



Crown
Prosecution
Service



Rape and serious sexual offences strategy

July 2020

2025





2025

This is our strategy on rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO¹) for the next five years. The strategy is underpinned by a commitment to ensuring the right person is prosecuted for the right offence. It represents a clear articulation of the role that the CPS can play in driving a step change for the criminal justice system as a whole – a turning point in how we collectively approach our work.

We hope that everyone involved in the criminal justice response to RASSO will join us in this ambitious drive for improvement. It reflects careful consideration and many conversations with our dedicated front-line prosecutors, partners across the criminal justice system and the victims' groups who inform and scrutinise our work. We are immensely grateful for their input.

The impact of RASSO on victims, their families and their communities cannot be underestimated. While there has been long term progress in how the criminal justice system responds to these offences, more needs to be done to encourage victims to report abuse with confidence and to support them through the criminal justice process in order to bring more offenders to justice.

Decision making in these cases is not easy. It requires a careful and balanced assessment of all relevant evidence, including that related to any suspect, to ensure there is a fair trial and we deliver justice for all.

The CPS shares the deep public concern that while the number of RASSO reports to the police have increased in recent years, the number of cases going to court has fallen. Working with partners across the criminal justice system and with victims' groups to understand why this is happening, and finding the best way forward, is urgent and necessary.

Our strategy reflects the CPS's commitment to this endeavour and is developed within the context of our overall five year strategy: [CPS 2025](#). It provides a five-year vision, and every year significant steps towards achieving these aims will be included in our business plan. We will assess the impact from the delivery of these activities through a range of success measures which focus on outcomes and the quality of the service provided by the CPS.

Progress is only possible through a long-term and concerted effort and investment from all parts of the criminal justice system. We therefore welcome the work and scrutiny of the cross-Government review into this issue, currently underway. We are committed to supporting its development and responding to its recommendations – including those from the upcoming joint inspection of the police and CPS response.

The CPS relies on the essential work of the police, the external Bar, the courts, specialist services and others. Building strong partnerships – at local and national levels – and demonstrating effective leadership across the whole system is a priority which underpins our entire strategy. Tackling such complex and serious crimes requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach and the CPS role is absolutely vital, but only forms one part of a meaningful solution.

Max Hill,
Director of Public
Prosecutions



Rebecca Lawrence,
Chief Executive



¹ Rape and attempted rape

RASSO: Context and challenges

Rape and serious sexual offences are devastating crimes which can have a lasting impact. These crimes are committed primarily by men against women and girls but can also be perpetrated against men and boys¹. They occur in all communities and involve offenders and victims with different protected characteristics, from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.

RASSO victims are all too often targeted by offenders because of one or more protected characteristics or other form of vulnerability. These factors may provide ease of access or opportunity for the offender, who may also hope that a vulnerable victim will be less likely to report the crime, and less likely to be believed if they do. We are committed to providing further assistance to our prosecutors in developing effective case strategies which expose this behaviour.

RASSO remains one of the most complex areas of our work and the crime of rape is commonly misunderstood. There are many factors which can make this a uniquely challenging offence to prosecute, and it is rightly managed by highly trained, specialist prosecutors.

In many cases there will be no visible sign of injury and rape is most commonly perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Significant psychological evidence shows that the neurological response to the trauma of rape and sexual assault can impair a complainant's ability to give a clear and coherent account of the event. Some victims may return to the suspect after the event and/or contact them with friendly messages to reduce the risk of being targeted again by the perpetrator, or because they want to block out the abuse in order to return to a sense of normality. To those who are not experts in this field, these responses to rape can appear counter-intuitive and impact unfairly upon perceptions of the credibility of a complainant and an allegation.

Shame, guilt, fear of the process, fear of not being believed, shock, cultural context, embarrassment, language barriers and fear of reprisal from the community are just some of the hurdles that victims might need to overcome to report an incident to the police and support a prosecution.

The CPS often has to overcome significant legal and evidential requirements in order to effectively, efficiently and fairly proceed with a RASSO prosecution. Proving that sexual activity took place without consent is the key issue in many cases. Someone consents only if s/he agrees by choice to that penetration and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice. In investigating the allegation, it must be established what steps, if any, the suspect took to obtain the complainant's consent and the prosecution must prove that the suspect did not have a reasonable belief that the complainant was consenting.

