

**NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR WORKING WITH  
INDEPENDENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE ADVISERS AND SUPPORT  
SERVICES**

**2021**



## **Contributors**

The development of this National Framework has been informed by insights from ISVAs, ISVA services and support services as well as representatives from the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

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## **Introduction**

This National Framework is for use by the police and CPS across England and Wales. The framework outlines minimum standards on liaising and communicating with Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) and local services supporting victims who work within the criminal justice system context. The framework outlines 11 components under the following three standards:

1. Multi-Agency Partnership Working
2. Effective Processes
3. Supporting victims

The work of the police and CPS with local service providers varies across the country reflecting local needs and capabilities. This framework, therefore, does not seek to be prescriptive and provides flexibility in how the minimum standards are met. Instead, in order to provide a level of consistency across the country, the framework outlines the key areas where communication and liaison between the police, CPS, ISVA and local services should be prioritised at a minimum.

These minimum standards largely reflect how the police and CPS should be working with service providers in principle as outlined in the Victims' Code, Achieving Best Evidence Guidance and in our own policies. The framework, therefore, does not seek to increase burden or unnecessary bureaucracy recommending that existing practice and processes should be built upon wherever possible.

The expectation is that local police and CPS will apply this framework locally in six months' time from launch by December 2021. We appreciate that for some this is very achievable given local structures and relationships in place. We also recognise that those areas where connections with ISVAs and local service providers are not made or formalised may experience delays in identifying services given the complexities with the commissioning landscape and the absence of a comprehensive register of support services.

## **Context**

The National Police Chiefs' Council and the CPS are working together to implement a Joint National Action Plan on rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO), published Friday 22 January 2021 and available to download [here](#). In recognition of the importance and value of working with ISVAs, and support services, the development of this framework has been prioritised.

Our Joint National Action Plan is a significant programme of work. Any actions from our plan which have a bearing on this framework – for example on improving communication with victims – will be reflected in updated versions of the framework to further support local leads.

### **Independent Sexual Violence Advisers and Support Services**

Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) and other local service providers work across England and Wales to provide a range of support, advice and help for victims of sexual violence – whether they report to the police or not.

For further information about the role of, and expectations from, ISVAs see the following guidance published by the Home Office in 2017: ‘Essential Elements of the ISVA Role’ [link](#). It is important to acknowledge, that victims may choose to receive support from a range of other service providers in addition to or instead of an ISVA, such as Support Workers, Case Workers, Counsellors/Therapists. Where necessary, police and prosecutors can also use this framework to guide their interactions with other local support services as appropriate.

ISVAs, and support services, can be based within a variety of organisations including specialist sexual violence and abuse organisations. They can receive referrals from a number of agencies and also victims who can self-refer. They provide practical advice and impartial information that can range from how the criminal justice system works to how to access other local support services.

ISVAs must be trained to support victims within strict boundaries so that their role as a supporter does not impact on the case. If there is a reasonable line of enquiry identified requiring assessment of notes from support services, the request and the reasons behind it must be clearly explained.

