



Norfolk's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) response to inspections published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

Section 55 of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 37 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017) requires local policing bodies to respond and publish comments on all inspection reports pertaining to your force within 56 days of report publication.

Inspection Title:

An inspection report on 'Progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations'

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Rape and Spotlight

Police Forces:

All local forces in England and Wales

Link to Report:

[Progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/progress-to-introduce-a-national-operating-model-for-rape-and-other-serious-sexual-offences-investigations-his-majestys-inspectorate-of-constabulary-and-fire-rescue-services)

Section 55 Response Deadline:

17 October 2024

Key Findings

Operation Soteria is a programme that aims to transform how forces across England and Wales handle rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO) investigations. The National Operating Model (NOM) sets out how forces should change their approach to investigating RASSO. Operation Soteria builds upon Project Bluestone, a programme where the police and academics worked together to examine RASSO cases and data in detail.

HMICFRS examined seven questions relating to Operation Soteria across nine early adopter forces (Durham Constabulary, The Met, South Wales Police, West Midlands Police, Gwent Police, Kent Police, Lancashire Constabulary, Warwickshire Police and Wiltshire Police)

who have been putting Soteria and the NOM in place since 2021. The seven question areas were as follows:

1. To what extent have forces adopted the pillars of Soteria and to what extent do they prioritise suspect-focused investigations?
2. How effectively do forces identify and disrupt repeat suspects?
3. How effectively do forces carry out victim-centred investigations and achieve procedural justice?
4. How effectively do forces provide for their officers' well-being in the context of RASSO investigations?
5. How effectively do forces prioritise officer and staff learning and development on the national standards for RASSO investigations?
6. To what extent do forces have good strategic analysis to improve RASSO investigations and prevent offences?
7. How effectively do forces' digital forensic services provide quality and timely support for RASSO investigations?

Using these questions, HMICFRS mapped the police approach to Soteria in nine early adopter forces having evaluated the progress they have made, and the benefits and challenges forces have found so far.

Question area one looked at the adoption of the Soteria model and prioritisation of suspect-focused RASSO investigations. It was found that for such major changes to succeed, there must be visible senior leadership and strong oversight from the start.

Most forces inspected treat RASSO as a sub-category under other priority crime types, for example, serious violence, violence against women and girls (VAWG) or domestic abuse.

Most forces investigated had detailed plans to put Soteria in place and also had good leadership and governance structures. However, project managers and pillar leads need time to make sure that such a large-scale programme of change can succeed. Most forces inspected made sure Soteria strategic leads had the time and resources they needed to make changes. This included developing plans to invest in support staff, trainers, investigators, analysts, and digital forensics personnel.

Most inspected forces understood Soteria and how to use the six pillars but in a few forces, senior leaders didn't fully understand how it works or the benefits it can offer. Furthermore, forces should use problem profiles to help them understand current and emerging threats to public safety but not all forces had one for RASSO.

Every force inspected had scrutiny panels which they used to improve their approach to RASSO investigations by examining cases when no further action was taken. Some panels included the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs). However, ISVAs often weren't equal members of scrutiny panels which means they can't select cases that they think would benefit from a review.

The shortage of RASSO detectives makes dealing with demand difficult. Forces are trying different methods to recruit more RASSO detectives, but the Home Office should urgently complete its review of the role of Detective Constable. This will set out plans to make this career path more attractive and help reduce detective shortages. The shortage of detectives means some non-specialist personnel handle RASSO cases. Most forces reduce the risks of doing this by getting experienced RASSO supervisors to oversee these cases.

Under Soteria, investigators assess the wider context of a crime including intelligence about the RASSO suspect and digital evidence. It also means considering how the suspect acted towards the victim (and others) before and during the alleged crime. This detailed approach helps investigators build cases where the evidence points towards or away from a suspect. It also helps police and prosecutors collect evidence that a jury is more likely to understand.

Investigators should consider asking the CPS for Early Advice (EA) in RASSO cases, particularly where the investigation is complex or sensitive. EA involves CPS prosecutors giving the police guidance to help them understand what evidence they need to support a prosecution or if a suspect can be charged.

Under Soteria, the police and CPS focus on making sure evidence requests are proportionate and justifiable. Some investigators stated that some decisions made by some on-call prosecutors before charging a suspect are not victim-centred enough.

Many investigators and police supervisors didn't fully understand the evidence required in word-on-word rape investigations. These cases can include those where the people involved disagree about whether consent was given.

There is no consistent approach to identifying and disrupting repeat suspects across forces. Furthermore, few forces knew how many repeat suspects they arrested. To keep victims safe, forces must make sure they have a good understanding of repeat RASSO offenders, regardless of whether they have been arrested or convicted.

The police could use Protection Orders more effectively to safeguard victims. Under Soteria, forces are encouraged to use all types of Protection Orders to protect victims. These place restrictions on people's behaviour to stop them causing sexual harm to others. Examples of Protection Orders are Sexual Risk Orders and Sexual Harm Prevention Orders. Additionally, the police don't use their powers to retain fingerprints and DNA often enough.