These cases require a careful and balanced assessment of all relevant evidence, including that related to the accused or the suspect, in order to ensure that the right cases are prosecuted and there is a fair trial. This might involve scrutiny of accounts given of the event, forensic examination and careful consideration of digital material and CCTV coverage. In recent years, social media has presented both evidential opportunities and challenges. Investigators and prosecutors must contend with significant volumes of material that might be relevant to the prosecution and necessary for disclosure.

² For further information about male victims of offences related to rape and domestic abuse please see the following public statement on [cps.gov.uk](https://www.cps.gov.uk)

The CPS response

This strategy sets out how we will fulfill our ambition to narrow the disparity between the number of offences reported to the police and cases going to court, as well as, encouraging more people to come forward and report with confidence. We are committed to working with our criminal justice partners to secure improvements at every point in the system.

We will ensure that everyone is treated with respect and that our actions are in accordance with our role in delivering justice for all. Casework decisions taken fairly, impartially and with integrity help to secure justice for victims, witnesses, defendants and the public. When making decisions, prosecutors must be fair, independent and objective and our decisions must be independent of any prejudice or improper and undue influence from any source. Prosecutors must always act in the interests of justice and not solely for the purpose of obtaining a conviction.

In those RASSO cases that are referred to the CPS for a charging decision, we are committed to providing a fair, high-quality and sensitive service, responsive to the individual needs of complainants, while upholding the rights of suspects. We are determined to play our role in helping complainants to fully participate in the criminal justice process.

Every charging decision is based on the same two-stage test in the Code for Crown Prosecutors³:

- Does the evidence provide a realistic prospect of conviction? That means, having heard the evidence, is a court more likely than not to find the defendant guilty? And;
- Is it in the public interest to prosecute? That means asking questions including how serious the offence is, the harm caused to the victim, the impact on communities and whether prosecution is a proportionate response.

In order to reach Code compliant decisions and assess the evidence, our prosecutors must have a clear understanding of the complexities surrounding the offence of rape. This includes understanding the changing nature of sexual behaviour in the digital age, and the range of ways in which victims may respond to offending and perpetrators seek to offend.

³ The Code for Crown Prosecutors is a public document that sets out the general principles Crown Prosecutors should follow when they make decisions on cases. For further information, visit: <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/code-crown-prosecutors>

Strategic approach

RASSO 2025 will guide what we do over the next five years, helping to focus our work where it really matters.

The five themes of this strategy reflect the strategic aims of CPS 2025. They represent the organisational capabilities that support us in fulfilling our core role – making sure that the right person is prosecuted for the right offence, and to bring offenders to justice wherever possible. There is no hierarchy between the strategic aims – each is equally important if we are to achieve our vision – and progress will be assessed against a range of success measures.

Our people are at the heart of everything we do.

Our **digital capability** enables our success.

Through our **strategic partnerships**, we shape a legal, policy and operating framework that facilitates our core role: independent and fair prosecutions.

High standards of **casework quality** are essential to delivering justice. We work with partners across the criminal justice system to make the public safer.

Everyone at the CPS plays their part in delivering every strategic aim. Everything we do contributes to our ultimate goal of building **public confidence** through delivering services that are fair and understood by all communities.



Aim and outcomes

AIM

The disparity between RASSO reports and criminal justice outcomes is narrowed, and public confidence in the criminal justice system response to these cases is increased.

OUTCOMES



- National and local leaders are visible and passionate in their delivery of the RASSO programme.
- Guidance, training and learning support improved casework standards.
- Prosecutors and advocates understand the complexities connected with rape and victim behaviours - such as the impact of trauma on memory and the changing nature of sexual behaviour encounters.
- Specialist RASSO resources are consistently deployed across the CPS.
- Support for the success and wellbeing of RASSO teams enables them to thrive.



- The need to balance the requirements of the investigation and the right to privacy in a digital age is understood and respected by investigators, prosecutors, victims as well as the wider public.
- Prosecutors understand the implications of new technology for RASSO prosecutions.
- The benefits of new technology are harnessed to support effective RASSO prosecutions.



- There is a shared understanding across the sector on the causes of the disparity between reports and criminal justice outcomes.
- The CPS and police work collaboratively at a national and local level to deliver a joint RASSO action plan.
- CPS insight informs Government RASSO strategies, action plans, policy and legislation.
- Our RASSO strategy, policy and guidance is informed by stakeholder expertise and insights.



