

‘Progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations’ published by HMICFRS on 22 August 2024
Avon & Somerset PCC response dated 17 October 2024

Operation Soteria is a programme to transform how the police handle rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO). It was introduced as it was recognised that RASSO victims were being failed by the criminal justice system.

Avon and Somerset Police help lead the way with these changes (through Project Bluestone) and since 2021, 19 early adopter forces have been putting Soteria in place via the National Operating Model (NOM). The NOM sets out a foundation of investigative practice and corporate guidance that help forces achieve better outcomes in RASSO cases.

RASSO forms part of those offences classified as male violence against women and girls (MVAWG) because victims are disproportionately women and girls and the offenders are disproportionately male. MVAWG is part of priority 2 of my Police and Crime Plan that I will soon publish.

It is imperative that we continue to improve our response to these awful crimes. We must ensure the service provided to victims continues to get better and that we try and prevent these crimes from happening in the first place.

It should be noted that I have a legal duty to respond to inspection reports within eight weeks of their publication. However, the Constabulary have longer to address these recommendations.

Recommendation 3

By 31 January 2025, all forces should make sure personnel working on rape and other serious sexual offences receive College of Policing approved training on the investigation of word-on-word cases.

Response

The Constabulary sought clarity on this recommendation and it was confirmed that this related to the [Full Code Test for RASSO cases](#). The Constabulary have already delivered training which included this. The new RASSO Initial Skills Development Programme was given to over 85 investigators in the Constabulary, exceeding the target, set nationally, of 53. This was also covered as part of the continued professional development for the whole CID Directorate.

Recommendation 5

By 31 July 2025, chief constables should make sure their forces use the new definition of repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspects to identify and manage them.

Response

This requires completion of recommendation 4, which is for national bodies to define what a repeat RASSO suspect is by 31 January 2025. Once this national definition has been agreed the Constabulary will adopt it.

The Constabulary are currently developing a new RASSO Problem Profile which includes developing a perpetrator behaviour model; this recommendation will be considered as part of that work.

Recommendation 7

By 31 January 2025, all chief constables should make sure their forces prioritise identifying and disrupting rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO) suspects.

This includes making sure that:

- forces track, manage and respond effectively to breaches of bail and protection orders in RASSO cases; and
- all relevant personnel complete National Operating Model training on using criminal and civil orders to tackle RASSO.

Response

The Constabulary has established procedures that address this recommendation. The training described in Recommendation 3 covered the second point here as it involved disruption activity such as the use of criminal and civil orders.

The Constabulary have prioritised the allocation of RASSO cases within CID which has helped achieve earlier arrests and improved disruption. The Soteria Disruption Toolkit which appears in the National Operating Model was developed in line with the Constabulary. It sets out current practice and provides a clear route-map for improvement. The latter is driven by Bluestone “Disruption Champions”, who have received additional training to better support longer-term disruption as a vital component of rape investigation.

However, the Constabulary have also recognised the need to improve bail management, not just in RASSO cases, and this is part of broader work being undertaken to better manage offenders and suspects.

Recommendation 9

By 31 January 2025, chief constables should make sure their forces have good processes in place for applying to retain DNA and fingerprints to improve their use of section 63G of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE).

Response

The Constabulary have specific guidance on applying to retain biometric information under section 63G of PACE. This is available on their intranet and links to the broader guidance on retention of biometric data.

Recommendation 11

By 31 March 2025, all chief constables should make sure that, as part of adopting the National Operating Model, their forces:

- develop a rape and other serious sexual offences problem profile;
- include the National Operating Model flight deck within their strategic performance monitoring; and
- adopt any key performance indicators (KPIs) that are agreed and published by the Soteria Joint Unit.

Response

As noted above the Constabulary are already developing their RASSO problem profile which should be finished by the deadline in this recommendation.

The Constabulary developed a RASSO data tool as part of their Soteria-Bluestone work and the Superintendent lead for Bluestone, together with their leadership team monitors the flight deck on a monthly basis. However, the Constabulary need to ensure this is forming part of broader strategic performance monitoring.

The Constabulary helped develop the original Soteria KPIs at a national level and have supported subsequent iterations.

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