



Words Matter Reporting Guidelines

For Decision

Please ensure ALL sections of this report are fully completed after discussing with the subject expert and a version control included.

Meeting name:	Constabulary Governance Board
Date of meeting:	Monday 16 September 2024
Title of paper:	Words Matter Reporting Guidelines
Author:	Emma Hillary, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) Communications and Engagement Officer, and Jo Webb, Constabulary External Communications Team Leader
Sponsor/ Board member:	Hilary Allison, Head of Public Affairs

Executive summary:

In 2022, a series of rapes and sexual assaults was reported to the Constabulary, which resulted in an opinion piece published in the Stroud Times titled: 'Sexual assault rather than rape – is wording sanitising the offence?' You can read this [here](#). This article highlighted the active and passive voice - how in communications we say that a woman was raped, rather than that a man raped a woman. We realised there is no guidance for communicators on how to report on Violence and Intimidation Against Women and Girls (VIAWG). Subsequently, over the past two years, we have researched and created the Words Matter Reporting Guidelines alongside not-for-profit organisation, This Ends Now.

This is a progressive document that recognises the nuances of language, and gives practical advice specifically when reporting on male VIAWG. It intends to initiate a change in language to reduce victim blaming and misogyny, and we hope this shift can help create a safer society for victims/survivors.

There is power in words. Something which may appear subtle, could instead have underlining implications. We occasionally see the phrase 'child porn' in the news, when in reality a criminal has been convicted of having indecent images of children. Another well-known phrase is 'revenge porn' - that is not the legal term for the offence, but it is what we all recognise. These

statements have something in common – they both imply that the victim is consenting in some way, and ultimately the phrases are inadvertently victim blaming.

There has been a lengthy consultation period for our guidelines, involving internal and external experts, both at a local and national level. Words Matter goes beyond current existing guidance, and we believe it is the first of its kind nationally aimed at police communicators. If implemented, these guidelines will improve communications by both the Constabulary and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), and ensure we do not victim blame, and that we challenge unconscious gender-biases. This in turn should impact on reporting in the media.

These guidelines have been supported by the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) communications lead for Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), as well as key external experts including Women’s Aid, The Hollie Gazzard Trust and Zero Tolerance.

In 2023 we were able to present the idea behind Words Matter at Cheltenham Literature Festival, and due to its popularity, we have been invited back to present again this year (2024).

Recommendations:

CGB is asked to support the following recommendations:

- To support the Words Matter Reporting Guidelines, and agree that they should be adopted and implemented by the Constabulary in all internal and external communications
- To agree that that the Words Matter Reporting Guidelines will sent to the PCC Governance Board for approval so that they can be adopted and implemented by the OPCC in all internal and external communications.

Cost of recommendations

There are no costs to implementing these within our department, Communications and Engagement. However, if there is a need to give inputs to other departments across the Force, or with our local media, or other organisations, there could be small expenses, such as mileage, but these would be kept to a minimum as this could be done virtually if required.

Costs	Amount	Budget details
Capital costs	NA	NA
Revenue costs	NA	NA

Other	Unquantifiable but minimal	Any small costs be paid by Communications and Engagement
-------	----------------------------	--

Detail how the proposals contribute to:

- **HMICFRS PEEL recovery plans – consider:**

- How good is the Force at building, developing and looking after its workforce and encouraging an ethical, lawful and inclusive workplace?

This innovative set of guidelines has inclusivity at its core. It will make the Constabulary and OPCC’s communication and engagement teams more acutely aware of the impact of language on vulnerable victims and victims who belong to minority groups.

Additionally, this paper was written following extensive consultation with a variety of experts, and by adopting these guidelines, we will be representing our communities across the county, victims and minority groups better through our communications.

- How good is the Force at planning and managing its organisation efficiently, making sure it achieves value for money, now and in the future?

These guidelines provide an effective and clear approach for our workforce to be able to avoid victim blaming language in relation to Violence and Intimidation Against Women and Girls (VIAWG), which is key in our communications. Time will be saved as the thought-provoking guidance document will provide quick answers to difficult decisions and discussions, which may have ordinarily taken a long time previously. The guidelines also make communications more consistent across both legal entities (Constabulary) in relation to VIAWG as there is agreed advice.

- **Performance improvement plans**

These guidelines provide an effective and clear approach for our workforce to be able to avoid victim blaming language in relation to Violence and Intimidation Against Women and Girls (VIAWG) and ensure an improved approach.

- **VIAWG**

VIAWG is at the heart and soul of this document. These guidelines could be a major contributor to supporting victims, and to both the Constabulary’s and OPCC’s plans to tackle male violence against women, and through wider adoption, potentially the police service and other organisations.

Our use of language is subtle, but so powerful, and avoiding victim blaming within our communications will help empower victims and play a role in addressing misogyny.

The document gives guidance on how the language used in all communications can empower victims of VIAWG by us putting the onus on the perpetrator making a choice to commit a crime, and that the victim played no part in that.

The linguistic shifts we make, such as simply calling something image-based sexual abuse, rather than 'revenge porn', are essential as they help perpetrators, who are predominantly men for these type of offences, understand the seriousness of their actions. The use of the word 'porn' in revenge porn, implies that there was consent.

We believe there is a relationship between the words we use as a society and men's attitudes and behaviours towards women. A man makes a decision to rape a woman, a woman does not choose to be raped. Yet the media often make it sound like she had a choice, and sometimes the perpetrator is removed from the headline in its entirety. Our communications can help improve this.

- **Police Race Action Plan**

We consulted with a large number and variety of different people, groups and organisations to ensure that, within this guidance document, we were representative of the views of ethnically diverse communities.

- **The Constabulary's plans to be an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.**

These guidelines are about being anti-discriminatory and for both the Constabulary and OPCC to be committed to this. It gives guidance to make sure communications from both organisations are inclusive, representative and not victim blaming.

Specific business benefits:-

- To gain a better understanding of VIAWG
- To provide a clear and effective approach for police communicators and to enable them to write non-victim blaming, progressive communications around incidents related to VIAWG
- To increase trust within our communities by showing a prioritisation for victims by using accurate language and putting the accountability on the perpetrator and their choices
- To have better engagement with our audiences
- To support other progressive areas of work on this topic, such as Operation Soteria, where a similar approach within the Criminal Justice system is being looked at in terms of use of language

- To help our workforce understand why language is important and how subtle changes can have a wide-reaching impact
- To ensure we accurately report on incidents of male VIAWG and that we are factually correct and careful with our use of language
- Make communications around VIAWG more consistent, efficient and effective
- Make Gloucestershire Constabulary's communications around VIAWG exemplary and forward thinking, progressing ourselves in the field far beyond other forces.

Person responsible for implementation:-

Emma Hillary, OPCC Communications and Engagement Officer, and Jo Webb, Constabulary External Communications Team Leader.

Once approved by the relevant Board member who will present this paper, please submit it to the **Executive Support** mailbox two weeks before the date of the meeting.

Public Access to Information

Information contained within Constabulary papers is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Reports which are submitted for consideration at PCC Governance Board are likely to be made public. If the paper contains sensitive information then please detail below.

Is this a decision of significant public interest?

This includes a decision with any impact on the community, expenditure in excess of £50,000, or any decision that would be of obvious interest to the media or the general public

Yes

This will be a positive move toward gender equality and more accurate and fair reporting of VIAWG, not only from the Constabulary and OPCC, but encouraging and influencing local media outlets for when they report on incidents of VIAWG.