- The Code Test is clearly understood and continues to be correctly applied in all RASSO cases.
- Communication and working relationship with police is improved and supported by effective processes.
- Our action plans are proportionate and clearly explained to and executed by the police.
- Sufficient specialist advocates are available and effectively instructed for RASSO cases.



- Public understanding of the role of the CPS in RASSO cases is improved.
- Public trust in our approach to RASSO cases is improved.
- Communication with RASSO victims and witnesses is timely and sensitive to the needs of vulnerable individuals.
- The CPS works effectively with partners to inform and support victims.



Our people are our greatest asset. Every single one of our employees contributes to delivering justice through independent and fair prosecutions.

We will support our people – from prosecutors to paralegal officers, administrative staff and specialist advocates – in the delivery of this programme through strong, visible leadership at all levels. We will continue to ensure our specialist RASSO units are adequately resourced; our people receive guidance, training and learning support; and that the wellbeing of RASSO teams is prioritised.

As the world – and the nature of sexual offending – changes around us, our people need to be equipped with the skills, tools and support they need to succeed.

National and local leaders are visible and passionate in their delivery of the RASSO programme.

Our national and local leaders will lead delivery of RASSO 2025, prioritising delivery against its aims at every level of our organisation.

They will visibly and passionately promote the strategy with staff, partners and stakeholders - locally and nationally - driving forward our shared mission to deliver the improvements we all want to see.

Guidance, training and learning support improves casework standards.

We will prioritise learning so that all our RASSO colleagues continue to be equipped with the skills, tools and support they need to succeed. Our people will receive high-quality guidance and mandatory training which continues to evolve in order to reflect changes in law and practice. Importantly, training and guidance will also be updated to reflect our growing understanding of the vulnerabilities of victims and the complexities of offences.

There is invaluable expertise and experience outside the CPS and we will continue to ensure that our training programmes benefit from external insight. We will encourage our people to make professional links with Independent Sexual Violence Advisors and similar services, as well as victims' organisations, to share expertise.

We will create a culture where colleagues learn from and support each other, and where self-reflection is encouraged. We will support staff to learn from previous casework – including what went well and what could have been improved.

Prosecutors and advocates understand the complexities connected with rape and victim behaviours – such as the impact of trauma on memory and the changing nature of sexual behaviour encounters.

When making fair and independent decisions in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors,

our prosecutors need to carefully consider all relevant evidence from an informed position. This requires a comprehensive understanding of advancements in technology, the dynamics of the offence including the tactics deployed by offenders as well as the complexities of rape and victim behaviours. We are committed to raising awareness of these issues and of myths and stereotypes.

Advancements in technology have led to dramatic and rapid changes including online dating and use of social media, and the sharing of sexual imagery and messages via these platforms. There is also an increased understanding of the psychological and physiological reactions occurring at the time of a traumatic event which can impair an individual's ability to recall an event and provide a coherent and consistent account of their experience. We are committed to raising awareness of these issues to inform our work along with addressing any myths and stereotypes through our case and advocacy strategies.

The CPS is reviewing how we deliver advocacy and how we develop and support our advocates. We will work with the Bar to ensure up-to-date training on RASSO – including trauma-informed advocacy; the changing nature of sexual behaviour and the effective use of section 41 of the Youth and Criminal Justice Evidence Act. We will ensure that completion of this training is a requirement to secure a place on the CPS's RASSO advocacy list. We will continue to ensure that our instructions to advocates focus on issues such as myths and stereotypes and consider ways to effectively conduct regular assessment and oversight of their work through trial observations and standardised counsel report forms.

Specialist RASSO resources are consistently deployed across the CPS.

We will ensure that our RASSO teams have the capability and capacity to make effective decisions in complex cases.

We will track the availability of specialist RASSO resources against demand. We will plan ahead to ensure we meet demand, recognising the need to train and upskill prosecutors before they are allocated to RASSO units. The CPS secured increased funding for additional prosecutors, and pressures on RASSO units will be carefully considered when they are allocated. Although we emphasise the deployment to our RASSO teams is only for those who are experienced and specifically trained for the work.

Support for the success and wellbeing of RASSO teams enables them to thrive.

Our RASSO teams work in a complex and challenging environment, and are passionate about their work. They are dedicated to making fair and independent decisions which bring offenders to justice, and they understand the significance of positive outcomes for victims and the wider community.

RASSO teams must be equipped with the skills and tools they need to do the job, and be adequately resourced. Their success, however, will also hinge on the emotional and psychological support we provide to them to deal with the demanding and traumatic nature of this work.