## MINIMUM STANDARDS

### Standard 1 – Multi-Agency Partnership Working

Component	Detail
<p><b>Component 1 - Nominate single points of contact (SPOCs) across police, CPS, ISVAs and relevant service providers</b></p>	<p><b>SPOCs, if supported strategically, will be at the heart of successful delivery of this framework.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SPOC role already exists across several areas and these should be utilised wherever possible to deliver this framework.</li> <li>• Local SPOCs must be identified across police investigation teams, CPS RASSO Units and ISVA agencies or relevant service providers.</li> <li>• For the police the SPOC could be the force lead, delegated lead or local RASSO Detective Inspector; for the CPS the SPOC would be the RASSO Unit Head or a delegated lead. SPOCs from ISVA agencies or relevant support services should be identified locally in partnership with support providers.</li> <li>• It might be possible, locally, for SPOC roles to be identified and agreed beyond the police, CPS, ISVA services and relevant support services (for example with the HMCTS).</li> </ul> <p><i>SPOC Role</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The emphasis for the SPOC is around working together, with mutual respect, understanding and appreciation of the roles and remit of all agencies, in order to deliver an effective and high-quality response in RASSO cases.</li> <li>• The SPOC will be responsible for the delivery of this framework on behalf of their agency including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>supporting multi-agency partnership working</u> (attending Multi-Agency Rape Scrutiny Group meetings (component 3); promoting learning and development (component 4));</li> <li>○ <u>supporting the implementation of effective practices</u> (referral process and route to inform CPS (component 5); local process on no further action (component 6); information sharing protocol (component 7); succession planning (component 8));</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Component	Detail
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>supporting victims</u> (agreeing routes for lines of communication (component 10); considering equality issues (component 10); assessing support needs and providing appropriate support (component 11); ensuring support at court (component 11)).</li> <li>● Working together in a multi-agency and professional way to support (not replace) the case-specific work of investigators and reviewing lawyers, as well as that of ISVAs and relevant support services, who are not involved with the investigation due to their independent role.</li> <li>● The SPOC will provide a point of contact to deal with matters raised and improve communication across the police, CPS and ISVAs or relevant services.</li> <li>● Details of the SPOC should be communicated across agencies and offer, by virtue of remit, a line of effective communication between agencies and provide a direct point for queries or investigational updates.</li> <li>● The SPOCs will also be the contact for escalation matters if required.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Component 2 – Establish a Multi-Agency Rape Strategic Group</b></p>	<p><b>The Multi-Agency Rape Strategic Group will meet regularly to provide strategic oversight and support for the delivery of this framework.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strategic multi-agency groups and meetings already exist across several areas; these should be utilised to deliver this component of the framework.</li> <li>● The structure, frequency and membership of the meeting should be decided upon locally reflecting local needs. We recommend that this reflects the requirements of area Safeguarding Boards and that the group meets (including virtually) at least twice a year.</li> <li>● We further recommend that this group is linked to and, where needed, reports relevant issues up to the Local Criminal Justice Board.</li> </ul> <p><i>Terms of Reference</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Terms of Reference will need to be agreed locally amongst partners but should reflect that this group:</li> </ul>

Component	Detail
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Has ultimate responsibility and accountability for delivery of this framework when describing the purpose of the group;</li> <li>○ Commits to working together and considers links to the work of wider bodies and groups such as Police and Crime Commissioners;</li> <li>○ Appreciates the roles, remit and value of each agency;</li> <li>○ Ensures a partnership of equals across statutory and voluntary sector organisations;</li> <li>○ Resolves issues escalated from the Multi-Agency Rape Scrutiny Group (see component 3);</li> <li>○ Effectively plans for the future including through succession planning;</li> <li>○ Agrees locally how frequently to meet with the recommendations that it (a) reflects the requirements of area Safeguarding Boards and (b) meets (including virtually) at least twice a year.</li> </ul> <p><i>Membership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Chair of this group should be decided locally – it might be jointly chaired by police and CPS or have a rotational chair.</li> <li>● Membership of the strategic meetings should comprise of senior representatives across agencies who are in a position to discuss issues around capacity/demand and make decisions at meetings that can commit their agency to a proposed course of action. For the police this should be the RASSO Strategic Lead (Superintendent or DCI). For the CPS, this should be a Chief Crown Prosecutors or Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutors.</li> <li>● Appropriate membership and representation from ISVA and relevant support services will need to be considered and decided upon locally in partnership with service providers.</li> <li>● Membership beyond the police, CPS and ISVAs and relevant support services (for example the courts’ services, Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Police and Crime Commissioners and other stakeholders) is encouraged but will need to be agreed locally.</li> <li>● Careful consideration needs to be given to the size of these meetings, particularly in larger forces / Areas, to ensure the right balance between appropriate representation while allowing for meaningful discussion.</li> <li>● The Chair of the Multi-Agency Rape Scrutiny Group (as per component 3 below) should attend this meeting to raise or escalate issues as appropriate or as part of a locally agreed escalation process.</li> <li>● A coordinator should be appointed to manage the meetings including managing and reporting on actions.</li> </ul>



