



HM CPS

HM Crown Prosecution
Service Inspectorate

The CPS's approach to 'honour'-based abuse casework

**Part one: How the CPS has
developed its approach to
'honour'-based abuse and
its engagement with the
third sector and others**

September 2026

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Who we are

His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate inspects prosecution services, providing evidence to make the prosecution process better and more accountable.

We have a statutory duty to inspect the work of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Serious Fraud Office (SFO). By special arrangement, we also share our expertise with other prosecution services in the UK and overseas.

We are independent of the organisations we inspect, and our methods of gathering evidence and reporting are open and transparent. We do not judge or enforce; we inform prosecution services' strategies and activities by presenting evidence of good practice and issues to address. Independent inspections like these help to maintain trust in the prosecution process.

Our vision

We are part of the solution to improving the criminal justice system through high-quality inspection.

We have four priorities to enable us to deliver this vision:

- we hold the CPS and SFO to account for what they deliver (we make recommendations that drive improvement)
- victims will be at the heart of inspection (where we can, we will use victim experience in our inspection)
- using our 25 years of experience we will help public prosecutors improve (their legal casework)
- inspection will identify and spread best practice.

Our values

We act with integrity, creating a culture of respect, drive innovation, pursue ambition, and commit to inclusivity in everything we do.

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1. Chief Inspector's foreword

'Honour'-based abuse is a particularly complex and harmful form of offending. It can encompass a range of criminal behaviour, often taking place within family or community settings and characterised by coercion, control, fear, and a perceived need to preserve family or community 'honour'. Victims frequently face significant barriers to reporting abuse and supporting a prosecution, making it essential that agencies across the criminal justice system respond with both sensitivity and confidence.

The evidence we received indicated that important developments were underway across the CPS

We set out our intention to carry out an inspection of the Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS's) handling of 'honour'-based abuse within our 2026-27 business plan¹.

This report represents the first phase of that work: a landscape review of recent activity by the CPS. We decided to undertake this landscape review before examining casework.

The evidence we received indicated that important developments were underway across the CPS and among partner organisations. Providing time for those changes to take effect and become embedded will allow the second phase of our inspection to more meaningfully assess their impact.

In this initial phase, we have sought to understand the current landscape of 'honour'-based abuse, including the challenges faced by victims and the perspectives of organisations that support them. This report also highlights the significant work the CPS has done, and is continuing to do, to strengthen its response to this important area of casework — including engaging with victims, community organisations and specialist third-sector groups to inform guidance, policy and practice.

The second phase, which we will conduct in 2027-28, will focus on how 'honour'-based abuse cases are handled in practice. We will examine casework, engage with prosecutors and other CPS staff, and seek the views of stakeholders to assess whether cases are being managed effectively. We will also assess whether victims are being appropriately supported and engaged, and whether prosecutors have the tools, skills, knowledge and confidence necessary to respond to this complex and challenging form of offending.

¹ *Business plan 2026-27*; HMCPsi; March 2026.
hmcp.si.justiceinspecto.rates.gov.uk/report/business-plan-2026-27/

Scope of this inspection stage

Female genital mutilation is often included under the umbrella definition of 'honour'-based abuse. As part of our early engagement, when we were thinking of scoping this inspection, I made a decision not to include female genital mutilation cases within the scope of this inspection. Given the very low volume of prosecutions, we concluded that an inspection of the CPS alone would be unlikely to provide sufficient insight into the wider challenges associated with prevention, identification and reporting.

We are, however, exploring opportunities to work with other inspectorates and oversight bodies to consider these broader issues through a multi-agency lens.

We are grateful to the victims' organisations, community groups, stakeholders and CPS staff who contributed their time and expertise

This report does not reach judgements about the quality of the CPS's casework or its operational performance. Rather, it establishes an evidence base for the next stage of our work and provides a timely overview of the current position.

We are grateful to the victims' organisations, community groups, stakeholders and CPS staff

who contributed their time and expertise to this review. Their insights have helped shape our understanding of the challenges that remain and the progress that has been made.

The effective prosecution of 'honour'-based abuse plays a vital role in protecting victims, building confidence in the criminal justice system and holding perpetrators to account. We look forward to undertaking the next phase of this inspection and assessing how effectively these objectives are being delivered in practice.



Anthony Rogers
HM Chief Inspector

2. Context and background

What is 'honour'-based abuse?

2.1. 'Honour'-based abuse describes a range of abusive and violent behaviours and practices motivated by the abuser's perception that a victim has brought, or may bring, 'dishonour' or 'shame' to themselves, their family or their community. It can occur within any community, regardless of faith or background.

2.2. Although it is sometimes linked to 'honour'-based abuse, we have excluded consideration of female genital mutilation (FGM) from this inspection. FGM is a specific offence; reporting is very low and prosecutions even lower. We are working with other inspectorates, including those related to education and healthcare, to assess how we might jointly inspect the prevention of, and response to, this horrific crime across public bodies, not just the criminal justice system.

2.3. There is no single offence of 'honour'-based abuse. 'Honour'-based abuse can cover a range of offences such as:

- rape and serious sexual offences
- stalking or harassment
- controlling or coercive behaviour
- offences against the person
- in the most extreme cases, murder or attempted murder.

2.4. It can also include harmful practices such as dowry abuse, breast flattening, virginity testing and hymenoplasty, spiritual abuse or immigration abuse.

