

**ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE**

**PAPER NO: AP22/14**

**SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –  
18 MARCH 2022**

**SUBJECT: SUPPORTING VULNERABLE VICTIMS**

**SUMMARY:**

1. This report will bring together the Constabulary's approach to supporting vulnerable victims alongside its compliance with the Victims Code. It will provide a holistic overview of both demand and activity and where appropriate will provide statistical information to support the narrative.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

1. The Accountability and Performance Panel is asked to take note the contents of the report.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The response to victims and witnesses remains a priority area for Suffolk Constabulary and is of significant importance currently owing to the impacts of the Covid pandemic. Victims are still having to wait some months before finalisation of court cases, notably in relation to Crown Court trials and this is a key issue being actioned by the Local Criminal Justice Board chair through direct contact with HMCTS. Victim engagement in the criminal justice process and timely justice is at risk if these delays are not addressed.
- 1.2 The Constabulary response to victims is managed through a variety of mechanisms and departments within the Constabulary. The offer to universal victims is managed through the Supporting Victims subgroup, chaired by the Head of the Justice Services Command. This subgroup has responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Victims Code of Practice and working with partners in the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to ensure services are available to support these victims.
- 1.3 Additional work for specific categories of crime is managed through the Crime, Safeguarding and Investigation Management Command. This command deals more specifically with victims of Domestic Abuse, Hate Crime, Modern Day Slavery, Human Trafficking, Rape and Serious Sexual Offences and work in partnership with several agencies to resource the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub.
- 1.4 This report will aim to provide an overview of the holistic service provided to all victims.
- 1.5 Data for inclusion in this report is currently under development and is likely to evolve as the report develops. In all instances, data will reflect the most recent period possible.

## **2. SUPPORTING VICTIMS SUBGROUP**

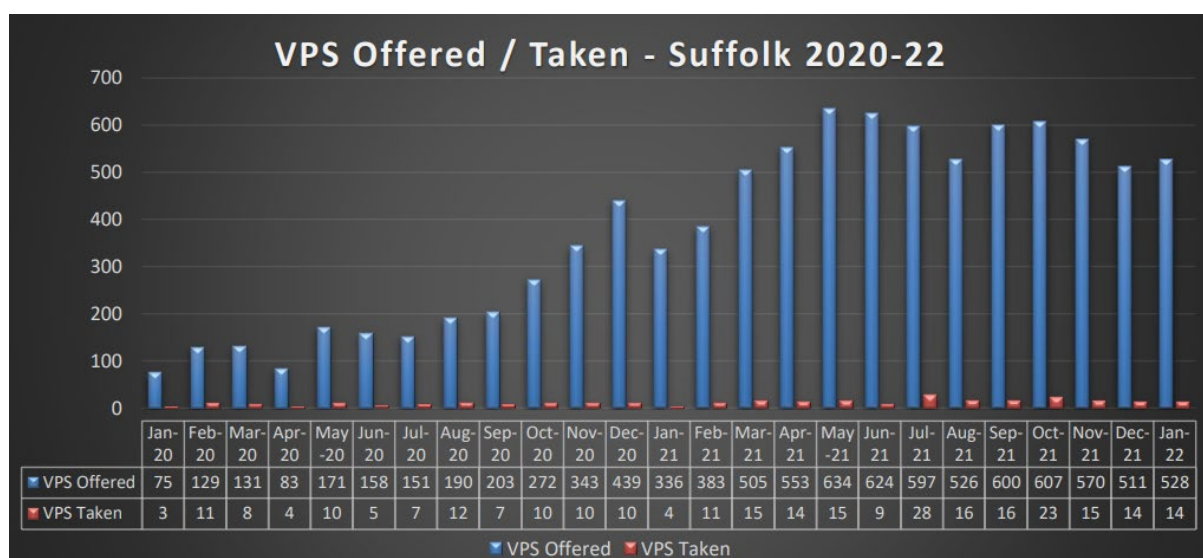
- 2.1 The Supporting Victims Subgroup, established almost two years ago, continues to meet on a regular basis. The group is made up of a number of representatives from various departments and includes colleagues from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk.
- 2.2 The subgroup has now designed and embedded a strategy which is presented as a plan on a page to direct activity. This approach also affords the group the opportunity to record actions and achievements and to ensure direct read across to any reports emanating from Inspecting bodies at both a local and national level. **A copy of this strategy has been included at Appendix A.**
- 2.3 The chair of the Supporting Victims Subgroup is now also the co-chair of the LCJB Victim and Witness Subgroup, thereby facilitating wider engagement in the agenda and ensuring the work of the Constabulary aligns to work also ongoing by other Criminal Justice partners.