We will put in place specific support within RASSO work to carefully and sensitively address burn-out, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.



Digital capability



Advancements in technology continue to transform how we live and work. It also has a bearing on the nature of criminality, the RASSO cases we prosecute, the volume of evidence we receive and the decisions that victims have to make before seeking redress from the criminal justice system. Technology can also provide evidential opportunities to build stronger cases in order to support fair and effective prosecutions.

We will work with our police colleagues to ensure a balanced approach between the requirements of a fair and comprehensive investigation and the right to privacy within RASSO prosecutions, assisted by the helpful guidance provided by the Information Commissioner and the courts⁴. This requires a clear understanding of the implications of new technology as well as making the most of the evidential opportunities it presents.

The need to balance the requirements of the investigation and the right to privacy in a digital age is understood and respected by investigators, prosecutors, victims as well as the wider public.

Disclosure is a fundamental part of fair criminal investigations and trials. Disclosure obligations apply to all offence types, but RASSO cases can present particular challenges given the volumes of potentially relevant digital material generated. CPS guidance is clear that searches of digital devices should not be pursued as a matter of course in every case. It is crucial that only reasonable lines of enquiry are pursued to avoid unnecessary intrusion into a complainant's personal life. Where a review of electronic communications is necessary, a staged approach should be considered. Enquiries should be focused, using search terms and date parameters.

We will work with the police to ensure complainants are kept informed about decisions that are made in relation to examination of the devices and what is being shared and why, as well as the consequences of refusing access to data.

We will continue to develop guidance to help investigators and prosecutors balance the needs of an investigation with the right to privacy. We will work together with the police to help the public understand the impact of digital and third-party evidence on our casework, including how we decide what data to obtain, how and why we need it as part of a criminal investigation and prosecution, and how it might be used.

Prosecutors understand the implications of new technology for RASSO prosecutions.

As new technology continues to evolve, so must we. We will help our people to develop their digital knowledge and skills so that they remain up-to-date with the latest developments and ensure consistency with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation guidance, training and oversight regimes.

Taking an active and innovative approach to digital capability will also help us to work effectively with our partners and improve the way in which justice is done. We will work closely with the police to explore digital solutions which enable us to consider evidence in a timely way.

Meaningful analysis of the shifting demands and challenges we face is vital. We will work with agencies across the criminal justice system to collect and share data to understand the wider picture. These insights will support evidence-based work to drive change across the criminal justice system and beyond.

The benefits of new technology are harnessed to support effective RASSO prosecutions.

While the proliferation of evidence created by new technology presents additional considerations for RASSO prosecutions, it can also present evidential opportunities to build stronger cases. It is vital that we proactively identify and utilise these opportunities at the earliest stage, as part of our overall case strategies.

⁴The Information Commissioner's report 'Mobile phone data extraction by police forces in England and Wales' (June 2020) is available at ico.org.uk. See also the Court of Appeal Judgment on Mobile Phone Extraction: R v Bater-James and Mohammed [2020] EWCA Crim 790.



Strategic partnerships

An effective criminal justice response to RASSO will involve authorities beyond the police and prosecutors. The CPS works at the heart of the criminal justice system in England and Wales. We are well placed to build effective strategic partnerships across criminal justice agencies, the Government and specialist third sector organisations to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of justice.

We will contribute positively to inform and influence cross-Government work on system wide improvements, including law and policy reform to address systemic issues.

There is a shared understanding across the sector on the causes of the disparity between reports and criminal justice outcomes.

Partners across the sector must arrive at a shared understanding of the causes of criminal justice outcomes in RASSO, based on a range of quantitative and qualitative data. Research and evidence enables us to jointly analyse how RASSO is dealt with and where improvements can be made to support victims and ultimately close the gap between reports and criminal justice outcomes.

Relevant data is available from different sources, recorded in different ways and over different timescales. This can make tracking the progress of specific cases across their lifecycle difficult, creating barriers to meaningful analysis. Through close cooperation between partners, data can be carefully brought together and used to provide important insights on patterns and regional variations. We will use this information to improve national and local responses across the criminal justice system.

We will continue to jointly own major change initiatives on digital transformation which contribute to cross-cutting criminal justice priorities on RASSO.

The CPS and police work collaboratively at a national and local level to deliver a joint RASSO action plan.

The investigation and prosecution of RASSO allegations presents one of the most important challenges facing the whole of the criminal justice system.