2.5. Forced marriage can be a form of 'honour'-based abuse, although it is an offence in its own right². It includes behaviours that may lead to a forced marriage, even if the marriage does not take place. It can be committed in one of four ways:

- using violence, threats or any other form of coercion to make someone enter into a marriage without their full and free consent
- deceiving a person so that they leave the UK for the purpose of a marriage they have not freely consented to, because of violence, threats or coercion
- any conduct intended to make a person who lacks capacity enter into a marriage
- any conduct intended to cause a person under the age of 18 to enter into marriage.

2.6. For the first time in England and Wales, there is now a statutory definition of 'honour'-based abuse, contained in section 144 of the Crime and Policing Act 2026³, which was given Royal Assent on 29 April 2026. At the time of writing, it was not yet in force.

2.7. The definition sets out that 'honour'-based abuse occurs where a person engages in abusive behaviour toward another person who is a member of the offender's family, or a relevant connection of the offender, and that the offender is wholly or partly motivated by their perception that the victim has behaved, is behaving or may behave in a way which shames or dishonours the offender, the victim or their families or communities, and that does not comply with the accepted norms of behaviour in the offender's community.

2.8. The Crime and Policing Act lists the types of behaviour that constitute abuse. These include physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, spiritual abuse, psychological or emotional abuse or any other abuse.

² 121. Offence of forced marriage: England and Wales, *Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014*; UK Parliament; March 2014.

legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/12/section/121

³ 144. Meaning of "'honour'-based abuse", *Crime and Policing Act 2026*; UK Parliament; April 2026.

legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2026/20/section/144

2.9. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) currently uses the following definition of 'honour'-based abuse:

"An incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse), which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community's code of behaviour."

Prevalence in England and Wales

2.10. The Home Office publishes statistics on 'honour'-based abuse offences in England and Wales⁴. The latest figures show that 2,715 'honour'-based abuse-related offences and 125 offences of forced marriage were reported to the police between April 2024 and March 2025.

2.11. The most common reported 'honour'-based abuse offences were controlling and coercive behaviour (22%). Assault, rape, stalking and threats to kill made up a large proportion of the other reported offences.

2.12. There is little accurate data on the true extent of 'honour'-based abuse, and it is believed that the majority of offences go unreported.

CPS prosecutions

2.13. Since 16 April 2025, the CPS has published quarterly data summaries that show the number of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage prosecutions in previous quarters and years. The data was published at the request of prosecutors and community stakeholders.

2.14. At the time of writing, the latest data had been published on 23 July 2026⁵. It shows that in England and Wales in the year ending March 2026, there were 96 completed prosecutions for 'honour'-based abuse, and 39 completed prosecutions for forced marriage.

⁴ Statistics on so called 'honour'-based abuse offences, England and Wales, year ending March 2025; Home Office; November 2025.

gov.uk/government/statistics/so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-year-ending-march-2025/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2025

⁵ CPS data summary quarter 4 2025-2026; CPS; July 2026.

cps.gov.uk/publication/cps-data-summary-quarter-4-2025-2026

2.15. Of the 96 completed prosecutions for 'honour'-based abuse:

- 48 resulted in convictions
- 32 cases were stopped by the CPS as a result of victim and witness issues
- nine cases were stopped because there was no longer sufficient evidence to prosecute
- four cases were stopped because prosecution was no longer in the public interest
- two cases were closed for administrative reasons
- in one case, the defendant was found not guilty after a trial.

2.16. The statistics show a similar picture for forced marriage, although the victim attrition rate was lower than for 'honour'-based abuse. Of the 39 completed prosecutions for forced marriage:

- 26 resulted in convictions
- eight cases were stopped as a result of victim and witness issues
- two cases were stopped for evidential reasons
- two cases were stopped because prosecution was no longer in the public interest
- one case involved a jury finding the defendant not guilty after a trial.

2.17. It is important to note that not all offences reported to the police will result in a prosecution. Not all offences investigated by the police will be referred to the CPS. This may be because the police or CPS decide there is insufficient evidence for a case to be prosecuted⁶, or the CPS decides that prosecution is not in the public interest⁷.

2.18. We asked the CPS what they thought the reasons might be for the disconnect between the number of cases reported to the police and the number

⁶ 4.6 The evidential stage, *The Code for Crown Prosecutors*; CPS; October 2018.

cps.gov.uk/publication/code-crown-prosecutors#section4

The evidential stage of the Full Code Test, as set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors (the Code), states that prosecutors must only start or continue a prosecution when there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction against each suspect on each charge.

⁷ The public interest stage of the Code states that a prosecution will only take place if it is in the public interest.

of prosecutions each year. The CPS could only comment on the reasons for the cases that were sent to CPS and not proceeded with.

2.19. When we interviewed CPS policy staff, one view they expressed was that prosecutors may be overly cautious about identifying cases as 'honour'-based abuse resulting in some cases not being flagged. We will test this assumption when we conduct the inspection in 2027-28. The CPS has recently published updated guidance aimed at improving prosecutors' understanding and confidence in identifying appropriate cases⁸.

2.20. Another reason may be inaccuracy in applying relevant monitoring flags to identify relevant cases for reporting purposes.

2.21. The conviction rate for 'honour'-based abuse cases is 50%. The conviction rate for 'general' domestic abuse cases is 73%. One reason for this may be the much higher victim attrition rate for 'honour'-based abuse prosecutions (33.3% in the year ending March 2026) compared to domestic abuse offences (13.8% in the same period).

