

29th March 2012

To: Councillor Barbara Janke, Bristol
Councillor John Calway, South Gloucestershire
Councillor Paul Crossley, Bath and North East Somerset
Councillor Nigel Ashton, North Somerset
Councillor Ken Maddock, Somerset

CC: Matthew Symonds, VOSCUR / Safer Future Communities Network Co-ordinator
Russ Kent, Victim Support / Victims, Services Advocate

Dear Councillor,

Appointments to the Police & Crime Panel for Avon & Somerset

We note that as part of the introduction of the Police & Crime Commissioner a shadow Police and Crime Panel is scheduled to be in place by summer 2012. This panel should comprise ten members from the unitary, county and district councils within Avon and Somerset Police Authority. We note that Council Leaders will be expected in April to form a joint selection committee for appointment to this shadow panel. As part of our local Bristol-based campaign on women's political representation, **Counting Women In**, we are writing to all Leaders to remind you of the importance of 50:50 gender representation on the Police & Crime Panel and some of the specific issues relating to women which we would expect this panel to have the expertise to address.

In recent years the Avon & Somerset Police Authority has been relatively well gender balanced, with roughly 50:50 representation. However, we note that the balance in gender representation is made up substantially through the Independent members of the Authority. Higher numbers of male councillors on the Authority mirror the higher numbers of male councillors generally – only 23% of the councillors of Bristol City Council, for example are women. Clearly, the change of composition signalled by the introduction of the Police & Crime Panel risks the representation becoming significantly unbalanced, unless this issue is specifically considered.

We would ask therefore what action you are taking as Council Leaders to ensure gender balance on the new panels? For instance, are you working together across the Avon and Somerset area to address this issue? If, as is highly likely, the representation on the Panel will not be diverse (in terms of both gender and other equalities communities) we would encourage you as Council Leaders to consider how you capture diversity as essential in your determination of co-opted members for the Police & Crime Panel.

Our primary concern in relation to the panel representation – which is shared across the country by women's organisations – relates to the importance of the work undertaken by Avon & Somerset Constabulary and the Police Authority to address crimes of Violence & Abuse Against Women & Girls (VAAWG). As we are sure you are aware, reported and

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unreported crimes of violence against women and girls comprise a very significant proportion of crime (links below):

- Women are very unlikely to report their experiences of violence. For example a woman will have experienced 35 incidents of domestic violence on average before making a report to police. Most rapes are never reported.
- The recent Mumsnet survey found that if women do report, it is not likely to be to the police. Local councillors are not likely to encounter disclosure or reporting from their constituents.
- Recent evidence to the Leveson enquiry has reiterated that the media tend to under-report and misrepresent crimes of VAAWG.
- Women make up more than 50% of the Avon and Somerset population and one in four will have been a victim of VAAWG.

We are less knowledgeable about the work in other local authorities within Avon & Somerset, however, in Bristol there is a wealth of knowledge and expertise in relation to VAAWG and excellent partnership working. This delivers an excellent range of complementary programmes from Operation Bluestone to projects on trafficking, FGM, support for women exiting prostitution and a strong strategy for prevention, the cornerstone to ending violence against women and girls.

The Police and Crime Commissioner will have a significant role in ensuring the maintenance and further development of this work, including the important task of challenging attitudes expressed in the local media and in society that provide a conducive context for VAAWG. It is therefore of vital importance that the Police & Crime Panel not only strives for 50:50 gender representation but also has at least one co-opted member who has an extensive, in-depth understanding of the issues related to VAAWG. While a general awareness is today much more common in elected councillors, the majority do not have detailed knowledge of the issues. Without specific consideration in the co-option process we are at risk of a Panel that is not adequately able to address this important issue of accountability for the Avon & Somerset Police and Crime Commissioner.

We would be happy to engage in further discussion regarding this issue, and look forward to your response.

Regards

Bristol Fawcett Counting Women In working group

Follow us on twitter @wearsthe shoes and find our blog at <http://wearsthe shoes.wordpress.com>

[http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/articles/domestic_violence - the facts the issues the future/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/articles/domestic_violence_-_the_facts_the_issues_the_future/)
<http://www.mumsnet.com/campaigns/we-believe-you-campaign-survey-on-rape-and-sexual-assault>
[http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/evaw coalition submission to the leveson inquiry final jan 2012.doc](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/evaw_coalition_submission_to_the_leveson_inquiry_final_jan_2012.doc)

Appendix: How did the party leaders respond?

Barbara Janke, Bristol

No reply.

John Calway, South Gloucestershire

No reply.

Paul Crossley, Bath and North East Somerset

"Please be assured that diversity in representation on the panel is a key objective of mine in discussions with other leaders in establishing the Police and Crime Panel for Avon & Somerset. I'll be pushing very hard to ensure the panel has gender balance as well as political and geographical balance."

Nigel Ashton, North Somerset

no reply.

Ken Maddock, Somerset

"The make-up of this panel is currently under discussion by Somerset County Council Officers and Elected Members and I will ensure your views are reflected. You are right to highlight the importance of the Panel and its membership and your comments are welcome and well made. At this moment I can't make any commitments but as the structure and membership of the panel is clarified, we will publish any decisions or relevant consultations to the widest possible audience. I can confirm that Somerset County Council has an excellent track record in partnership working as you have highlighted and we take our responsibilities to the most vulnerable individuals, including victims of domestic abuse, very seriously."