



STAFFORDSHIRE
POLICE

Non-Contact Sexual Offending Policy

Policy Owner: PPU - RASSO

Effective from 20/09/2024

Review required: annually

Background

The Angiolini Enquiry launched in 2021 after the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by Wayne Couzens, a serving police officer. The Enquiry seeks to establish a comprehensive account of Couzens' career and conduct, to identify missed opportunities and to make recommendations based on findings. In February 2024, the Enquiry published part 1 of its report.

This included a series of recommendations that have been accepted completely by policing.

Recommendation 1 requires that:

At the earliest opportunity, and by September 2024 at the latest, police forces should ensure that they have a specialist policy on investigating all sexual offences, including so-called 'non-contact' offences, such as indecent exposure.

The College commissioned an evidence review to explore connections between sexual exposure, including online exposure or cyberflashing, and contact sexual offending:

The evidence review found that:

- The overwhelming majority of sexual exposure crimes are not reported to the police.
- There are no research studies yet available on connections between cyberflashing and other sexual offending.
- The limited literature on sexual exposure offline finds evidence of escalation for some offenders. It also finds evidence of maintenance and de-escalation in convicted sex offenders. There is evidence that greater interaction with victims during sexual exposure may be a risk factor for offenders who move to contact sexual offending.

- Some evidence suggests voyeurism may be more indicative than sexual exposure of more extensive patterns of sexual offending (Vera-Gray and McGlynn, 2024).

Based on this evidence, there are important implications for Staffordshire police's approach to non-contact sexual offences and the creation of this policy:

- Crimes of sexual exposure must be taken seriously. They are harmful, threatening and violating forms of sexual offending in themselves, and are not only a possible 'gateway' to contact sexual offending.
- Investigations should look beyond escalation to explore patterns of offending.
- There is no reliable evidence currently to suggest that certain types of sexual exposure are more likely to lead to contact sexual offending. There is also no comprehensive evidence that certain types of sexual exposure are more harmful to experience. Therefore, this policy will apply to all forms of online and offline sexual exposure.
- Proactive policing responses to sexual exposure as a serious offence will be utilised

Understanding the scope of "non-contact offending"

There is no nationally agreed definition of a non-contact sexual offence. However, the College recommends that force policies include three types of offending as a minimum:

- sexual exposure, often known as 'indecent exposure' and sometimes investigated as outraging public decency
- voyeurism and similar offences, including 'upskirting' and producing or recording intimate images without consent
- online sexual exposure, known as 'cyberflashing'

The College of Policing also directs us to consider wider offending which includes the following offending behaviours:

- Catcalling and wolf whistling
- Following, persistent following, cornering, isolating
- Kerb crawling
- Leering or persistent staring
- Physical assault that has a sexual or gender-based element
- Sexual gestures
- Sexual propositioning, sexually explicit comments, intrusive persistent questioning
- Viewing pornography in public

Advice and guidance can be provided by the Crime Registrar wherever there is ambiguity over the criming of incidents listed as "wider offending".

Police Response

How forces engage with and respond to victims initially is fundamental to addressing their experiences of harm. It is crucial in ensuring that victims are confident their experiences are being taken seriously. Failure to answer or support victims effectively can result in victims losing confidence in the police. It can also mean that investigative opportunities are missed, with a higher risk of further harm occurring. It is important that victims reporting non-recent events are afforded the same quality of service as those who have been victimised more recently.

Any investigation into these offences should be in line with the National Operating Model brought about by Operation Soteria. Ensuring investigations are suspect focussed, victim centred and context led.

As such the following needs to be incorporated:

Suspect focussed

Identify the offender to see if they hold a position of trust
Safeguarding referrals and disclosures to be made
Intelligence and criminal conviction checks to be completed both locally held and national information sources - identify if they are a repeat suspect
Offender disruption tactics to be completed - this could include educational courses, SRO, SHPO, CBO, community protection notice, public space protection orders
Discussion within MATAC's
Intelligence harvesting from the known suspect including known social media accounts, vehicle, frequented locations etc

Victim centred

Taking report seriously from the victim and provide them with a professional level of service
Overcome any myths or misconceptions investigators have
Uphold procedural justice for the victim
Assess the victim impact and ensure victims code is followed and support and safeguarding measures are put in place

Context led

Aim to give an insight about what happened, who was involved and in what type of location or situation
Consider the resources or strategies the suspect used to commit the offence and whether they are a repeat suspect
The circumstances in which the offence has been reported
The victims circumstances - have they been targeted due to a certain vulnerability.
Social, cultural and situational factors
Victim and suspect relationship - known, acquaintance, stranger etc

All incidents within the scope of these crime types should be treated as any other investigation – Golden hour principles adhered to, all reasonable lines of enquiry made and suspects brought to justice.