2.22. This is an issue that we will consider in part 2 of this inspection, where we will analyse CPS cases.

⁸ *'Honour'-based abuse and forced marriage: guidance on identifying and flagging cases*; CPS; February 2026.
cps.gov.uk/prosecution-guidance/honour-based-abuse-and-forced-marriage-guidance-identifying-and-flagging-cases

3. Framework and methodology

Inspection framework

3.1. We designed the inspection framework to provide a comprehensive, strategic overview detailing:

- how the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has developed its approach to 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage
- the extent to which recent initiatives are designed to support a high-quality service to victims.

3.2. Given the publication of recent policy and guidance by the CPS, we decided to split the inspection activity into two parts. This part one is a landscape review to establish how the CPS has developed its approach to 'honour'-based abuse and its engagement with the third sector and others. Part two is to follow, and will examine the quality of the CPS's legal decision-making in 'honour'-based abuse cases.

3.3. The scope of the inspection is reproduced in Annex A.

Methodology

3.4. We examined CPS prosecution guidance, data which is publicly available on the CPS website, and key documents the CPS provided to us.

3.5. We sent a questionnaire to the 14 CPS 'honour'-based abuse Area leads and received eight responses.

3.6. We interviewed the CPS Deputy Director of Strategy and Policy for 'honour'-based abuse, and a senior policy advisor who is directly responsible for 'honour'-based abuse policy. There have been recent changes at senior level in the CPS, meaning that portfolios and lead roles are changing. When we conducted this landscape review, we were not able speak to a Chief Crown Prosecutor lead for 'honour'-based abuse.

3.7. We also interviewed representatives from two third sector organisations who have previously engaged with the CPS: Karma Nirvana and Southall Black Sisters.

3.8. This review was led by legal inspector Justine Allan. Business service support was provided by Ben Hayter. Senior legal inspector Colin Darroch supervised.

3.9. We are grateful to all those who engaged with us — including staff in the CPS policy directorate, CPS Area leads, and representatives of Karma Nirvana and Southall Black Sisters — for giving us their time and sharing their knowledge and expertise with us.

4. Understanding and engagement

4.1. Before the introduction of a statutory definition of 'honour'-based abuse, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) adopted the following definition, which is still in use:

"An incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse), which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community's code of behaviour."

4.2. The CPS recognises that these types of crimes are often perpetrated by victims' families, extended families and community members and, as such, often involve multiple defendants.

4.3. In order to better understand the cultural complexities of 'honour'-based abuse, the CPS engages with third-sector organisations in a number of ways.

Multi-agency conferences

4.4. Together with the Home Office and the National Police Chiefs' Council, the CPS organised two conferences aimed at better understanding and improving multi-agency action surrounding 'honour'-based abuse.

4.5. The first of these conferences was held in March 2025 and attended by representatives of the CPS, Home Office, the police, Border Force, and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, together with Victim Support, local councils, academics and representatives of the third sector. The stated objectives of the conference were:

"To further educate attendees on the complexities of 'honour'-based abuse, share and develop best practices for prevention and intervention, foster collaboration between different sectors working on 'honour'-based abuse, and empower survivors by providing them with more confidence in the criminal justice system."

4.6. The second conference was held in February 2026. Its stated aims were:

"To explore how to move from awareness to sustained action fostering collaboration and multi-agency working between different sectors working on 'honour'-based abuse."

4.7. The CPS told us that workshops at both conferences had provided useful input into both the amended CPS prosecution guidance, which was published in February 2026, and the updated joint protocol between the CPS and the police,

which is due to be published in the 2026/27 business year. In particular, a workshop at the 2025 conference had allowed the CPS to gather views from a wide-ranging group of organisations regarding the scope and detail of the amended protocol.

4.8. In our interviews with the third-sector organisations, they indicated that the events were generally good. However, they said that more focus on the impact of offending, and survivor testimony and issues faced by survivors, may have been more impactful.

Consultation with the third sector

4.9. Representatives from the CPS sit on several working groups that consider the impact of 'honour'-based abuse and how to improve the service to victims. These include the Harmful Practices working group in London and the Home Office Criminal Justice Group for 'honour'-based abuse. Third sector groups are invited to and involved in these working groups, which in the main are organised by the Home Office. This minimises the impact on the third sector by ensuring a co-ordinated government response, which minimises pressure on their limited resources.

4.10. The CPS consulted third sector organisations on the new CPS prosecution guidance. Southall Black Sisters told us that they were pleased to have been recognised as experts and that their views had been sought, but they thought that their input would have been more useful if they had been involved at an earlier stage and had seen the extracts they were given to consider in the context of the full guidance.

4.11. The CPS told us that it intends to involve the third sector in developing new training for prosecutors, which it intends to launch at the end of 2026. The training will complement pre-existing training about 'honour'-based abuse developed by the Home Office and will be designed to assist prosecutors in building better case strategies. Once the training modules have been developed, the CPS intends to form a panel to test the training and engage with third sector organisations.

4.12. The CPS told us that there are around 70 third-sector organisations who are involved with 'honour'-based abuse. It cannot offer any payment or expenses for any work these organisations do with the CPS. The CPS varies the organisations it engages with to avoid placing undue burden on a select number, and to make sure it hears from a variety of organisations with different perspectives.

4.13. The CPS has invited third sector organisations to attend and speak at internal events. For example, Karma Nirvana was invited to give a short presentation at the 'honour'-based abuse leads meeting in May 2026.