Component	Detail
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up-to-date contact lists should also be maintained.</li> </ul>
<b>Component 3 – Establish a Multi-Agency Rape Scrutiny Group</b>	<p><b>The Multi-Agency Rape Scrutiny Group will meet regularly to bring together operational leads to support the delivery of this framework.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Multi-Agency Rape Scrutiny Group will support the implementation and delivery of this framework through open and honest discussion, feedback as well as scrutiny of RASSO cases.</li> <li>Scrutiny panels, scrutiny and involvement panels, operational multi-agency groups and meetings already exist across several areas; these should be utilised to deliver this component within the framework where possible, although it is a decision to be made and agreed locally.</li> <li>The structure, frequency and membership of the meeting should be decided upon locally reflecting local needs. It is, however, recommend that the groups meet (including virtually) approximately every quarter or at least every six months reflecting local agreement which will need to take into account capacity of all those involved.</li> </ul> <p><i>Terms of Reference</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Terms of Reference will need to be agreed locally amongst partners but should reflect that this group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has responsibility for the implementation and delivery of this framework and be responsive to problems as they occur;</li> <li>Aims to develop and improve response / service provision / practices in RASSO cases through an interagency approach and understanding;</li> <li>Will escalate matters to the Multi Agency Strategic Rape Group as appropriate or as part of a locally agreed escalation process;</li> <li>Appreciates the roles, remit and value of each agency;</li> <li>Ensures a partnership of equals across statutory and voluntary sector organisations;</li> <li>Creates a safe environment within which to discuss issues and the need for agencies to be open to receiving and giving criticism as well as sharing best practice;</li> <li>Expects all representatives to be involved in shaping meetings and contributing to discussions;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Component	Detail
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensures that where specific cases are being considered client confidentiality is addressed through practical steps such as anonymisation to allow learning to be discussed and shared.</li> </ul> <p><i>Membership</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Chair of this group should be decided locally – it might be jointly chaired by police and CPS or have a rotational chair.</li> <li>● Membership of this group will comprise of the nominated SPOCs; membership of agencies beyond police, CPS and support services (for example the courts’ services, Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Police and Crime Commissioners and other stakeholders) is encouraged and subject to local agreement.</li> <li>● Careful consideration needs to be given to the size of these meetings, particularly in larger forces / Areas, to ensure the right balance between appropriate representation while allowing for meaningful discussion.</li> <li>● A coordinator should be appointed to manage the meetings including managing and reporting on actions.</li> <li>● Up-to-date contact lists should also be maintained.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Component 4 – Learning and development, and foster good relationships</b></p>	<p><b>Effective multi-agency partnership should support learning and development across agencies leading to greater appreciation of the roles and responsibilities.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Building on and reflecting efforts amongst local partners this component recognises the importance of sharing or co-developing products across agencies.</li> <li>● Silo working ought to be avoided to maximise the potential of local learning and development products whilst maintaining the independence of each agency.</li> <li>● Opportunities to involve ISVA and relevant support services within local police and CPS learning and development activities should be explored whilst being sensitive to their capacity to carry out such requests. In turn, police and CPS should consider supporting ISVA and relevant services learning and development.</li> <li>● The framework includes this component, reflecting significant activity around learning and development which takes place locally.</li> </ul>

## **Standard 2 – Effective Processes**

<b>Component</b>	<b>Detail</b>
<p><b>Component 5 – Agree a process around referral to ISVA, or appropriate service, including a route to inform CPS of their involvement</b></p>	<p><b>To ensure that the complainant has been made aware of support services at the initial stage of reporting.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several local processes in relation to referral processes to an ISVA or support services already exist. If needed, their appropriateness and effectiveness should be considered on a multi-agency basis to make sure all partners are content.</li> <li>• Information should be provided about relevant ISVA or support services at the initial stage of reporting an offence and, where possible, there should be an element of choice to select an appropriate service. Many forces have integrated the need to refer within their systems / case management files to support investigators.</li> <li>• Notification of a referral from the police to the appropriate destination within the appropriate service provider should be made as soon as possible from the initial report. This should provide basic identification information at a minimum. We recognise good practice in relation to these forms which includes information about the unique reference number and any vulnerability or specific support needs.</li> <li>• No direction is given to an ‘opt in’ or ‘opt out’ system – this should be considered locally as needed.</li> <li>• The independent nature of ISVAs and appropriate services should be recognised throughout this process.</li> <li>• Where there is CPS involvement, the prosecutor should be made aware by the investigator of the involvement of the ISVA or appropriate support service including their contact details. Where this information is recorded – for example the MG3 and / or MG6 documents – should be agreed and used consistently across cases.</li> <li>• Where ISVA or appropriate service provider information is not relayed to the CPS, the prosecutor should ask for information about their involvement.</li> <li>• Lines of communication between the ISVA or appropriate service provider and the CPS lawyer should be agreed locally.</li> </ul>