## **3. VCOP COMPLIANCE**

- 3.1 The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime places statutory responsibilities on Criminal Justice agencies, several of which fall to the police. These include completing a needs assessment to highlight any support needs; inviting the victim to make a Victim Personal Statement; providing information about what to expect from the criminal justice process; referring the victim to appropriate support services; getting explicit consent from victims before passing details of any support services; providing information regarding Restorative Justice; advising how to make a complaint if a victim feels any entitlements have not been received; providing information about the police investigation, such as to whether the suspect has been charged or bailed and whether the suspect is going to be prosecuted or not, or if the crime is going to

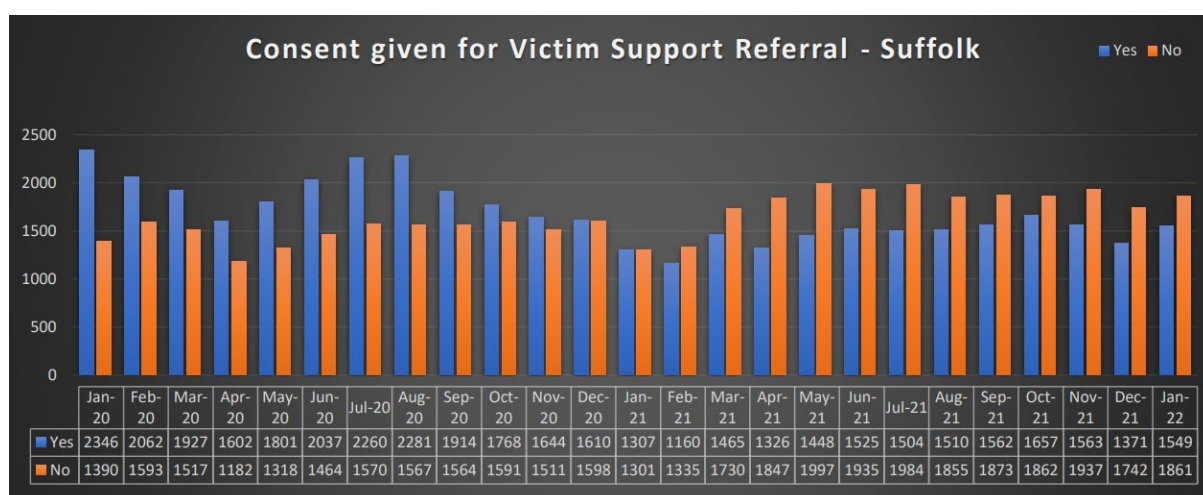
be dealt with outside of court proceedings. The list is not exhaustive and will be based on individual needs of the victim.