4.14. In December 2025, the CPS organised an 'honour'-based abuse scrutiny panel. The panel consisted of a number of invitees from the third sector, together with CPS, Home Office and police representatives. The panel discussed two cases involving 'honour'-based abuse, one case of forced marriage and one case involving female genital mutilation. The issues the panel discussed included:

- when it is appropriate to flag a case as 'honour'-based abuse
- the importance of a context-led approach to prosecution
- strengthening multi-agency working and knowledge of 'honour'-based abuse across criminal justice partners.

4.15. As a result of the panel, actions were set to review the role and job description of the 'honour'-based abuse leads, to emphasise their role in supporting prosecutors with flagging decisions, and to improve prosecutors' understanding of, and applications for, ancillary orders such as Forced Marriage Protection Orders.

4.16. Third sector organisations told us that they really welcomed being involved in the scrutiny panel. They would like panels to be held regularly and, if they are involved again, to have more time to prepare. To date, they have not had any feedback from the CPS following the panel, which they would have welcomed. We understand the CPS hopes to hold scrutiny panels annually.

4.17. More generally, third sector organisations said that they would like more contact with the CPS, and that the CPS only seemed to contact them when it wanted their input; for example, when developing new guidance. They felt they could offer more support to the CPS by helping it to understand how and when cases do not lead to a successful prosecution more generally, not just for the relatively small number of cases selected for a scrutiny panel. They felt that there was an assumption on the part of the CPS that cases mainly fail as a result of victims withdrawing support for a prosecution; when in their view, cases also fail because of evidential issues, which could often be rectified at an early stage in the case.

4.18. We will test these views both with the CPS and third sector when we undertake our full inspection in 2027.

5. Organisational learning

Area leads

5.1. In 2023, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) re-established the 'honour'-based abuse leads network. Each CPS Area has a nominated 'honour'-based abuse lead who, alongside their roles as prosecutors, meet quarterly to discuss issues relating to 'honour'-based abuse. The network is seen as an opportunity for the Area leads to come together to receive strategic updates, discuss live cases and showcase good practice to improve the prosecution of 'honour'-based abuse.

5.2. The 'honour'-based abuse Area leads meetings often include a presentation on a specific case involving 'honour'-based abuse. In the past they have included guest speakers from academia or the third sector.

5.3. The 'honour'-based abuse National Scrutiny Panel held in December 2025 resulted in an action to review and develop a description of the Area lead role, which will include cascading knowledge and understanding of 'honour'-based abuse within Areas. The scrutiny panel findings related to building expertise and the need for 'honour'-based abuse specialists within Areas, emphasising partnerships, the requirement for appropriate cases to be flagged, and consideration of external specialist 'honour'-based abuse support.

5.4. At the scrutiny panel, the third sector raised concerns that cases were not always being flagged as 'honour'-based abuse when they ought to have been. These findings were shared with the 'honour'-based abuse Area leads, with the expectation that the findings would be shared with prosecutors in the CPS Areas who deal with cases involving 'honour'-based abuse.

5.5. The 'honour'-based abuse Area leads have a dedicated Teams channel which they use to discuss general issues relating to 'honour'-based abuse. When we inspect the quality of the CPS's casework, we will interview Area leads and consider the impact that they have in raising awareness, improving flagging and providing support and guidance across their Area.

5.6. There was an indication, from those we engaged with at the CPS Headquarters policy unit, that 'honour'-based abuse Area leads undertake their roles alongside their substantive daily responsibilities as prosecutors and managers. In part two of this inspection we will consider how the 'honour'-based abuse Area lead role operates in practice.

5.7. As part of our engagement with the CPS, we attended one of the 'honour'-based abuse Area leads meetings. The agenda for the meeting was a standard one, and included a strategic update, an update on 'honour'-based

abuse data and a summary of current live CPS cases involving 'honour'-based abuse. There was also a short update on the recent changes to CPS prosecution guidance, a case study presented by one of the 'honour'-based abuse Area leads, and a presentation by a guest speaker from Karma Nirvana.

5.8. At the meeting, 'honour'-based abuse Area leads were given the opportunity to discuss case-specific issues. The case study highlighted positives and negatives of the CPS's handling of the case and generated lots of discussion, and raised issues that naturally would have helped improve case outcomes if fed back to other Area lawyers. The effective and consistent cascade of learning from these meetings is an aspect we will include in our 2027 inspection.

5.9. We conducted a short survey of the 'honour'-based abuse Area leads, to better understand what their role involves and how they make sure that good practice and learning are shared with staff in their Area. We received responses from eight of the 14 Area leads. Some who responded had been recently appointed as 'honour'-based abuse Area leads, while others were significantly more experienced.

5.10. While there is currently no specific definition of the 'honour'-based abuse Area lead role, all of those who responded to the survey understood their role to include disseminating information from the Area leads meetings, including good practice and lessons learned, and raising awareness generally of 'honour'-based abuse related casework issues. Some Area leads carried out local case management panels on cases involving 'honour'-based abuse, so that they had better oversight of the cases in their Area, and could offer their assistance and expertise to prosecutors who may be new to this type of casework.

5.11. The survey identified that 'honour'-based abuse Area leads used various methods of sharing information and updating staff.

- Several had given presentations to Area staff following the publication of the recently updated CPS prosecution guidance on 'honour'-based abuse.
- One had given an update to a legal leadership forum⁹ involving local legal managers, who were then expected to disseminate this information to prosecutors on their teams.
- One was exploring the possibility of engaging a third sector provider to provide some training for prosecutors.

⁹ An internal mechanism used by senior managers in the CPS to share knowledge, improve casework quality, and develop the leadership skills of CPS managers.

5.12. When we undertake our casework quality inspection, we will look specifically at how feedback is used in and across Areas to improve performance and outcomes.

