

**Response to HMICFRS Report on Progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations (Op Soteria)**

[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](https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/progress-to-introduce-a-national-operating-model-for-rape-and-other-serious-sexual-offences-investigations/)

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PCC Response: 17.10.24

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**Executive Summary**

As Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, I am committed to implementing the HMICFRS recommendations from Operation Soteria to improve rape and serious sexual offence (RASSO) investigations and enhance victim support. My office’s delivery of services, including Victims First and a standalone Sexual Violence Service, demonstrates our focus on providing tailored, victim-centred care. I will continue to strengthen partnerships, secure sustainable funding, and work closely with Thames Valley Police to ensure these improvements deliver better outcomes for survivors and maintain public confidence.

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| **Introduction:**  I welcome the findings of the HMICFRS report on the progress of Operation Soteria, which outlines significant improvements in the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO). Shifting the focus to perpetrators and strengthening victim support is critical to ensuring justice and care for those affected. As Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, I am committed to ensuring these recommendations are implemented in our force and that we contribute to wider national efforts to improve the handling of these crimes.  **Response to Recommendation 10:**  Recommendation 10 highlights the need for PCCs to play a key role in securing and managing funding to ensure adequate victim support services are in place for survivors of rape and serious sexual offences. I fully support this recommendation and recognise the importance of ensuring that these services are properly resourced.  In Thames Valley, we have already made significant strides in supporting victims through services like Victims First, which provides tailored support to individuals affected by crime. In addition to this, we commission a holistic standalone Sexual Violence Service, ensuring victims have access to comprehensive, specialist support. Furthermore, Thames Valley Police’s use of Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) as equal partners in RASSO scrutiny panels strengthens our victim-centred approach, ensuring that victims' voices are heard and their experiences considered at every stage of the investigation.  Additionally, the force’s “hub and spoke” model for RASSO investigations helps centralise expertise while supporting local investigators. This is key to delivering both high-quality investigations and comprehensive victim care. I will continue to work with the Chief Constable to ensure that sufficient funding is directed towards improving victim services and supporting the operational demands of RASSO investigations, in line with the priorities set out in my Police & Crime Plan. This includes:   * Ensuring consistent support for ISVAs and other critical victim support roles. * Exploring additional funding opportunities to further enhance victim services, ensuring equitable coverage across the region. * Collaborating with local authorities, victim services, and charities to ensure that those affected by serious sexual offences receive the support they need to navigate the criminal justice system and rebuild their lives.   **Next Steps:**   * My office and I will meet with senior police leadership and key partners to ensure the necessary funding streams are secured and that the recommendations in this report are implemented effectively across Thames Valley. * I will request regular updates on the availability and distribution of victim support funding, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently to provide the best possible care for survivors of serious sexual offences. * We will also continue to support and develop the collaborative approaches, like the RASSO scrutiny panels, that have already proven effective in providing holistic care for victims.   **Conclusion:**  Operation Soteria presents an important opportunity to improve how we support victims and investigate serious sexual offences. As PCC, I will ensure that Thames Valley Police continues to deliver on these recommendations, providing the necessary resources and support to victims, and working towards improving outcomes for those affected by these crimes. |