We have committed to a wide-ranging, joint programme of work with the police through a joint police-CPS RASSO Action Plan. That plan, for publication later in 2020/21, aims to improve case progression, help us to build stronger cases from the outset, and accelerate the time taken to bring cases to court. We will work closely with specialist victims' groups, who will be able to provide expert advice and input to inform this work.

Our insight informs Government RASSO strategies, action plans, policy and legislation.

We will continue to work alongside our partners to fulfil our role in the wider cross-Government

review of RASSO, which is designed to identify and implement system-wide improvements. We will continue to invest in our relationships with Government departments, criminal justice agencies and specialist third-sector organisations. We will use these relationships to develop an evidence base for policy and legislative reform, drawing on a rounded assessment of operational and community need and impact.

Our RASSO strategy, policy and guidance are informed by stakeholder expertise and insight.

An open, collaborative and meaningful partnership with specialist third-sector organisations is critical in delivering high-quality RASSO strategies, policies and guidance. These, in turn, have a positive impact on the quality of our casework. Our third sector partners also form a crucial feedback mechanism about what's working – or not – both locally and nationally.

Insights from these specialists will continue to inform our work. We will continue to build these relationships at both a national level – through the CPS Violence Against Women and Girls External Consultation Group, for example – and locally – through Local Scrutiny and Improvement Panels and other local groups.

We will continue to work with partners across the CJS to deliver on our disclosure obligations and ensure that all our decision making is balanced, independent and fair to all parties.

Joint Police-CPS Rape Action Plan in Focus

Key to the success of RASSO 2025 is delivering a wide-ranging, joint programme of work with the police to address issues including case progression, building strong cases from the outset, and accelerating the time taken to bring them to court.

We will work with the police to continue to drive progress together on digital capability and disclosure, embedding guidance to help investigators and prosecutors balance the needs of an investigation with the right to privacy.

The Sixth Edition of the Directors Guidance on Charging is currently in active development. It will contain a separate annex dealing specifically with the early advice prosecutors provide to the police.

Victims' groups and the latest research in the field of sexual violence will provide valuable insight as we progress with the joint action plan. We will also monitor progress through a joint approach to analysing data and overseeing performance.

The Director of Public Prosecutions and the NPCC Criminal Justice lead are jointly accountable for this work. They are supported at a strategic level by joint Senior Responsible Officers from the CPS and police, and at an operational level by a joint working group and a number of project groups to take forward specific areas of work.



CaseWORK quality



Every charging decision is based on the same two-stage test in the Code for Crown Prosecutors⁵.

- Does the evidence provide a realistic prospect of conviction? That means, having heard the evidence, is a court more likely than not to find the defendant guilty? And;
- Is it in the public interest to prosecute? That means asking questions including how serious the offence is, the harm caused to the victim, the impact on communities and whether prosecution is a proportionate response.

Our RASSO teams often have to make difficult and finely balanced decisions. In accordance with the two-stage test required under the Code, all decisions should be fair, objective and independent, based on the facts and merits of each individual case. When assessing whether there is a realistic prospect of conviction, prosecutors must assume that the jury hearing the case will be objective, impartial and reasonable, properly directed and acting in accordance with the law.

We will support and empower our RASSO prosecutors to deal effectively with complex cases and we will provide them with support they need to make high quality decisions in accordance with the Code.

We do not operate in a vacuum, and we are dependent on the work of other criminal justice partners. We will work particularly closely with our police partners to develop and deliver shared local and national standards, holding each other to account for achieving them.

Our advocates play an integral part in delivering justice at court; not only through their advocacy but through their communication with the defence, their decision making, support to complainants and witnesses and assistance to judiciary. Recognising their expertise, skill and dedication, this strategy outlines our commitment to delivering high quality, cost-effective advocacy in RASSO cases.

The Code Test is clearly understood and continues to be correctly applied in all RASSO cases.

Prosecuting the right person for the right offence is at the very heart of what we do. We do not have any conviction rate targets in the CPS – every decision to charge must be based solely on an assessment of each individual case in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors.

We will continue to carefully scrutinise all of our decisions including through the Victims' Right to Review Scheme; casework quality assurance; national assurance processes which allow for qualitative and quantitative assessment of performance across all Areas on rape cases irrespective of the gender of the victim or defendant; and Local Scrutiny and Involvement Panels made up of volunteers to reflect local community concerns and case management panels. We will be honest and transparent when we make mistakes, so that we can continue to learn and improve.