5.13. One area where the CPS is seeking to strengthen the understanding and sharing of good practice is in developing a feedback mechanism through inclusion and community engagement managers (ICEMs). There are 14 ICEMs within the CPS, one in each geographical Area. Their role is to work externally to build public trust, improve services for victims, and address community concerns about the justice system.

5.14. The ICEMs are currently managed within each local Area. During this financial year (2026-27), they will be centralised and brought into the Policy and Strategy Directorate in the CPS. One of the aims of this change is to help disseminate information and share best practice in a consistent and more strategic way. This change will allow the CPS to improve accountability and consistency across CPS Areas, and to create a national repository which will be used to strengthen policy and practice. Again, we will test the impact of this change in our forthcoming inspection.

Training

5.15. The CPS told us that the low conviction rate for 'honour'-based abuse is a key issue discussed at the Area leads' meetings. Newly developed training modules for prosecutors, which will be released at the end of this year, will focus on the post-charge period and case strategy, with the aim of improving post-charge progression of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage cases.

5.16. The CPS told us that the availability of expert witnesses in 'honour'-based abuse is often crucial in securing convictions. Prosecutors need to better understand the differences between domestic abuse and 'honour'-based abuse —cultural nuances, for example — or the fact that 'honour'-based abuse often involves multiple defendants. The new training modules will be designed to improve understanding of these issues.

6. Assurance and oversight

Prosecution guidance and training

6.1. To make sure its staff are appropriately equipped, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) regularly reviews its prosecution guidance and, where appropriate, updates that guidance. As part of this process, new prosecution guidance on 'honour'-based abuse, forced marriage and harmful practices was published on 26 February 2026. This followed a period of consultation including with 'honour'-based abuse Area leads, external stakeholders and third sector groups.

6.2. The new guidance replaces that previously published in March 2023. It reflects learning from the National Scrutiny Panel, particularly about clearer flagging, earlier consideration of special measures, and the importance of a suspect-centric approach to case strategy. The main changes are that:

- the new guidance includes specific sections covering multiple harmful practices and offences, including immigration abuse, dowry abuse, virginity testing and hymenoplasty, which were not included in the earlier guidance
- a section on case-building has been added, which consolidates the earlier guidance about investigations, risk assessments and taking a suspect-centric approach
- the new guidance sets out how case decisions should be recorded
- guidance on supporting witnesses and victims has been expanded and developed, including applying for special measures to support them
- the new guidance includes clearer and more prescriptive instructions to prosecutors relating to flagging 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage cases, setting out explicitly where one or both flags should be used.

6.3. To accompany the new guidance, the CPS is developing new training modules. These are expected to be released at the end of 2026. We were told that the CPS intends to consult with stakeholders and the third sector when developing this training, and will convene a panel to test the training before it is released.

6.4. In some Areas, 'honour'-based abuse Area leads are involved in local case management panels for 'honour'-based cases. These are meetings where prosecutors and managers discuss complex or high-risk cases to review case strategy and ensure management oversight.

6.5. The Area leads told us that they were notified of all cases in their Area believed to include an element of 'honour'-based abuse, to ensure consistency and oversight; and were available to answer any ad-hoc queries, or support prosecutors in their Area who may be prosecuting 'honour'-based abuse cases (but that there was no requirement to proactively review or dip sample those cases).

Flagging

6.6. The main way the CPS gathers data about 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage is via electronic 'flags'. These are manually set by CPS staff on the CPS's case management system (CMS). There are separate flags for 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage.

6.7. The new prosecution guidance explains, with examples, when each flag should be used. This includes cases which should be flagged with both flags.

6.8. Data about cases flagged as 'honour'-based abuse and/or forced marriage has been publicly available on the CPS website since 2024. The published data relies on CPS staff applying the appropriate flag, which can be done at any point after the case is registered with the CPS and before it is concluded.

6.9. The 'honour'-based abuse Area leads we surveyed told us that part of their role was to monitor and assure the data from their Area, to make sure cases were flagged appropriately. They can get a list of flagged cases in their Area from CMS to assist them with this.

6.10. We examined cases which had been flagged as either 'honour'-based abuse or forced marriage between July 2025 and June 2026. There were 81 cases that had been flagged as 'honour'-based abuse. Sixty-eight of those cases (84%) were correctly flagged as 'honour'-based abuse.

6.11. Another ten cases involved some form of domestic abuse, including rape, controlling and coercive behaviour and assault. These may have been flagged as a precaution or to indicate that 'honour'-based abuse had been considered as a possibility at some stage in the case.

6.12. The remaining three cases were flagged in error; they involved offences which are not typically 'honour'-based abuse cases. The three incorrectly flagged cases were theft from a shop, aggravated burglary and failure to provide a specimen.

6.13. We also examined 28 cases that had been flagged as forced marriage in the same period. Ten cases (35.7%) had been correctly flagged. They included six breaches of a Forced Marriage Protection Order, one forced marriage, two intentional strangulation cases and one kidnap.

6.14. The other 18 cases were flagged in error. They included 16 cases of domestic abuse (nine of which were, or potentially should have been, flagged as 'honour'-based abuse), driving whilst disqualified and possession of a Class B drug.

6.15. Given the relatively low number of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage cases in the CPS, errors such as these should be easy to identify and rectify.

