



SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

ORIGINATOR: CHIEF CONSTABLE

PAPER NO: AP25/12

SUBMITTED TO: ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL –
7 MARCH 2025

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING VULNERABLE VICTIMS

SUMMARY:

1. This report sets out the progress that has been made in respect of the support provided to vulnerable victims. It provides background context in respect of the service provided to victims, an update on the work ongoing to increase the delivery of the Victims' Code of Practice (VCOP) and more detailed updates in respect of the work ongoing to support the most vulnerable victims and victims of the most serious crimes.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) is asked to consider the progress made by the Constabulary and raise issues with the Chief Constable as appropriate to the PCC's role in holding the Chief Constable to account.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The services provided to victims remain central to Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan and the Chief Constable's Delivery Plan. From the first call for service, to a criminal justice outcome the Constabulary aims to deliver a service that delivers the Victims' Code and provides confidence and reassurance for victims and witnesses. Suffolk Constabulary's work in relation to victims focusses on these key elements of the Police and Crime Plan:

- Keeping people informed, and updated, once they have reported a crime;
- Ensuring compliance with the police elements of the Victim Code with a strong focus on how the force supports victims through the investigation;
- Maintaining a continued focus on tackling the crimes which constitute Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG).

1.2 The service to victims is overseen through the Supporting Victims Group which is chaired by the Head of Justice Services, and this group is a sub-group of the Investigation Standards Board chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable, Local Policing.

1.3 The service provided to victims varies according to need and this paper sets out the work that is ongoing in particular in relation to VAWG, domestic abuse, rape and serious sexual offences and hate crime. These and other specialist areas of crime are managed within the Crime, Safeguarding and Investigation Management Command.

1.4 The Victims and Prisoners Bill received Royal Assent in May 2024, and a formal commencement date is awaited from the new Government. The aims of the Bill include raising awareness of the Victims' Code and requiring improvement to agency compliance which in turn should improve victims' experience of the justice system. It is important that criminal justice partners work together to ensure effective service to victims throughout the criminal justice process. Through the Local Criminal Justice Board Suffolk, Constabulary works closely with its criminal justice partners to provide effective services to victims.

1.5 Whilst the partnership is strong, there are significant challenges within the criminal justice system locally as well as nationally. Court backlogs are not being reduced and delays are now also emerging in the Magistrates Courts as well as the Crown Courts. This issue continues to be actively monitored through the Local Criminal Justice Board and through representation by the National Police Chief Council Criminal Justice Leads. The Constabulary's Victim and Witness Care Unit provides updates to those whose cases are awaiting trial and, with so many more cases in the system, their work has increased significantly. Additional resources have been provided and are likely to be needed until well into 2025.

2. NORFOLK AND SUFFOLK CONSTABULARIES SUPPORTING VICTIMS SUBGROUP

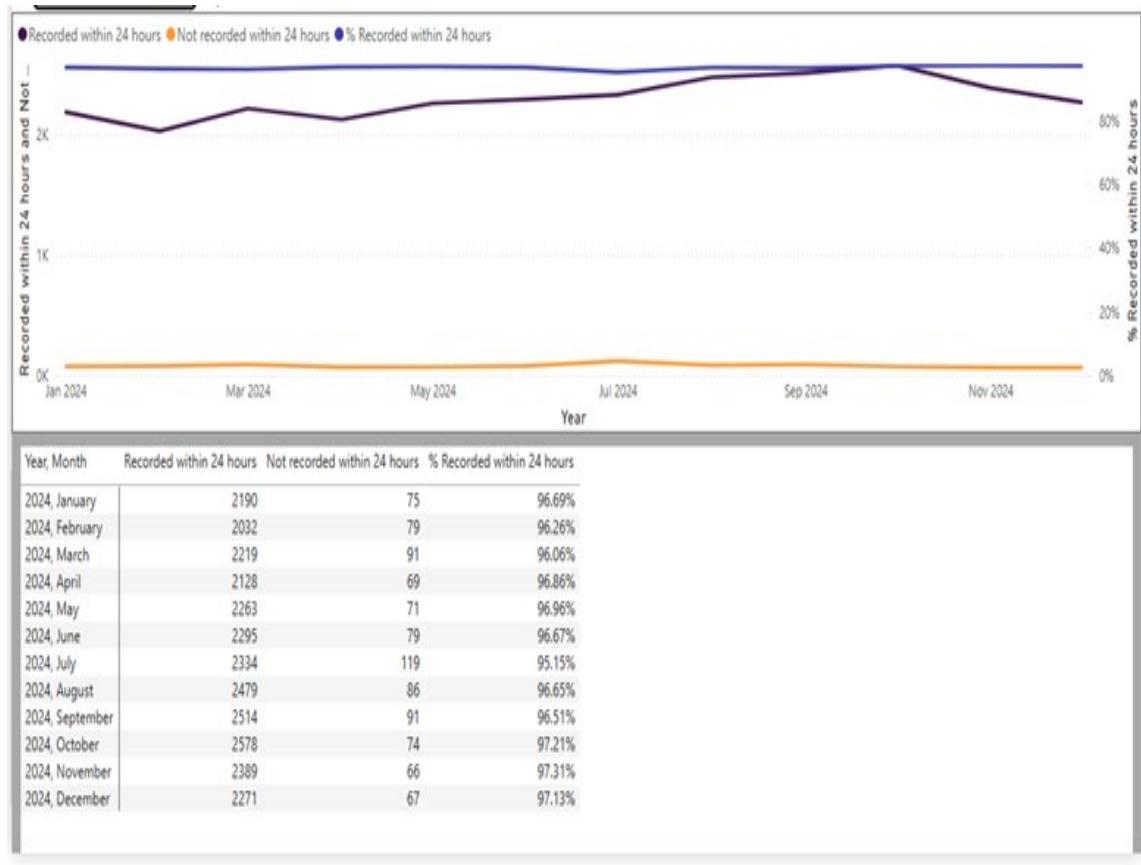
2.1 The Supporting Victims Subgroup is made up of representatives from various departments and includes colleagues from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk.

2.2 The aim of the subgroup is to oversee the delivery of the Victims' Code and to ensure that 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.