These guidelines are likely to generate media attention as they are the first of their kind aimed at police communicators. We anticipate that we will have allies when it comes to public support for these guidelines, as there are already similar ones aimed

	<p>specifically at the media (for example media guidance for how journalists should report on fatal domestic abuse created by Level Up titled ‘dignity for dead women’).</p> <p>As communications professionals within the Constabulary and OPCC, we cannot control what the media write, but we can have a substantial influence. We hope over time that the media will adopt the same principles and that we are adding to what other national organisations are trying to achieve in press reporting.</p>
<p>Does this report contain sensitive information?</p> <p>Does this report contain any information which falls into these categories?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) would, in the view of the chief officer of the police, be against the interests of national security; b) might, in the view of the chief officer of police, jeopardise the safety of any person; c) might, in the view of the chief officer of police, prejudice the prevention or detection of crime, the apprehension or prosecution of offenders, or the administration of justice; or d) is prohibited by any enactment. e) breaches commercial sensitivity 	<p>No</p>

ORIGINATOR CHECKLIST (MUST BE COMPLETED)	Comments These sections must not be left blank
<p>Has legal advice been sought on this submission if required?</p>	<p>Yes – including copyright and by the Constabulary’s Legal Department, who have no concerns from a legal perspective</p>
<p>Has the Chief Finance Officer been consulted, if required?</p>	<p>No – but any costs will be minimal</p>
<p>Have equality, diversity and human rights implications been considered, as appropriate?</p>	<p>Yes - they are at the core of the document</p>

We are committed to being an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

<p>How are the recommendations consistent with the Police and Crime Commissioner`s objectives?</p>	<p>The document supports the PCC's priority of toward tackling male violence towards women and girls (VAWG).</p> <p>It's also in line with the Constabulary's Corporate Strategy by encouraging a thoughtful and compassionate approach to the language we use, and supports the Force operational priority of tackling male violence and intimidation against women and girls (VIAWG).</p> <p>It supports the national VAWG strategy, as well as the national priority of improving satisfaction among victims.</p> <p>It goes towards improving the public's trust and confidence in police, so contributes to our legitimacy.</p>
<p>Has consultation been undertaken with people or agencies likely to be affected by the recommendation?</p>	<p>Yes – we have consulted with a group of internal volunteers which include people from relevant departments, such as the Child Abuse Investigation Team, the Rape and Serious Sexual Offences team, the Professional Standards Department (PSD) and staff associations.</p> <p>We have also gone through an external consultation process where experts from relevant partners such as media experts, female rights activists and charities have viewed, contributed to and supported the document. They include: Zero Tolerance, The Nelson Trust, Hollie Gazzard Trust,</p>

We are committed to being an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

OFFICIAL

	<p>Right to Equality, Bliss Qadesh (PhD Researcher, Centre for Gender and Violence Research, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol), Nicole Garnon (former journalist and editor of a daily regional newspaper in south Wales and marker on law papers for the National Council for the Training of Journalists, and an external marker for the Journalism degree course at Cardiff University), Helen Race (Survivors' Network), Monica Bhogal (Director, Schools Consent Project), Isabella Lowenthal-Isaacs (Women's Aid Federation of England).</p>
<p>Has communications advice been sought on areas of likely media, community, staff or partner interest and how they might be managed?</p>	<p>Yes – the creators of the guidelines are communications and media professionals from both the Constabulary and the OPCC.</p>
<p>Have all relevant implications and risks been considered?</p>	<p>Yes – following the guidelines will achieve a more consistent approach toward VAWG. The document has been two years in the making and all risks have been considered.</p> <p>The document, through the research, creation and editing process, has been amended accordingly to mitigate these risks and there have been several versions which have been built upon throughout this time.</p> <p>For example, some draft guidance which was being considered to be included due to several high-profile media articles, which may have been seen to be contentious</p>

We are committed to being an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

	<p>(around men/trans women and rape cases), has been removed until further guidance is provided at a national level for consistency.</p> <p>Some feedback at an earlier stage was also how one version had too much emotion and personal opinion, with a question on why this document focused predominantly on male VIAWG, when men are victims too.</p> <p>We therefore refined the language in the document. However, the subject matter remains the same as men are predominantly perpetrators of violence against women, and there is a national strategy to tackle this, with statistics to support this.</p> <p>Following public feedback we also know that not calling rape what it is, can cause a public backlash, and our guidelines explain why we should be calling incidents what they are and stating who is responsible.</p>
<p>Has this paper /proposal been submitted through any other Constabulary boards? If so, please detail along with the date and result.</p>	<p>No – but we ask for it to be submitted to the PCC’s Governance Board following approval</p>

1. Purpose / key drivers of report

We are submitting this paper with a request for our reporting guidelines to be adopted both internally and externally by the Constabulary and OPCC as we must shift away from victim blaming language.

These guidelines explain how to communicate about incidents of VIAWG in a way which empowers victims, and to be explicit about where responsibility lies - with the perpetrator.

We are committed to being an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

As a public service, we must encourage victims to trust our organisations and help encourage the media to be better when reporting on VIAWG.

There is a drive from both organisations to recognise and call out discrimination – this document does this through our communications around VIAWG. We predict positive internal impact in both organisations as the guidance encourages staff, particularly communicators, to be more compassionate with their language and to be aware of the positive and negative impacts of correct and incorrect language. The guidance encourages a compassionate view towards victims/survivors of VIAWG.

This is also necessary as it supports the national VIAWG strategy and has been supported by the former NPCC communications lead, and it is important because similar guidance does not exist and this is a vital gap to fill.

2. Main content or background information if required

In the summer of 2022 there was a series of male VIAWG offences in Stroud reported to police, which led to an opinion piece being published on Stroud Times titled: ‘Sexual assault rather than rape – is wording sanitising the offence?’ You can read this [here](#).

This article highlighted how sometimes when a man rapes a woman, police communicators call it a ‘serious sexual assault’, and not what it is – rape. The use of the active and passive voice was also explained - how in communications we say that a woman was raped, rather than how a man raped a woman.

The Constabulary’s External Communications Team Leader, Jo Webb, reached out to the author to discuss the contents of the opinion piece and an opportunity to work together was offered due to the shared interest on this topic.

The series of incidents in Stroud, which included an alleged stranger rape, indecent exposures and sexual assaults, all occurred within a short period of time and had gained publicity. This led to fear within the community, particularly for women and girls.

The previous year, in 2021, the actions of a serving Met officer, Wayne Couzens, put a spotlight on VAWG after he raped and murdered Sarah Everard. This case, as well as others which have rightly gained publicity, led to a significant impact on the public, in particular women and girls, trusting the police.

Due to the concerns raised in Stroud, Rodborough Parish Council organised a public meeting and asked for police to attend.

However, due to the high level of interest, a bigger venue was required and Emma Hillary, then the Constabulary’s External Communications Officer for the Stroud area,

OFFICIAL

got involved in the planning of the event. The Subscription Rooms was booked as a venue and we (Emma Hillary and Jo Webb) had agreed to meet the co-founders of a not-for-profit organisation, which had subsequently been formed by the author of the above article, called This Ends Now. (When Emma moved to the OPCC to take up a role in the Communications and Engagement area there, it was agreed that she should continue with this and her work with Jo).