- 3.2 Using the information secured from Inspectors audits in each county and the manual dip sampling of 30 cases undertaken by the chair's Staff Officer and tactical lead for Victims, data on all victims' rights is now collated into a performance pack which is shared at every Supporting Victims Subgroup meeting. This information provides a general overview for attendees as to the improvements being made but it is recognised as not being 'comprehensive' in that it only includes data obtained from dip sampling. It is however a useful indication of the improvements being made and enables the group to focus on areas of development for the future. It should be noted that Suffolk Constabulary is in a strong position nationally in relation to compliance with the Code with a significant number of other forces still unable to provide data on compliance to any level.
- 3.3 Recent activity has been focussed on a small number of rights with a view to improving compliance in these areas specifically. These are the requirement to offer a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) and to secure consent to refer to Norfolk and Suffolk Victim Care (NSVC) for support.
- 3.4 Victim Personal Statements enable a victim to provide their feeling to a court on the impact the offence has had on them. They can be taken at various times during the length of an investigation and more than one may be taken in some cases. Whilst the Police cannot control when these statements are read out in court, the Constabulary do work with colleagues in the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), to ensure that where taken, best use is made of the information provided by victims and witnesses.
- 3.5 Suffolk Constabulary are improving the number of times they offer the opportunity to a victim to make a Victim Personal Statement as can be shown in the below table. This improvement is a result of targeted awareness raising across the organisation throughout 2021.



- 3.6 Work has also been progressed relating to referrals to support services. Victims who provide consent should be referred to support services within 2 days of their crime being recorded. Locally, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner commissions Norfolk and Suffolk Victim Care to provide this service and referrals are automatically generated from the crime recording system.

- 3.7 Whilst the below table may look as though referrals are reducing, it does in fact present an improved picture in relation to data quality with previously some victims not being offered the opportunity to decline a referral when offered.



- 3.8 Whilst manual dip sampling on the completion of needs assessments for vulnerable, intimidated, persistently targeted victims and victims of serious offending would suggest compliance is already high across the Constabulary, recent work has secured technical developments on existing systems which will continue to improve this position.
- 3.9 Workload pressures remain high in the Witness Care Units, however the additional resources provided through Suffolk precept and Norfolk PCC funding has provided much needed additional support and enabled a reduction of personal caseloads for the existing team.
- 3.10 Much of the additional work continues to arise from last minute changes to Court listings and subsequently requiring updates being provided to victims. This is not only stressful for the victim but also for the case worker who must try and explain the reasons for any delay verbally to the victim. Prolonged long-term management of victims, especially those who have reported serious sexual offences or domestic abuse therefore remains a concern and the continued welfare of the staff within the Unit remains a priority for the Justice Services Command.
- 3.11 The current trajectory for the return to pre-pandemic levels in the courts is now estimated not to be achieved until March 2025. As such, a review is now underway to assess the resourcing levels within this team as it is likely that the recent increases will need to be sustained until at least this time.

#### 4. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

- 4.1 There is a well-established partnership and governance process for tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) within the county, led by a VAWG steering group. This steering group includes representatives from key agencies and has recently secured the addition of nominated representatives from groups offering support to victims.
- 4.2 Following consultation between partners and stakeholders a revised VAWG strategy 2022-2025 has now been signed off by the county's Safer Stronger Communities Board and this was published in early February 2022.
- 4.3 Work is now ongoing with partners, including victim representatives forming part of the Suffolk Violence and Abuse Partnership, to develop an action plan which meets the agreed

strategic aims of prevention, supporting victims, pursuing perpetrators, and strengthening the system.

- 4.4 Internal governance of VAWG within the constabulary has been developed to build on existing structures for Domestic Abuse, Serious Sexual Offences and Serious Violence. A Chief Officer lead has been appointed (Assistant Chief Constable) supported by the Detective Chief Superintendent as strategic lead and identified tactical leads at Superintendent rank.
- 4.5 The strategic and tactical approach to tackling VAWG as outlined, is heavily dependent on continuing to take a partnership and victim centred approach to delivering improvements and to achieve confidence and satisfaction with the public.
- 4.6 The national proposal for a VAWG performance framework is anticipated and once received will facilitate the inclusion of VAWG specific data in this report.