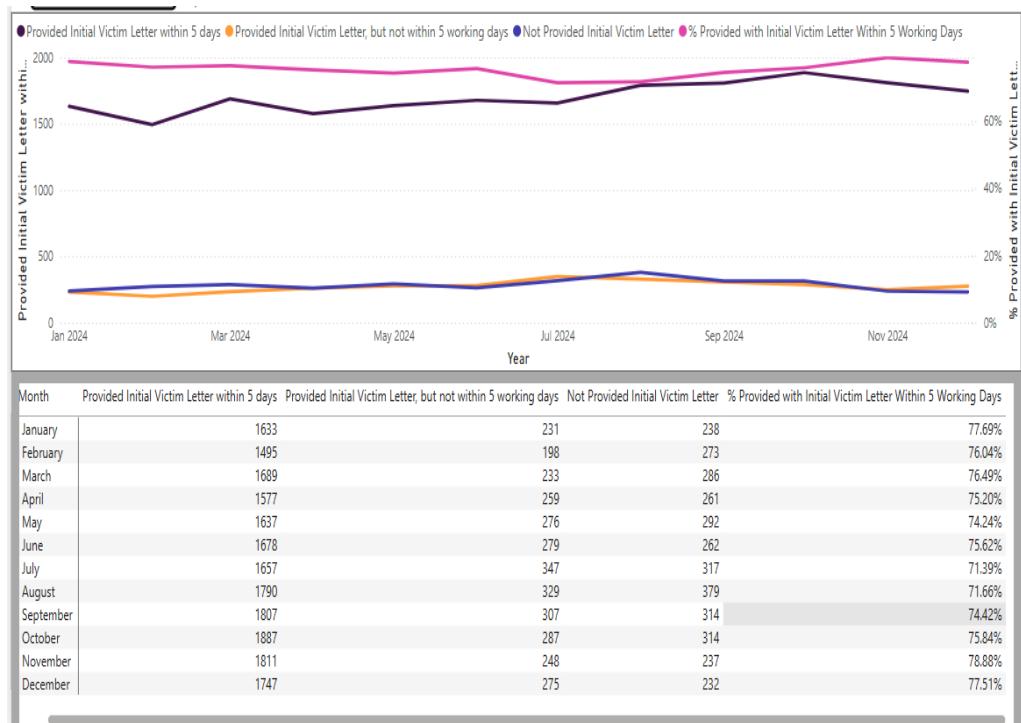
3. VICTIMS CODE AND COMPLIANCE FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 The Victims and Prisoners Act places a legislative requirement on all police forces and other criminal justice bodies, to collect information, both quantitative and qualitative, to review their compliance with the Victims' Code, to drive improvements to services provided to victims.
- 3.2 Following the national metrics pilot that took place between May-July 2024, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) has been considering next steps. It is anticipated there will be a public consultation on the Victims' Code in early 2025 and metrics may be confirmed by the end of 2025 for reporting in 2026.
- 3.3 Current Constabulary data on all victims' rights is collated into a specific Victims Code dashboard. This dashboard secures data automatically from the Constabulary Crime and Intelligence system, Athena. The Constabulary reviews performance against the victim's code at monthly force performance meetings. Managers can also access the dashboard to monitor the performance of their teams in respect of VCOP compliance. The Dashboard is currently being updated to support the new Victims Code metrics for reporting in 2026 once the metrics have been confirmed.
- 3.4 Whilst the Constabulary contributes to all the rights in some way, for the purpose of accountability and recording, only rights 1 to 9 are assessed and contribute to compliance table (1) however rights 8 and 9 are generally the responsibility of the Witness Care Unit and not the Officer in the case.
- 3.5 The below tables demonstrate the overall Victims Code compliance across the Constabulary between 1st January 2024 to 31st December 2024.
- 3.6 Average Victims Code Compliance for rights 1-7 (OIC) is currently 82.21% for the period 1st January 2024 to 31st December 2024. Overall average compliance including rights 8 & 9 is 76.21% .
- 3.7 The Supporting Victims Subgroup have identified areas of priority with a view to improving compliance in three areas specifically. These are the requirement to offer a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) (Right 7) to provide key investigative updates in a timely manner to victims of crime (Right 6), and to provide written acknowledgements to victims that their crimes have been recorded (Right 3). Further planned training in the New Victims' Code will look to support better and improved compliance in these areas.

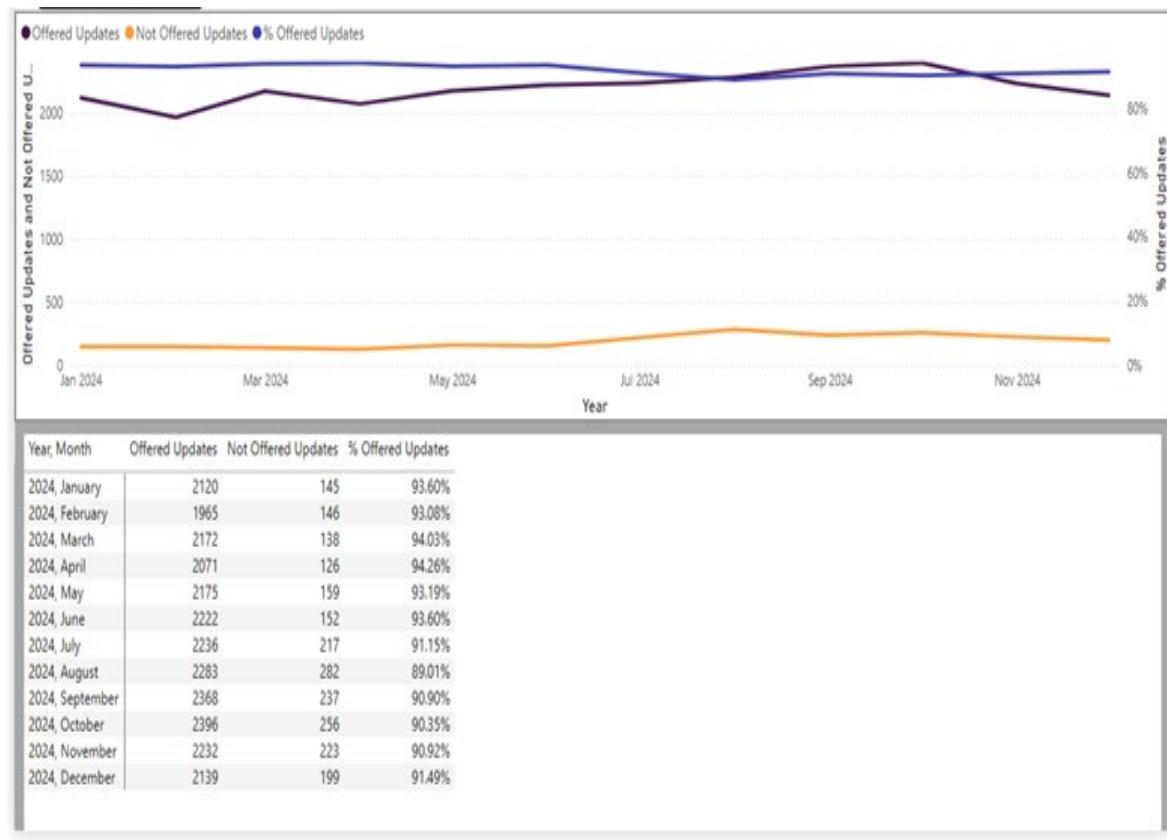
Right 2 – Crime recorded within 24 hours