Soteria takes a victim-centred approach to RASSO investigations. It encourages investigators to examine the full context of a crime to understand what a suspect has done. It challenges the behaviour of suspects by looking at how they acted towards the victim and others before and during the alleged crime and it uses procedural justice to help win the trust of victims who report RASSO.

Many RASSO victims get timely support from ISVAs, but others do not. In some force areas, rape victims wait four months to receive specialist support. This is due to rapidly growing demand. Despite some extra funding for victim services, demand keeps rising with

no long-term approach to make sure support services can give consistent support to victims in the future.

Some forces do not give dedicated well-being support to RASSO teams. RASSO teams can all access well-being support services, however due to their workloads, most don't have the time to research and access the support available and only some forces give mandatory psychological screening to RASSO personnel. Critical reflection is a key part of the Soteria model which encourages personnel to reflect on their attitudes and beliefs and consider how these could affect their approach to cases. It also helps them think about how their work affects their well-being.

High workloads can harm investigators' well-being, but some forces are making positive changes. Some forces have a policy where investigators only manage up to 15 cases at once which makes it easier for them to cope with demand. It means they are less likely to take work home with them or have problems sleeping due to stress.

Many RASSO investigator posts are held by trainees. Nearly every force inspected struggles to recruit enough detectives, however most are working hard to fill vacancies in RASSO teams, but there are often still gaps. As a short-term measure, some forces use student officers or trainee detectives who join RASSO teams on an attachment. This is a short-term placement in a RASSO team as part of their training.

New specialist training shows early signs of improving RASSO investigations. Every force inspected had either already given new rape investigation skills training to many personnel or had plans to do so by spring 2024. The new training teaches investigators about the psychology of sex offending and its impact on victims, and they said that this has helped them become better investigators. In general, the new specialist training standards are a good thing. Without enough trained detectives in RASSO roles, they will have a limited impact.

Forces must make sure they are using qualitative and quantitative data to measure their performance on Soteria as Soteria uses a wider range of factors to measure how well forces manage RASSO cases. The NOM gives forces guidance on adopting these wider performance measures, which should include both quantitative and qualitative data. The Soteria Joint Unit has created a set of Soteria key performance indicators for all forces to use as part of the NOM. These are yet to be finalised but should help forces use more consistent performance measures.

Many forces inspected know there are gaps in their data which means they can't collect and use some types of information. Data gaps often exist because of limited force IT systems that can be fixed by individual forces themselves. Very few forces are doing enough to improve data accuracy or educate personnel about this.

Forces have invested in technology to improve RASSO investigations, making sure their digital forensic units can access the latest technology. They invest in computers and cloud-based services to keep up with demand and new forensic standards.

Digital media investigators (DMIs) can help forces recover digital evidence in a proportionate way. DMIs help RASSO investigators use digital evidence during their investigations but in a proportionate way, and in many forces, digital media investigators give training to RASSO investigators and some CPS prosecutors.

Forces need long-term national support and funding to help them put Soteria in place. The Soteria Joint Unit is only funded until March 2025 and is not funded to help deal with weaknesses found in the most recent round of Soteria self-assessments. This will mean it cannot help forces adopt Soteria and the NOM.

Recommendations

14 recommendations are made within the report, five of which are directed at Chief Constables and forces nationally.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 that are agreed and published by the Soteria Joint Unit.

Areas For Improvement

There are no areas for improvement made.

Chief Constable response to report and any Recommendations/Areas for Improvement

This report entitled "An inspection report on progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations in early adopter police forces" resulted from an inspection conducted by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) into nine of the nineteen police forces that were early adopters of Operation Soteria model for investigating Rape and other Serious Sexual offences.

Norfolk Constabulary was not one of the early adopter forces but largely welcomes the report findings, which will assist us as we continued to embed the Operation Soteria National Operating Model (NOM) to achieve better outcomes in rape and other serious sexual offences cases.

The report has resulted in fourteen recommendations. Four of these recommendations (Recommendations 2, 4, 6, and 12) have been directed in the first instance towards other bodies, including the Soteria Joint Unit, the College of Policing, and the National Police Chiefs' Council, but require all police forces to work with these bodies to take the recommendations forward. The Constabulary will endeavour to support these programmes of work, but notes that to do so will require new sources of funding to be identified.

Five of the recommendations have been specifically directed to all police forces and Chief Constables across England and Wales. Norfolk Constabulary accepts all these recommendations.

We have reviewed our current position against each of these recommendations and have developed a plan which will help us to achieve the standards outlined by HMICFRS within the timeframes that they have specified.

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.

