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Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
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Dear Home Secretary,

I write in response to the HMICFRS final inspection report: **A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape - Phase two: Post-charge.**

I acknowledge the recommendations made in this report and understand that recommendations 1, 8 and 9 (listed in appendix A for reference) are applicable to all Forces, including Essex Police.

The Chief Constable has provided a detailed response to me regarding each of the recommendations relevant to Essex Police. This assures me that the Force is either meeting the recommendations or is on target to achieve them.

Notwithstanding the above, it is important to recognise that the level of rape convictions in Essex and across much of the country is woefully inadequate.

While I am reassured that Essex Police is responding to the specific recommendations highlighted in this report in a timely and effective manner I am not convinced that these recommendations will be adequate to achieve the significant improvement we need to make to reassure the public that rape is investigated and prosecuted properly.

In Essex, I will continue to push Essex Police and its partners across the Criminal Justice System to do more, including the Crown Prosecution Service. We cannot stay in the position we are at the moment with so few cases going to court and so many victims being left down.

Essex Police have employed some positive practices in these areas and continue to work towards providing the best possible support to victims and obtaining the best outcomes in court.

The Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ISVA) service in Essex, which I fund, conducts joint visits with CPS to victims who are considering disengaging post-charge. A pilot project to increase capacity of the ISVA service is enabling bespoke targeted support to vulnerable and repeat victims, and its impact will be monitored.

Essex Police is working with CPS to place greater focus on an Offender Centric Approach and the two organisations have collaborated on training in this area. Compliance with the Victim Code of Practice is important, and Essex Police has developed some tools to ensure a consistency of approach. An Aide Memoire has been shared with all officers and a Victim Closure Template is currently being trialled in one Local Policing Area.

Internal governance and oversight is implemented through the Essex Police Training and Skills Board and Essex Victim Witness Action Group.

The solved rates for rape and other sexual offences are far below an acceptable level. More must be done to change this, to achieve justice for victims and to protect future victims from serial perpetrators. The harm caused by this type of crime is significant, and improved outcomes should be a focus both nationally and locally.

I have concerns regarding the capacity of courts to cope with current and future demand. The courts still have a large backlog of cases, which has existed since before (and made worse by) the impacts of Covid. We know that there is a correlation between the time taken to bring a case to court and both successful conviction and abandonment rates. Adding resources to the front end of the system, to encourage victims to engage and to improve detection rates, will not result in better outcomes unless the courts are able to handle the demand for their services. In fact, the backlog in itself is a deterrent to victims who may otherwise be supportive of prosecution. I have previously expressed an interest in establishing a Nightingale Court in Essex and would still welcome some engagement on how this could be made a reality.

'Improving support for victims of crime' is a key priority in Essex and is included in my Police and Crime Plan 2021-2024. The recommendations in the Inspection Report are supported by the commitments in my Police and Crime Plan, delivery against which is regularly and rigorously monitored, including through the monthly Performance and Resources Scrutiny Board.

I will continue to monitor the work of Essex Police in this regard, and to hold the Chief Constable to account.

Yours sincerely



Roger Hirst  
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner  
c.c. Ben-Julian Harrington, Chief Constable, Essex Police.

## **Appendix A – Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

- Immediately, police and prosecutors should review and significantly improve communications with victims from the point of charge onwards.

### **Recommendation 8**

- Immediately, the police and the CPS should work collaboratively to ensure that bad character is considered in all rape cases, and progressed wherever it is applicable.

### **Recommendation 9**

- Immediately, forces should make sure that victims of rape are given the opportunity to make a victim personal statement (VPS) at the earliest possible time, with the option of updating this statement closer to the court trial date.
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