

By email

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20th October 2021

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Dear Councillors and Assembly Members,

Thank you for writing with your concerns about violence against women and girls. We are all horrified that that man used his position of trust as a Met officer to deceive, rape and murder Sarah Everard. His actions have shocked Londoners: they are appalling and are a gross betrayal of everything policing stands for.

We fully understand the questions being asked of us as an organisation and we want that scrutiny to help us do what is needed to improve and rebuild confidence.

I have asked Baroness Casey of Blackstock to lead an independent and far-reaching review into our culture and standards of behaviour. She will also assess our current leadership, recruitment, vetting, training, communications and other processes. I am also sure you will agree, Baroness Casey is extremely experienced and highly respected and will ask the difficult questions needed for this thorough review. This will build a stronger Met, ensure lasting improvement to our service for Londoners and help public confidence in us. I hope her appointment and the significant urgent actions we are taking will go some way to provide immediate and vital reassurance to Londoners.

To outline a number of immediate priorities:

- We are boosting the number of investigators to do more to prevent and identify the abuse of trust by our people. We will also create a new dedicated team to focus on the investigation of allegations of sexual misconduct and domestic abuse;
- We will publish an action plan shortly on the detailed steps we are taking to improve how we tackle the issues women and girls tell us make them feel unsafe, and ensure we have a positive, supportive and healthy culture that sets an example for all to follow; and
- As part of our mission to focus on what matters most to Londoners and keep the city safe for everyone, we will renew our work to drive better operational outcomes, including continuing to prioritise key crimes such as rape and serious sexual offences.

I also welcome the inquiry announced by the Home Secretary into the case of the man who killed Sarah Everard and then to look into specific issues around vetting practices, professional standards and discipline, and workplace behaviour. In addition, the Prime Minister has launched a Home Secretary-chaired taskforce to drive cross-government action on tackling violence against women and girls to help maintain public confidence in policing.

We will play our full part, working with you and other partners, on the inquiry and the taskforce, to deliver action where it is needed to rebuild confidence.

I hope you find the answers below helpful.

Yours sincerely

Cressida Dick

Cressida Dick
Commissioner

1. Make clear that tackling Violence against Women and Girls is an absolute priority for policing in London and in every single borough. This must include an immediate review to ensure that there are consistently high standards in every single borough to respond to violence against women and girls.

Violence has been my number one priority through my Commissionership. Violence against women and girls is a priority.

We fully appreciate how events this year have heightened concerns about violence against women and girls in London. We completely share that concern. The Met is absolutely committed to doing everything we can to keep women and girls safe, and to feel safe.

Every day we are working closely with our partners across this city to deliver a safe environment for women and girls to go about their daily lives.

We recognise that we need to build public confidence, and especially with victims of serious offences, including rape, to come forward and be heard and supported so that police can remove violent offenders from our streets. The Met's upcoming VAWG action plan will outline those steps.

Each BCU is scrutinised in a number of ways by its local community including through independent advisory groups, ward panels and policing encounter panels.

2. Prioritise investigating crimes against women and girls when they are reported, no matter at what level, and ensure that women are treated with the required sensitivity.

Working with our partners across the criminal justice system, we are determined to bring offenders to justice. We are prioritising action against sexual and violent, predatory offenders.

We have already taken a number of important steps in this area, including strengthening protections for victims, whilst bearing down on perpetrators. This ranges from increased public patrols to specialist Predatory Offender Units to arrest and charge those who carry out violence, much of it domestic or sexual violence. These are based in every Basic Command Unit across London, and since last November they have arrested over 2,100 suspects, almost two thirds of which were for domestic abuse offences.

In addition, we will deliver DA (Domestic Abuse) Matters training to 6,500 frontline staff to improve our initial response to domestic abuse, assisting officers with recognising and responding to coercive and controlling behaviour - and equipped to both deal with the perpetrator and ensure victims can access support.

3. Immediately suspend anyone in your force against whom there is an allegation of violence whilst due process is followed and urgently improve screening and vetting processes.

Suspension of officers is carried out in accordance with Regulation 11 of the Police and Conduct Regulations 2020.

The criminal investigation of any allegation of violence against a woman by a police officer is undertaken by the local force as determined by the Home Office Crime Recording Standards. Misconduct investigations for officers of the MPS in these circumstances would be carried out by the MPS Directorate of Professional Standards.

Where specific criteria are met, these cases may be referred to the Independent Office of Police Conduct for consideration of whether they should manage or undertake the investigation. Care is taken to ensure that the investigating officers are not local or acquaintances of the officer concerned.

Suspension decisions must be made according to the Regulations and on a case-by-case basis. Any blanket policy of the sort you suggest would not be lawful.

4. Commit to investigating and progressing all cases involving sex or gender based violence, including domestic abuse. This should include domestic violence where the perpetrator is, for example, a child of, or carer for, the victim.

Each case must be considered on its merit and based on the evidence available. We understand that crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls, such as domestic abuse and sexual violence, have devastating consequences. They can have a profound and long-lasting impact on those directly affected, as well as on communities and society as a whole.

For example, we are trialling an important new approach for sexual assault investigations called Project Bluestone. It uses research evidence to change the approach and emphasis on investigations. By focusing more on suspects than victims, it channels resources with the aim of stopping and challenging repeat offenders. We are confident it will deliver real change and results.

We also recognise that a large percentage of VAWG is perpetrated behind closed doors which has a wide ranging and long lasting impact on the survivors and those who that are witness to it within a domestic setting. The targeting of VAWG in private premises includes key areas within the recently developed MPS Public Protection Plan improving our response to rape and sexual offences; domestic abuse, stalking and harassment; child abuse (including online and indecent images); harmful practices (such as female genital mutilation); and the management of registered sex offenders.