6.16. Accurate data is important for several reasons. The CPS uses the data to engage with and discuss performance in a large number of meetings. Recently, at a summit about female genital mutilation, the data was used when presenting about the CPS's action around 'honour'-based abuse more widely and the extent of cases seen. Data is also used at 'honour'-based abuse Area leads meetings, when discussing performance, and to identify and highlight trends such as the relatively low number of referrals for forced marriage. Flagging is also used to track cases through the criminal justice system and to identify conviction rates and reasons for non-conviction. Data is also published to ensure transparency.

6.17. We will re-assess the accuracy of CPS guidance when we assess the quality of legal casework in 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage cases.

6.18. The third sector told us that they use published CPS data as part of internal and external training, in particular to highlight their frustrations about reduced prosecution numbers, compared to the number of victims who report 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage offences to the police.

6.19. It is therefore important that the CPS ensures that data it gathers and publishes is accurate. The CPS recognises this and the updated guidance on flagging was put in place to address these issues.

7. Victim focus

7.1. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) ensures that its evolving approach to 'honour'-based abuse meets the needs of victims in a variety of ways.

7.2. The CPS's strategy on violence against women and girls (VAWG)¹⁰ shifts the primary focus of investigations away from the behaviour of victims and onto the actions of the suspect before, during and after an allegation (a suspect-centric approach). The VAWG strategy includes a commitment to work with specialist organisations, and experts on the psychological impact of trauma, to develop new training on trauma for prosecutors, which will assist them in understanding the needs of victims.

The CPS has secured £5 million funding over two years to improve the service provided to domestic abuse victims. This includes a pilot scheme in three Areas

7.3. 'Honour'-based abuse conferences jointly organised by the CPS, National Police Chiefs' Council and Home Office, held in March 2025 and February 2026, provided opportunities for the CPS to engage with third sector organisations supporting and representing victims. The 2025 conference included a workshop inviting suggestions for a joint protocol between the CPS and police to improve handling of cases involving 'honour'-based abuse.

7.4. To accompany the strategy on VAWG, the CPS has also produced an action plan on 'honour'-based abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and harmful practices 2025-2030. The action plan includes actions identified at the National Scrutiny Panel, as well as the need to work with partners to make sure products, guidance and policies promote the CPS's understanding of intersectionality¹¹ and the application of intersectional approaches.

7.5. There has also been a renewed focus on communication between the CPS and victims, aimed at making sure victims are better informed about, and supported through, the criminal justice process. This will include reviewing and developing the pages related to 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage on the CPS website, to make sure they provide accessible information in clear and simple language.

7.6. The CPS has secured £5 million funding over two years to improve the service provided to domestic abuse victims. This includes a pilot scheme in

¹⁰ *Violence against women and girls strategy 2025-2030*; CPS.
cps.gov.uk/publication/vawg-2025-2030

¹¹ Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different forms of discrimination interact.

three Areas, offering pre-trial meetings to adult victims of domestic abuse cases in the Crown Court. It aims to give them the opportunity to meet a member of the prosecution team, ask questions, discuss the court process and understand what support, including special measures, may be available. At the request of the CPS, this was extended to include victims of 'honour'-based abuse and forced marriage.

7.7. These are all aspects that we will include in our future inspection, by which time they should have been implemented and had time to embed.

Annex A

Scope

A landscape review of the prosecution of 'honour'-based abuse by the Crown Prosecution Service: scoping document

A. Introduction

'Honour'-based abuse (HBA) is a collection of practices which are used to control behaviour within families or other social groups to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and/or 'honour'. Such abuse can occur when perpetrators perceive that a relative has shamed the family and/or community by breaking their code of 'honour'. It is an umbrella term used to encompass various offences that are prosecuted under existing legislation. These crimes are often carried out by the victim's family, extended family, or members of their community.

At present there is no single legal definition that covers HBA and it is not a specific criminal offence. However, in August 2025 the government announced its intention to introduce a statutory definition of HBA that is expected to be introduced in 2026.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) currently defines HBA as:

"An incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse), which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community's code of behaviour."

HBA includes the specific offence of forced marriage (FM) contrary to s.121 Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, and a range of other offences which are prosecuted under more general legislation for offences such as assault, threats to kill, controlling and coercive behaviour, stalking and harassment. Consequently, HBA offences can be prosecuted in either magistrates' courts or the Crown Court. Within the CPS, FM and female genital mutilation (FGM) offences are always prosecuted by Complex Casework Units, whilst other offences involving HBA are usually prosecuted by their volume crime units (magistrates' court, Crown Court, and Rape and Serious Sexual offences units).

The CPS monitors these cases by identifying and flagging all cases of HBA and FM on its case management system. These are two separate monitoring flags.

Prosecutors should flag cases appropriately, identifying flags for monitoring HBA and FM as well as any other flags that may be relevant such as domestic abuse (DA). Note: not all FM cases will meet the definition for HBA. If a case involves both FM and HBA then it should be flagged with both FM and HBA.

Both the police and CPS have local specialist HBA and FM leads whom they can consult for advice and guidance on the handling of these cases.

B. Background

CPS

In June 2025 the CPS launched internally their new five-year strategy for tackling violence against women and girls (externally November 2025). The strategy included several commitments including:

- To implement a joint National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and CPS HBA and FM investigation and prosecution protocol,
- To introduce National Scrutiny Panels for HBA cases that have been finalised,
- To develop and roll out new training modules on HBA, FM and FGM,
- To update prosecution guidance on HBA,
- To develop an HBA, FM and FGM action plan, including hosting a national multi-agency conference to share best practice, raise awareness and promote partnership working.

