

Annual Progress Report for the Police, Fire and Crime Panel on the Strategy to Address Violence Against Women and Girls; and Victims' Centre

York & North Yorkshire
Office for Policing, Fire,
Crime and Commissioning

Part of the



October 2024

This report provides an update to Members on progress made against the six Strategic Objectives of the joint Strategy to Address Violence Against Women and Girls since the last [annual update](#) provided at the Panel meeting held on 12th October 2023, and what we plan to do next. This report also provides an update on the progress of the new Victims' Centre for York and North Yorkshire.

Strategy to Address Violence Against Women and Girls

The joint Strategy to Address Violence Against Women and Girls (“VAWG”) was launched in June 2022 and can be found on the York and North Yorkshire Office for Policing, Fire, Crime and Commissioning (“OPFCC”) website here: [Addressing violence against women and girls in North Yorkshire and City of York](#).

The Strategy was informed by local and national strategies and crucially, by local women and girls themselves. When developing the Strategy, the OPFCC undertook consultation with strategic partners and stakeholders, local organisations representing women and girls, and spoke directly with victims and survivors via focus groups and an online survey – full details can be found here: [What did you tell us is important? - Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner North Yorkshire](#).

The six Strategic Objectives set out in the VAWG Strategy are:

- 1: Listening to All Women and Girls**, including those from rural and under-represented communities, and proactively seeking feedback to inform continuous service improvements
- 2: Tackling the root causes of VAWG through Prevention and Early Intervention**, including campaigns aimed at increasing awareness, early help and community-led interventions
- 3: Increasing Public Confidence and Trust in the Police**, including holding the police to account on their handling of reports of VAWG
- 4: Strengthening the Multi-Agency Approach to Address VAWG**, including the wider criminal and civil court processes
- 5: Enhancing Support Services for Victims**, including ensuring that high quality services are available to everyone at their time of need
- 6: Facilitating Behaviour Change by Perpetrators**, including both enforcement and rehabilitation interventions by expanding the availability and scope of behaviour change programmes

VAWG Strategic Governance and Accountability Arrangements

The VAWG Strategic Governance Board has continued to meet twice a year to conduct biannual reviews of overall progress against our six Strategic Objectives. The Board has published the findings of these biannual progress updates on the OPFCC website here:

[Joint Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy - Progress Update - December 2022](#)

[Joint Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy – Progress Update – June 2023](#)

[Joint Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy – Progress Update- April 2024](#)

A representative of the VAWG Professionals Sub-group attends the VAWG Strategic Governance Board to feedback key discussion themes and shared experiences impacting the sector including increasing demand for specialist support services, resourcing limitations and future funding concerns.

VAWG Strategy Delivery Plan

The VAWG Strategy Delivery Plan outlines how we intend to achieve the six Strategic Objectives and was co-produced by the Joint VAWG Strategy Delivery Group which is made up of representatives from local statutory partners and stakeholders. A representative of the VAWG Professionals Sub-group also attends the Joint VAWG Strategy Delivery Group to ensure we continue to adopt a person-centred and trauma-informed approach wherever possible within our delivery activities.

The Group has met every two months but recently agreed to meet quarterly moving forward. The Group aims to identify learning opportunities, share best practice and consider findings from relevant national and local surveys, consultations and feedback from victim and survivor forums. The Group have examined specific issues in more depth through ‘Spotlight Topic’ presentations on a variety of subjects including stalking, special measures in court for victims and witnesses in criminal justice proceedings, and Family and Civil Court processes.

The Group has also established Task and Finish Groups to lead on specific activities: one group is assessing scope and membership locally of national ‘Safe Spaces’ schemes such as ‘Ask for Angela’ and ‘Ask for Ani’ and exploring how these can be expanded and more effectively joined up with local support services; another group is exploring options to coordinate training and support for Professional and Workplace Champions to ensure a more trauma-informed response to disclosures of VAWG, whilst the VAWG Professionals Sub-group continues to consider how to increase the network of Community-based Champions and volunteers.