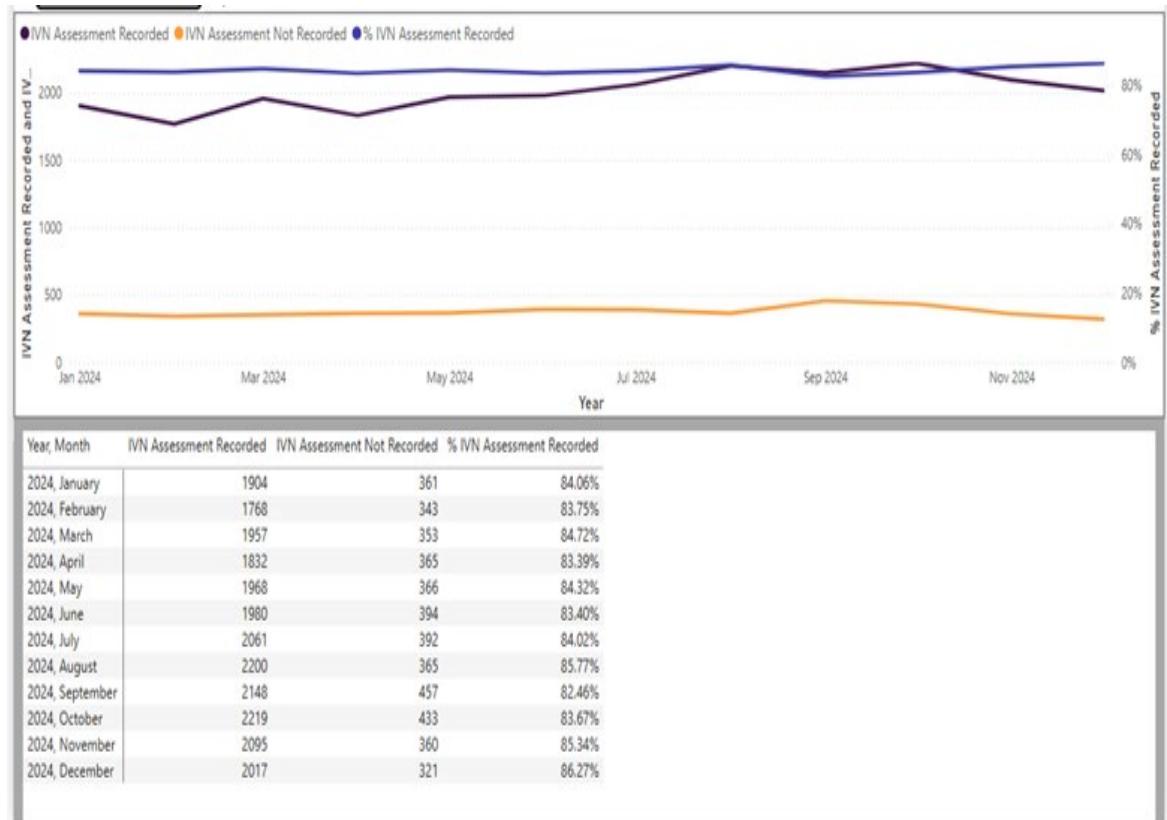
Right 3 – Initial Victim Letter provided within 5 days



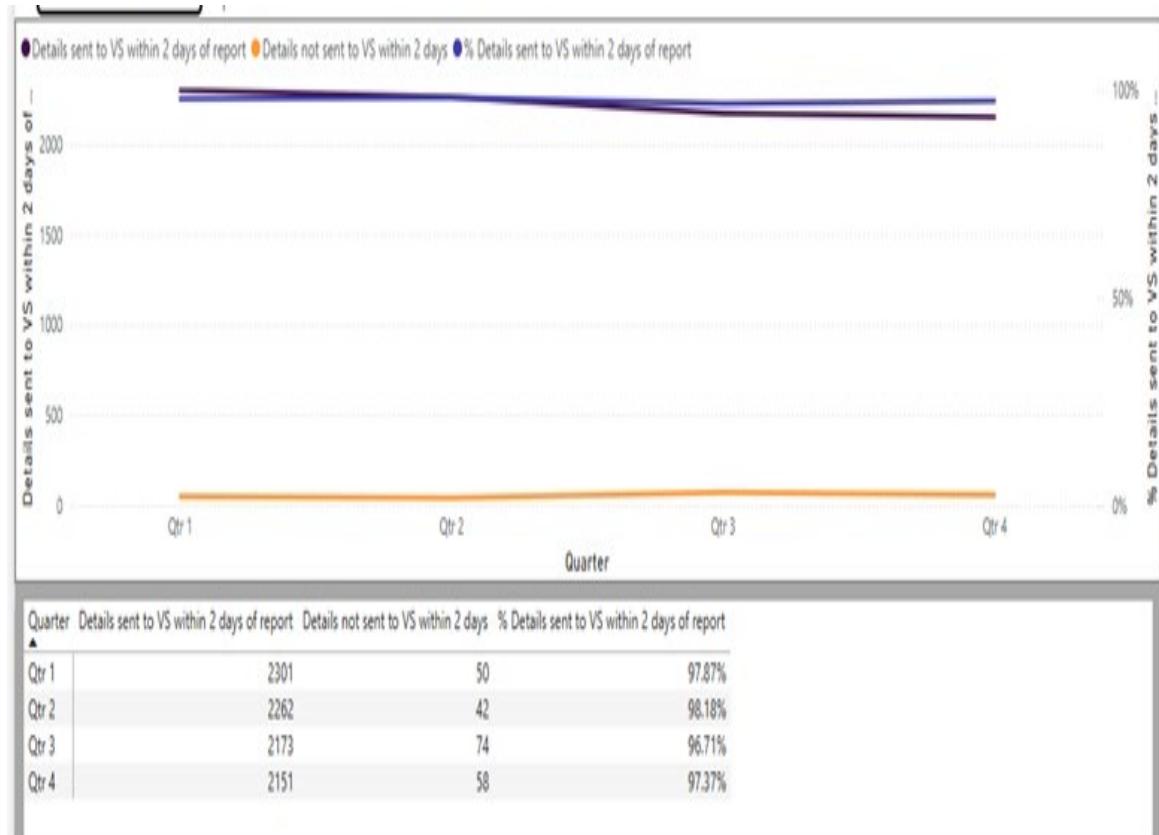
Right 3 – Victim contract for updates agreed



