



RESPONSE BY THE PCC TO HMICFRS INSPECTIONS OF CLEVELAND POLICE

INSPECTION DETAILS

Title of Inspection - An inspection report on the progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations in early adopter police forces

Date Inspection Published - 23 August 2024

Type of Inspection:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleveland Specific | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Follow Up | <input type="checkbox"/> Thematic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Partner Inspection | |

Is Cleveland Police quoted in the Report? ☐ Yes ☒ No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

Introduction

In a new report, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has assessed the progress of Operation Soteria.

Soteria is an unprecedented programme that aims to transform how forces across England and Wales handle rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO) investigations. RASSO is a term that covers most serious sexual crimes, including all rape, attempted rape and sexual assault offences.

The National Operating Model (NOM) sets out how forces should change their approach to investigating RASSO.

The six pillars of Soteria were used to create the NOM. These are:

1. having a suspect-focused investigation;
2. targeting and disrupting repeat suspects;
3. supporting victims by using a procedural justice approach;
4. improving investigators' knowledge, learning and well-being;
5. using data and analysis effectively; and
6. improving RASSO investigations through effective use of digital forensics.

The pillars are linked. Therefore, if forces put them in place properly, there should be system-wide changes. Furthermore, improvements should continue in the long-term because there are new structures in place too. However, it also means that forces must improve across all six pillars to get the full benefits of Soteria.

In this inspection, the HMICFRS looked at nine early adopter forces who have been putting Soteria and the NOM in place since 2021. The HMICFRS set out to understand the benefits and challenges already reported from Soteria.

The HMICFRS examined seven questions relating to Soteria. These are:

1. To what extent have forces adopted the pillars of Soteria and to what extent do they prioritise suspect-focused investigations?
1. How effectively do forces identify and disrupt repeat suspects?
2. How effectively do forces carry out victim-centred investigations and achieve procedural justice?

3. How effectively do forces provide for their officers' well-being in the context of RASSO investigations?
4. How effectively do forces prioritise officer and staff learning and development on the national standards for RASSO investigations?
5. To what extent do forces have good strategic analysis to improve RASSO investigations and prevent offences?
6. How effectively do forces' digital forensic services provide quality and timely support for RASSO investigations?

Findings

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

1. Adoption of the Soteria model and prioritisation of suspect-focused rape and other serious sexual offences investigations
 - Most forces see responding to RASSO as a strategic priority;
 - Some forces don't fully understand the system-wide benefits of Soteria
 - Some forces don't understand the extent of RASSO in their areas
 - Most forces use RASSO scrutiny panels well
 - The detective shortage continues to be a problem
 - Most forces face challenges in managing demand in RASSO units
 - Suspect-focused investigations are helping investigators consider the wider context of RASSO cases
 - Early advice isn't always working well enough
 - Soteria is helping to improve the relationship between some police and CPS RASSO specialists
 - Training on word-on-word cases must improve
2. Identification and disruption of repeat suspects
 - Forces need national guidance to help them identify and disrupt repeat suspects
 - There is no consistent approach to identifying and disrupting repeat suspects across forces
 - The police should do more to protect victims during RASSO cases
 - The police don't always manage pre-charge bail breaches well
 - The police could use protection orders more effectively to safeguard victims
 - The police don't use their powers to retain fingerprints and DNA often enough
3. Victim-centred investigations and procedural justice
 - Soteria is helping to create a new victim-centred culture
 - Many specialist RASSO support services are overstretched
 - There isn't enough funding for victim services
 - Police communication with victims is improving but varies across forces
 - Forces don't always use victims' feedback to make improvements
 - The police don't always explain to victims decisions to take no further action
 - It is too early to tell if a national survey of RASSO victims shows improvements under Soteria
4. The well-being of rape and other serious sexual offences investigators
 - Some forces don't give dedicated well-being support to RASSO teams
 - Critical reflection should become a key part of RASSO investigations
 - High workloads can harm investigators' well-being, but some forces are making positive changes
 - Many RASSO investigator posts are held by trainees
5. Learning and development on the new national standards

- New specialist training shows early signs of improving RASSO investigations
- RASSO personnel must have protected time to complete training

6. Strategic analysis to improve investigations and prevent offences

- Forces must make sure they are using qualitative and quantitative data to measure their performance on Soteria
- Forces still have major gaps in their data
- Forces don't always have the resources needed to analyse data effectively

7. Digital forensic services

- Forces have invested in technology to improve RASSO investigations
- Digital media investigators can help forces recover digital evidence in a proportionate way

Considering Soteria as a wider model for change

Soteria is an evidence-based academic model that is victim-centred, context-led and suspect-focused. It is grounded in decades of research that has examined policing practice and why RASSO victims have been systematically failed.