One example is Operation Aegis, which was rolled out across all BCUs in April 2021. Our aim is to improve public protection across six areas: missing persons, child exploitation, child abuse, online child sexual abuse & exploitation, domestic abuse, and rape & serious sexual offences. We are seeking improvement by creating a consistent approach where officers are better at identifying and managing risk, taking every opportunity to improve outcomes for victims.

5. Put in place a compulsory training programme for all existing police officers and new recruits on Violence Against Women and Girls which addresses misogyny, appropriate support for victims and securing convictions.

All officers, including those training to be Special Constables and PSCOs, are given classroom sessions where they are introduced to the Equality Act 2010, and are taken through the considerations of good practice pertaining to the 'protected characteristics'. This is crucial in ensuring that they have the requisite understanding and knowledge to enable them to be fair and respectful to their communities, irrespective of the role that they are undertaking.

These sessions reflect on the implications of bias, prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping, as well as demonstrating effective approaches to challenge inappropriate behaviour amongst colleagues. Participants are also asked to discuss the impact of conscious and unconscious bias on the decision-making process, and how this can affect wider engagement and inclusion.

All existing officers are required to complete a College of Policing course related to the Equality Act 2010. This sits alongside an ambitious leadership programme reaching all 10,000 Met leaders, focused on creating an open and transparent working environment and a truly inclusive culture.

In addition, all officers are taught that victims of crime must be treated in a respectful, sensitive and professional manner without discrimination of any kind. Every victim will be assessed and support will be tailored to meet their needs. Victims receive appropriate support to help them, as far as possible, to cope and recover and be protected from re-victimisation.

The victim care policy places victims at the centre of our culture and creates consistency in victim satisfaction across our Borough Command Units (BCUs) and communities. We ensure that victims of crime know what information and support is available to them from reporting a crime onwards and who to request help from if they are not getting it. These measures also help us to secure convictions by supporting victims and witnesses throughout the legal process.

We ensure training courses are regularly reviewed and that content is up to date and relevant, and raise any issues relating to training at the Victim Care Board. Monthly performance figures are shared with partners such as MOPAC, Victim Support and Citizens Advice.

6. Commit to protecting whistle-blowers who raise concerns about the behaviour of fellow officers who exhibit behaviours which could lead to abuse or violence against women or girls

Earlier in 2021, the Met introduced a new whistleblowing policy for all areas of concern. We believe that acting with honesty and integrity is at the very core of what makes us professional police officers and staff.

Unethical or unprofessional behaviour by a policing colleague, irrespective of rank, grade or role should never be ignored and it's important to note that the same professional standards apply whether an individual is on or off duty, and communicating face-to-face or online.

The policy sets out the MPS' expectation that everyone who raises a concern, in good faith, will be listened to and supported.

There are a number of ways in which a report can be made, depending on the individual circumstances, but reporting openly in person is always encouraged and supported. Every OCU has a Professional Standards Unit who are able to give the individual advice at an early stage. The range of reporting options is designed to give whistle-blowers the flexibility to choose the most appropriate method of reporting.

7. Commit to record misogyny as a hate crime and collect and share data on whether sex or gender was a factor in crimes in every borough.

The MPS is committed to doing all it can to protect women from crime, particularly where crime is motivated by misogyny or any form of hatred.

We are awaiting the Law Commission's review on hate crime legislation and their recommendations for reform.

We are taking an active interest in the evaluation of recording of misogyny in other forces and we'll be taking preparatory steps to ensure we are ready to implement the recommendations of the Law Commission review and Home Office Guidance without delay.

8. Tell us how many women and at what level are currently employed in the Met and in each Basic Command Unit and what efforts are being made to increase the number of women in, and diversify, the force in your area.

Please find our latest BCU statistics here in which:

- table 2.1 provides a breakdown of officers by BCU and gender;
- table 3.1 provides the same for staff;
- table 4 the same for PCSOs; and
- table 6 provides a breakdown of ranks by gender:

<https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/force-content/met/stats-and-data/workforce-data-force-august-2021.xlsx>

Our work to achieve this includes:

- Developing a recruitment narrative to ensure our messaging specifically addresses perceived barriers to joining the Met; and
- Prioritising recruitment from London's communities through outreach, including investing in Recruitment Outreach team.

9. Have a named lead officer of suitable seniority to make operational decisions and establish reference groups with responsibility for Violence against Women and Girls in each BCU to monitor, discuss and propose improvements and make the details of this named officer public and shared widely via Safer Neighbourhood Teams, Ward Forums and local councils.

Every Met Basic Command Unit across London has a Superintendent in charge of Public Protection. They each lead a large team whose work focuses predominantly on keeping children safe and tackling violence against women and girls. The Met also has a Public Protection Commander who leads on the strategic response to violence against women and girls. In addition, the Met also now has two full-time policy leads to improve standards even further.

To drive further improvement, the Met has developed and implemented a new Public Protection Improvement Plan. Local BCUs now receive regular performance packs which share analysis for five public protection priority areas: child abuse, rape, domestic abuse, hate crime, and missing persons.

10. Task your Borough Commanders to attend scrutiny at the relevant councils, to provide evidence of an improvement plan, delivery against objectives, and monitoring outcomes.

All BCU commanders have regular contact with their locally elected politicians. They also maintain regular links and work in partnership with local authorities within their BCUs on VAWG and community safety matters generally - including attending scrutiny committees, as requested.

Dedicated BCU leads on public protection and VAWG will also have regular contact with the elected members who sit on children/adult safeguarding and community safety boards.

We note that each council will have different approaches to issues including whether they have a dedicated steering groups on specific community safety issues like VAWG. BCUs will continue to engage in a continued joint approach in order to deliver the best outcomes for communities.