## **5. DOMESTIC ABUSE**

- 5.1 Domestic Abuse has been a priority for the Constabulary for a number of years, and as a result work is always underway to look for opportunities to improve the service provided to victims of this horrendous crime.
- 5.2 In September 2021 the Constabulary strengthened our THRIVE process to ensure all Contact and Control Room staff appropriately assess threat, risk, and harm, recording their rationale as to any decision making. Specific vulnerability training has also been delivered to further enhance and support this process.
- 5.3 An internal 'voice of the child' campaign was launched on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022, to ensure the presence of children at any domestic incident is carefully considered and proactive steps taken to ensure that children are engaged. This approach ensures their welfare is checked and a clear record made of interactions and safeguarding action taken.
- 5.4 October 2021 saw the introduction of the Vulnerability – Victim Offender Location (V-VOL) analytical tool. This enables the Constabulary to better identify repeat victims, suspects, and locations, at a county or locality level. The tool utilises the Cambridge High Harm Index score to apply risk scores and will be used to inform tasking and co-ordination processes and strengthen our ability to allocate resource to the most vulnerable victims.
- 5.5 The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) have achieved a 100% sign up to Op Encompass from all primary schools, secondary schools, and colleges in Suffolk. In 2021 there were **3304** Op Encompass shared with education settings, enabling schools to offer additional pastoral support to child victims of DA.
- 5.6 In December 2021 an interim policy was introduced across the Constabulary to formalise the process of detectives reviewing and where appropriate investigating, all high-risk domestic abuse cases. While a more formal evaluation of this approach is pending, early signs are that the use of these experienced resources is resulting in positive outcomes in high-risk DA cases and importantly very positive feedback from victims as to the service they have received.

Supporting vulnerable victims		Recent 12m	Previous 12m	Diff against previous 12m	LTA	Diff against LTA
Domestic Abuse						
Crime						
	Crime volume	9207	9580	↑4%	8899	↑3.5%
	Proportion of all crime which is Domestic Abuse	18.6%	No comparison- strategic measure			
	Solved number	1085	1061	↑2.2%	1154	↓6%
	Solved rate	11.8%	11.0%	↑0.8pp	13.0%	↓1.2pp
	Domestic Abuse related stalking and harassment	2446	2586	↓5.4%		
Victims						
	Number of victims	6247	6446	↓3.1%		
	Victims per population	8	No comparison- strategic measure			
	Proportion of victims who are repeat DA victims	26.7%	No comparison- strategic measure			
	Victims not yet ready to support	45.9%			49.3%	↓3.4pp
Offender management						
	Domestic abuse arrest rate	31.8%	28.1%	↑3.7pp		

**Additional measures under development**

Data up to end of January 2022 (blank fields denote data under development)

Supporting vulnerable victims		Recent 12m	Previous 12m	Diff against previous 12m	LTA	Diff against LTA
Stalking and Harassment						
Stalking						
	Crime volume	1036	855	↑21.2%		
	Solved rate	13.5%	12.4%	↑1.1pp		
	Solved number	140	106	↑32%		
	Victim not ready to support	32.0%	32.0%	No change		
Harassment						
	Crime volume	2400	2601	↓7.7%		
	Solved rate	10.0%	10.0%	No change		
	Solved number	241	259	↓6.9%		
	Victim not ready to support	27.8%	35.2%	↓7.4pp		

**Additional measures under development**

Data up to end of January 2022 (blank fields denote data under development)

- 5.7 Suffolk is not an outlier when compared with the other forces in England and Wales. On average, 1 in 5 crimes recorded by police forces are DA related.
- 5.8 The Constabulary continue to attend Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC) in conjunction with key partners where victim safeguarding activity is discussed and aligned. The table below shows the number of MARACs attended in 2021.

	No. of MARAC cases heard	No. of cases heard with children linked	Total no. of children linked to heard MARAC cases
<b>Southern</b>	584	325	683
<b>Western</b>	616	321	663
<b>Northern</b>	243	140	297
<b>Total</b>	<b>1443</b>	<b>786</b>	<b>1643</b>

- 5.9 In November 2021 the Constabulary launched a new Domestic Abuse Continuous Improvement Plan. Its purpose is to outline to officers and staff, communities, and partners how we intend to continuously improve our approach to domestic abuse in Suffolk.

## CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

We will continually look to improve our end to end processes relating to Domestic Abuse and ensure an effective investigation and appropriate outcome for every report of Domestic Abuse.