Component	Detail
<p><b>Component 6 – Agree a process on communicating decisions to take no further action</b></p>	<p><b>To ensure that the complainant receives information to take no further action in a manner best suited to their individual needs, together with appropriate support in place at the time the decision is relayed.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several processes in relation to no further action already exist locally. If needed, their appropriateness and effectiveness should be considered on a multi-agency basis to make sure all partners are content.</li> <li>• It is the victim/complainant (or appropriate adult / advocate who can act in their best interest where the complainant is unable or needs assistance to make an informed choice) who is best placed to outline their preferences around communication at the start of an investigation; this information will need to be recorded by the investigator and consent sought for sharing appropriate information with the support service provider.</li> <li>• Based on this, the police, CPS and ISVA or appropriate support service will work to the agreed lines of communication reflecting the victim/complainants rights and entitlements. Where this information is recorded – for example the MG3 and / or MG6 documents – should be agreed and used consistently across cases. It should be noted that someone’s communication preferences may change during the course of an investigation / prosecution which ought to be accommodated as far as possible.</li> <li>• There should be no sense of ‘ownership’ over the victim/complainant – agencies should work together to support them.</li> <li>• Direct communication to the victim/ complainant of a decision to take no further action should wherever possible be provided with prior knowledge of key agencies and communicated as per the complainant’s wishes. In exceptional situations, a recorded rationale must be provided if required, as to why this process was not met.</li> <li>• Local development of the process will be required to ensure that agreed principles and local arrangements can be effectively managed.</li> <li>• The rationale for a decision to take no further action should be sensible, clear and accessible. Information around rights (including the right to review) and, where possible, support services should also be provided.</li> <li>• The local process should outline additional steps in cases where people have communication barriers e.g. disabilities, impairment, difficult understanding / reading English.</li> <li>• ISVAs and support services should independent of the criminal justice system and work within strict boundaries and should not seek or receive evidential information or discuss the specific details of the case.</li> <li>• Opportunities for ISVA and support services to raise issues around this process should be provided through liaison with lead investigators and prosecutors, or the relevant agency SPOC or through the scrutiny group.</li> </ul>

Component	Detail
<p><b>Component 7 – Agree and implement an Information Sharing Protocol (national template to be provided)</b></p>	<p><b>To provide a clear information-sharing policy so that each agency knows what can be shared and how this will be done.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several processes in relation to information-sharing already exist locally. If needed, their appropriateness and effectiveness should be considered on a multi-agency basis to make sure all partners are content.</li> <li>• An information-sharing protocol should be used to provide a clear information-sharing policy, so that each agency knows what can be shared between agencies – ensuring consent where needed – and how this will be done. A national template will be provided for areas to agree and implement locally.</li> <li>• An information-sharing protocol is important for the identification and management of cases and to support effective working between agencies.</li> <li>• Their existence partially surmounts the problems caused by departing staff.</li> <li>• The protocol should be based on the complainant’s <u>consent in each specific case</u> to share information with ISVA and support services for the purposes of supporting them through the criminal justice process. If provided, the protocol should include a requirement to share relevant information to provide support including seeking consent in each case.</li> <li>• ISVAs and support services should be independent of the criminal justice system and work within strict boundaries and should not seek or receive evidential information or discuss the specific details of the case.</li> <li>• Any consideration as to whether to obtain or inspect the records from support services must be made in compliance with the Attorney General’s Guidelines on Disclosure, CPIA Code of Practice, Joint Protocol on Third Party Material and Pre-Trial Therapy Guidelines as appropriate.</li> <li>• If there is reason to believe that there is relevant discloseable material and the records must be requested, an explanation will be provided as to what information is sought, why it is sought and how the material will be handled.</li> </ul>

Component	Detail
<p><b>Component 8 – Introduce succession planning arrangements</b></p>	<p><b>Succession planning arrangements should be introduced to prevent a breakdown in relationships or support provided.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful approaches locally are often inspired by highly skilled and motivated individuals. Problems can arise when these key personnel leave post on a permanent or temporary basis; this framework therefore recommends that succession planning arrangements are introduced especially for those who fulfil the SPOC role.</li> <li>• At a case-level, where possible and appropriate, consistency and continuity are important. There is, however, an acknowledgement and acceptance that people connected to a specific case may change. Each agency involved must take responsibility to inform others of any changes as appropriate or put in place measures to ensure lines of communication remain open as needed.</li> </ul>