HMCPSP carried out an inspection to support the cross Government review - we welcomed their findings that our decision making was good, but we recognise that there is work to do particularly

in improving communication with police colleagues and the proportionality of our action plans.

Communication and working relationship with police is improved and supported by effective processes.

Working with the police as part of a prosecution team is crucial. Effective collaboration between investigators and prosecutors from an early stage will ensure the right evidence is collected, to build the strongest case possible from the outset. Each organisation is reliant on the other to carry out its functions effectively.

When cases are sent to us for consideration by police colleagues, we will provide clear, timely advice on the strengths of a case and what evidence is required to build the case for a successful prosecution. This will enable investigators to seek constructive engagement of the defence at an early stage and to keep complainants updated on the progress of the case.

Our action plans are proportionate and clearly explained to and executed by the police.

A good quality file of evidence is reflective of a good police investigation. As a prosecution team, the CPS and the police want to ensure these cases are investigated swiftly and effectively. We will provide further guidance on the provision of early advice to the police, focusing on the CPS adding legal value to the early stages of an investigation to assist the police to focus on the reasonable lines of enquiries from the outset. We will also improve implementation of action plans through proportionate requests, effective communication, clear timelines and robust escalation points in order to reduce the number of cases that are administratively finalised and expedite bringing strong cases to court.

Sufficient specialist advocates are available and effectively instructed for RASSO cases.

The advocate's role is central to our work. Instructing the right advocate for the right case underpins how we sustainably provide flexible, resilient and high quality advocacy, which delivers the best service for complainants and witnesses.

We will ensure the availability and effective instruction of specialist RASSO advocates. All in-house and external advocates will deliver high quality advocacy in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors. This will support the delivery of justice through flexible, resilient and sustainable advocacy services.

Our advocacy selection process provides that only those advocates who have relevant, up-to-date skills and experience are appointed to the RASSO panel. These advocates must be able to deliver high quality prosecution advocacy services and have a commitment to meet our aims and objectives on RASSO cases.

⁵ For further information on The Code for Crown Prosecutors visit: <https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/code-crown-prosecutors>



Public confidence



If we are to build public confidence, then we must treat everyone fairly and – importantly – in a way that helps people to understand the decisions we take.

We are committed to working with and better supporting complainants. We will continue to work with specialist victims' groups and other partners to ensure victims and witnesses can easily access information about our role. We will ensure that complainants and witnesses receive a high quality service throughout every case, recognising that empathetic communication is important.

Ensuring suspects and defendants are treated fairly is central to our role in upholding the rule of law. We must ensure that the right person is prosecuted for the right offence after making carefully considered decisions in a timely way and complying with our disclosure obligations.

Public understanding of the role of the CPS in RASSO cases is improved.

The more the public understands about our role and trusts the decisions we make, the more likely they are to: report abuse and support prosecutions as victims or witnesses; engage with the process and trust the outcomes as fair and just. This enables us to deliver justice and prosecute offenders in order to make the public safer.

We are committed to fairness and justice to all involved in RASSO cases. We will publish clear and accessible public guidance which explains the disparity between volumes of reported incidents and criminal justice outcomes as well as outlining the CPS's work on RASSO. We will also consistently communicate our casework outcomes through a range of platforms to encourage greater public understanding around how our work helps to keep them safe.

Public trust in our approach to RASSO cases is improved.

For the public to trust the service we provide, they need to be confident that our decisions are fair and effective. We must be able to demonstrate that we understand and empathise with RASSO complainants as well as ensuring suspects and defendants are always treated fairly by the CPS.

We will keep working to understand what drives trust in our organisation. We will welcome and respond to scrutiny of our work from other Government departments and specialist victims' groups. We will publish guidance for RASSO victims so that they know what they can expect from us and what, in turn, will be expected from them and why. We will work closely with specialist third-sector organisations to help develop and share this work.

Communication with RASSO victims and witnesses is timely and sensitive to the needs of vulnerable individuals.

Not every complainant or witness will agree with the decisions we make or the eventual outcome of a case. This should not mean that they feel they have been treated unfairly. All of us – regardless of our role – need to listen carefully to complainants and witnesses, and provide clear, effective and

empathetic explanations of our decision making. Where a complainant feels unhappy with a decision, they can ask for a meeting with the prosecutor to explain the decision-making further, ask for a review of the decision in appropriate cases or turn to our new streamlined online complaints app to escalate the issue.

