

Ministry of Justice / England and Wales

Press release / Published = 15 December 2022 [Further FoC distribution via CCJ-News]

From:

[Ministry of Justice](#), [Home Office](#), [The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP](#), and [The Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP](#)

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Rape response overhaul delivers progress

Victims are seeing significant improvements in the criminal justice system's response to rape, a new report has revealed today (15 December 2022).



- Rape Review update reveals improvements across the criminal justice system
- Number of adult rape cases reaching court up 91% from 2019
- Government on track to hit Rape Review target
- Draft national model for police investigations into this horrific crime published for first time

18 months on from the government's pivotal Rape Review Action plan – which sought to increase the volumes of trials being heard and ensure more rapists face justice – significant progress is being made according to the latest progress summary.

In the most recent data for 2022, the number of cases referred by the police to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) was up 95 percent; the volume of cases charged was up by two-thirds; and the number of cases reaching the Crown Court was up 91 percent, compared to 2019 averages.

These figures come a week after the announcement of the first national 24/7 rape support line – the latest way in which the system is being drastically improved to better serve victims and justice.

From this enhanced initial support, victims are also benefitting from better collaboration between the police and prosecutors and less intrusive investigations, along with greater support through the court process.

These cross-system improvements mean that while there is much more to be done, the government is on track to meet its Rape Review target – to more than double the number of adult rape cases reaching court by the end of this parliament.

Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab said:

Rape convictions are up two thirds since last year and the number of CPS charges is also up by nearly two thirds from 2019.

But I want to make sure victims are properly supported throughout the criminal justice process. That is why we introduced a 24/7 rape and sexual abuse helpline, pre-recording of evidence in court to spare them the trauma of testifying during a live trial, and a new approach to police investigations that focuses on the behaviour of the suspect rather than the victim.

This [progress is set out in an update on the reforms to the response to rape](#), published by the government today. Since the publication of the Rape Review Action plan in June 2021, the government has:

- Rolled out pre-recorded evidence for rape victims to every Crown Court in England and Wales, sparing them the trauma of testifying during live trial
- Launched a 24/7 rape support line to provide victims access to vital help and information whenever they need it.
- Expanded Operation Soteria to a further 14 police forces and to 3 new Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) areas.
- Passed new laws via the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022) to stop unnecessary and intrusive requests for victims' phones, with the majority of forces in position to ensure no victim should be without their devices for more than 24hrs by the end of March 2023.
- Consulted on further reducing requests for personal information, such as medical or social services records, with next steps being published shortly.
- Launched a specialist sexual violence support pilot at three Crown Courts - Leeds Newcastle, and Snaresbrook in London. It seeks to provide victims with enhanced at-court support and help increase throughput of cases. It includes the introduction of trauma-informed training for court staff, maximising the use of technology, and access to ISVAs at court.
- Quadrupled funding for victim support services to £192 million a year by 2025, this includes investment for the recruitment of 1000 Independent Sexual Violence Advisors.
- Amended the Online Safety Bill to better protect victims from abusers who share intimate images without consent.

This work is starting to deliver results. In 2021, the number of rape convictions increased by 67 percent compared to 2020, and the CPS is making charging decisions on average 29 days quicker according to the latest data available

Today's update comes as the Home Office publishes an independent report outlining the findings on Operation Soteria, which brings together academics and police to improve rape case outcomes and aims to radically transform the way police and the CPS deal with rape – shifting the focus onto the suspect, rather than the victim.

Home Secretary Suella Braverman said:

We need radical improvement in the way police handle rape cases. As a society, too often, we have failed the victims of sexual violence and that cannot continue.

This independent report shows that there are big obstacles to overcome and the whole of the criminal justice system needs to work together.

But there are also early signs of improvement and I'm determined to build on these to deliver a sustainable shift in the way rape is investigated.

Academics were brought into 5 'pathfinder' police forces to work alongside frontline police officers and develop new tools for improvement - Avon and Somerset, the Metropolitan Police Service, Durham Constabulary, West Midlands Police and South Wales Police. Early indicators of change can already be seen, including stronger collaboration with prosecutors, improved organisational capability and more specialist knowledge of sexual offending being applied to investigations. A further 14 forces are now participating in the programme.