- 5.10 A new project will see Suffolk Constabulary staff working one-to-one with domestic abuse offenders to address and alter their behaviour, protect victims, and reduce demand on the Constabulary. The Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Unit (DAPU) has been part funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner's uplift project. A team of three - one Police Constable and two staff members – will be working one-to-one with offenders over an extended period, as well as working with partner organisations, to look at and alter their behaviour. This is the first time the Constabulary has worked with domestic abuse offenders in this way, and we are excited about the opportunities this will present.

## 6. RAPE AND SERIOUS SEXUAL OFFENCES

- 6.1 The Eastern Region Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) Strategic Governance and Operational boards are both working to a Regional Action Plan. This plan was created in response to the National RASSO Action Plan.
- 6.2 The Strategic Governance Board meets monthly, and the agenda includes a data pack where all key areas of performance are reported. This assures there is focus on timeliness, quality, and quantity.
- 6.3 In July 2021, two reports were received:
1. Criminal Justice Joint Inspection – A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape
  2. HMICFRS – Evaluation of Rape Survivors' Experience of the Police & other Criminal Justice Agencies
- 6.4 There are 13 recommendations within the Criminal Justice report. Those recommendations relevant to the Police have been adopted into the Suffolk Serious Sexual Offences Delivery Plan and progress is monitored there.
- 6.5 In December 2020, the Attorney General issued new guidelines in relation to Disclosure. In essence, the requirement for full disclosure has been moved to the beginning of an investigation at the pre-charge stage. This requirement has seen a significant change in process and therefore impacts on the capacity of detective assets across the Constabulary.



The new process is still embedding but has proved challenging when investigating these complex crimes.

- 6.6 The performance position remains stable, in line with our regional counterparts and slightly above the national average.

Supporting vulnerable victims		Recent 12m	Previous 12m	Diff against previous 12m	LTA	Diff against LTA
<b>RASSO</b>						
Crime volume		2143	1796	↑ 19.3%	1935	↑ 10.7%
Solved rate		4.9%	6.0%	↓ 1.1pp	5.5%	↓ 0.6pp
Solved number		106	109	↓ 2.7%	107	↓ 1.0%
Investigation not possible		3.2%			3.9%	↑ 0.7pp
Victim not ready to support		44.6%			47.1%	↓ 2.5pp

**Additional measures under development**

Data up to end of January 2022 (blank fields denote data under development)

Supporting vulnerable victims		Recent 12m	Previous 12m	Diff against previous 12m	LTA	Diff against LTA
<b>Child Sexual Abuse</b>						
Crime volume		1294	1254	↑ 3.2%	1335	↓ 3%
Solved rate		8.9%	10.1%	↓ 1.2pp	9.1%	↓ 0.2pp
Solved number		115	127	↓ 9.5%	121	↓ 5%
Victim not ready to support		31.8%			33.1%	↓ 1.3pp
Non recent CSA		30.4%		No comparison- strategic measure		

**Additional measures under development**

Data up to end of January 2022 (blank fields denote data under development)

- 6.7 We continue to encourage victim engagement working with the ISVA service and providing bespoke information leaflets to victims at the time of reporting to ensure they are able to make informed choices.
- 6.8 In May 2021, Avon and Somerset Police hosted a launch event for their Project BLUESTONE. This was a project aimed at transformational change in the investigation of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences. The project was subsequently rolled out to a small number of other forces under the banner of Op SOTERIA. In Suffolk, we have taken the learning from this project and incorporated relevant actions within our Serious Sexual Offences (SSO) Delivery Plan. Suffolk are likely to be incorporated into the SOTERIA project during early 2022.
- 6.9 An internship placement completed a project aimed at understanding non engagement with younger victims began in July 2021. We are currently examining the findings and will use them to improve services offered to victims of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences.
- 6.10 Throughout 2021, the Safeguarding Investigation Unit (SIU) has been operating with seriously reduced numbers of qualified detectives. Whilst there are good numbers of officers, the balance of experience versus non-experience has been precarious. Despite this the Safeguarding Investigation Unit has continued to achieve some significant criminal justice outcomes in recent months with several instances of long sentences.