On the night of the meeting, the room was full. A panel consisting of partners, the local MP, a representative from Stroud District Council, as well as the Constabulary and OPCC, gave updates to the public followed by a question and answer session.

During this impactful meeting, where many areas were covered, female members of the public highlighted how they did not like the style of communications which had been issued around the recent crimes as they had been vague, were too passive and were indirect.

The women who were there wanted to be heard, and they wanted reassurance from the police, more communication and updates in future to ease their worries.

After we spoke with the co-founders of This Ends Now, we established that there was no national guidance on this area to support police communicators, and over the past two years, we have researched and created the Words Matter Reporting Guidelines.

These guidelines have not only taken on board feedback from the community at the event, but there has been an extensive wider consultation process.

We approached and asked for internal volunteers from across the Force and OPCC who had an interest or expertise in VIAWG. Those who engaged with the process included both police officers and staff who are experts in domestic abuse, sexual violence, those experienced with victim support, learning and development, the hate crime coordinator, a transgender woman with lived experience and members of the Neurodiversity Staff Association.

An external consultation phase then followed, led by This Ends Now. Advice and feedback was gained from national experts in VIAWG, with the full list detailed earlier on in this document.

As a result, Words Matter is a robust set of thought-provoking guidelines written specifically with police communicators in mind, and we believe it is the first of its kind nationally which is specifically for communication teams.

It is a progressive document which recognises the nuances of language, and gives practical advice specifically when reporting on male VIAWG.

We are committed to being an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

OFFICIAL

It intends to initiate a significant change in language to reduce victim blaming and misogyny, and we hope a shift in language can help create a safer society for victims/survivors.

The Constabulary's External Communications Team is frequently writing press releases about crimes, which go directly to the public and media. Headlines and statements from those press releases are often copied verbatim by reporters and shared wider, which means the wording needs to be correct at the source. This is similar for the OPCC's team.

A key component of the policy is a shift from the passive voice to the active. Rather than saying a woman was raped by a man, it is important that the focus is on the perpetrator and their actions. The woman did not choose to be raped, however, the man chose to rape her.

The guidelines give helpful tips on terminology which may not overtly appear to be victim blaming, but it is, such as 'revenge porn' or 'child porn'.

By using inclusive and accurate terminology, which makes it clear that the perpetrator is responsible for their actions, will help end victim blaming in police communications.

The guidance delves into whether we call people victims or survivors, and asks communicators to let people choose themselves at the point of a conviction or sentence report.

Example press releases are included, as well as a table of examples of what we should and should not say.

If implemented these guidelines can improve the communications by both the Constabulary and OPCC to ensure we do not victim blame and that we challenge unconscious gender-biases.

These guidelines have been supported by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) communications lead for VAWG, as well as key external experts such as Women's Aid, The Hollie Gazzard Trust and Zero Tolerance.

In October 2023, we were invited to present the idea behind Words Matter at Cheltenham Literature Festival. Emma Hillary and Paul Cruise (then Neighbourhood Inspector for Stroud) were on the panel for the discussion. Due to its popularity, we have been invited back to present at next month's event, and provide an update. This will be on Saturday 5 October, when Emma and Jo will be on the panel, along with Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, Jess Phillips, and Sydney McAllister from This Ends Now.

We are committed to being an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

A copyright statement was written for the document, based on other programmes and documents the Constabulary owns copyright for. This statement is with Legal Services for review and approval.

3. Options and or Recommendations

Constabulary Governance Board (CGB) is asked to agree:

- To support the Words Matter Reporting Guidelines, and that they should be adopted and implemented by the Constabulary in all internal and external communications
- That that the Words Matter Reporting Guidelines will sent to the PCC Governance Board for approval so that they can be adopted and implemented by the OPCC in all internal and external communications.

4. Financial and resource implications

There are no costs to implementing these guidelines, however there may be small costs (such as mileage) to perform outreach and inputs to wider departments outside of Communications and Engagement. Depending on interest, there may also be the opportunity to give inputs to local press, other police forces or national police communicator conferences (it maybe that this can be done virtually if required).

5. Risk Assessment

Several risks have been identified and mitigated as part of the research and editing process of creating the Words Matter Reporting Guidelines. These relate to issues which were contentious and they have since been resolved.

One issue around publicity of the approved document could be that we get a media or public backlash to it. To mitigate this we will aim to get people with a similar interest on board when it comes to supporting the guidelines. For example, this could be people who are spokespersons on this subject who have been impacted by media reporting when a relative has been murdered, and/or other trusted organisations who have been involved with the creation of this document.

6. Equality and Diversity impact assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed (Appendix B to this paper).

7. Environmental impact assessment

This report has a neutral impact on the Constabulary's approach to the environment and delivery of ISO 14001 environmental management systems requirements.

8. Consultation matrix

Once the draft paper has been submitted, it will be circulated for comments from internal stakeholders – **the author does not need to do this** – Executive Support will circulate and collate the responses into one feedback matrix which will be presented at CGB.

9. Departmental contact

Communications & Engagement Department:

- Emma Hillary, OPCC Communications and Engagement Officer - 01452 754601
- Jo Webb, Constabulary External Communications Team Leader - 01452 75238.

Appendices

Ensure any relevant reference is added to each paper, for example: CGB Business case

Appendix A – Words Matter Reporting Guidelines
Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Version history – summary of previous versions and amendments

Version, date and change history:	Version	Date	Summary of change history
	0.1	21/08/24	Document created with several parts filled in by Emma Hillary
	0.2	22/08/24	Document reviewed with additions made and document completed by Jo Webb
	Final	24/08/24	Minor amends and additions by Hilary Allison

Executive Board member approval:	
Name:	Hilary Allison, Head of Public Affairs
Date:	Friday, 24 August 2024

Security marking:
Official

We are committed to being an anti-discriminatory organisation. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

Note: Comments in this colour blue will need to be edited once page numbers are established in the design phase.

Words Matter - guidelines for reporting on male violence and intimidation against women and girls

Foreword

The Words Matter reporting guidelines have been created in collaboration with Gloucestershire Constabulary, Gloucestershire's Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and This Ends Now.

These guidelines aim to initiate a significant change in language for police communicators reporting on instances of male violence against women and girls in order to reduce victim blaming and misogyny.

These crimes are committed primarily, but not exclusively, by men and boys against women and girls, and victim blaming language contributes to a culture which normalises this.

Therefore, it is important to accurately report on incidents within the context of a society where male violence and intimidation against women and girls is prevalent.

A shift in language can help amplify the voices of victims and survivors, place responsibility on the perpetrator and improve accuracy in reporting by naming the crime.