We will improve the quality of our communications to ensure that they are timely, take into account our diverse communities and be sensitive to the needs of those who are particularly vulnerable.

We will continue to apply for the special measures that vulnerable or intimidated victims or witnesses need to give their best evidence throughout the case. We will talk to the complainant or witness prior to their giving evidence to explain clearly what they can expect in court.

Our RASSO teams have all had specialist training on effective and empathetic communication with victims. Every Area has a dedicated Victim Liaison Unit, with a named point of contact for complainants and witnesses to ensure clear lines of communication and accountability.

The CPS works effectively with partners to inform and support victims.

Effective communication with, and support for, victims will only be possible through a cross-agency approach. We have engaged with partners in revising the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (The Victims' Code) and commit to complying swiftly with its obligations to improve victims' experiences.

We will work closely with the police and specialist third-sector organisations to ensure victims receive the right and consistent information as well as feeling supported and listened to.

Delivery



Leadership across the CPS is collectively accountable for the delivery of RASSO 2025. They are supported in this effort by the CPS's Director of Strategy and Policy and Director of Legal Services who are the Senior Responsible Officers for this strategy. The work will be delivered through a range of project groups to take forward specific areas of work.

Each year our published business plans will reflect progress on this work, against each of our five CPS 2025 strategic aims and corresponding success measures. We will also provide regular updates to our national and local victims' groups on progress against delivery.

We will regularly assess the impact following the delivery of these activities through a range of success measures which focus on outcomes and the quality of the service provided by the CPS. This will allow for assessment on many aspects of our work including:

- Appropriate legal decision making
- Timeliness of charging decisions
- Meeting disclosure obligations
- Quality of letters sent to victims
- Victims and witnesses who agree with: "I feel listened to by the CPS in court"
- Community panel who agree with "The CPS responds to our feedback"
- Public who agree with "I am confident that the CPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime"
- Cases dropped at a third or subsequent hearing
- Timeliness of response to, and compliance with, judge directions
- Guilty pleas at first hearing

The table on the following page provides an overview of actions for 2020/21. It will be updated in this and future years to reflect any additional commitments emerging from the completion of the cross-Government review into the criminal justice response to RASSO cases; the joint CPS and police rape action plan; and the joint inspectorate review into the police and CPS handling of RASSO cases.

Table 1: Overview of Actions for 2020/21

<h2>Our People</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a leadership strategy on RASSO focusing on the work of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Chief Executive, Chief Crown Prosecutors, Heads of RASSO Units and other senior colleagues. • Jointly with the police, and following the cross-Government review, host a national conference and regional workshops to deliver specialist training to RASSO investigators and prosecutors, including on taking an offender centric approach and a trauma informed approach. (Joint police-CPS action plan on rape) • Review the recruitment, development and support strategy for RASSO units. • Ensure that the CPS’s wider advocacy strategy reflects the RASSO perspective, including issues around capacity, instruction and oversight in RASSO cases. • Revise, consult on and publish updated legal guidance on RASSO to support the work of our prosecutors. • Provide further training for RASSO prosecutors, advocates and managers on proportionality and disclosure in RASSO cases, as well as additional training on trauma. • Finalise guidance on pre-trial therapy following consultation. • Provide tools to increase the understanding and use of forensic evidence in RASSO cases. (Joint police-CPS action plan on rape) 	<h2>Strategic Partnerships</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement recommendations from the cross-Government review. • Implement the joint police-CPS Rape Action Plan. (Joint police-CPS action plan on rape) • Launch an updated joint rape protocol with the police. (Joint police-CPS action plan on rape) • Create a cross-agency RASSO working group to consider how best to collect, share and analyse data from different parts of the criminal justice system.
<h2>Digital Capability</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance, jointly with the police, on the gathering of data from different digital devices and social media platforms. (Joint police-CPS action plan on rape) • Respond to the Information Commissioner’s Office report on mobile phone data extraction and ensure that our practices are compliant with the Data Protection Act. • Evaluation of early case planning conferences to ensure police and prosecutors agree a clear strategy for the case at an early stage. • Support to the police to pilot a new Information Management Document to record the approach that they have taken to reasonable lines of enquiry from the outset. 	<h2>Casework Quality</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the recommendations in the HMCPSI Rape Report. • Implement a new process for providing early investigative advice in RASSO cases. This will include consideration of effective progression of RASSO investigations and an effective system between the police and the CPS – including for cases returned to the police pre-charge. (Joint police-CPS action plan on rape) • Refresh the list of advocate panel members for 2020-2024.
		<h2>Public Confidence</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to consult with victims’ group including through the Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) External Consultation Group, the Forum for Male Victims of VAWG Crimes and, locally, through Local Scrutiny and Involvement Panels. • Publish a RASSO public policy statement. • Publish digital walk through of the process for RASSO victims, including an explanation of the CPS’s role. • Improve communications with victims in RASSO investigations and prosecutions, including reviewing Victim Communication and Liaison training and on issues such as section 41 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act. Explore additional support and training to ensure empathetic communication. (Joint police-CPS action plan on rape) • Pilot new model for communication with victims. (Joint police-CPS action plan on rape) • Ensure effective use of a range of special measures. • Improve communication and liaison with Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs). (Joint police-CPS action plan on rape)