## 7. USE OF PROTECTIVE POWERS

- 7.1 To ensure we are maximising opportunities to take steps to safeguard victims, a Constabulary lead for preventative powers has been appointed. Their use is also monitored and scrutinised in the Managing Offenders subgroup, chaired by the Head of the Justice Services Command. Training of key personnel on these preventative orders, including Domestic Violence

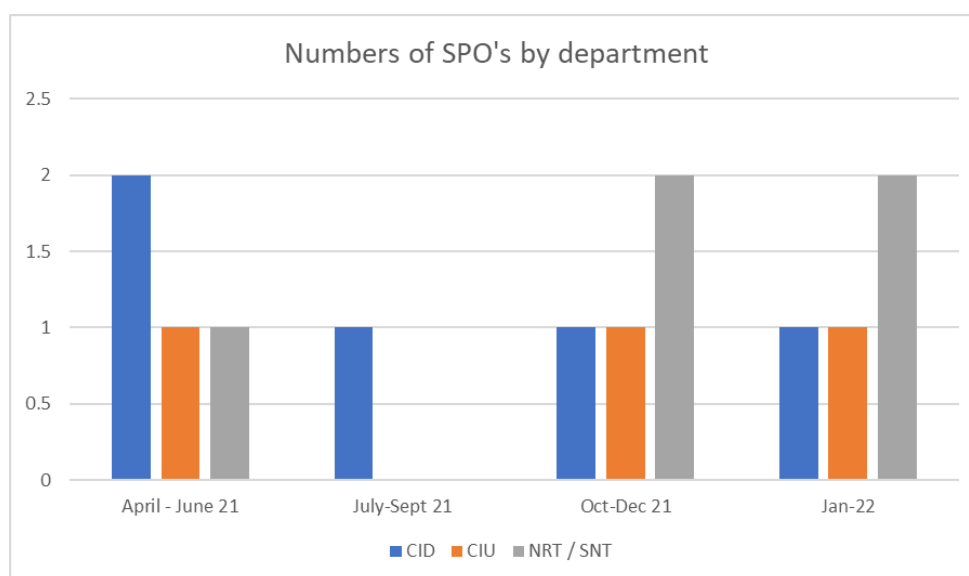


Protection Notices and Stalking Protection Orders, together with wider communications is resulting in improvements.

## 8. STALKING PROTECTION ORDERS

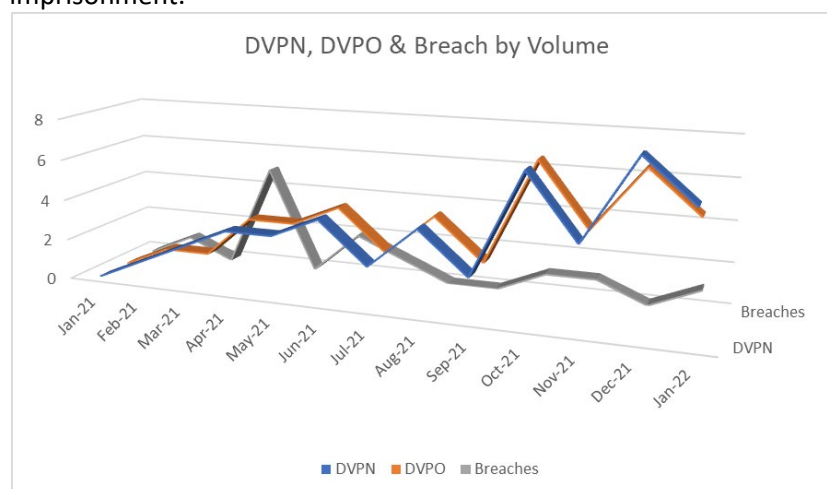
- 8.1 Numbers of Stalking Protection Orders obtained across the Constabulary are increasing. Those obtained in January and up to 2nd February 2022 match the numbers obtained in the previous quarter. (Figures include full & interim orders). A further SPO has been sought in February with the court hearing pending (Not reflected within the figures below).