Delivery Plan on a Page

Objectives

Outcomes

Aims

1. Listening to All Women and Girls



1. Proactive engagement with under-represented communities and seldom heard women
2. Ensure parity of services across both urban and rural areas, and other isolated communities



Regular consultation and engagement with women and girls.
Engage regularly with under-represented communities.
Expansion of the York Women's Centre.

2. Tackling the root causes of VAWG through Prevention and Early Intervention



1. Increase awareness and promote zero tolerance of all forms of gender inequality and VAWG
2. Increase availability of Early Help and Community-led Interventions



A range of age-appropriate materials, interventions, and campaigns to challenge misogyny, stalking and street harassment, illegal cultural harms and a network of VAWG Champions.
Explore the development of 'Safe Spaces' and apps and other initiatives.
Facilitate Vulnerability and 'spiking' awareness training.

3. Increasing Public Confidence and Trust in the Police



1. Increase confidence in reporting VAWG offences
2. Identify learning opportunities and ensure continuous improvement



Support police officers to adopt a trauma aware response.
Better identify and respond to VAWG 'gateway offences', Stalking, illegal cultural harms, rape and police perpetrated domestic abuse.
Use Rape and Domestic Abuse Scrutiny Panels to review cases that had a NFA outcome.

4. Enhancing Support Services for Victims



1. Improve Safeguarding and Risk Management Approaches
2. Improve the experiences of those going through Criminal Justice Processes
3. Improve the experiences of those going through Civil and Family Court Proceedings



Multi-agency work focussed on identifying and safeguarding victims and identifying and manage risk from perpetrators.
Availability of special measures in court and Work with the Crown Prosecution Service to support evidence-led prosecutions.
Explore options for establishing Court Observers Panels.
Work to prevent further victimisation within the family court process.

5. Enhancing Support Services for Victims



1. Ensure high quality services are available to everyone at their time of need



Explore options to jointly commission services to offer trauma-aware support for victims.
Use support services to better identify victims of modern slavery & consider the gendered nature of Exploitation.

6. Facilitating Behaviour Change by Perpetrators



1. Increase availability of interventions for perpetrators of VAWG offences that focus on both enforcement and rehabilitation
2. Increase availability of interventions for those with Dual Status and Unmet Needs



Develop a full suite of perpetrator services including for domestic abuse & stalking.
Seek to divert women at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

Refresh of VAWG Strategy and Delivery Plan

The current VAWG Strategy covers the period 2022-2024, and the six Strategic Objectives and 12 Outcomes and 17 Aims set out in the Delivery Plan are now due to be fully reviewed and updated accordingly to ensure they remain aligned to local need and expectations. This review and refresh of the VAWG Strategy is aligned to the timeframes for the new Police and Crime Plan and Fire and Rescue Plan, with the new Strategy to be place from April 2025 for an initial period of four years.

To inform this review, work has commenced to re-assess local need and demand by collating all available relevant data, including reported crimes and incidents, commissioned services performance data and other relevant information or intelligence. Acknowledging that VAWG offences continue to be under-reported, we will work with the VAWG Professionals Sub-group as well as the York Centre for Voluntary Service (known as York CVS) and Community First Yorkshire to maximise opportunities to link in with other local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (“VCSE”) organisations, particularly non-commissioned specialist support services and charities to enhance data already available.

A detailed analysis of the latest VAWG Survey responses will be undertaken to ensure the voices of victims and survivors remain central to the development of our Strategic Objectives. The OPFCC are also exploring options to facilitate focus groups and other consultation methods to expand our reach and engagement with more diverse communities to ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to have their views represented.

Alongside this, a comprehensive Communications and Engagement Plan will be produced in partnership with our Communications and Engagement and Inclusivity and Public Confidence teams to increase awareness and accessibility of support services, projects and initiatives delivered under the VAWG Strategy and how they contribute to achieving the 17 Aims and 12 Outcomes of the six Strategic Objectives. This Communications and Engagement Plan will be aligned to the full scope and duration of the refreshed VAWG Strategy and will support achieving the Outcomes under Objective 1 in particular by focussing on developing a range of consultation and engagement opportunities with under-represented communities and groups.