Since then, the CPS has made significant progress including:

- Published refreshed and expanded guidance on HBA and FM on 26 February 2026,
- Co-hosted with the Home Office and the NPCC the second national HBA multi-agency conference on 4 February 2026,
- Developed an HBA, FM, FGM and Harmful Practices action plan,
- Maintained a live case log that has been expanded to include FGM components and FGM Protection Orders,
- Held the first national HBA Scrutiny Panel in December 2025,
- Updated its external facing webpages,
- Held quarterly meetings with HBA leads in CPS Areas,
- Mandated the inclusion of FM and FGM in monthly meetings held by the Heads of Complex Casework Units to improve oversight of cases.

By the end of 2026 the CPS intends to:

- Launch new training modules for HBA/FM,
- Publish the new HBA/FM Joint Protocols.

Central Government

In December 2025 the Government launched its new violence against women and girls (VAWG) strategy that includes HBA, including FM and FGM. The strategy explains how the Government plans to deliver on its ambition to halve VAWG in a decade. The Government is also currently consulting with agencies on the new statutory definition for HBA.

HMCPsi

Within our 2025-26 business plan, HMCPsi indicated an intention to conduct an inspection into the CPS's handling of cases involving HBA. Within the business plan the stated purpose of the inspection was to assess the quality of casework in cases involving HBA, gather evidence of victim experience by engaging with the third sector and include examination of cases of FGM, FM and HBA.

C. Published Data

CPS published data¹ as at Q2 2025/26 indicates that on a rolling year to date (RYTD) basis there have been 102 prosecutions for HBA. 46 of those cases have ended in conviction (45.1%), and 56 (54.9%) have a non-conviction outcome recorded. 39 of those convictions were achieved via a guilty plea (38.2%), with seven convictions secured after trial (6.9%). Of the cases which ended without conviction, 52 cases (51%) were dropped by the CPS, two cases (2%) were dismissed/acquitted during or after trial, and two cases (2%) were finalised administratively. Within those cases which concluded on a non-conviction basis, 30 cases (53.6%), had 'victim or witness reasons' cited as the reason for the outcome, and in 20 cases (35.7%) the case failed for 'evidential' reasons.

CPS data indicates there have been 38 FM prosecutions nationally on a RYTD basis. Of these, 21 (55.3%) ended in conviction, and 17 (44.7%) were dropped by the CPS. 17 of those convictions were achieved via a guilty plea (44.7%), with four convictions secured after trial (10.5%). Of the cases which ended without conviction, 16 cases (42.1%) were dropped by the CPS, and one case (2.6%) was finalised administratively. Of note, nine cases (52.9%) ended for 'victim reasons', six cases (35.3%) ended for 'evidential' reasons, and one case (5.9%) on public interest grounds.

D. Victims' Voice

The impact on victims of HBA and FM can be significant. Victims in these types of cases are often some of the most vulnerable and many do not have confidence in the criminal justice system. They may feel loyalty to their family or community which makes them less likely to support a prosecution. Victims can be under threat during and for a significant period after a prosecution. There can be specific barriers for victims with insecure immigration status.

We recognise that the CPS has recently engaged with third sector organisations representing victims in developing its updated HBA and FM guidance. These include Karma Nirvana, Southall Black Sisters, IKWRO and Savera UK.

As part of this landscape review we will engage with representatives of the third sector to establish the extent to which they were consulted and engaged with by the CPS, particularly in relation to the new CPS guidance on HBA and FM. We will seek to establish the extent to which the new published guidance, in their view, addresses issues they may have raised in consultation with the CPS.

It is anticipated that we will engage in more detail with those third sector organisations on any future inspection activity intended to assess the impact of the new guidance.

E. Objective

To provide a comprehensive, strategic overview detailing how the Crown Prosecution Service has developed its approach to 'honour'-based abuse, and the extent to which recent initiatives are designed to support a high-quality service to victims.

To provide a sound evidential basis for HMCPSP to conduct a future inspection once recent CPS policy and guidance changes have embedded.

F. Review criteria

We will review the following:

1. Background and context of 'honour'-based abuse.
 - a. What is 'honour'-based abuse?
 - b. What data is available
 - a. to show the extent of prevalence in England and Wales
 - b. to show the number of prosecutions undertaken by CPS, whether they are successful or not and why?
 - c. What trends does the data reveal?
- c. How has CPS policy and guidance evolved over recent years to meet the demands involved in prosecuting 'honour'-based abuse?
2. Understanding and engagement.

How does the CPS ensure it understands the cultural complexities of 'honour'-based abuse through engagement with communities and third-sector organisations?
3. Organisational learning.

How does the CPS ensure learning from engagement, scrutiny panels and case discussions is shared and used to improve understanding and practice across the organisation?

4. Assurance and oversight.

How does the CPS assure itself that staff dealing with 'honour'-based abuse are appropriately equipped, supported and supervised?

How effectively does the CPS monitor the accuracy of HBA and FM flagging and ensure the integrity of its data?

5. Victim focus.

How does the CPS ensure that its evolving approach to 'honour'-based abuse meets the need of victims?

G. Methodology

This review will gather evidence from work undertaken by CPS at a national level including a review of relevant documents and some limited on-site attendance to conduct interviews with relevant staff.

Document request

We will examine documents relating to the following:

National

1. CPS Headquarters relevant national legal and operational guidance (where not available on CPS intranet)
2. Agenda/minutes from CPS led national HBA multi-agency conference
3. HBA, FM, FGM and Harmful Practices action plan
4. Agenda/minutes from the national HBA Scrutiny Panel
5. Agenda/minutes from quarterly meetings with HBA leads in CPS Areas

On-Site Phase

National interviews:

In CPS headquarters the following will be approached for an interview:

- CPS HBA lead
- Director of Policy
- CPS Policy leads for HBA

CPS Area surveys:

A survey will be undertaken of the CPS Area HBA leads.