We have collated the relevant training material that has been produced by the College of Policing and the national Soteria Joint Unit and are now planning training delivery for Detectives who investigate rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO). A Task and Finish group will be established to plan and deliver relevant Continuous Professional Development training, including training on the investigation of word-on-word cases, through the development days that are already built into shift patterns. Invites will be extended to officers that work within our District Crime Units and relevant members of the Constabulary's Professional Standards Department. Consideration will then be given to wider force roll-out.

Some training products are still awaited from the national Soteria team.

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.

HMICFRS have set the national Soteria Joint Unit a deadline of the end of January 2025 to create a definition and produce the associated guidance for forces to adopt. Once this has been received, we will then implement the appropriate processes.

The Constabulary already has a system that flags to Investigators repeat RASSO suspects.

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.**

In relation to identifying and disrupting rape and other serious sexual offences suspects, we already have a process that flags to Investigators repeat RASSO suspects. In addition, repeat victims and suspects are highlighted via our monthly Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group (TTCG) process and are reviewed by a Detective Superintendent.

As part of our force transformational change plans (Pillar 5) work is ongoing which will result in improved processes for tracking, managing, and responding to breaches of bail in line with the requirements of this recommendation.

Protection Orders in RASSO cases (Sexual Risk Orders) are managed by our Public Protection Unit who also provide advice to Investigators on obtaining interim orders where appropriate.

Work is also ongoing under our transformational change planning to improve our use of civil orders to tackle RASSO. We are also exploring best practice nationally. Investigators have already received training in the use of civil orders and guidance is available to relevant officers and staff.

The National Operating Model training material on using criminal and civil orders to tackle RASSO will be included in the Continuous Professional Development events that are being planned, and the Safeguarding and Investigations Command is working with the Constabulary's Legal Services Department to identify the most efficient local model for the use of civil orders. The system that we already have in place which flags to Investigators repeat RASSO suspects helps to ensure that civil order opportunities are being considered.

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.

Norfolk Constabulary has a documented process that it follows when applying for retention of biometric data. This process is under joint review by the Safeguarding and Investigation Command and the Joint Justice Command. The outcomes of the review will be implemented by 31 January 2025, in line with the timeframe specified by HMICFRS.

Guidance has been issued to all Detective Sergeants and Detective Inspectors to ensure that an application to retain DNA and fingerprints is considered in cases where they decide in their capacity as an Evidential Review Officer that no further action will be taken in a RASSO case. This is also being included in the Rape finalisation matrix.

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 that are agreed and published by the Soteria Joint Unit.**

The Constabulary has a Rape and Serious Sexual Offences problem profile, with associated recommendations, which has recently been refreshed.

The requirement to include the National Operating Model flight deck within our strategic performance monitoring, and to adopt any key performance indicators that are published by the Soteria Joint Unit, is captured within our force transformational change plans under Pillar 5.

The Constabulary is also making improvements to the RASSO data that is reported within the performance pack that is produced for the Safeguarding and Investigations Command Quality and Standards (performance monitoring) meeting. These improvements will take in to account the developing indicators to be released from the Soteria Joint Unit.

PCC response to report and any Recommendations/Areas for Improvement

I welcome the publication of “An inspection report on progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations in early adopter police forces”.

Soteria was developed as a result of work which identified the impacts on victims/ survivors of rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO) and the ways in which the investigations of these offences could be improved. It provides an evidenced-based model and takes a victim-centred and suspect-focused approach to RASSO. The implementation of Soteria, and the successes and lessons arising from it, is an important step in addressing the way that victims/ survivors of are dealt with by the police and by the wider justice system. It is therefore of interest to note both the ways in which the early stages of Soteria have helped improve detection and processes, and the barriers that have prevented some parts of Soteria being successfully implemented in some forces.

While some of these barriers will remain, or worsen, over time due to the cut-off of Soteria funding, the lessons learned in this report, and the associated Recommendations, will improve the way that RASSO cases are considered in Norfolk. Importantly however, the report draws into sharp focus the limitations of forces in implementing Soteria, given the many operational pressures that are faced and the reasonable need to either redeploy people in already stretched services, or the consequences of officer burn out or sickness on case load - and subsequently onto the experiences of victims.

Having reviewed the report, I accept the Recommendations made and which are relevant to Chief Constables.

I note that the HMICFRS observes that consistent national support is needed to resolve issues such as those identified in the report. As national funding for Soteria is due to end in spring 2025, I also welcome the HMICFRS’s observation that without further funding and support, the benefits so far gained may be lost and victims will be badly affected as a result. Norfolk Constabulary has accepted the report’s recommendations aimed at Chief Constables, and I will periodically review the implementation of Soteria in Norfolk with respect to these recommendations to ensure that lessons learned in other constabularies can benefit our county also. I will also work with my own Association of Police and Crime Commissioners to continue to raise the need for proper resourcing into RASSO investigation teams with the Home Office.

For Office Use Only:

- Response forwarded to the Chief Constable.
- Response forwarded to the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.
- Response published on the OPCCN website.