The Deputy Mayor for Policing, Fire and Crime, Jo Coles will host a VAWG Summit on the 25th November 2024 for strategic leads and local stakeholders to agree a vision for the VAWG Strategy, alongside refreshed Strategic Objectives, Outcomes and Aims from 2025. This will include considering how we will know whether we are successfully achieving our joint strategic priorities, identifying key performance measures, shared opportunities and risks, and mapping key areas of overlap or interdependencies where closer partnership working maybe required.

Progress Achieved in past 12-months

Objective 1: Listening to All Women and Girls, including those from rural and under-represented communities, and proactively seeking feedback to inform continuous service improvements

Outcome 1.1: Proactive engagement with under-represented communities and seldom heard women

In July 2023, we launched a new VAWG Survey to assess the difference we have made to date by hearing about specific experiences of violence or abuse, and in particular, the type of response and support received; we also asked if there is anything else the public think should be done locally to

tackle VAWG. In the 12-months from 31st July 2023 to 1st August 2024 we have received 264 responses, which will be used to inform the refresh of the 17 Aims and 12 Outcomes of the six Strategic Objectives as set out in the current Delivery Plan. This VAWG Survey will remain live indefinitely on the OPFCC's website here: [What should be done to STOP Violence Against Women and Girls?](#) and will be reviewed at least every six months to ensure the views and personal experiences of victims and survivors remain central to shaping and driving our future activities. We will continue to work with our partners and key stakeholders to promote the VAWG Survey and encourage responses from under-represented communities and seldom heard women.

Focus Groups and interviews continued to be held with those willing to share their expertise by experience to ensure the voices of victims and survivors inform practice development and innovation on key issues including:

- in October 2023, a Victims of Rape Focus Group discussed and reviewed the letters to be sent from the CPS (instead of the Witness Care Unit) to inform them of the outcome of their case and consider how we measure the impact of these letters on those who receive them, and also considered how victims would like to be represented at OPFCC and/or CPS Rape Scrutiny Panels; and
- in January 2024, a Focus Group was convened with five women who are currently being supported by York Drug and Alcohol Services which helped identify gaps in current service provision for women who use substances and a new weekly women-only recovery group now takes place at York Women's Centre as a result.

Trusted relationships continue to be developed with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities at four sites across North Yorkshire in Burn, Carlton, Thirsk and Stokesley through a new Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Domestic Abuse Community Support Officer pilot commissioned by North Yorkshire Council; between October 2023 and June 2024, 19 victims accessed support, including three adult males and nine workshops were delivered on-site, plus 32 off-site support sessions were delivered to 15 individuals, resulting in 20 onward referrals into specialist services.

Outcome 1.2: Ensure parity of services across both urban and rural areas, and other isolated communities

'Liberty Links' continues to provide mobile and outreach services to women in rural and other isolated communities throughout the Ryedale district via a specially converted van; since commencement in August 2023 this provision has provided Brief Intervention support to 116 women and 59 women have been engaged into longer-term support as a result. Further additional funding has been secured by the OPFCC through the Home Office Safer Streets Fund for St. Giles Trust to purchase and convert another van to reach more women, initially commencing deployments in the Craven area in the coming months.

Serious Violence Duty Funding has also been awarded to St. Giles Trust to develop the ['Libby Girls' project](#) offering detached youth work to girls at risk of exploitation in more urban areas, initially Scarborough.

Drop-in sessions for women have been established in Northallerton, Selby and Scarborough, however these are not women-only spaces. Work is ongoing to identify suitable premises to establish a dedicated Women's Centre in Scarborough.

[New Beginnings](#) have been awarded Community Safety Services Funding by the OPFCC to expand their domestic abuse peer support project into Craven to ensure the voices of those living in rural and other isolated communities are heard.