### **Standard 3 – Supporting Victims**

Component	Detail
<p><b>Component 9 – Agree route(s) for lines of communication.</b></p>	<p><b>Effective communication is only possible if it considers individual needs and preferences.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To establish, at an early stage of the investigation, in consultation with the complainant and ISVA or relevant support service, an agreed route for lines of communication.</li> <li>• The emphasis here is about placing control in the complainant’s hands (or appropriate adult / advocate who can act in their best interest where the complainant is unable or needs assistance to make an informed choice) to ensure effective and inclusive communication by the chosen agency between partners.</li> <li>• Where this information is recorded – for example the MG3 and / or MG6 documents – should be agreed locally and used consistently across cases.</li> <li>• Consideration could be given to asking them whether they wish the ISVA or supporter to be involved in the communication of key decisions to them, including being present for the communication of decisions to take no further action (see component 6 for further information).</li> <li>• This information should be highlighted to the CPS prosecutor at the point of referral.</li> <li>• It is important that this information is recorded in an agreed place so that relevant colleagues, such as those in Victim Liaison Units, can easily identify and access it.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Component 10 – Ensure multi-agency consideration of equality issues.</b></p>	<p><b>Agencies need to work together to ensure that the needs of all complainants, including under-represented or vulnerable groups, are understood and addressed.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police, prosecutors and ISVAs (and appropriate service providers) should consider and address issues related to equality and diversity, covering the protected characteristics and the needs of under-represented groups within their local region and through the Multi-Agency Rape Scrutiny Group.</li> <li>• Where relevant, expertise from specific support service should be sought to inform discussion at appropriate Multi-Agency Rape Scrutiny Group meeting.</li> <li>• While the facility to collect data in relation to age, ethnicity and sex is available, recording can be patchy. Agencies should come together to share information they hold relevant to equality and diversity to improve the understanding of local needs.</li> </ul>

Component	Detail
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying and addressing additional barriers is important. As is the recognition of people’s individual experiences of abuse – which can be very different – and equality and diversity issues that intersect which can lead to multiple or complex prejudice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Component 11 – Agree a way of working together to assess support needs as well as explaining, identifying and applying for special measures and other requests.</b></p>	<p><b>Agencies need to work together to ensure support for the victim/complainant through the court system, including ensuring that they are fully informed about the support available to enable them to give their best evidence.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The police and ISVA, or appropriate service provider, work together with other relevant agencies such as Witness Care Units and the witness services to carry out and respond to a bespoke assessment of the complainants’ needs. This should include a full and accurate explanation of all special measures available and other requests such as a pre-trial court familiarisation visits (where an ISVA or appropriate service provider may attend if appropriate) and a pre-trial witness interview.</li> <li>This should also consider ongoing support needs that people may have reflecting time taken for cases to go to trial.</li> <li>For investigation officers this will require, in addition to the acknowledgement within the MG 11 that Special Measures are required, a full and comprehensive completion of the MG2 that explains the type of Special Measures requested, why these measures have been requested and fully explain the benefit of these Special Measures to support the case.</li> <li>Information in relation to ISVA, or relevant service provider, involvement along with needs’ assessment and appropriate support requirements should be relayed to the prosecutor prior to charge. The prosecutor should consider this information at the earliest stage and highlight any further issues which need to be considered.</li> <li>The information should then form the basis of special measures’ meetings. Subject to views from the complainant, the ISVA or appropriate service provider can attend special measures meetings.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Component 12 – Support at court.</b></p>	<p><b>Building on component 11, to ensure that support is available at court.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This should include an explanation of the role and involvement of the ISVA to the defence advocate and court where necessary from the Prosecuting Advocate.</li> </ul>



Component	Detail
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="501 242 1921 347">• The Prosecuting Advocate’s brief should include details of the ISVA or appropriate service provider. Those supporting victims should, in turn, could also be informed of or seek information about the name of the Prosecuting Advocate in advance of the trial.</li></ul>