

Editorial release: February 2022

For immediate release

**Safer Streets campaign in Warrington helping to tackle violence against women and girls**

**Everybody has the right to go about their daily routine without fear or prejudice.**

Since the tragic murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa in London, the debate around how the police and other services should tackle crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls such as stalking, harassment, sexual violence and domestic abuse has featured prominently in the national conversation.

A documentary filmed here in Cheshire, ‘Stalkers’, hosted by Stacey Dooley, highlighted the dangers faced by women and girls and the work ongoing in Cheshire Constabulary’s Harm Reduction Unit (HRU) to protect them. The HRU helps victims to recover through practical support and Special Victims’ Advocates.

Cheshire’s Police and Crime Commissioner John Dwyer heard first-hand about how the concerns raised across the country were no different here in Cheshire. In his Police and Crime Plan he outlined his commitment to tackling violence against women and girls through continuing to fund the HRU and providing more more community-based support for victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence through Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) and Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) schemes.

Since taking office, the Commissioner has applied to the Home Office for extra funding to help tackle violence and intimidation against women and girls in Cheshire.

In November 2021, the Commissioner was successful in securing £550,000 for the Warrington Safer Streets project, which sees a number of initiatives being rolled out to help make residents and visitors to the borough feel safe.

Enhanced CCTV and street lighting will be added to the town centre, complementing neighbouring streets which have already been given the same enhancement. There will also be a ‘safe taxi’ scheme and an awareness and learning package for taxi drivers and other guardians to promote active bystander intervention – encouraging people to challenge inappropriate behaviour when they see it.

Pupils across Warrington will also be educated on how to spot and challenge unacceptable behaviour towards women and girls, and additional training and support will be provided to police officers to enable them to identify perpetrators at an early stage.

John Dwyer, Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire, said: “Tackling violence and intimidation against women and girls requires a collaborative approach and the Safer Streets funding supplied by the Home Office has helped the police, council and other partners tackle the issue on both sides of the coin.

It’s vital that we work to protect women and girls from harmful behaviour, but that cannot happen without resolute action to prevent that behaviour from happening in the first place. We need to educate people that the perpetrator is always responsible for their own behaviour, with no exceptions.

“Using some of the initiatives mentioned above shows how well all the agencies involved have worked together to help tackle and prevent violence against women and girls.”

The Safer Streets project in Warrington links in with work being undertaken elsewhere in the county. This includes the £300,000 investment the Commissioner secured as part of the Home Office’s Safety of Women at Night (SWaN) fund.

This fund enabled Cheshire Constabulary to invest in technology providing a real time video call link between the call handlers in the Force Control Centre and victims of crime. This technology aims to reduce the fear of sexual offending, improve the confidence that women and girls have in the police and justice system and make Cheshire’s night-time economy safer for everyone.

John Dwyer added: “This technology demonstrates our commitment to making Cheshire as safe as possible. I want to see how it helps us protect women and girls and expand its use to other types of crime, if appropriate.

“It enables call handlers to send a secure link, direct to your phone, allowing them to view the incident instantly and give the caller quick reassurance.

“In the case of sexual assaults, if a victim calls the police immediately after an incident, the call handler can start recording a first account from the victim, enabling evidence collection at a very early stage, and may help to identify an offender it they are still in the area.

“There needs to be a concerted effort from all agencies involved to help improve the feeling of safety for everyone on our streets. As you can see, work is being undertaken but we can’t rest on our laurels. I am committed to doing all I can to help and support victims, hold perpetrators accountable for their actions and educate the next generation on acceptable behaviour.”

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