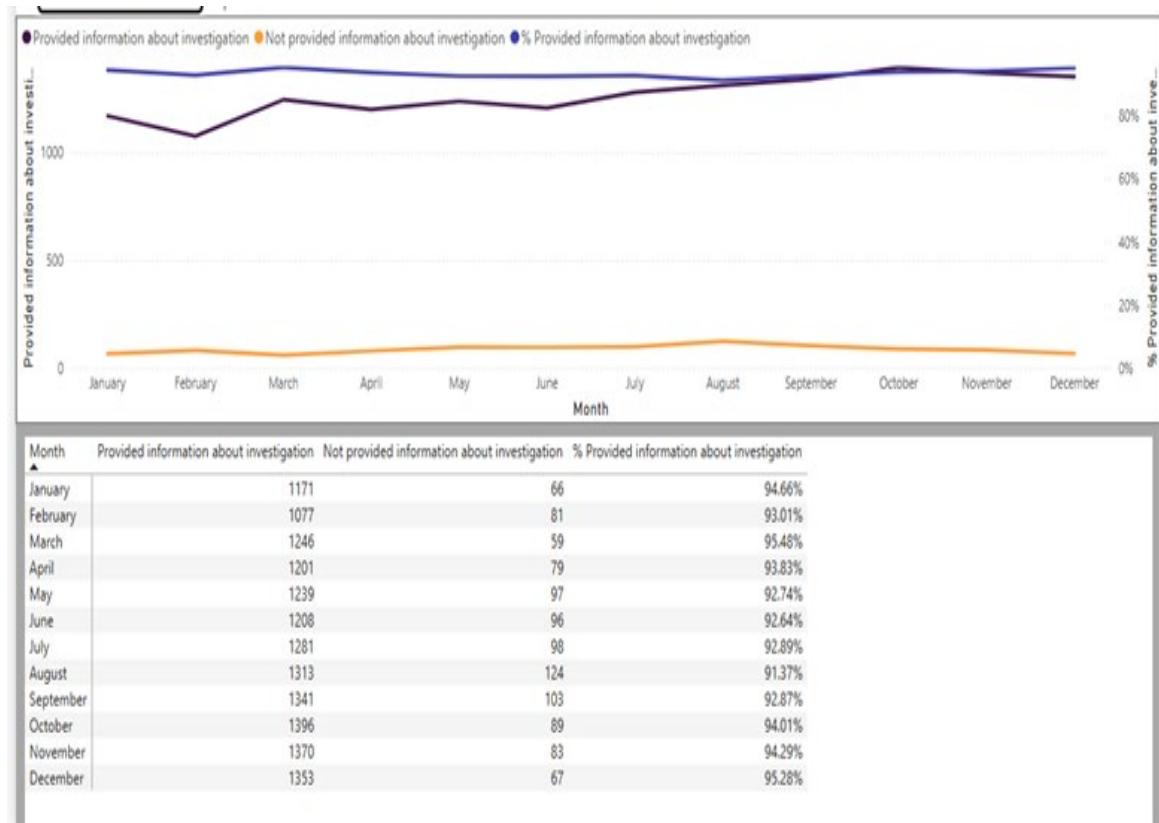
Right 4 - IVN Recorded



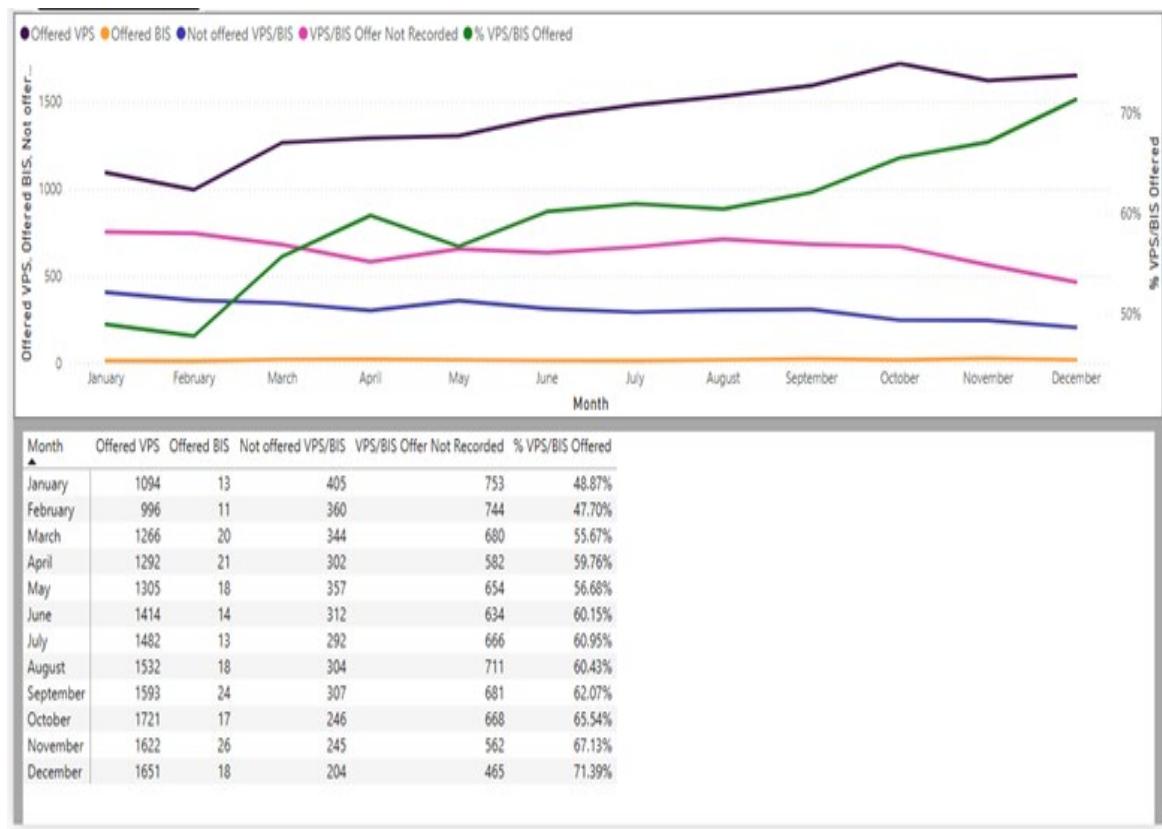
Right 4 - Referred to Victim Support within 2 days



Right 6 - Provided with key updates on the investigation



Right 7 - Victim Personal Statement (VPS) Offered



3.8 The Constabulary's Witness Care Unit continues to carry heavy workloads of over 100 cases per witness care officer due to Crown and Magistrates Court backlogs. 7 Additional temporary staff members have provided much needed additional support and enabled the team to keep pace with workloads which are still growing. Court data shows cases are still growing in both the magistrates and Crown Courts. A full Witness Care review is being completed by Chief Inspector Howes to look at working practises including automation opportunities.

4. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)

4.1 Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) is an umbrella term that covers a range of offences that disproportionately impact on women and girls, such as domestic abuse, sexual offences, stalking and harassment, female genital mutilation and forced marriage. VAWG is a societal issue that requires a whole system approach. Working together with partner agencies through the Safer Stronger Communities Board (SSCB) is crucial to our local response and together we have developed a strategy to help reduce and prevent violence against women and girls. This is available via <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/imported/suffolk-violence-against-women-and-girls-strategy-2022-25.pdf>

4.2 The County VAWG Action Plan has been in place since 2022. The current plan is under review to ensure that the partnership response to VAWG remains focused, current, and working towards the Suffolk vision of playing their part in preventing and identifying Violence against Women and Girls.

4.3 The Rape Scrutiny Panel continues to meet quarterly, where three rape investigations are reviewed. The panel focused on investigations where police have decided on No Further Action. It is attended by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Survivors in Transition,

Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVA's), Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) and Health. The investigations are reviewed to establish whether they have been sufficiently progressed, if there were any missed opportunities, if the victim had received appropriate support and whether the investigation should have been referred to the CPS.

4.4 The National Domestic Abuse Joint Justice Action Plan has been developed and the Constabulary is currently working with the Crown Prosecution Service to meet its requirements, this includes implementing a Joint Operational Information Meeting with a specific focus on Domestic Abuse to identify and remove barriers to successful prosecutions.

4.5 In 2022, the HMICFRS received a super complaint from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust in relation to the police response to Stalking and Harassment. Following review, a series of recommendations were made; in November 2024 Suffolk Constabulary published an action plan to address the recommendations [Stalking Action Plan | Suffolk Constabulary](#).