The IDAS specialist Older Persons and Rural Lead, funded via the Ministry of Justice National ISVA/IDVA Fund secured by the OPFCC (until 31st March 2025), continues to provide specialist support and advice to all IDAS teams through internal training and Peer Case Reviews, in addition to holding their own caseload where more complex advocacy is required for older people and those living in rural communities. As evidence suggests older people are much less likely to self-refer into support for domestic abuse, by linking in with services already working with older people such as Housing, Social Care and Disability Support Services to increase awareness amongst frontline staff and targeting services where older people are more likely to frequent such as pharmacies, GP surgeries, banks and supermarkets is now increasing suitable referrals into IDAS for older people.

The IDAS specialist Military Lead continues to develop relationships with both army personnel and families living within Catterick garrison and has now been fully integrated into the Community-based Services support offer to include other military communities. They have developed strong working relations with the HIVE Information Centre (provided by the Army to give information support to all members of the Service community) and the Army Welfare Service at Catterick, with further work ongoing to develop relationships with Unit Welfare Officers at the Army Training College in Harrogate, SSAFA (the Armed Forces Charity) and RAF Welfare services at RAF Leeming. The Military Lead hosts weekly drop-ins at Catterick Community Hub and have delivered a 6-week Moving On from Domestic Abuse (“MODA”) programme, co-facilitated by a serving soldier who now volunteers for IDAS; they are also now working with Aurora New Dawn, a national service for Army and Navy personnel to jointly deliver MODA groups. They continue to provide specialist training inputs and awareness raising to army personnel including presentations to the Unit Welfare Officers at their annual training programme days, along with an ISVA and Children’s Worker; training for Royal Military Police as part of their regular refresher programme; and have interacted with over 600 personnel at 2x Military Health Fair events in 2023. Discussions are ongoing with Army Welfare and Mountain Healthcare Ltd to establish an Independent Scrutiny Panel for Military Investigations and Disciplinary processes involving domestic abuse or sexual offences.

Objective 2: Tackling the root causes of VAWG through Prevention and Early Intervention

Outcome 2.1: Increase awareness and promote zero tolerance of all forms of gender inequality and VAWG

We continue to see increased reporting of hate crime linked to misogyny and misandry since the launch of this Strategy; 45 crimes reported in 2022 compared to 34 crimes in 2021, and this increased again in 2023 with 51 hate crimes reported. Misogyny continued to feature during Hate Crime Awareness week in October 2023 with a dedicated session on ‘Misogyny, sexism and violence against women and girls’ delivered by IDAS and North Yorkshire Youth. This year IDAS will be offering a free online seminar for Misogyny and VAWG on Thursday 17th October 2024 aimed at frontline practitioners working with those who may be impacted by these types of crimes; the full programme for Hate Crime Awareness Week 2024 is available online now on the North Yorkshire Partnership website: [Hate Crime Awareness Week 2024 | North Yorkshire Partnerships \(nypartnerships.org.uk\)](https://nypartnerships.org.uk)

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service are exploring options to expand Local Intervention Fire Education (“LIFE”) courses for young people in 2024/25 to include misogyny. An easy read leaflet on misogyny has been jointly developed by North Yorkshire Police and the North Yorkshire Learning Disability Partnership as well as a One Minute Guide for practitioners to increase accessibility of information on misogyny as a Hate Crime.

The ‘All About Respect’ Project has been awarded Home Office Safer Streets Funding secured via the OPFCC to raise awareness of gender-based violence amongst young people. ‘All About Respect’ was developed by York St John University, York College, and local specialist charities IDAS and Survive. The project is student-led, working collaboratively with young adults (aged 16-25yrs) and aims to create a space for open and honest dialogue about healthy relationships in young adults. The funding has been used to develop the [All About Respect Active Bystander Training](#) modules on Sexual Violence / Harassment / Abuse along with a module on Hate Crime; these modules are delivered with supporting resources and can be used independently or as part of a wider educational training package on gender-based violence to be delivered from 2024, initially with universities and colleges in York and Selby but with the intention of rolling this out countywide. The funding will also facilitate consultation with young people through a variety of methods including dancefloor events, focus groups and surveys to reach a large representative sample of young people locally to hear their experiences and views.

