaints and conduct matters.

The workshops highlighted that there is a wide range of positive practice taking place across police forces in the VAWG space, with examples given of local initiatives, improved victim-survivor support and a willingness to share learning more widely.

Some police forces told us that they are implementing actions as a result of recommendations from external inquiries, such as the [Angiolini Inquiry](#) and the investigation into the [Centre for Women’s Justice super-complaint](#) on police perpetrated domestic abuse. The discussions in the workshops were encouraging, but we heard that resources or lack of specialist expertise can be a barrier in the handling of VAWG matters.

We discussed the principles of good communication, safeguarding, and knowing where to go for advice and support. The workshops provided an opportunity to set out the IOPC expectations when responding to VAWG matters, and to embed the messages from [Focus 23 – Violence Against Women and Girls](#). The interactive case study discussions showed that those participating in the discussions were able to identify red flags in perpetrator behaviour. This led to engaging discussions on the different approaches among forces. There were interesting discussions on how police victim-survivors can, and should be supported to report abuse, and the additional barriers they may face.

There was a strong appetite at each session, and also evident in the survey feedback, for more guidance and practical support on avoiding victim-blaming

language. This would help to embed more trauma-informed, victim-centred communication in complaint and conduct handling.

The workshops also highlighted a strong enthusiasm among forces to share initiatives, learn from each other and build on positive practice, to support more consistent and effective responses to VAWG-related complaints and conduct matters.

“As a result of the workshop, we are likely to take a more trauma-informed/responsive and victim-centred approach when handling complaint and conduct matters involving violence against women and girls.

The session reinforced the importance of understanding the wider context of VAWG, recognising potential barriers to reporting, and ensuring our processes and scrutiny arrangements appropriately reflect the experiences and needs of victims and survivors”

6. Insights for oversight activity

The findings suggest that future oversight work should use the workshops as a foundation for more sustained engagement with forces. In particular, oversight activity should continue to focus on whether forces are embedding victim-centred, trauma-informed approaches in complaint and conduct handling, including how they:

- identify safeguarding issues
- recognise missed opportunities
- avoid language or assumptions that could minimise victim-survivor experiences

The strong appetite for shared learning shows there is value in continuing to create opportunities for PSDs and LPBs to exchange examples of positive practice. This could include further workshops, existing regional forums or via Oversight newsletter features.

The survey feedback indicates that invitations to workshops and future engagement should clearly explain the content and intended audience, so forces can nominate the right colleagues to maximise the impact of the sessions.

In terms of practical support, complaint handlers would benefit from more guidance on avoiding victim-blaming language. The development of guidance should be informed by the themes raised in the workshops and survey feedback, ensuring it responds directly to the areas where forces have requested more clarity and support.

7. Next steps

1. **Consider additional learning tools to complement the existing IOPC guidance on [avoiding victim-blaming language](#).** Consider what other practical and interactive learning tools could be developed for complaint handlers, which will provide examples of victim-blaming language, suggested alternative wording and prompts for reviewing complaint correspondence and decision-making. When developing other learning tools, consider if IOPC staff could also benefit from this support.
2. **Share positive practice examples from forces.** The [positive practice examples](#) shared in the workshops have been collated. Please continue to share examples of positive complaint handling practice that may support wider learning, by emailing oversight@policeconduct.gov.uk. Suitable examples will be considered for wider circulation in the Oversight newsletter.
3. **Continue to use regular engagement channels to discuss VAWG complaint handling and reinforce learning.** Continue to have conversations with PSDs and LPBs around the handling of VAWG-related complaint and conduct matters to maintain momentum and encourage practical change. Continue to engage with forces on changes that have been implemented and what further support is needed.
4. **Embed insights into future oversight activity.** Use the findings to inform future Oversight work, including the planning of any future Oversight workshops (on any topic).

8. Conclusion

Our VAWG workshops provided a valuable opportunity for our Oversight team to engage directly with policing stakeholders on a priority area of significant public concern. Participant feedback shows the sessions increased understanding, supported reflection on current complaint and conduct handling practice, and helped to reinforce the importance of victim-centred approaches.

The findings also show that there is already a strong foundation of positive practice across forces, alongside clear enthusiasm to share initiatives and learn from each other. At the same time, stakeholders identified areas where further support would be beneficial.

The Oversight team will use these insights to inform future engagement, develop practical resources and continue to support forces in strengthening their response to VAWG-related complaints and conduct matters.

More information on the IOPCs programme of work to tackle violence against women and girls can be found on our [website](#).

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