5. **DOMESTIC ABUSE**

Investigations Recorded

5.1 Figure 1 below, shows the number of domestic abuse investigations, and non-crimes recorded from 1 January 2019 through to the end of December 2024. Overall, domestic abuse crimes recorded in 2024 were 8.4% below the 3-year average, with 638 crimes recorded each month. Non-crime investigations in 2024 rose, with the average of 569 offences per month, which is 2.6% higher than the 3-year average.

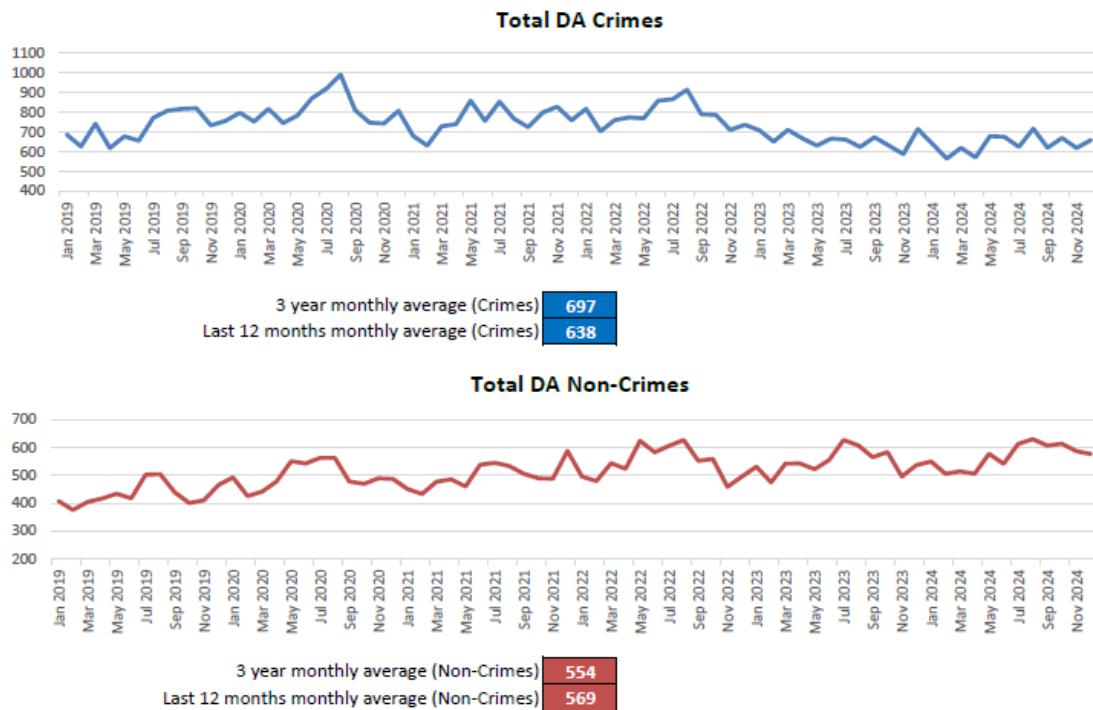


Fig1 DA crimes and Non-crimes June 2019 – November 2024

Positive Action and Outcomes

5.2 Positive action is counted where a suspect has been recorded as 'arrested' or 'interviewed'. This number fell throughout 2024, but there was a significant rise in arrests in the second and third quarters of 2024, so officers are making increased use of police powers to arrest.

5.3 As shown in Table 1 below, the solved rate of domestic abuse crimes was 13.3% in 2024. There was a decrease impacting this from May through October, with December's data showing a 14% solved rate. Chart 6, below, shows the performance throughout 2024.

Quarter	Month	Outcome Type								*Of which Outcome 20 (Further action undertaken by another agency)	Solved Rate		
		Positive (Outcomes 1-8)		Victim Supports but evidential difficulties (Outcome 15)		Victim Does Not Support (Outcome 16)		Other (Outcomes 9-14, 17-22)*					
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%				
Q3 2023	Oct 2023	84	12%	163	24%	364	54%	62	9%	673	13.3%		
	Nov 2023	101	15%	150	23%	345	52%	64	10%	660	17.2%		
	Dec 2023	79	13%	136	22%	360	57%	56	9%	631	11.0%		
Q3 2023 Total		264	13%	449	23%	1069	54%	182	9%	1964	13.6%		
Q4 2023	Jan 2024	92	13%	143	21%	387	56%	70	10%	692	14.4%		
	Feb 2024	77	14%	111	20%	290	53%	73	13%	551	13.6%		
	Mar 2024	78	13%	158	25%	317	51%	67	11%	620	12.6%		
Q4 2023 Total		247	13%	412	22%	994	53%	210	11%	1863	13.5%		
Q1 2024	Apr 2024	72	13%	164	29%	270	48%	62	11%	568	12.6%		
	May 2024	70	11%	175	27%	311	48%	96	15%	652	10.3%		
	Jun 2024	78	13%	157	25%	304	49%	81	13%	620	11.6%		
Q1 2024 Total		220	12%	496	27%	885	48%	239	13%	1840	11.5%		
Q2 2024	Jul 2024	72	11%	163	26%	313	50%	82	13%	630	11.5%		
	Aug 2024	85	13%	158	24%	340	51%	82	12%	665	11.9%		
	Sep 2024	59	10%	152	26%	317	53%	67	11%	595	9.5%		
Q2 2024 Total		216	11%	473	25%	970	51%	231	12%	1890	11.0%		
Q3 2024	Oct 2024	83	13%	165	25%	314	47%	102	15%	664	12.4%		
	Nov 2024	84	13%	126	20%	344	54%	85	13%	639	13.6%		
	Dec 2024	92	15%	145	23%	327	52%	60	10%	624	14.0%		
Q3 2024 Total		259	13%	436	23%	985	51%	247	13%	1927	13.3%		

Table 1 DA Crime Outcomes in Suffolk 2023 - 2024

Use of Ancillary Orders

5.4 A Domestic Violence Protection Notice (DVPN) is an emergency non-molestation and eviction notice which can be issued by the police to a perpetrator. Because the DVPN is a police-issued notice, it is effective from the time of issue, thereby giving the victim the immediate support they require in such a situation. Within 48 hours of the DVPN being served on the perpetrator, an application by police to a magistrates' court for a Domestic Violence Protection Order (DVPO) must be heard. A DVPO can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days. Suffolk makes consistent use of DVPNs over time, with the average of 5.8 issued per month. 89% of those are granted as DVPO's at the Magistrates' court.

5.5 Stalking Protection Orders (SPOs) were introduced in January 2020. In early 2024 an officer within the Crime Coordination Centre was assigned as a Single Point of Contact for improving the use of these orders. She has delivered considerable training to frontline officers, identifies cases that may be suitable for SPOs and then pursues applications to court. This has seen an increase in SPOs being used, as chart 7, below, shows.

