

POLICE AND CRIME PANEL

10TH SEPTEMBER 2019

REPORT OF ASSISTANT CHIEF CONSTABLE RACHEL BACON, CITIZEN FOCUS -
PRESENTED BY DETECTIVE CHIEF INSPECTOR CLAIRE WHEATLEY

RAPE AND SERIOUS SEXUAL OFFENCES

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to describe the performance of Northumbria Police in relation to Rape and Serious Sexual Offence (RaSSO) investigations. Significant activity has been undertaken leading to demonstrable improvements which are highlighted in the performance data. Future plans to ensure continued improvement are outlined.

2. BACKGROUND

PERFORMANCE

- 2.1 The Police and Crime plan and Violence against Women and Girls Strategy both highlight that preventing violence and abuse, the provision of services, effective partnership working, the pursuit of offenders and protecting the vulnerable are our main priorities. Vulnerability with a focus on prevention sits at the heart of the Force's 2025 strategy.
- 2.2 A summary of the most recent RaSSO (Rape and Serious Sexual Offences) performance is shown below and is reported on the relevant sections of the RaSSO improvement plan.
- 2.3 RaSSO volumes have increased (see table at 2.5) and are above the national average. Northumbria Police has improved Rape charge rates overall since September 2018 (5.8% to 6.5%) and is above the national figure for charge rates (national: 4.5%) and report to conviction rate (Northumbria: 3.4%, national 2.9%). Whilst there had been an increase in the conviction rate, this has reduced in recent months (currently 53%) and the Force is below the national position (63.8%). The average time between charge and trial is at least one year, therefore many of the cases where work has been undertaken to improve investigative standards have not yet reached trial. Onward monitoring of the conviction rate will be required to ensure that this improves.
- 2.4 The comparison to national average rates helps to positively set the current performance achievements within realistic comparators due to the changes in crime recording and prosecution rates.

DEMAND CHALLENGES

- 2.5 Since 2015, sexual offences have increased by 95%. More recently there has been a 23% increase in the current year compared to the 12 months to July 2017, however in the most recent 12 months to July 2019 there has been a small decrease overall of -1% (see table at

2.5). This reduction has been mainly due to a decrease in Rape offences in the first four months of 2019/20 in comparison to the same period in 2018/19.

	Rape	Sexual offences (excl rape)	All SO
12 months to July 2017	1,429	2,420	3,849
12 months to July 2018	1,825	2,958	4,783
12 months to July 2019	1,713	3,006	4,719
Change on 12 months to July 2017	20%	24%	23%
Change on 12 months to July 2018	-6%	2%	-1%

- 2.6 This currently equates to 1.2 Rape crimes per 1,000 population and the force remains the 4th highest nationally (based on 12 months to June 2019). The Force Management Statement (FMS) predicts a further 7% increase in demand per annum.
- 2.7 Despite the unprecedented increase in demand in relation to RaSSO, Northumbria Police have improved performance and working in partnership with a range of agencies to prevent sexual abuse, ensure the earliest identification and best possible support for victims, to enable them to cope and recover and to ensure perpetrators are held to account for their actions, which will result in improved criminal justice outcomes.

ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN

- 2.8 A number of measures have been introduced to improve performance which is overseen by Assistant Chief Constable, Citizen Focus:
- Movement of Police Officers into Safeguarding to assist with increasing demand;
 - Recruitment of Police Staff Investigators (PSI) PIP Level 2 into Safeguarding to assist with increasing demand;
 - Improved partnership working with the Crown Prosecution to improve efficiency of processes, understanding of roles, and quality of evidence;
 - Improved partnership working in the development of Rape Scrutiny Panels and the sharing of valuable recommendations;
 - The development of Rape Victim Survey and the use of finding to improve service delivery;
 - Visits conducted to well performing police forces to improve Northumbria Police practice;
 - Improved understanding of victim pathways and partnership working with Victims First Northumbria (VFN) to provide increased support to victims;
 - Development of the multi-agency victim teams and the interface between the victim teams and Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA's) to ensure improved support for RaSSO victims;
 - Repeat victim analysis for assessment resulting in improved safety planning of vulnerable victims;
 - Review of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference process to assist in supporting domestic related RaSSO offences;
 - The introduction of key wording in the recording of RaSSO, Modus operandi (MO's) to allow a meaningful analysis to improve understanding of demand;
 - Repeat perpetrator analysis for assessment to assist in multi-agency prevention and disruption opportunities;
 - Increased management of sex offenders by neighbourhood teams;
 - Raising investigative standards programme aimed at all front line officers and detectives;

- Appointed staff within the Safeguarding Strategic Team dedicated to identifying individual and organisational learning to improve Northumbria Police's response to RaSSO offences from point of contact throughout the Criminal Justice process.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR 2019/2020

2.9 There are six key areas for focus in 2019/2020 that have been identified through the analysis of rape and serious sexual offences reported to the Police, victim feedback, performance reviews, rape scrutiny panel findings, internal reviews and review of national strategies and reports. The key focus areas are:

Victims

Ensure partnership working is in place to ensure the support offered to those who have experienced sexual violence is effective and sustainable.

- To work with partners to reduce the volume of victims who do not support prosecution.
- To increase Police Officer and Police Staff understanding of VCoP (Victims Code of Practice).
- To consider the feedback from victim satisfaction reports and address areas for development.
- To improve service delivery by working with partners and utilising rape survey findings.

To continue to and improve the service and support to vulnerable and complex people at risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and for those involved in sex work.

- To work with Changing Lives and designated liaison officers to support the safety of women and girls.
- To understand the needs of complex victims.
- To increase awareness of sexual violence with alcohol and drug agencies.

People

Staff are equipped to tackle sexual violence and support/ maximise partnerships.

- To work with partners to identify and address improvements throughout victims pathway.
- To have a clear understanding of rape crime and to utilise the analysis to understand issues such as victim attrition.
- To develop a clearer understanding of performance and the prevalence of sexual violence.
- To ensure that there are manageable caseloads for officers working in Safeguarding.
- To provide Police Officers and staff with continuous professional development in investigations covering aspects of the investigation from initial report to court.

Partners

Work with partners to increase awareness of sexual violence within the community.

- To increase collaboration with agencies to promote awareness of sexual violence and improve awareness in vulnerable and hard to reach groups.
- Continue working with LSCB to ensure that sexual violence is a priority for schools and colleges. To ensure that children and young people are being informed of safe and healthy relationships and increase disclosures and referrals by schools to Police.

Criminal Justice Outcomes

To identify priority areas and work jointly with Criminal Justice agencies to improve Criminal Justice outcomes.

- To ensure all investigators follow standard investigation procedures – Raising investigation standards and policy procedures.
- To ensure appropriate supervision of RaSSO investigations which drive the investigative strategy.
- To continue partnership work with the CPS to allow early identification and the resolution of issues, and to increase the number of appropriate challenges to ensure more cases result in the right outcome.
- To work with the CPS to provide training to Police to improve knowledge and understanding of disclosure and third party material.

Targeting Offenders

To work with agencies to develop a process to identify individuals that pose a high risk of sexual harm and are non-convicted in order to share information with agencies to help manage risk.

- To work with agencies to improve information sharing to identify perpetrators at the earliest possible stage.