Victim voice:

Representatives of the third sector will be approached for interview.

H. Equality Impact Assessment

A preliminary evaluation of the need for an equality impact assessment (EIA) has been undertaken. The potential effects of the review on disadvantaged groups or individuals with protected characteristics have been considered. Based on the nature of the review and the methodology to be used, there is no indication that any protected groups are likely to be impacted by the outcome. As no impacts were identified during the screening process, a full EIA is not anticipated to be required. This position will be kept under review throughout the course of the review.

Annex B

Glossary

Ancillary orders

Orders which the prosecution can invite the court to make, or the court can decide to make of its own volition — for example, to prevent the defendant from contacting the victim or engaging in certain activity.

Area

The Crown Prosecution Service is divided into 14 geographical Areas across England and Wales. Each Area is led by a Chief Crown Prosecutor, supported by an Area Business Manager.

Case management system (CMS)

An IT system for case management used by the Crown Prosecution Service, which records most of the details of cases and provides management information and data. Through links with police systems, the case management system receives electronic case material that has replaced paper files.

Charging decision

A decision by the Crown Prosecution Service (or the police in certain circumstances) whether there is sufficient evidence, and whether it is in the public interest, to charge a suspect with a particular offence. The process is governed by the Director's Guidance on Charging¹², 6th edition, which came into effect in December 2020.

Controlling or coercive behaviour

Repeated or continued behaviour that amounts to being controlling or coercive and has a serious effect on the victim. The victim and perpetrator must be personally connected, and the perpetrator knows or ought to know that the behaviour will have a serious effect on the victim.

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

The main public agency for conducting criminal cases in England and Wales, responsible for:

- prosecuting criminal cases investigated by the police and other investigating bodies
- advising the police on cases for possible prosecution
- reviewing cases submitted by the police

- determining any charges in more serious or complex cases
- preparing cases for court
- presenting cases at court.

It has been operating since 1986 and is headed by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Defendant

Someone accused of and charged with or convicted of a criminal offence.

Domestic abuse

The cross-government definition of domestic violence and abuse is “any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family member regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass but is not limited to psychological; physical; sexual; financial; and emotional.”

Dowry abuse

Dowry is a tradition practised globally. It is practised differently across cultures, but typically involves a bride's family providing payments to her husband's family and serves as financial security for women in many cultures. If the husband and/or his family perceive the dowry to be insufficient or deny access and control over the dowry, the bride and/or her family could be subjected to abuse. Common forms of dowry abuse include or may feature financial demands and extortion, control over finances or property, isolation, threats and coercion, and domestic servitude.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

A procedure where the female genital organs are injured or changed and there is no medical reason for this.

Forced marriage

A marriage where one or both people do not or cannot consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used to force them into marriage. It is also when anything is done to make someone marry before they turn 18, even if there is no pressure or abuse.

Forced Marriage Protection Order

A civil (not criminal) legal order that can protect someone who is at risk of forced marriage or has already been subjected to it. Breaking a Forced Marriage Protection Order is a criminal offence.

'Honour'-based abuse

The Crown Prosecution Service defines 'honour'-based abuse as “an incident or crime involving violence, threats of violence, intimidation, coercion or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse), which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of an individual, family and/or community for alleged or perceived breaches of the family and/or community's code of behaviour.”

'Honour'-based abuse Area lead

A member of Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) staff who supports prosecutors with cases involving 'honour'-based abuse and/or forced marriage. Each CPS Area has its own lead. The leads meet quarterly to discuss issues relating to 'honour'-based abuse casework in the CPS.

Hymenoplasty

A specific offence, defined as the reconstruction of the hymen, with or without consent.

Inclusion and community engagement manager

Sets out the Crown Prosecution Service's commitment to promoting fairness, equality, diversity and inclusion across the criminal justice system by engaging with community groups and those at risk of exclusion.

Intersectionality

The framework used to understand how overlapping personal identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality and disability, intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination, inequality and vulnerability.

Local case management panel (LCMP)

A discussion held within a local Crown Prosecution Service unit between a lawyer and their manager(s), or between managers, to discuss progress on a case and determine what other work needs to be done. The panel may review whether the decision to charge was correct or, if there has been a significant change in the case, whether it still ought to proceed.

National Scrutiny Panel

A multi-agency panel, the primary purpose of which is to engage with communities and partners on sensitive cases at a national level. It will typically involve discussion about two or three cases between the Crown Prosecution Service, criminal justice partners, and representatives from voluntary sector organisations.

Prosecutor

A lawyer in England and Wales who is independent from the police and other investigators. Crown Prosecution Service prosecutors decide whether to bring criminal charges, decide on appropriate charges, advise investigators, prepare cases and present them at court.

Special measures

The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 provides for a range of special measures to enable vulnerable or intimidated witnesses in a criminal trial to give their most accurate and complete account of what happened. Measures include giving evidence via a live TV link to the court, giving evidence from behind screens in the courtroom and using intermediaries. A special measures application is made to the court within set time limits and can be made by the prosecution or the defence.

Suspect-centric

Analysing a suspect's behaviour and actions before, during and after an alleged criminal offence.

Virginity testing

The examination of female genitalia, with or without consent, for the purpose (or purported purpose) of determining virginity.

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