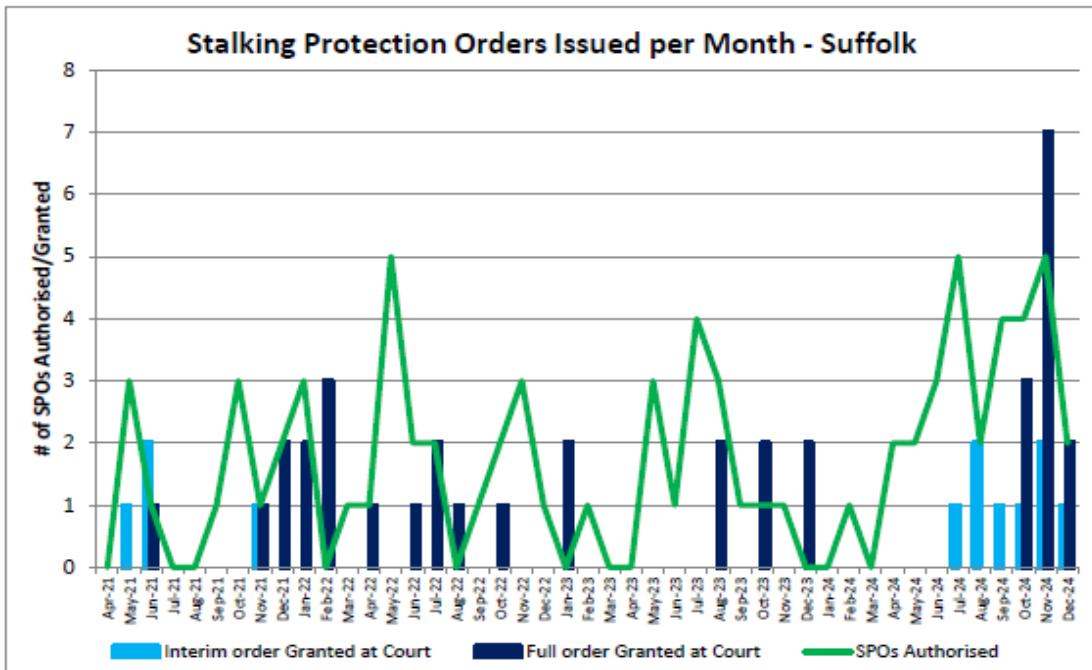


Fig 2 – Stalking Protection Order use in Suffolk 2021 – 2024

Domestic Violence Disclosures Scheme (DVDS) - (Clare's Law)

5.6 The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) is known as “Claire’s Law”, and the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme (CSODS) is known as “Sarah’s Law”. DVDS was legislated in 2014 and CSODS in 2011, with both seeing increased usage over the years as the public become more aware of both schemes and the practice of consideration for both disclosure schemes within our own daily business. Both processes can be triggered by police and other professionals, known as “right to know” (RTK) or via an application from a member of the public either for themselves or on behalf of another. These are known as “right to ask” (RTA) applications. Figure 3 below, shows the increase in applications under both schemes, particularly DVDS.

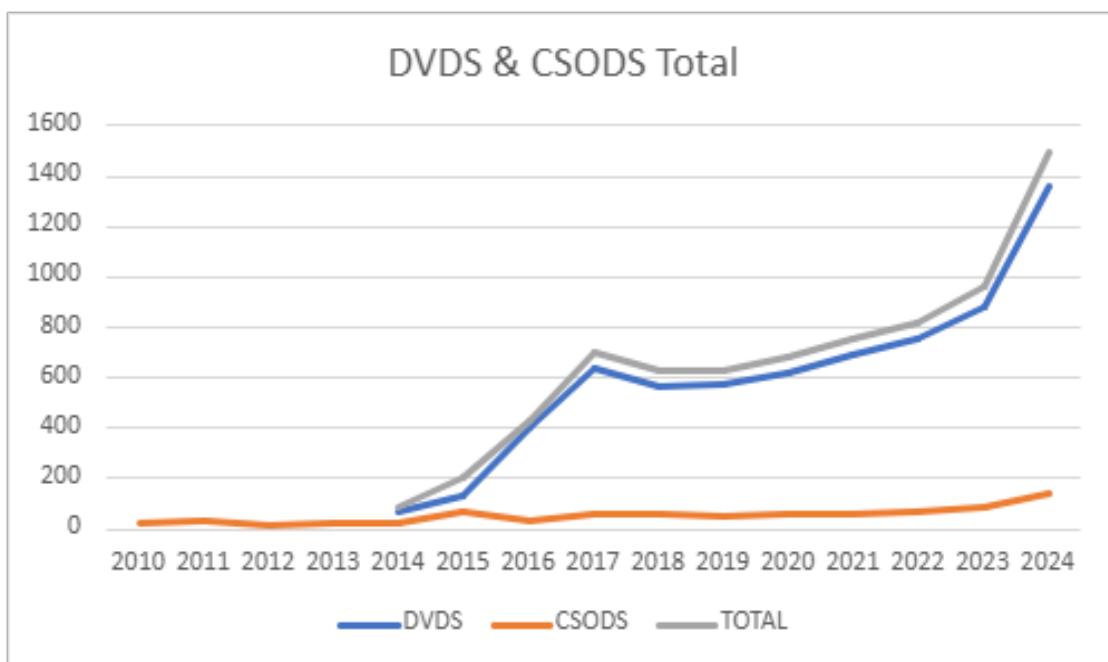


Fig 3- DVDS and CSODS use in Suffolk 2010 - 2024

6. RAPE AND SERIOUS SEXUAL OFFENCES (RASSO)

6.1 Operation Soteria transformation and implementation plans have dominated this reporting period. Strong progress has been made across the Pillar leads and both the transformation and implementation plans have received chief Officer sign off. Roll out of the National Operating Model Products will be the focus of the implementation plan.

6.2 The RASSO Joint Operational Improvement Meeting (JOIM) has continued to meet bi-monthly, and the agenda includes a data pack where all key areas of performance are reported. This assures there is focus on timelines of submissions, and cases moving through the early criminal justice process. The RASSO JOIM is creating information sharing and consistency across Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex and supports Police and CPS improvement work.

6.2 Monthly Police RASSO lead and regional Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) RASSO lead meetings are now in place. These provide an excellent opportunity for improved working relationships and the ability to raise positive work alongside specific areas of improvement required both in force and with CPS RASSO. Personal changes within CPS have delayed some of the improvement work, but a new District Crown Prosecutor is now in post.

6.3 National Soteria CPD involves 3 days of training for all RASSO investigators. This is being rolled out during this period and will upskill the investigative teams around the National Operating Model. Suffolk is currently training front line officers with the first responder Op Soteria training package. This is being delivered by operational Safeguarding Investigation Unit (SIU) staff due to challenges with availability of crime trainers within the Learning and Development department.

6.4 Ongoing challenges remain with positive charge rates for RASSO cases. This is being reviewed both locally and regionally across Police and the CPS to identify opportunities for cases to be progressed. However, the data tables 2 and 3 below, show small but steady increases in both charge rates, and positive outcomes. Op Soteria is providing a platform for Policing to use context led investigations to secure charges.