These guidelines have been developed with the support and input of both internal and external consultants. This includes:

External:

- Allison Quinlan - Manager of Right to Equality
- Bliss Magdalena Qadesh – PhD researcher, Centre for Gender and Violence Research, University of Bristol
- Helen Race – Training and Partnerships Officer at Survivors' Network
- Isabella Lowenthal-Isaacs – Policy and Practice Manager at Women's Aid Federation of England
- Jo Zawadzka - Campaigns and Engagement Officer at Zero Tolerance
- Katie Lewis - Partnerships & Development Manager at The Nelson Trust
- Monica Bhogal – Director of the Schools Consent Project
- Nick Gazzard – Founder and Patron of the Hollie Gazzard Trust
- Nicole Garnon – former editor of South Wales Argus and marker on law papers for the National Council for the Training of Journalists

Internal:

- Child Abuse Investigation Team
- Hate Crime Coordinator

- Learning & Development
- Neurodiversity Staff Association
- Professional Standards Department
- Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Team
- Specialists in domestic abuse and sexual violence
- Victim Strategic Coordinator

Contents page

1. Top tips:
 - Avoid victim blaming
 - Use the active voice
 - Name the crime
2. Victim or survivor?
3. Writing about crimes
 - With adult victims/survivors
 - Domestic abuse
 - Sexual assault
 - Rape
 - Multiple perpetrator rape
 - Stranger rape
 - Domestic homicide
 - Familicide
 - Commercial sexual exploitation
 - Public sexual harassment
 - With child victims/survivors
 - Child sexual abuse
 - Indecent images of children
4. Writing about image-based sexual abuse offences
 - Image-based abuse
 - Deepfakes
5. General tips for reporting
 - Headlines
 - Language around age
 - Referencing the perpetrator's profession/occupation
 - Vulnerabilities
 - Sex workers or women who sell sex
 - Writing about false reports of rape
6. Copyright / contact
7. Appendices
 - a. Example press release – sexual assault

- b. Example press release – rape with victim and suspect not known to each other
- c. Example press release – false allegation of rape (police caution)
- d. Resources for further guidance

1. Top tips

Avoid victim blaming

Ensure all communications are free from victim blaming language. Victim blaming is when the responsibility for the crime is put on the victim, rather than the offender who choose to commit an offence.

The wording 'victim/survivor' has been used throughout these guidelines as some people identify as a victim, while others as a survivor. [For more on this see 'Victim or survivor?' on page XX.](#)

Focus on the perpetrator's actions ([see 'Use the active voice' on page XX/below](#)) and avoid unnecessary details about the victim/survivor's behaviour, clothing or location that could inadvertently shift blame away from the perpetrator.

Victim blaming language can be subtle and is often used unconsciously. Details about a victim/survivor's level of intoxication, what they were wearing, or whether they were in an area known for crime should not be included, as this implies that they hold some form of responsibility.

Geographical information, such as a road name, town, or name of an establishment can be used when necessary for context or witness appeals. However, be cautious with details that might suggest the victim/survivor was at fault.

Avoid using details, such as the victim/survivor's profession, vulnerabilities or personal characteristics, as this can unintentionally lead to victim blaming.

Ensure information is presented in a way which does not imply blame, and instead focus on the perpetrator's actions and the crime.

Use the active voice

Always describe incidents by using the active voice to focus on the perpetrator's actions. For example, write "a man raped a woman", rather than "a woman was raped by a man". The active voice holds the perpetrator accountable for their actions and avoids shifting blame to the victim/survivor, who did not have a choice.

The way we use language unconsciously keeps attention off the issue of male violence against women and girls (VIAWG), and therefore avoid phrases which make the perpetrator seem invisible. Depictions of violence that obscure the role of the perpetrator perpetuate problematic views of women as passive victims of crimes.

The media often use police press releases as a basis for writing their articles, and therefore it is vital that all headings, subheadings and the body of the press release are written in the active voice.

Name the crime

Clearly identify the crime which has been reported in all communications to ensure accuracy and in order to not sanitise offences. For example, an incident reported as rape, should be described as such, rather than a 'serious sexual assault'.

In line with the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (2017), the only exception to this approach should be when it is deemed necessary to safeguard a vulnerable person (for example, if they have mental health vulnerabilities), to protect a victim's interests (for example, considering the victim/survivor's request) or as an investigative tactic.

In these circumstances, the decision to use a different term, such as a 'serious sexual assault', must be carefully considered by the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) after consultation with the External Communications Team. The SIO should record the rationale behind any decision to not use the accurate term.

When writing communications about incidents that may be difficult to describe, include as much information as possible to provide context, rather than trying to define it by a specific overarching term. If you are uncertain about how to label an incident, first state what the offence was and/or what the perpetrator would be or has been arrested on suspicion of, and then explain what was reported to have taken place. Remember to use the active voice to avoid victim blaming.

2. Victim or survivor?

In police communications, a complainant in a crime will predominantly be referred to as a victim. This will generally be the case for witness appeals.

However, the word survivor has been widely used to describe victims of male VIAWG, as it can be used as a term of empowerment.

Once a case has been proven in court, communicators should ask the individual how they would prefer to be referred to within a press release. This may be as a victim, survivor, or another term which they find empowering.

If you are unsure or you are speaking in general terms, you can use 'victim/survivor'.

There are legal protections for victims of sexual offences which entitle them to lifelong anonymity under the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1992. This protection also applies to victims of female genital mutilation, human trafficking and modern slavery. This anonymity stays in place regardless of whether an allegation is withdrawn, no further police action is taken or the accused is acquitted.

Victims/survivors can waive their right to anonymity if aged over 16, without requiring consent from the court. This must be provided to police communicators and/or reporters in writing.

Working with victims/survivors, either anonymously or named, can be a powerful way for communications to encourage others to come forward and report crime or seek support. For post-conviction reports, use victim personal statements where possible or ask for a statement to be provided for a press release in order to give victims/survivors a voice within your communications.

3. Writing about crimes

With adult victims/survivors

Domestic abuse

Always use the term 'domestic abuse' instead of 'domestic violence', as not all domestic abuse is physical. Domestic abuse can encompass, but is not limited to, incidents of controlling and coercive behaviour and psychological, physical, financial, emotional and sexual abuse.

When describing the crime, do not refer to domestic abuse as 'a domestic' or 'a domestic dispute', as these terms frame the incident as a private, family problem, rather than a serious crime.

Use the terms 'abusive partner' or 'living with an abusive partner', instead of 'an abusive' or 'toxic' relationship. The latter terms shift focus away from the abuser and imply that both parties are equally responsible for the abuse. Domestic abuse is about power and control exerted by the perpetrator, and this should be clearly recognised in communications.

Never use qualifiers such as an 'on-again-off-again relationship' to describe the relationship in question, as this can lead to victim blaming by implying the victim/survivor is complicit in the abusive situation.

If children are present during the crime, write in communications that they have been 'impacted by', or 'exposed to' domestic abuse, rather than simply witnessing it. The effects of domestic abuse can be traumatic and long lasting.

In cases of domestic abuse, the victim/survivor must be personally connected to the perpetrator. For example, when they are or have been in an intimate relationship, are cohabiting, engaged, married, civil partners, have had or have a parental relationship to a child, or they are relatives. Only include the connection between the perpetrator and victim/survivor when it is necessary or there is a purpose to do so. Consider only providing this level of information post-conviction with consent from the victim.

Although victims/survivors of non-sexual offences are not protected by law with anonymity, do not release information which could identify them without their consent.

Sexual assault

Sexual assault is when one person intentionally touches another person sexually without their consent. The touching can be done with any part of the body or with an object.

When you are reporting on an incident of sexual assault, it is important to always refer to the incident as sexual assault. Refrain from using phrases such as 'sexually touched', as this implies consent was given.

Consider using the term 'without consent' in the body of a press release. For example, if a man kissed a woman without her consent and you are appealing for witnesses, in communications refer to this as a sexual assault. Then provide more context and state how it was reported that a man kissed a woman without her consent.

Consent is defined in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 as someone engaging in sexual activity if they agree by choice and they have the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If consent is given, it can be withdrawn at any time.