Serious Violence Duty Funding has been awarded to the [‘She Was Walking Home’ project](#) which will deliver 10 awareness raising performances which are based on real-life testimonies and educational workshops in different educational/youth settings during the 2024/25 academic year. These sessions will also explore language, behaviour, reporting and support available.

The [‘Just a Kiss’ film series](#) funded by Home Office Safer Streets Funding secured via the OPFCC was launched on 12th October 2023 to raise awareness of how stalking and harassment can manifest, targeting young people aged 16-24 years with one episode released each day via the OPFCC’s Social Media channels during October; there had been a total of 5,857 YouTube views of the ‘Just a Kiss’ episodes at the end of March 2024.

‘Just a Kiss’ is now being used to raise awareness amongst the next generation of police officers at a local, regional and even international level – the film series was shown to approx. 1,800 Policing students at Leeds Trinity University in November 2023 and the University now intends to create a dedicated learning module around the ‘Just a Kiss’ film series; it was shown as part of a package of support delivered by the University to Policing students at the Lviv State University of Internal Affairs in the Ukraine, and the University are developing a similar project for Romanian Police Officers. Nick Wallen, Lecturer in Policing at Leeds Trinity University said:

“Stalking and Harassment is a serious subject that has to be taught with sensitivity and care, and the ‘Just a Kiss’ film the team have put together is an incredibly helpful resource as a training tool for new Police Officers. There are a number of different risk factors that we might see in a range of Stalking and Harassment scenarios, and this film captures them all. We had a fantastic reaction to the video from the Police Students on our course today, and we really look forward to further incorporating this film into our interactive workshop.”

More locally, ‘Just a Kiss’ was shown to students at Craven College in Skipton in January 2024 and students on the Uniformed Services course at Askham Bryan College in York during Student Safety Week in December 2023, and will now be added to their standard induction package college wide. The film has also been circulated to staff within CPS Yorkshire and the Humber. We are now working with North Yorkshire Police and both universities in York, as well as the Home Office to explore options to develop packages for university, secondary and primary school student audiences to use the film as an educational tool.

[The Halo Project](#) were awarded Serious Violence Duty Funding to write, produce and launch a North Yorkshire specific film featuring black and minoritised victims of cultural harms. The short film ‘Behind Closed Doors’ is trauma informed and co-produced with local women and girls aged up to 25 years who have experience of cultural violence and abuse and aims to raise awareness of the serious hidden violence and abuse faced in black and minoritised communities. The film

premiered to a limited audience of commissioners and stakeholders at the Everyman Cinema in York on Thursday 12th September 2024 and will shortly be shared with education and community settings as a free resource. The Halo Project have also been commissioned by the OPFCC to deliver specialist Illegal Cultural Harms Support Services including education and awareness raising to reach hidden victims within our Black and Minoritised communities.

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service have begun work to improve advice offered to individuals threatened with arson, in response to the threat of so called ‘honour’ based crimes.

The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (“DAHA”) project in North Yorkshire has delivered the ‘Domestic Abuse Awareness Course For Managers’ to managers and team leaders in North Yorkshire Council Housing and Customer Services since November 2023, and delivered level one domestic abuse awareness training to all Housing staff since January 2024 to increase awareness and recognition of domestic abuse at an earlier stage. The DAHA project is now offering training to Homelessness staff in Housing Law relating to Domestic Abuse and is creating a Domestic Abuse Champions network for North Yorkshire Council.

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service have commenced work on their first Domestic Abuse and Sexual Harm policy, operating procedure and associated training; this policy will be delivered during 2024/25 with associated training/awareness and processes across the organisation. This will be informed by an assessment of the type and level of training staff need to understand why VAWG happens, how we can respond more effectively, and how we can work with others to prevent it; this has been incorporated into the Prevention Team training programme. NYFRS have also begun to assess the consistency, safety, quality and impact of prevention interventions and established a Task and Finish Group to introduce a Safe Person Policy and Operating Procedure, based on national good practice.