Supporting vulnerable victims	Last 12M	Previous 12M	Diff against Previous 12m	Long-term average	Diff against long-term average
RASSO					
<i>Crime volume</i>	2,000	2,047	↓2.3%	2,147	↓6.9%
<i>Solved rate</i>	7.4%	5.9%	↑1.5pp	6.1%	↑1.3pp
<i>Solved number</i>	148	120	↑23.3%	130	↑13.2%
<i>Charged rate</i>	6.7%	5.5%	↑1.2pp	5.6%	↑1.1pp
<i>Charged number</i>	133	112	↑18.8%	119	↑11.2%
<i>Investigation not possible</i>	2.4%	2.4%	0pp	2.3%	0pp
<i>Victim not ready to support</i>	44.3%	48.6%	↓4.3pp	48.3%	↓4.0pp
<i>Evidential difficulties</i>	60.5%	61.9%	↓1.4pp	59.1%	↑1.4pp
<i>Live investigations</i>	708				
<i>Non recent</i>	25.1%	28.7%	↓3.6pp	26.1%	↓1.0pp
<i>SARC referrals - Child (0-17) *</i>	90				
<i>SARC referrals - Adult (18+) *</i>	233				

Data up to end of December 2024

** SARC data is from April 2024 to December 2024*

Table 2 – Rape and Serious Sexual Offence data for Suffolk 2024

Supporting vulnerable victims	Last 12M	Previous 12M	Diff against Previous 12m	Long-term average	Diff against long-term average
Child Sexual Abuse					
<i>Crime volume</i>	846	1058	↓20.0%	1113	↓25.1%
<i>Solved rate</i>	15.0%	11.5%	↑3.5pp	11.4%	↑3.6pp
<i>Solved number</i>	127	122	↑4.1%	125	↑1.2%
<i>Charged rate</i>	12.9%	11.2%	↑1.7pp	10.3%	↑2.6pp
<i>Charged number</i>	109	118	↓7.6%	112	↓3.3%
<i>Victim not ready to support</i>	34.6%	35.4%	↓0.8pp	35.1%	↓0.4pp
<i>Investigation not possible</i>	2.7%	2.0%	↑0.7pp	2.5%	↑0.2pp
<i>Non recent CSA</i>	24.9%	28.6%	↓3.7pp	26.7%	↓1.8%

Data up to end of December 2024

Table 3 – Child Sexual Abuse Offence data for Suffolk 2024

- 6.5 The Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) contract with Mountain Health Care has now been in place for 10 months. Staffing gaps have been filled and out of County victim movement has been very limited, however, both SARC Manager and Senior Manager posts are currently being re-filled.
- 6.6 Work has commenced on the new SARC, however, timescales for completion and the lead in time for ISO accreditation means the October deadline for ISO accreditation is likely to be missed. This will affect most regional SARC's and will require notification on all forensic reports to the Court from October 2025.

7. HATE CRIME

- 7.1 The constabulary maintains a Hate Crime Delivery Plan aligned to the College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice (APP) for Hate Crime. This plan is currently overseen by the Southern Area Commander and will be transferring to the County Partnership and Prevention Hub (CPPH) during the next period.
- 7.2 Suffolk Constabulary are represented at the Southeast Regional Hate Crime Forum and meet with regional force colleagues every quarter to discuss working practices, community tensions by exception and sharing best practice.
- 7.3 Statistical data relating to hate crimes is compiled by analysts and shared both internally and with partners via the Community Safety Partnerships. This is shared every quarter and provides a breakdown of crimes and incidents, crime types, location types, victims, suspects, and crime outcomes.
- 7.4 Figure 4 below shows the crimes and incidents by quarter and provides a breakdown according to investigation type. It remains that there is no legal requirement for an individual to disclose the specific element of the protected characteristic and therefore there are some challenges in interpreting the data.
- 7.5 Suffolk has seen a slight increase in reporting of racial hate crimes during this reporting period. This is a continuing trend from Q3 2023/2024 which coincides with international conflicts, however the overall volume remains lower than historical averages.

Crimes and incidents by Quarter - Force

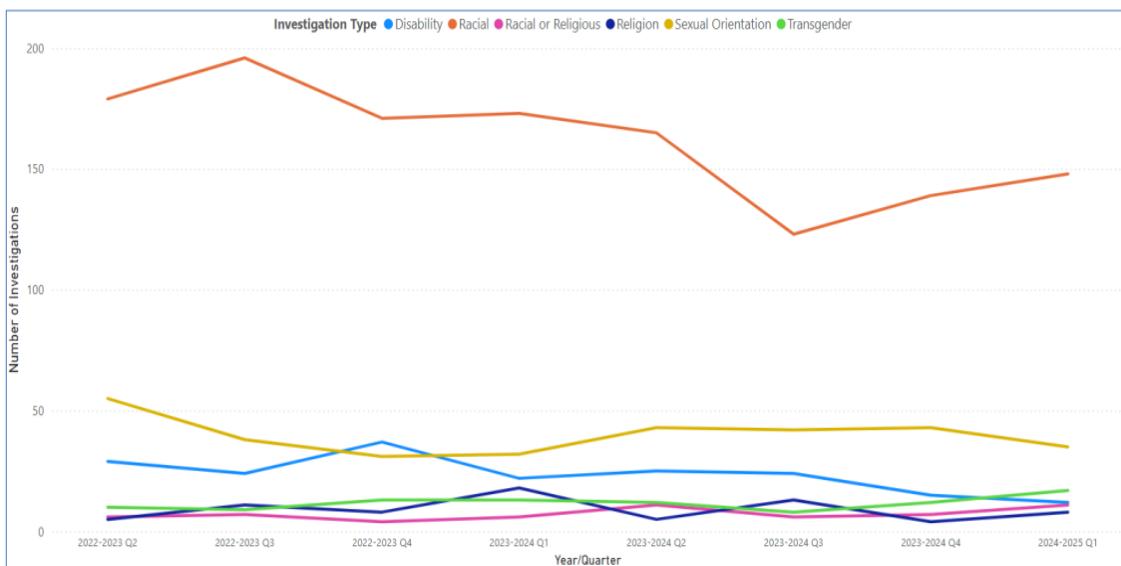


Fig 4 – Hate Crime in Suffolk 2022 - 2024

- 7.6 Hate Crime is a core responsibility of our Community Policing Teams (CPT), supported by the County Partnership and Prevention Hub (CPPH) Suffolk and a Diverse Communities Coordinator.
- 7.7 Vulnerability, Victims, Offenders and Locations (VVOL) data and the Hate Crime Dashboard provide community policing teams the ability to identify different trends in hate crime and implement problem solving responses. Problem Solving Plans (PSPs) and Police Activity Logs (PALs) are recorded to support the policing response and are scrutinised at a Monthly Intelligence Meeting (MIM) each month.
- 7.8 The new Diverse Communities Coordinator was recruited during this reporting period and is already working hard to build on existing relationships, developing new links with hard to reach communities and improving constabulary investigation standards. They are developing into a subject matter expert for the force and policing teams including; hate crime recording and management; supporting victims and communities subject of hate crime; and supporting problem solving.
- 7.9 Proactive engagement with vulnerable and diverse communities is undertaken by CPT Officers, supported by the Diverse Communities Coordinator. These engagements intend to increase confidence and reporting and are subject of scrutiny at the Neighbourhood Policing Working Group.
- 7.10 Data accuracy for Hate Crime remains a priority nationally due to challenges in the availability of information regarding protected characteristics. Victims are often reluctant to disclose voluntary information and as such the Constabulary, through CPTs and the Diverse Community Coordinator are working to build confidence within communities to improve these disclosures locally.