*Note - Data from April to June 2021 relates to cases in the South (2) and West (2) commands only*



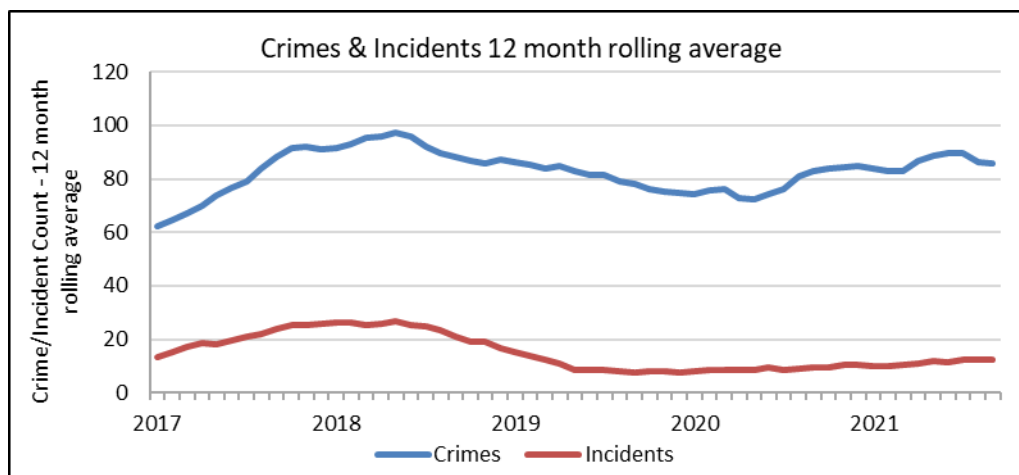
## 9. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION NOTICES & ORDERS

- 9.1 Numbers of notices and orders remain relatively low across the Constabulary, although a significant increase has been seen since October 2021. The Custody Investigation Unit are the department that has sought the most orders during 2021 notably linked to the fact they investigate a high percentage of domestic abuse crime across the county. Recorded breaches are relatively low in number, with outcomes ranging from between no findings and 8 weeks imprisonment.



## 10. HATE CRIME

- 10.1 Victim Offender Location (VOL) data is now produced in relation to Hate Crime. The provision of this data ensures that vulnerable victims are identified, referrals into relevant support agencies made and that targeted preventative action ensues.