Avoid euphemisms or terms such as 'unwanted advance' or 'sexually propositioned', as this language can downplay the severity of the crime. [See more information in the 'Name the crime' and the 'Use the active voice' on page XX.](#)

Rape

Always refer to an incident of rape as rape, rather than a 'serious sexual assault'.

In line with the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (2017), the only exception to this approach should be when it is deemed necessary to safeguard a vulnerable person (for example, if they have mental health vulnerabilities), to protect a victim's interests (for example, considering the victim/survivor's request) or as an investigative tactic.

In these circumstances, the decision to use a different term, such as a 'serious sexual assault', must be carefully considered by the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) after consultation with the External Communications Team. The SIO should record the rationale behind any decision to not use the accurate term.

Publicising guilty outcomes and sentences for rape and sexual assault can be an opportunity to encourage other victims to come forward. Therefore it is important that these incidents are reported on accurately and avoid victim blaming narratives. [See section on 'Avoid victim blaming' on page XX for more information.](#)

When writing a court report, there may be an opportunity to establish through the investigating officer whether the victim would like to be referred to as a victim, survivor, or another empowering term of their choice. [See section on Victim or Survivor? on page XX for more information.](#)

In all communications signpost to local support services that are available and where victims/survivors can report incidents to police or other organisations.

Multiple perpetrator rape

If more than one man rapes a victim/survivor or more than one victim/survivor, do not refer to this as a 'gang rape'. This term is inappropriate as it may sensationalise the crime and may have racial connotations. Instead, state how it has been reported that more than one man raped the victim/survivor(s), that it was a 'multiple perpetrator rape', or state the number of perpetrators involved.

Stranger rape

A 'stranger' rape is a rape which involves people who are not known to each other. Do not use the term 'stranger rape' in external communications. Instead, describe the incident as a 'rape involving people who are not known to each other'.

For external communications, clearly define an incident as rape by someone unknown at the earliest opportunity for the community to be aware of the potential safety risk.

Statistically, the majority of rape offences are committed by a man who is known to the victim/survivor. Therefore, when reporting on an incident of rape perpetrated by someone who is unknown to the victim/survivor, consider stating that it is uncommon in order to help dispel this common and harmful rape myth.

Domestic homicide

When writing communications on a domestic homicide, do not report on this in a way which compromises the dignity of the deceased. When writing statements for press releases on behalf of officers, avoid language which refers to the murder as a 'tragedy' or 'horror', as this is passive reporting and does not accurately reflect the fact a perpetrator chose to commit the crime. See 'Dignity for Dead Women guidelines', produced by Level Up, [in section XX for more on this](#).

During the early stages of an investigation, consider using the phrase that the perpetrator and victim were 'known to each other'. This can be used to explain to the public and media that the incident did not involve strangers, but be wary to provide further details prior to conviction, as any history of abuse may not yet be known.

Do not include information about the perpetrator's character or any sensationalising language. Stating their profession may imply respectability or community standing, potentially generating sympathy for the perpetrator. These details can shift the focus away from the crime itself and lead to problematic narratives in the media which attempt to rationalise or excuse the perpetrator's actions.

The only personal details about the perpetrator that should be released at charge and post-conviction are their name, age and address. [See 'Referencing the perpetrator's profession/occupation' on page XX for more on this](#).

Remember to use the active voice to place responsibility on the perpetrator for their actions. [See 'Use the active voice' on page XX for more on this.](#)

Familicides

Familicides are the murder of one or more members of a person's own family.

Communications must use language that accurately reflects the incident and the gravity of the crime. In the case of a suspected murder-suicide, avoid referencing the perpetrator's character or any sensationalising language.

Stating their profession may imply respectability or community standing, potentially generating sympathy for the perpetrator. These details can shift the focus away from the crime itself and lead to problematic narratives in the media which attempt to rationalise or excuse the perpetrator's actions.

The only personal details about the perpetrator that should be released at charge and post-conviction are their name, age and address. [See 'Referencing the perpetrator's profession/occupation' on page XX for more on this.](#)

Avoid suggestions that the family dynamic was problematic. Framing the family as troubled can imply that the victims/survivors were somehow responsible for the crime or that the perpetrator was driven to act in this way. This not only diminishes the severity of the crime, but also perpetuates harmful victim blaming narratives.

If reporting on prior allegations or convictions of domestic abuse, ensure that the information is factual and does not excuse the perpetrator's actions. [See 'Domestic abuse' on page XX for more on this.](#)

Communications should focus on the accountability of the perpetrator only, and be written using the active voice. [See 'Use the active voice' on page XX for more on this.](#)

Commercial sexual exploitation

Commercial sexual exploitation is a form of violence against women and girls. When writing about this, the focus should always be on men who choose to abuse women in this way, rather than the victim/survivor.

Do not use the term 'sex trafficking', instead use 'human trafficking for sexual exploitation' or 'commercial sexual exploitation'. This more accurately describes the arrangement, facilitation, or travel of persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

The term 'sex trafficking' removes the human element and is often inaccurately used to describe any travel or movement of people who sell sex or sexual services.

Where possible, avoid describing the victim/survivor by reference to their involvement in commercial sexual exploitation, as this can lead to victim blaming. [See section on 'Avoid victim blaming' on page XX for more information.](#)

Public sexual harassment

'Public sexual harassment' refers to any unwelcomed and unwanted attention, sexual advances or intimidating behaviour that occurs in public spaces.

The government's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, published in July 2021, identified that sexual harassment in public places is all too common. In the past, public sexual harassment has been captured by a number of offences, including the Protection from Harassment Act 1997, the Public Order Act 1986 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

The Protection from Sex-based Harassment in Public Act 2023, which comes into force in October 2024, has criminalised 'intentional harassment, alarm or distress on account of sex'. Under [this](#) new law, a person is guilty of an offence if they intentionally harass, alarm, or distress another person, and this conduct is motivated by the victim's sex (or presumed sex).

Public sexual harassment can include, but is not limited to, sexualised or obscene comments, unwanted whistling or gesturing, pressing against someone in a sexual way on public transport and persistent staring.

In communications always use the term 'public sexual harassment' to describe these incidents. Using this wording ensures that the focus remains on the unlawful and harmful nature of the conduct, rather than diminishing its impact through colloquial language*

Details about the incident can then be included in the body of the press release in order to provide context. However, it is important to use caution when referring to colloquial terms such as 'catcalling' and 'wolf whistling', as this can trivialise the seriousness of the crime.

Consider describing incidents as 'unwanted', followed by the act itself. For example, you could say 'unwanted sexualised comments had been made'.

Do not include details that could imply the victim/survivor was responsible for the harassment, such as their clothing, behaviour or presence in a public space. The focus should be on the actions of the perpetrator, who chose to commit the crime. [See section on Victim or Survivor? on page XX for more information.](#)

**We have yet to see how this offence will be charged in practice. If a different term is used in open court, consider using this term instead.*

With child victims/survivors

Child sexual abuse

The age at which individuals can legally consent to sex and/or sexual activity, also known as the age of consent, is 16. This is the same regardless of the person's gender identity, sexual identity and whether the sexual activity is between people of the same or different genders.

There are several different offences categorised by age groups in relation to child rape and sexual abuse. Regardless of the offence wording, sexual activity with a child, causing a child to watch a sexual act or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity is child sexual abuse.