The national operating model will be tested and refined before being made available to all police forces nationwide from June 2023.

Emily Hunt, survivor and independent advisor to the government on the Rape Review, said:

This is only the start of the step change we need to make to truly tackle sexual violence.

While important progress is being made, we cannot rest on our laurels and must continue to ensure victims of rape aren't just heard, believed and supported, but also have a better chance to see justice done.

Chief Constable Sarah Crew, National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Adult Sexual Offences said:

Uncovering deep rooted and systemic issues within policing is the first big milestone in achieving the transformational change required to improve the policing response to rape. Everyone in policing recognises that we must do better and this programme has been met with a genuine willingness and openness to change.

The evidence tells us that building specialist knowledge, supported by critical thinking and a problem-solving mindset are among the most important changes we can make to tighten our grip on offenders and address falling conviction rates. Officers must target rapists by focusing on suspects – not the credibility of victims – and using their legal and policing powers to disrupt offenders and further harm.

We are seeing green shoots of change in pathfinder forces and after 18 months, Avon and Somerset have increasing their adult rape charge rate from 3% to over 10%. Improvements are being made at pace in pathfinder forces and I am confident this work will lead to the sustainable progress victims so desperately deserve.

Strategic Advisor for Operation Soteria Bluestone Professor Betsy Stanko (OBE), and Joint Academic Lead Professor Katrin Hohl said:

This genuine collaboration has provided unprecedented data access, enabling the academic team to form a holistic, nuanced picture of how pathfinder forces tackle rape and other sexual offending. Some of our research highlights issues raised by campaign groups and replicate findings of earlier work, including those of the end-to-end rape review, while others are new.

Our evidence informed and research grounded approach forms a robust evidence base, which sits at the heart of Operation Soteria Bluestone. The police-academic co-created solutions are

starting to have traction, but our findings make clear the need for transformational change, there is lots of work to do.

Notes to editors

- On the 7th December, [the Government launched a 24/7 rape support line](#) and live chat, in partnership with Rape Crisis England and Wales. The service provides victims access to vital help and information whenever they need it on 0808 500 2222 and via www.247sexualabusesupport.org.uk

Operation Soteria

- Building on the 2019 London Rape Review led by Claire Waxman OBE, London's Victims' Commissioner, a new approach to transform the policing response to rape was developed within the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and by academics Dr Katrin Hohl and Professor Betsy Stanko.
- This new approach was first trialled as Project Bluestone within Avon & Somerset Police (January – March 2021), funded by the Home Office. It is the blueprint for Operation Soteria Bluestone, which aims to build a new national operating model for the investigation of rape and serious sexual assault.
- Over the first year, the police element of the programme examined a wide range of data in the five forces including case files, observations of investigations and training, reviews of body worn video footage, video-recorded interviews and forces guidance and procedures - in addition to the invaluable, harrowing and brave testimonies of victims and survivors.
- The programme has already been expanded to 14 further police forces and three new CPS areas.
- The learning from all 19 forces will be used to develop a National Operating Model for the investigation of rape. A preview of which is available in the report. It outlines some of the tools all police forces will be encouraged to utilise from June 2023 to improve their response to rape and other sexual offences.
- After findings showing a link between officer burnout and their confidence in using the right investigative strategies, Durham Constabulary rolled out additional wellbeing measures for investigative teams, including specialist trauma impact support training and peer led trauma informed support.

Latest figures

- Police referrals to the CPS continue to increase. There were 901 total police referrals in the second quarter of 2022, up by 95% from the quarterly average in 2019, when the Rape Review was commissioned.
- Adult rape cases charged by the CPS have also been increasing, with 402 suspects charged in the second quarter of 2022, up by 65% from the quarterly average in 2019.
- The number of adult rape Crown Court receipts have subsequently also increased in the second quarter of 2022 with 440 Crown Court receipts, up by 91% from the quarterly average in 2019.
- Adult rape convictions have also increased, up by 65% in the year to June 2022 compared to the year before and up by 41% compared to the year to June 2019.

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Published 15 December 2022

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