As White Ribbon UK Supporter Organisations, the OPFCC and North Yorkshire Police support the United Nations ‘16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence’ annual campaign that commences on 25th November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and White Ribbon Day), through to International Human Rights Day on 10th December. There have been a series of awareness raising events and activities carried out over this period each year including a series of short films showcasing the support services available to women and girls locally, with interviews with those who have used and benefited from this support to encourage others to come forward and seek help; these videos can be viewed on the OPFCC’s website here: [#16Days of Action - Supporting women and girls](#) The OPFCC and North Yorkshire Police also worked with partners, including York St. John University during Sexual Violence Awareness Week in February to raise awareness and promote local support services, challenge victim blaming, and spiking awareness: [#ITSNOTOK - Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week 2024](#)

Outcome 2.2: Increase availability of Early Help and Community-led Interventions

StopHateUK have been awarded Community Fund by the OPFCC to develop [‘Start Safe - Stay Safe’](#) a Street Harassment App for North Yorkshire, which aims to enable and empower people, particularly women and girls, to report incidents of street harassment and access support and advice. The App will offer a direct link to the police in case of emergency and allows the capturing of audio, video, or photographic evidence in support of their report. We are working with StopHateUK to finalise the App with input from North Yorkshire Police Safeguarding leads, North Yorkshire Council Safeguarding (Adults and Children) leads and City of York Council Safeguarding (Adults and Children), Public Health and Domestic Abuse leads. The App is now in testing phase and due to be officially launched in late October 2024.

IDAS previously delivered Vulnerability Training and Humankind delivered ‘spiking’ awareness training to 187 workers in Scarborough and York night-time economy settings to enable participants to have a better understanding of the risks posed to lone people within the context of sexual violence, domestic abuse, spiking and other gender-based attacks. The OPFCC secured Home Office Safer Streets Funding for IDAS to deliver in partnership with North Yorkshire Horizons [‘Safer Streets’ online and interactive training](#) sessions to workers in day and night-time economy settings from 2024/25. This training aims to help keep our streets safer and reduce risk for those using our town and city in both the day and night time economy, and compliments national ‘Safe Spaces’ schemes such as Ask for Angela by increasing the knowledge and confidence of staff to understand vulnerability, indicators of concern, and how to take appropriate action. However, take up to date has been limited and as at the end of July 2024, only two sessions have taken place with 20 attendees. We are working with colleagues within the wider Combined Authority to promote this free training opportunity to local businesses through the Mayoral Combined Authority Newsletter.

Objective 3: Increasing Public Confidence and Trust in the Police

Outcome 3.1: Increase confidence in reporting VAWG offences

The OPFCC secured Home Office Safer Streets Funding for North Yorkshire Police to deploy ‘Project Vigilant’ in Scarborough town centre from October 2023; ‘Project Vigilant’ is a perpetrator-focused approach to actively prevent sexual violence and predatory sexualised behaviour through increased specialist police visibility in the night-time economy to detect, deter and disrupt VAWG incidents. During the first six months, there were 6 deployments, 8 offenders identified and 23 disruptions / deterrents of VAWG incidents.

Serious Violence Duty Funding has been awarded to two North Yorkshire Police initiatives designed to provide more preventative and early intervention approaches to VAWG in night-time economy settings:

- [‘Operation Night Safe’](#) in Selby which will deliver visible patrols alongside provision of ‘safe spaces’ to help anyone who is out in the night-time economy, supported by Town Safety Officers, to engage with the public and focus on hotspot areas of concern; and
- [‘Operation Reach’](#) which is designed to address the current perceived lack of high visibility police presence in the night-time economy generally; officers will provide a holistic approach to early intervention and prevention to address issues including VAWG incidents.

We will now work together to develop a comprehensive communication strategy and campaign to support both Operation Reach and Project Vigilant throughout York and North Yorkshire to increase feelings of safety in the night-time economy, including purchasing ‘geo-fencing’ technology via Home Office Safer Streets Funding to send targeted social media messaging within night-time economy settings.