Do not refer to rape or sexual activity with a child in a way which implies consent, for example, writing 'man had sex with a 14-year old'. Instead, use the offence wording and refer to it as child sexual abuse. [See 'Name the crime' on page XX for more on this.](#)

When the perpetrator is in a position of trust, such as a school teacher, be mindful to not use language which sensationalises the crime. Use the offence wording, sexual activity with a child or causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity whilst in a position of trust, and refer to it as child sexual abuse. Use the active voice and state the perpetrator 'sexually abused' the child, rather than 'had sex with' them. [See 'Use the active voice' on page XX for more on this.](#)

There is an added imbalance of power in these situations where offenders groom and manipulate impressionable children. Referring to it as anything other than child sexual abuse is a damaging narrative which could deter child victims/survivors from coming forward to report these types of crimes, or recognising that they are being abused

Using words such as 'underage' or 'young' when describing the victim/survivor are inappropriate and should not be used in relation to child sexual abuse. These terms present abuse as an issue of sexual morality and incorrectly implies that children aged under 16 can legally consent to sex. [See 'Language on age' on page XX for more on this.](#)

Do not use the term 'child prostitute' to describe a child victim/survivor who has been exploited, as this phrase sensationalises the incident and contributes to victim blaming. It implies consent and that there is no coercion or imbalance of power, and puts the responsibility of the abuse, or not avoiding it, on the child. It also excuses the perpetrator when the reality is that the child is being exploited by an adult for sexual purposes. Instead, simply use 'child' and 'victim/survivor'.

Not all forms of child sexual abuse fall within the definition of 'paedophilia' and therefore, you should use this term with caution. As explained by the NSPCC, paedophilia is a psychiatric disorder where a person aged over 16 has a sexual preference for children, usually of prepubescent or early pubescent age. Referring to child sexual abuse as something perpetrated by 'paedophiles' ignores the fact that not all sexual abuse is motivated by a sexual interest in children, and not all people diagnosed with paedophilia sexually abuse children.

Indecent images of children

The offences of making, possessing or distributing indecent images of children should not be referred to as 'child porn' or 'child pornography'. Perpetrators have

abused children in order to create this type of material, whereas use of the word pornography implies consent and removes the perpetrator's abusive intentions.

The word 'indecent' in 'indecent images of children' is problematic, as it has victim blaming connotations.

Although this is the terminology used in legislation and must be used in charge releases and court outcomes, police communicators can provide context by clarifying that the creation of such material is the result of perpetrators abusing children. Therefore, when writing a post-conviction press release, consider including in a statement how the creation of this material is 'child sexual abuse', or 'child sexual abuse material'.

4. Writing about image-based sexual abuse offences

Image-based abuse

Image-based abuse, often referred to as 'revenge porn', is the non-consensual sharing of, or threatening to share, private, sexual materials of someone without their consent.

New legislation was introduced in January 2024 under the Sexual Offences Act (2003) in relation to this. When publicising charges or post-conviction reports, use the specific offence wording and do not refer to it as 'revenge porn'.

'Revenge porn' is a misleading term as it implies that the crime is motivated by revenge, when in reality perpetrators may have other motives such as control, humiliation, or gaining status. The term 'image-based abuse' or 'intimate image abuse' highlights that this behaviour is a form of abuse regardless of motive.

By contrast, 'revenge porn' trivialises the crime and implies the victim/survivor acted in ways that necessitated revenge, which perpetuates victim blaming. It also inaccurately labels the content as pornographic, potentially inviting others to view or share the content for sexual gratification.

Deepfakes

Images and videos that have been artificially created or altered to resemble a person's likeness are commonly called deepfakes. The creation and distribution of sexually explicit deepfakes are criminal offences under the Sexual Offences Act (2003).

Non-consensual sexual deepfakes should be described using the same terminology as other image-based abuse. Do not refer to this material as 'pornography' or 'revenge porn'. Use the term "deepfake" or specify that the images were created using AI or image-generating technology where needed.

5. General tips for reporting

Headlines

Press releases written by police communicators about crimes go directly to the public and media, and therefore it is imperative that they adhere to the Words Matter reporting guidelines.

Active language should be used in headlines to focus on the perpetrator's actions as this avoids shifting blame to the victim/survivor, who did not have a choice.

Headlines should also clearly identify the crime to ensure accuracy and in order to not sanitise offences. [For more on this, read the 'Top tips' section on pages XX to XX.](#)

Do not include information about the perpetrator's character, or the circumstances of the victim/survivor, as this can encourage victim blaming and/or sympathy toward the perpetrator.

A perpetrator's occupation should only be included if it is relevant to provide context, such as a teacher who has groomed a pupil. [For more on this, see 'Referencing the perpetrator's profession/occupation' on page XX.](#)

Example headlines:

Bad example: "Police appeal for witnesses after woman is victim of serious sexual assault in Gloucester"

Alternative: "Police appeal for witnesses after man rapes woman in Gloucester"

Bad example: "Builder is jailed after admitting to possessing child pornography"

Alternative: "Man is jailed after he admits to possessing indecent images of children"

Bad example: "Woman dies after attack while out walking dog in the Cotswolds"

Alternative: "Man arrested on suspicion of murdering woman in the Cotswolds"

Bad example: "Arrest made after woman sexually touched in Cheltenham"

Alternative: "Man arrested on suspicion of sexual assault in Cheltenham"

Language around age

Sexual contact with anyone aged under 16 is child sexual abuse or rape in the eyes of the law. Between the ages of 16-18, the victim/survivor is still a child, yet can legally consent to sex.

Anyone under the age of 18 should be referred to as a boy, girl, child or state their age. Once their age is given, for example a 17-year-old, they can also be referred to as a teenager.

Age brackets can be used, such as ‘a child aged under 13’ or ‘a child aged over 16’ when you need to give a broader age range.

Anyone older than 18 should be referred to as a man, woman, adult or person, regardless of whether they are a victim/survivor or perpetrator. Refrain from referring to them as a young man or young woman as this implies that they are not an adult in the eyes of the law. Additionally, describing adult perpetrators as 'young' can downplay the seriousness of their actions, implying reduced responsibility due to their age and potentially diminishing the perceived accountability.

Do not use the term underage girl(s) when describing a child victim/survivor as this is inappropriate. The term presents abuse as an issue of sexual morality and incorrectly implies that children aged under 16 can legally consent to sex.

Age	Do say	Because	Don't say
Under 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Boy/girl - Child - Child aged under 16 - State their age, thereafter can also use the word 'teenager' 	<p>This reflects their legal status as children.</p> <p>Children aged under 16 cannot legally consent to sex.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Underage boy/girl - Young man/woman
16 to 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Boy/girl - Child - Child aged over 16 - State their age - Teenager 	<p>This acknowledges their status as minors who can consent, but are still legally classed as children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Underage boy/girl - Young man/woman
Over 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Man/woman/person - Adult - Person aged over 18 	<p>They are considered to be adults in the eyes of the law.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young man/woman

Referencing the perpetrator's profession/occupation

Only state the perpetrator's profession or occupation in communications if it is directly relevant to the context of the crime. Ensure it is not used in a way that might sensationalise or detract from the seriousness of the offence.

For example, if the perpetrator used their professional position to commit the offence, it is appropriate to reference this to provide context.

Avoid sensationalising the crime by focusing excessively on the perpetrator's profession or occupation. The primary focus should remain on the criminal actions and their impact, not on the profession itself.

