

Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales
Office of the Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales
5th Floor
70 Petty France
London
SW1H 9EX

5 August 2020

Dear Dame Vera,

Thank you for your letter on so called 'honour-based' abuse and the 2015 HMICFRS inspection into the police response to these crimes. I am sorry for the delay in responding, which was caused by your letter not having reached me until recently. I understand this was a result of it being sent to a member of staff no longer in post.

As Minister for Safeguarding, tackling 'honour-based' abuse is one of my key priorities and it is an integral part of our efforts to end violence against women and girls. My officials work very closely with Karma Nirvana, who are funded annually by the Home Office, and I am pleased that we have recently been able to allocate them a further £59,000 to address the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic.

The 2015 HMICFRS inspection into 'honour-based' abuse was very valuable in highlighting where more needed to be done and the Government is committed to its full implementation. While I agree that there are areas where more work is needed, most of the recommendations are now either fully or mostly completed and a range of work has been undertaken as a result. For example, the Home Office has amended the police Annual Data Requirement to require police forces to record where a crime has been committed in the context of preserving the 'honour' of a family or community.

However, including 'honour based' abuse in the Annual Data Requirement will make a difference only if police officers can access the right professional information to identify and deal with these often complex crimes properly, and I share your concern that one of the recommendations for the College of Policing (recommendation 12) has not yet been implemented as drafted.

Recommendation 12 advised that the College of Policing should produce Authorised Professional Practice guidance to provide current and up-to-date standards for the police service in relation to 'honour-based' abuse and forced marriage. Third sector organisations, including Karma Nirvana, have previously raised the fact that this remains incomplete as a concern and I recently wrote to the Chief Executive of the College to share my view that a distinct piece of guidance on 'honour-based' abuse and forced marriage is required.

The College subsequently advised that they will be creating a new 'one stop' location within their webpages for anyone seeking products on 'honour-based' abuse related topics and that they will also look to work with forces to gather updated examples of 'honour-based' abuse related practice. I have also accepted the College's suggestion that I meet with them to discuss these matters further, and this will take place following the summer recess.

Thank you for your request to meet with officials. The Head of the Public Protection Unit, Shehla Husain, would be happy to speak with you to further discuss your concerns. Please contact her via Shehla.Husain@homeoffice.gov.uk to arrange this.

We continue to seek ways to offer more protections for victims of these awful crimes and to tackle perpetrators. The joint Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) has remained fully operational throughout the coronavirus pandemic and continues to operate a public helpline service to support those affected by forced marriage. The FMU also continues to run training sessions for police officers about forced marriage, and will shortly start doing so for social workers too. The Home Office has issued a range of materials to support professionals to help them understand these issues, including publishing statutory multi-agency guidance and making available free e-learning.

I am extremely grateful for the ongoing work you undertake to protect and support victims and would like to thank you for writing on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Victoria Atkins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

VICTORIA ATKINS MP