8. MODERN SLAVERY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING (MHST)

- 8.1 Suffolk Constabulary has 20 Victim Liaison Officers (VLOs) across the three localities. These offices are trained to provide enhanced support when victims are either first encountered or required to assist with ongoing investigations where additional support and rapport building would be beneficial. The VLO's have continued to assist investigations either as first

responders or during the ongoing process. The VLO's also have access to the victim navigator network provided through the Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU).

- 8.2 Operational staff across Suffolk Constabulary continue to be signposted to briefings and training around the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process for victims of MSHT. The process is managed by the Constabulary Serious Crime Disruption Team. Changes to the Statutory Guidance are reviewed, summarised, and disseminated to all staff within a few days, highlighting that the objective factors requirement in the reasonable grounds process has been removed, replaced by specific evidence which should be relied upon for an appropriate decision to be made. Joint training with key partners has been delivered, with a reviewed process to ensure the early sharing of NRM details between agencies where appropriate to do so. During 2024 there were 117 NRM reports submitted.
- 8.3 Officers are continuing to identify potential victims of modern slavery and exploitation during the investigative stage. Many investigations are linked to criminal activities such as drug supply and labour exploitation. The Constabulary Scorpion Teams regularly conduct intelligence led visits in connection to concerns regarding sexual exploitation seeking to provide support and reduce vulnerability.
- 8.4 As shown in Figure 5 below, crime reporting remains consistent with the NRM reporting showing a drop in the last 12 months, Suffolk is in line with the national picture.

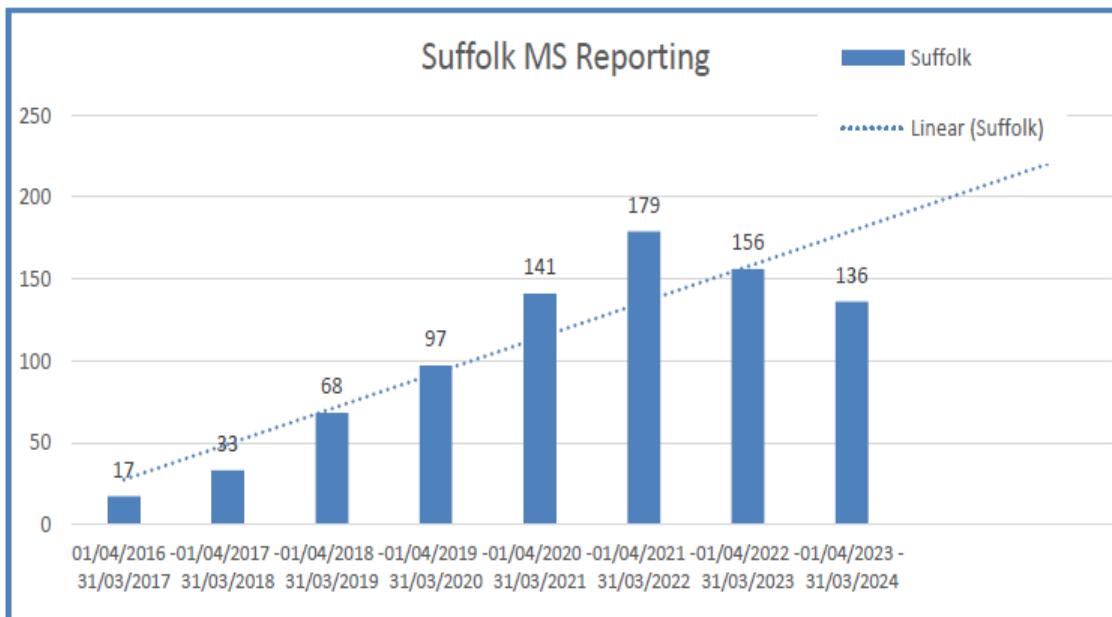


Fig 5 – Modern Slavery Crimes 2016 – 2024

- 8.5 As shown in Figure 6 below, forced criminality was the highest category of MDS offences during 2024, with drug related offences accounting for most criminal exploitation, with males involved in 90% of the reports. 42% of victims were young people.

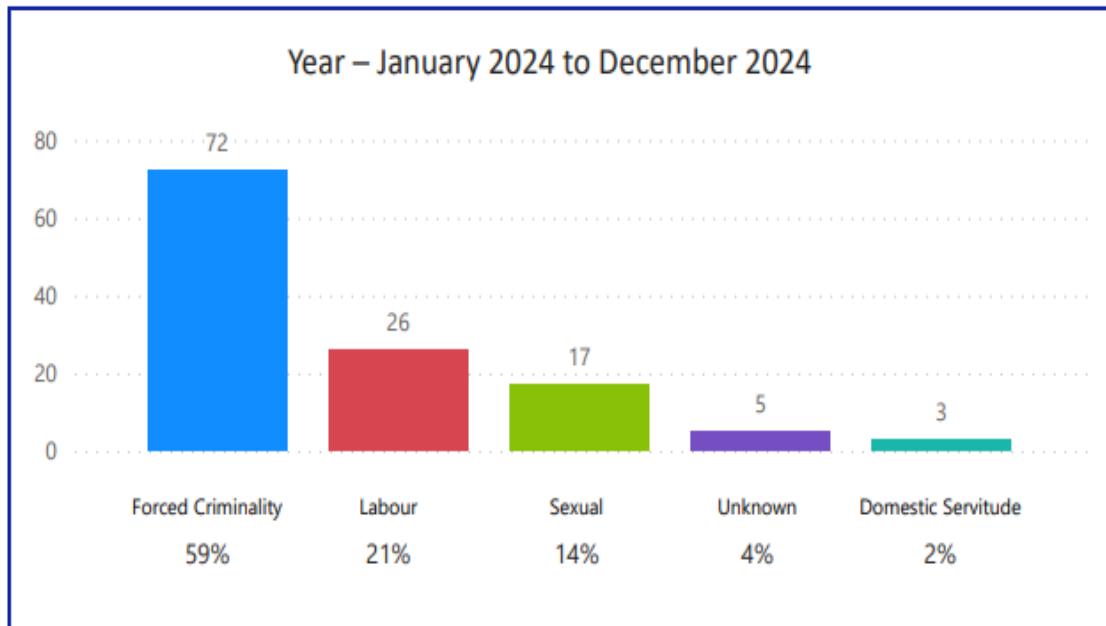


Fig 6 – Modern Slavery crime sub-classification 2024

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None.

10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

10.1 None

11. CHIEF OFFICER CONCLUSION

11.1 The Constabulary has developed strong governance where supporting vulnerable victims is concerned. There are well developed strategic plans in all areas, and demonstrable progress has been made where improvement activity has been implemented. Victims Code compliance is strong in the county and continues to make improvements in the areas that need it.

11.2 Op Soteria assessment and implementation is making good progress but is a significant commitment from the Constabulary towards further improvement to service to victims of Rape and serious sexual offences. Full compliance with the national operating model will be difficult to achieve without additional investment, and plans are still being progressed to ensure Suffolk has a local model that best suits the needs of victims in this county.

11.3 Overall, the Constabulary position where supporting victims is concerned is satisfactory and improving. There is more to be done to achieve the standards aspired towards in some areas and the Constabulary plans will continue to prioritise the service to victims to ensure the public are provided the support they need.