If it is deemed necessary to include the perpetrator's profession or occupation, ensure the language is clear and factual, and remember to use the active voice. [For more on this, see 'Use the active voice' on page XX.](#)

Vulnerabilities

Any victim/survivor of a crime may have vulnerabilities, such as an alcohol or drug dependency, mental or physical health issues, or a history of exploitation.

None of these factors excuse abuse and they should not be referenced in communications, as it could lead to victim blaming and infringe upon the victim/survivor's right to privacy.

There would need to be a policing purpose to release information about a person's vulnerabilities, for example if releasing details could help gain witnesses and aid an investigation. This should only be done following consultation with the victim/survivor and/or their family so that they are aware.

Consider having a non-reportable conversation with a reporter in order for them to be able to accurately report on an incident and not sensationalise it.

Sex workers or women who sell sex

Only mention a victim/survivor's involvement in selling sex if it is necessary and relevant to the context. Avoid using terms like 'prostitute' or 'prostitution,' as these can carry negative connotations and contribute to stigma. Instead, refer to them as a 'woman' or 'woman who sells sex.'

Where possible, ask the victim/survivor about their preferred terminology. If they identify with the term 'sex worker,' use it, but do so cautiously. The term 'sex worker' should only be used if it aligns with the victim/survivor's preference.

It is important to recognise that sex work exists on a spectrum and includes street-based sex work as well as those working through escort agencies or online platforms. It may be appropriate to ask a victim/survivor for their professional title if they are working on sites or as escorts, but not if they are involved in street sex work or survival sex work.

Writing about false reports of rape

Research has shown that false allegations of rape are rare, and that there are no more false reports of rape than any other crime.

There may be occasions when there is a requirement to publicise a false allegation of a rape or sexual assault, mainly if a public appeal for information had previously been done in connection with a report. This is to reassure the community that an

offence, which likely caused fear and concern, has been investigated and evidence proves it did not happen.

It should also be considered whether as part of the false allegation, a person was named as a suspect and/or someone was arrested, as this could have a detrimental impact on a person.

When an individual is charged with an offence, such as perverting the course of justice, the level of detail released is limited in order to not impact pending criminal proceedings. Once in a position to write proactive communications post-conviction, or if the person received a caution or faced no further action, it is vital to write this in a way which does not discourage victims/survivors from coming forward to police.

In these communications it is essential to mention how there are no more false reports of rape than any other crime, and resources can be included within the notes to editors section of a press release to highlight rape myths.

When communicating directly with the public, it should also be made clear why this information is being disclosed. It should primarily be to alleviate fears that there is a rapist who has not been arrested or to update the public on a case which has previously gained public interest.

These communications need to be written sensitively in order to not deter victims from coming forward and reporting incidents to police. Instead, focus on how false reports can take crucial time away from officers supporting victims and bringing perpetrators to justice.

Use clear, descriptive, but un-blaming language in the communications. For example: "A woman in her 20s has since disclosed that the rape which was alleged to have happened on Jones Street did not take place. She has apologised and has been cautioned for wasting police time."

As with any other crime, do not include unnecessary personal details about the individual who made a false report to police.

If possible, share drafted communications with an expert local partner agency, for example Gloucestershire Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre, to ensure that they are comfortable with the language and tone used. They could also include a statement within the press release to emphasise how false reports are rare.

To see an example press release for how to report on a case where an individual was cautioned for making a false report, [see Appendix C](#).

8. Copyright ©

These guidelines are brought to you by Gloucestershire Constabulary, Gloucestershire's Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and This Ends Now.

These organisations are responsible for reviewing and updating the guidelines on an annual basis for any changes or additions in law. Please note these guidelines only apply to policing in England and Wales.

The Words Matter reporting guidelines is the copyright of Gloucestershire Constabulary, Gloucestershire's Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and This Ends Now. You must have the prior written consent from all of these organisations to reproduce content or amend these guidelines in another police force or other organisation.

We are committed to being anti-discriminatory organisations. This means not only acting in a non-discriminatory way, but addressing systemic inequalities, disadvantage and discrimination.

If you have a query in relation to these guidelines, contact the relevant press office listed below:

- Gloucestershire Constabulary: press.office@gloucestershire.police.uk
- Gloucestershire's Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner: opccmedia@gloucestershire.police.uk
- The Ends Now: press@thisendsnow.co.uk

9. Appendices

Appendix A: Example press release - sexual assault

Heading: Police appeal for witnesses after man sexually assaulted woman in [location]

Subheading: The incident happened at [time] on [date]

Body:

Police are appealing for witnesses after a man sexually assaulted a woman in [location] earlier this week.

On [date] in [location] a man approached a woman from behind and sexually assaulted her.

He grabbed her breasts and tried to kiss her without her consent.

The incident happened between [time] and [time], and the man then walked off in the direction of [location].

The offender was described as being [description].

Investigating officers are asking for anyone who witnessed the incident or who saw the man in the area to contact them.

You can provide information to police online by completing the following form and quoting incident [XX of XX date].

Appendix B: Example press release – rape with suspect and victim not known to each other

Heading: Man arrested on suspicion of raping woman in [location]

Subheading: A [age] man from [location] has been arrested

Body:

A man has been arrested on suspicion of raping a woman in [location] and police are appealing for information.

The incident happened at [time] on [date], and following enquiries a [age] man from [location] has been arrested and is in custody for questioning.

Police are keen to hear from anyone who lives in the area and may have dashcam or CCTV footage which could assist.

Officers are in the early stages of an investigation and at this time it is believed that those involved are not known to each other.

You can provide information to police online by completing the following form and quoting incident [XX of XX date].

If you have experienced rape, sexual assault or abuse, and wish to report the crime, contact police by calling 101 or 999 in the case of an emergency. You can also report sexual offences online here: <https://www.police.uk/ro/report/rsa/alpha-v1/v1/rape-sexual-assault-other-sexual-offences/>

Gloucestershire Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre support women dealing with the effects of rape and sexual abuse. For more information visit their website www.glosrasac.org/

Appendix C: Example press release – false allegation of rape (police caution)

Heading: Update on investigation into alleged offence in [location] on [date]

Subheading: Police said false reports of sexual assaults and rape are rare, and they do not want to deter victims from reporting

Body:

Note to editor: *This press release has been issued as it is felt important to reassure the public, especially women and girls, who have expressed feeling unsafe following this report.*

Detectives investigating a report of rape in [location] on [date] have confirmed that this did not take place.

It has been alleged that the rape was committed by a stranger, however following an investigation it became clear that the incident did not happen.

[Spokesperson from the rape and serious sexual offences team] said false reports are rare and they do not want them to deter people from coming forward, but they take crucial time away from supporting victims and bringing perpetrators to justice.

They added: "There were more than 2,000 rapes and sexual assaults recorded by the Constabulary last year, which involved hundreds of victims who we're supporting through the investigation process.

"False reports are rare, but can't be ignored, and we will challenge them where appropriate as they take valuable time away from officers investigating genuine reports and working with victims who need our help and support. They can also lead to wrongful arrests.

"We felt the public should be made aware of the outcome of this investigation, as this case would understandably have caused fear and heightened public anxiety within the community at the time and since then.

"We encourage anyone who has been a victim of rape or other sexual assaults to please come forward and speak to police. We really do not want to frighten or discourage anyone who has been a victim of any sexual offence from talking to us, as we are here and want to support you."