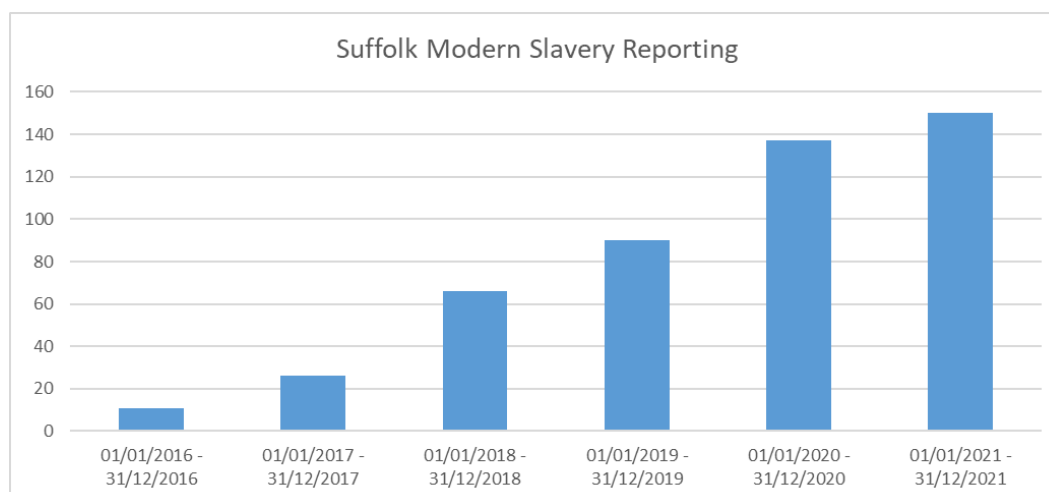


- 10.2 A Hate Crime Officer is now employed by Suffolk Constabulary who reviews all hate crimes across the county to ensure appropriate victim care has been offered and to provide additional advice and support. This will ensure that trends against specific communities are identified and early interventions put in place.
- 10.3 A contact list of third sector agencies has been created so officers who are reporting hate crime are able to appropriately refer and signpost victims to relevant agencies to secure an enhanced level of support.
- 10.4 Hate crime scrutiny panels are in place and Norfolk and Suffolk Victim Care are represented to understand and inform the victims perspective of hate crime to improve and enhance the service provided.

## 11. MODERN SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

- 11.1 In respect of Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking (MSHT) victims, Suffolk now has 10 Victim Liaison Officers (VLO's) trained to provide enhanced support when victims are first encountered. A victim book is worked through to ensure vulnerabilities are identified. This book is not only available to VLOs, but for all staff to utilise when in contact with MSHT victims.
- 11.2 To further support the correct approach to victims, Modern Slavery Victim Care (MSVC) advisors are available to provide support to frontline staff. They work closely with partners to ensure access is facilitated to provide support to victims. MSHT Champions across the Constabulary have received training to provide support for colleagues when dealing with MSHT victims.
- 11.3 Operational staff across Suffolk Police have been signposted to briefings and training about the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process for victims of MSHT. If an NRM is deemed as being "reasonable grounds that they are a victim of MSHT" they will receive support through that process. The number of referrals in Suffolk has increased annually in line with the national trend. This is positive in terms of supporting victims as Suffolk Police are recognising victims, and those victims are receiving an enhanced service via the NRM process. The process for

supporting victims is tested through internal audits, investigation reviews, and MSHT Network meetings with partners.



- 11.4 The intranet page for MSHT has recently been redesigned making it easier for staff to access support and guidance when dealing with victims.

## 12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 None

## 13. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

- 13.1 The challenges being experienced by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Services (HMCTS), particularly in relation to Crown Court trials is having a direct impact on delays within the Criminal Justice System. This is felt significantly by victims, witnesses and their families and the Constabulary are concerned about the impact on disengagement. Not only does this impact on the mental health of victims, but there are also wider concerns about confidence and trust in the Criminal Justice System, something which the Constabulary continues to highlight through relevant partnership meetings.

To oversee the delivery of the Victims Code and ensure victims and witnesses are supported through the criminal justice process from first point of contact, ensuring their needs are met and that they receive a consistent, good quality service.

## Create confidence

**Build the confidence of victims and witnesses to report and remain engaged with the criminal justice process**

- Focus on staff having the right behaviours and attitudes
- Use victims' experiences to shape our service delivery
- Ensure the training and learning available to staff concerning victim care and support is fit for purpose
- Act as a link to the CJB V&W Subgroup to align with partnership approaches



## Provide support

**Support vulnerable victims and witnesses through the Criminal Justice System**

- Ensure referrals to specialist support services and signposting to other support where required are made correctly.
- Ensure relevant staff are equipped, trained and skilled to Achieve Best Evidence
- Support the use of registered intermediaries where appropriate



## Deliver a quality service

**Deliver a consistent, good quality service to victims and witnesses**

- Lead on training implications relating to the revised Victims' Code of Practice
- Ensure all relevant material is appropriately disseminated across the organisations concentrating on the key rights -
  - Support services
  - Written acknowledgements
  - Providing updates
  - Informing victims about restorative justice
  - Offering a VPS or an impact statement for businesses



## Demonstrate compliance and quality

**Continue to manage VCOP obligations to increase compliance and raise victim satisfaction.**

- Use agreed recording process to capture and develop performance data
- Continue to deliver training to communicate VCOP obligations and recording requirements across both forces
- Identify areas of non compliance and support commands to address areas of concern