Soteria can transform the police approach to RASSO across England and Wales. In addition, it could be used to change how forces deal with other crimes, such as domestic abuse or modern slavery. But to succeed as a national model, for RASSO and even other crime types, Soteria needs a lot of support from the national level:

- The National Police Chiefs' Council's portfolio structures need to be simplified
- Forces need long-term national support and funding to help them put Soteria in place

Recommendations

In light of its findings, the HMICFRS has made 14 recommendations to chief constables, the National Police Chiefs' Council, the College of Policing and others. The recommendations are outlined below:

Adoption of the Soteria model and prioritisation of suspect-focused rape and other serious sexual offences investigations

- *Recommendation 1* - As soon as possible, and no later than 30 November 2024, the Home Office should complete its urgent review of the detective constable role. And it should share the findings of this review with the National Police Chiefs' Council. The review should include specific recommendations that make sure all forces have the investigators they need, including those who specialise in investigating rape and other serious sexual offences. In its review, the Home Office should focus on making this career path more attractive by offering better support, promotion opportunities and rewards.
- *Recommendation 2* - By 31 January 2025, the Soteria Joint Unit should work with the College of Policing, the Crown Prosecution Service and the police to approve and publish a new investigation management document. The document should avoid unnecessary detail, and focus on the specific advice police need from prosecutors in rape and other serious sexual offences cases.
- *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.

Identification and disruption of repeat suspects

- *Recommendation 4* - By 31 January 2025, the Soteria Joint Unit should work with the College of Policing, the National Police Chiefs' Council, the Victims' Commissioner and police forces to:
 - define what a repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspect is; and
 - create new guidance for forces on managing repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspects, including the benefits of using the potentially dangerous persons and multi-agency tasking and co-ordination processes

- *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 6* - By 31 January 2025, the Soteria Joint Unit and the College of Policing should work with forces to help them understand the National Operating Model's disruption toolkit. This should help the police to manage repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspects effectively.
- *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 8* - By 30 November 2025, the College of Policing and the Soteria Joint Unit should commission independent academic research to evaluate how well forces use criminal and civil orders in rape and other serious sexual offences cases. This should focus on officers' knowledge of protection orders and the application process and use of relevant orders, restrictions and breaches. Based on their findings, the College and the Joint Unit should give guidance to forces on the most effective way to use these powers.
- *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.

Victim-centred investigations and procedural justice

- *Recommendation 10* - By 30 April 2025, the Home Office and Ministry of Justice should adapt funding arrangements to make sure there is enough support for all rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO) victims. This should include:
 - providing extra funding for RASSO support services;
 - placing funding for RASSO support services on a long-term footing to make sure there is consistent specialist support available; and
 - working with the relevant police and crime commissioner's office to make sure national grant funding aligns with funding given via local commissioning arrangements

Strategic analysis to improve investigations and prevent offences

- *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.
- *Recommendation 12* - By 31 January 2025, the National Police Chiefs' Council's Digital, Data and Technology Coordination Committee should work with chief constables and the National Law Enforcement Data Programme to reduce data error rates. This should focus on errors on the Police National Computer and Police National Database.

Considering Soteria as a wider model for change

- *Recommendation 13* - By 30 June 2025, the National Police Chiefs' Council should report on its work to simplify its public protection portfolios. It should focus on improving practice quickly and consistently across policing.
- *Recommendation 14* - By 30 September 2024, the Home Office should work with the National Police Chiefs' Council to provide funding for the Soteria Joint Unit that lasts beyond March 2025.

FORCE RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

All new reports into the Force follow a specific process which involves informing the Governance of Audit and Inspection (GAIN) Board, chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable, of the report's publication and identifying an Executive Lead to monitor/drive progress of the actions going forward.

A plenary session with the Exec lead and relevant stakeholders is held to discuss the actions and agree how they will be progressed. The outcome from this session is reported back to the GAIN Board for acceptance and approval; progress is then monitored through governance meetings until such a time as the action is considered complete.

The process for closing actions is depicted by HMICFRS, as they award each action a level; the Force complies with the appropriate course of action, linked to this level, to formally close the actions.

The report included 5 recommendations for forces. These are recommendations 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 of those detailed above.

A plenary session will be planned to discuss and delegate the individual recommendations, following the September GAIN meeting. All actions will be progressed over the coming months with the support of the Executive lead.

The Force continues to actively work to satisfy all recommendations and AFIs which are discussed regularly in the relevant Force Governance meetings.

PCC RESPONSE TO INSPECTION

Comment by the PCC:

The PCC:

- recognises the importance of Operation Soteria and its ability to create effective RASSO investigations; and
- supports the HMICFRS's recommendations.

Soteria is already improving how the Force understands and supports victims and a positive cultural change is being achieved. The Force is now in the process of working towards a transformation plan, which will be subsequently followed by an implementation plan. The PCC recognises, however, that once this work is completed, there will need to be a robust oversight of plans to fully implement Soteria and the NOM and realise the benefits.

As part of its work, the Force has also established a Rape Scrutiny Panel, which includes representatives from the Force, the OPCC, the Crown Prosecution Service, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) and Domestic Abuse Co-ordinators from Cleveland's local authorities. The PCC values the work of this scrutiny panel in providing independent oversight to the investigation and handling of rape cases.

One of the PCC's policing priorities, as detailed in the Police and Crime Plan 2024-28, is to improve safety for women and girls and ensure victims are supported and perpetrators are held accountable. With regard to RASSO investigations, the PCC acknowledges that targeting and disrupting repeat offenders is of crucial importance, as is the need to support victims and understand their needs.

In terms of the PCC's Scrutiny Work Programme for 2024/25, the PCC is scheduled to hold two scrutiny meetings to consider/review evidence on the following topics:

- Domestic Abuse and Links with Stalking/Harassment (including Civil Court Orders)
- Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

At these meetings the PCC will seek assurance that the Force is creating a victim-centred and suspect-focussed approach to RASSO.

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