The following table provides detail of actions already delivered in 2020/21:

Table 2: Actions Delivered in 2020/21

<h3>Our People</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior leaders continued to engage with specialist stakeholder partners to build knowledge. • We provided a range of RASSO training for prosecutors, advocates and managers, including a module on the impact of trauma and a revised induction course for new starters. • We published draft guidance on pre-trial therapy guidelines for consultation. • We developed educational materials for our RASSO teams on the changing nature of sexual behaviour. • We published a toolkit for prosecutors considering cases of same-sex sexual violence and sexual violence involving a trans complainant or defendant. • We continued to provide Welfare Support workshops and specific Line Manager Welfare Support workshops, mandatory for all staff and line managers. • We published a review of the current rotation policy on RASSO units, reflecting views of RASSO prosecutors. <p>This national work builds on a range of local work. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPS Direct has developed additional support for staff in the form of resilience training for duty prosecutors to deal with the challenges of working in isolation and out of hours. • CPS Mersey-Cheshire has supported training for their local police colleagues on the role of the CPS, effective investigations and disclosure obligations. 	<h3>Strategic Partnerships</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We continue to be positively involved in the cross-Government review on the criminal justice response to adult rape and sexual violence. • We are developing a joint national action plan on RASSO with the police ready for launch this financial year. • For the first time, we provided CPS data on rape flagged prosecutions every quarter. • We continued to monitor and oversee rape performance on a quantitative and qualitative basis. <p>This national work builds on a range of local work. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of CPS Areas conduct Local Scrutiny and Involvement Panels, which consider rape cases in order to identify issues, learn lessons for future improvement and spread best practice. • CPS South East set up and expanded membership of a local RASSO Improvement Plan bringing together all three police force areas in the region as well as representative from Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Services. The purpose of the group is to bring together established processes and report mechanisms to oversee performance and the delivery of best practice. • CPS London South has conducted informal interviews between a RASSO lawyer and an officer to discuss specific topics such as early investigative advice and reasonable lines of enquiry. These are filmed and shown to police colleagues as part of the Advanced Safeguarding Training Course.
<h3>Digital Capability</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of our National Disclosure Improvement Plan, we provided mandatory training for all RASSO teams dedicated to reasonable lines of enquiry, so that only requests which are necessary and proportionate are made in every case. • We required RASSO prosecutors to complete Disclosure Management Documents and have delivered mandatory training on these to focus RASSO prosecutors' minds on digital strategy in cases. 	<h3>Casework Quality</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We assessed our performance on RASSO through our internal Violence Against Women and Girls Assurance Process. <p>This national work builds on a range of local work. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of CPS Areas have established regular clinics and surgeries to discuss case strategies with police colleagues. As well as building stronger cases, these have also improved working communication and working relationships. • CPS London South have been utilising video recorded interviews where possible to support victim impact statements. Feedback from the judiciary has been positive and that a visual account of the often harrowing ordeal a victim has endured has been extremely useful to the Court and the sentencing process.

Public Confidence

- We launched new training on Victim Communication and Liaison to improve the quality of the service provided to RASSO victims.

This national work builds on a range of local work. For example:

- CPS East Midlands is a member of Nottingham's Sexual Violence Action Network (SVAN) which brings together statutory and voluntary sector organisations to ensure an effective partnership approach to sexual violence. The SVAN has become so successful that it is now a model being used by other councils for other cities to combat sexual violence; this is due, in part, to the strength of the partnership and the shared values of its member organisations.
- A number of CPS Areas meet regularly with local Independent Sexual Violence Advisors to identify and address concerns.

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