Force analysts are engaged in identifying patterns or trends of non-contact sexual offending in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, which will help inform precision policing and support a problem solving and preventative approach.

Operational implementation

The following changes are supported by the recommendations provided by the College of Policing and are made to contribute to effective investigations.

1. Non-contact offences are to be correctly identified at the first point of contact. The FCC will receive enhanced training to help with correct identification of offences within the scope of this policy. Once identified, FCC will ensure the incident is tagged on STORM to alert RASSO supervision. The incident is to be allocated to the appropriate local resource to commence the investigation in line with existing response grading.
2. RASSO supervisors will be required to review these incidents as soon as practicable and provide investigative advice, ensuring they update the STORM log. These supervisors will have completed RISDP training which gives awareness on the national operating model. They will also be accredited in or working towards the specialist sexual assault investigators development programme in which they have to be PIP2 qualified. The investigation should not be delayed in the absence of a RASSO DS, however. If there is any uncertainty, Force Bronze or Silver should be contacted.
3. In line with the current crime continuum and with current college guidance, "non-contact" offences will remain with local officers for investigation. If circumstances change during the investigative process then the OIC should initiate initial a case conference with RASSO supervision as per the agreed process and crime continuum.
4. If the victim in the investigation is under 18 years old then a sergeant from the child protection unit should be asked to review the incident.
5. There may be occasions when the suspect has been identified as a registered sex offender who is being managed by MOSOVO. If this is the case then information and intelligence should be sought from the allocated offender manager to give a wider picture of risk and potential disruption tactics and case conferences to be considered.
6. Local Policing and Harm Reduction Hubs are to make full use of prevention methods/ suspect management tools (see vulnerability toolkit) with focus on increased use of civil orders (stalking protection orders / sexual risk orders).
7. Staffordshire Police will maximise opportunities to reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG) in public spaces within local strategy, policy and practice.
8. Staffordshire Police will also utilise national partnerships, charities and referral pathways to support all sexual offence victims and help manage offenders. In

particular, 'by and for' organisations working with victims from marginalised groups who can play an important role.

Performance

The Knowledge Hub are engaged with this policy and will undertake daily scanning for non-contact sexual offending along with other Serious Sexual Offending. These will be dynamically highlighted as necessary, tracked and incorporated into our existing Strategic Problem Profile under Operation Soteria.

The Performance framework designed under Operation Soteria will include offending, locations and victims of offences listed in this policy and will be shared within Local Policing to monitor, track, intervene and problem solve. Effective data will enable us to understand our local demand and inform resource allocation.

Monitoring of non-contact sexual offending should form part of Local Policing Team Performance Review for each area, and holistically at PPU Performance Board.

Incidents involving police officers and/or police staff

Consideration has been given around "non-contact" offending which involves officers and staff from within Staffordshire police. Any allegation of internal 'non-contact' sexual misconduct is assessed within the Anti-Corruption Unit in line with the 'STUDIOSB' nationally identified corruption categories. A number of reporting mechanisms are available for both complainants and witnesses. This includes overt referrals via the ACU and PSD e-mail, internal anonymous reporting platforms such as 'bad apple' and the internal integrity line. Externally, there is also reporting mechanisms such as Crimestoppers and the associated Police integrity line.

The Anti-Corruption unit is sufficiently resourced with qualified and experienced investigators (DC's and IO's) to enable thorough and detailed investigations. The professional standards department also has experienced detective constables and a detective sergeant to manage allegations that are suitable to be investigated outside of the ACU. All reports are assessed for identified criminal offences as well as an assessment being made for any breaches of the standards of professional behaviour under the Police Misconduct regulations. Any reports of off duty police alleged to have committed sexual offences are assigned to the relevant RASSO unit. A PSD investigator is appointed to oversee and progress identified breaches of the standards of professional behaviour.

Supervisory support

It is accepted that the crimes described within the policy will need to be managed effectively and the role of a supervisor is a critical component in policing's response to contact and non-contact sex offences.

- Supervisors should ensure that appropriate risk assessment is undertaken, including safeguarding of victims and witnesses.
- Supervisors should ensure that all officers are supported by someone with the right skills, knowledge and experience for the crime type. This applies both to first response and investigative roles.
- Officer and staff welfare must be considered. Sexual offence cases of any type can be distressing due to their nature and impact. Supervisors are responsible for identifying officer and staff welfare concerns.

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