It had been reported that an unknown man had raped a woman in her [age] in the area of [location] on [date].

A public appeal for information was then issued.

Following extensive enquiries by the Constabulary's Rape and Serious Sexual Offences team, a woman from [location] was cautioned for wasting police time.

The investigating officer, [name], said: "The woman involved was remorseful and understood the damaging consequences of her actions, and she was relieved to admit the truth during a police interview."

A man was arrested in connection with the rape allegation, however CCTV evidence later showed that no rape took place and he will face no further police action.

[Officer's name], from the Rape and Serious Sexual Offences team, said: "There is power behind words, and it is never too late to confirm the truth.

"Our role is to listen with empathy to every report, carry out a full and impartial investigation and then follow the evidence. We did that in this case, but the evidence proved that it did not take place.

"The majority of rapes relate to people who know each other, and proven false reports of rapes are rare.

"Extensive enquiries take place when a report is made to police, such as sending forensic samples for examination, speaking to witnesses, house to house enquiries, trawling CCTV footage, digital forensic reviews, intelligence gathering and other fast-track actions.

"In this case a report was made by a third-party - someone who had been told about the incident, reported it to police, and officers then made contact with the alleged victim to establish the details and start an investigation.

"Reports are always taken seriously, whether they are made directly by the victim or by a third-party, and we have a specialised team of passionate officers who are dedicated to bringing rapists and sex offenders to justice."

[Name] from the Gloucestershire Rape and Sexual Assault Centre (GRASAC) said: "False allegations of rape are very rare and in fact make up less than three per cent of all reported rapes, which is no higher than other falsely reported crimes. We know that most people who are affected by sexual violence do not report these crimes to the police.

"It is really important to note that when a disclosure is made the person is believed and it is then crucial to check-in with them with regard to what they would like to happen next. For example, to report the incident or to seek alternative support."

GRASAC can be contacted via [insert details].

Appendix D: Resources for further guidance

Dignity for Dead Women – Media guidelines for reporting domestic abuse deaths. Created by Level Up in 2022: <https://www.welevelup.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Media-Guidelines-V2-1.pdf>

Ending victim blaming in the context of violence against women and girls – created by the Independent Office for Police Conduct in 2024: <https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/IOPC-ending-victim-blaming-guidance-Feb-2024.pdf>

Media Guidelines on Violence Against Women – Created by Zero Tolerance:
<https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Media-Guidelines-on-Violence-Against-Women.pdf>

Why language matters: why we should never use ‘child pornography’ and always say child sexual abuse material – Created by NSPCC in 2023:
<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/why-language-matters/child-sexual-abuse-material>



EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Policy

Policy Title	Words Matter Reporting Guidelines
Policy Reference Number Obtain from Governance & Compliance Team Ext 2852	NA – guidelines rather than policy
Version Number Obtain from Governance & Compliance Team Ext 2852	See above
Policy Owner	Emma Hillary, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner Communications and Engagement Officer, and Jo Webb, Constabulary External Communications Team Leader
Person Completing (if different to the owner)	
Department	Communications and Engagement
Ext No:	Emma 4601 / Jo 2378
Date originally created	January 2023
Date originally signed off	
Date of reviewed	
Date of next review	



EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Policy



EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Policy

Section One – Aims & Relevance Test

Aims

Identify the main aim(s) or purpose of the policy. It is vital to begin the assessment process with a clear understanding of the policy you want to develop or are reviewing. Please summarise the main aim(s) and purpose of the policy.

The aim of the guidance document is to help communicators discuss topics of male VAWG in the most accurate way that avoids victim blaming and encourages trust and confidence in the police and its partners. All protected characteristics will be treated the same.

Relevance Test

This should be carried out at the development stage or review of the policy. It should be based on existing knowledge, data, statistics, complaints, satisfaction levels, publicity & media and best estimates of the impact it 'could' have on people.

Do you believe there might be an adverse impact for people or members of the following groups (internally and externally) (you may wish to refer to the [EIA Guidance](#))?

	YES	NO
Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Gender (inc. trans-gender)	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Marriage and Civil Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Race/ Ethnicity	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Religion or Belief	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Sexual Orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Any other aspect of identity	<input type="checkbox"/>	X

If you have indicated 'No' to all categories, please explain why you believe there to be no impact.

The document has equality at its core, it is written with the aim of ending victim blaming against a marginalised group and to report more accurately, and less sensationalised.



EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Policy

If you have indicated yes to all/ any, please briefly summarise and identify the way(s) in which this policy, or parts of the policy may have an adverse impact.

Based on the information above and the amount, or significance of the impact identified, please indicate the overall level of impact you consider to be associated with this policy.

High	Requires full impact assessment & internal/ external consultation in year one & annual review. Continue to section 2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medium	Requires full impact assessment and relevant consultation in year one and bi-annual review. Continue to section 2.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low	No further assessment required and review every three years Note – This is not high risk, but due to the nature of the changing VIAWG landscape and new laws being brought in, we feel it would be best practice to review the guidelines annually.	X

[*If it is Low, Equality Impact Assessment completed. Go to section 5](#)

Section Two – Impact Assessment

Based on the information and/ or evidence you have, detail the ways in which this policy 'could' have an adverse impact on the people/ groups you have identified in section one (internal and external).

Consider Alternatives

Where you have identified adverse impact you should consider whether there are alternative ways to implement the policy. Please provide details of your considerations and decisions below.



EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Policy

Section Three – Consultation

You should consult and engage with people who could be affected by the policy at an early stage to inform your decision-making throughout. List the people you have consulted here, and summarise the views and feedback obtained on the separate **EIA Consultation Form**.

We have undertaken extensive consultation both internally and externally.

Section Four – Monitoring Arrangements

Throughout the earlier section of this impact assessment process you will have assessed and revised areas of your policy. However, you will only know the actual impact of the policy once it has been put into operation. Please state the ways and methods through which you will monitor this policy. You should be specific around the sort of information and data you will use and collect. It will be used at the next review to inform your assessment.

We will review VIAWG related communications intermittently from both the Constabulary and OPCC to see if the guidance has been implemented and that it is consistent. We will also seek the opinion of This Ends Now.

Section Five – Authorisation & Quality Assurance

Policy Owner (to sign the two declarations below)

I am satisfied that this policy has been fully impact assessed. I understand that the Impact Assessment of this policy is a statutory obligation.

Signed: Emma Hillary and Jo Webb **Date** 22/08/24

Name: Emma Hillary and Jo Webb

Publication

This policy (or a FOI redacted version) will be published on the Force Internet Publications Site in accordance with our commitments under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The contents of this policy and impact assessment are suitable for publication.

Yes



EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Policy

No

Signed: Jo Webb

Number 2378

Date: 22/08/24



EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT Policy

The completed impact assessment and policy (if applicable) should now be submitted for ‘sign off’ by forwarding an e-mail to:

- Catherine Brown, Governance & Compliance, Secretariat for the Information Governance Board

<p><i>Impact Assessment Sign Off.</i></p> <p><i>Date:</i></p> <p><i>By Whom:</i></p> <p><i>Comment(s)</i></p>

Security Marking:		Official	
		Author/Reviewer	
		Catherine Brown - Author	
Version	Date	Changes (ensure public copy amended and uploaded to external website)	Complied with Policy Guidance ✓