SOUTH YORKSHIRE SYMCA MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY

17 October 24

To: His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

Dear Chief Inspector

Response from Oliver Coppard, South Yorkshire's Mayor, to the HMICFRS report: *An inspection report on progress to introduce a national operating model for rape and other serious sexual offences investigations in early adopter police forces.*

I welcome the findings of this progress report, and the helpful information about how the work of Op Soteria is transforming how forces deal with rape and other serious sexual offences. The impact of rape and other sexual offences on victims, their families, friends and the wider community cannot be overstated, and it is vital that the criminal justice system provides an excellent quality and timely response on investigations, prosecutions and victim support.

Within the report there were seven recommendations that directly affect police forces, and one recommendation which requires Mayors/PCC involvement to ensure national grant funding aligns with local commissioning arrangements.

(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.

I agree with this recommendation.

In South Yorkshire, over 200 officers have completed the Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) Development Skills Development Programme (RISDP). This exceeds the initial request for forces to train at least 50 officers during 2024. Whilst the RISDP training will continue to be delivered, the Specialist Sexual Abuse Investigators Development Programme (SSAIDP) will remain the principle training for those working in the RASSO portfolio within SYP.

(Recommendation 4) By 31 January 2025, the Soteria Joint Unit should work with the College of Policing, the NPCC, the Victim's Commissioner and police forces to:

- **a. define what a repeat rape and other serious sexual offences suspect is; and**
- **b. 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 coordination process**

I agree with this recommendation.

Our own learning from Op Soteria, is that the identification and disruption of repeat suspects is critical. A national definition alongside guidance for forces on managing repeat suspects would support consistency of approach.

This can also present an opportunity across for consistency of effective suspect management across a wider range of investigation types, for example across VAWG offences more widely.

(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

I agree with this recommendation.

I would ideally like to see forces using this definition and supporting guidance as swiftly as possible, recognising the need to engage with partners under the multi-agency public protection arrangements. Once agreed, I will work with my Chief Constable to ensure this recommendation has been actioned.

(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.

I agree with this recommendation.

If there are things that Mayors and PCCs can also do to support this, using our convening powers with other local partners, I would welcome your thoughts on what we might do individually and collectively.

(Recommendation 7) By 31 January 2025. All Chief Constables should make their forces prioritise identifying and disrupting rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) suspects. This includes making sure that:

- **c. Forces track, manage and respond effectively to breaches of bail and protection orders in RASSO cases; and**
- **d. All relevant personnel complete National Operating Model training on using criminal and civil orders to tackle RASSO.**

I agree with this recommendation in principle.

As HMICFRS recognises, there are national challenges in recruiting and retaining detectives, alongside the wider financial pressures that all forces are facing.

There is no doubt that my forthcoming Police and Crime Plan will include VAWG and RASSO cases as a priority for South Yorkshire Police. This will be in addition to the other areas that I will be asking the Chief Constable to prioritise in the coming years.

(Recommendation 9) By 31 January 2025, all forces to ensure good processes are in place for applying to retain DNA and fingerprints and improve use of section 63G of the Police and Criminal Act 1984.

I agree with this recommendation.

(Recommendation 10) By 30 April 2025, Home Office and Ministry of Justice to adapt funding arrangements to ensure there is enough support for RASSO victims including:

- **e. Provide extra funding for RASSO support services**
- **f. Long-term funding arrangements to ensure consistent availability of specialist support.**
- **g. Working with PCC offices to ensure national grant funding aligns with local commissioning arrangements**

I agree with this recommendation in principle.

I definitely agree that, for all victim support services, there should be long-term funding, which is aligned to the local commissioning arrangements of Mayors and PCCs.

However, I think it would be more beneficial to look at support services in a more strategic and holistic way, rather than by specific crime types. Whilst RASSO cases are of course a priority, so too will be wider VAWG cases, cases involving youth violence and victimisation, hate crime, issues that affect victim and community confidence more broadly.

I think there is greater benefit to be had by Mayors and PCCs working with the Ministry of Justice and Home Office to look at how different funding streams for victim and support services could be brought together and delegated to local decision-makers. I would be very happy to start such a discussion if that would be helpful.

(Recommendation 11) By 31 March 2025, all Chief Constables should make sure that, as part of adopting the National Operating Model, their forces:

- **h. Develop a rape and other serious sexual offences problem profile**
- **i. Include the National Operating Model flight deck with their strategic performance monitoring; and**
- **j. Adopt any key performance indicators (KPIs) that are agreed and published by the Soteria Joint Unit**

I agree with this recommendation in principle.

However, I would want to see forces fully consulted prior to the introduction of any performance indicators that might be introduced. It is important that the indicators are realistic, proportionate to the resources available, and can measured consistently across forces without adversely impacting on wider police performance.

As Mayor, I would be concerned if any nationally mandated performance indicators had unintended consequences on the wider work of the force, or delivery of my Police and Crime Plan priorities – which we will want to measure and assess locally.

Commenting more broadly on the report, I am pleased to say that whilst South Yorkshire Police were not included as one of the early adopter areas, the Chief Constable and I have a shared focus on RASSO, and South Yorkshire Police have developed a bespoke plan focused on improving their response to rape and sexual offences. The force is actively working towards implementation of the National Operating Model.

Approximately 3 years ago, a RASSO Gatekeeper role was introduced within the force. The role has provided expert insight and support for the management and progression of RASSO cases throughout the police investigation, focussing on many elements of the national model. The role has provided a key point of liaison between the police and partners on RASSO cases throughout the wider criminal justice system including with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the courts improving the quality of investigations and submissions to the CPS.

As a result, police charge and summons outcomes for rape offences have increased in South Yorkshire to above the national average. The percentage of adult rape cases resulting in a charging decision was 7% in the 12 months to March 2024. This is higher than the national average of 6% for the same period, and higher than the 3% charge rate in South Yorkshire in the period Jan-Dec 2019.

This is not to say that further improvements for victims and survivors of RASSO crimes cannot be made, there is always room to learn and get better at what we do.

However, I am assured by the findings from your recent report, that the areas you have highlighted are ones which South Yorkshire Police have already begun to identify and address.

I have copied this letter to the Home Secretary for her information.

I look forward to working with you both to keep people safe across South Yorkshire.

Best,

Oliver Coppard
Mayor of South Yorkshire