Trauma-aware approaches are included in training courses completed by North Yorkshire Police for sexual offences, child protection and domestic abuse investigations and victim interview skills. In addition Stalking Clinics hosted by the specialist Stalking Team specifically provide trauma-informed investigative support and advice to officers and supervisors investigating stalking offences, including specialist support services available. Subject matter experts in child sexual and criminal exploitation, domestic abuse, missing persons, and child protection provide specialist training inputs to new recruits, front line officers and newly promoted sergeants.

There has also been increased joint working between North Yorkshire Police and specialist support services to help police officers to adopt a trauma aware response and ensure the right support is offered when victims do report, specifically:

- IDAS have provided specialist training inputs to a number of police training events including:
 - Three Sexual Offence Liaison Officers (“SOLOs”) events attended by 48 police officers;
 - Two Specialist Sexual Abuse Investigators Development Programme (“SSAIDP”) training courses attended by 18 police officers; and
 - SSAIDP Continuous Professional Development event attended by 25 police officers
- The Halo Project have delivered around 75 online webinars and in-person training sessions to around 3,000 frontline workers and officers over the last two years to enhance safeguarding and protection of black and minoritised victims.

North Yorkshire Police have now adopted Op Soteria Bluestone to improve responses to victims of Rape And Serious Sexual Offences (“RASSO”). The self-assessment stage was concluded in January 2024 and included a review of all current delivery, practice and performance in respect of RASSO across all six pillars of the national Op Soteria operating model; this provided several key performance indicators against which improvement will be measured by North Yorkshire Police. The planning phase has now commenced to develop North Yorkshire Police’s local Op Soteria transformational and implementation plans, with implementation phase due to commence from November 2024. As part of Op Soteria there is a national training programme for all officers who attend as First Responders for RASSO cases, focused on a trauma informed approach. North Yorkshire Police are also exploring options to facilitate delivery of Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust’s ‘Trauma Aware Response’ training for Police, Probation and Court staff as part of North Yorkshire Police’s Op Soteria implementation plans.

North Yorkshire Police have introduced ‘Office Manager’ posts in all CID offices to identify and assess “gateway” VAWG offences and ensure the most appropriate resource is allocated as a result; where offences are allocated to a PIP1* trained officer, PIP2* oversight will be arranged via a Detective Sergeant providing greater oversight of gateway offences which will ensure a full investigation plan is agreed, thus providing a better-quality service to the victim.

**Professionalising Investigation Programme level 1 and 2 is a structured development programme to give the police service and other sectors of law enforcement the skills to conduct professional investigations. It provides consistent registration, examination, training, workplace assessment and accreditation to a national standard.*

North Yorkshire Police are also working with CPS colleagues to progress the 10 Strategic Priorities outlined in the new Domestic Abuse Joint Justice Plan which was launched in January 2024; the Joint Justice Plan is a national framework, which both Police and CPS must implement locally and regionally. The Joint Justice Plan Strategic Priorities will be incorporated into the existing North Yorkshire Police Domestic Abuse Tactical Delivery Plan to ensure that required actions are progressed in 2024/25.

Outcome 3.1: Identify learning opportunities and ensure continuous service improvements

The national Operation Soteria Bluestone victim experience survey has now been completed; this was a national survey led by academics, not police. The data from this survey is now being shared with North Yorkshire Police to inform North Yorkshire Police’s Op Soteria implementation plans to

develop approaches to rape investigations and prosecutions, improving support for victims and putting the focus on the suspect.

A recommendation within the national Op Soteria Bluestone Action Plan is that there should be consultation with the police prior to the CPS making a decision to take No Further Action ('NFA') however the CPS locally have raised a lack of capacity (at this time) to deliver against this national recommendation. In the interim, it has been agreed that when North Yorkshire Police receive a notification that the case is to be NFA'd by the CPS this will be reviewed by the RASSO Detective Inspector who will make an assessment as to whether they agree with this decision and what is the learning from this (if any); where they disagree, the appropriate challenge process will be followed locally.

Objective 4: Strengthening the Multi-Agency Approach to Address VAWG

Outcome 4.1: Improve joint Safeguarding and Risk Management Approaches

The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences ("MARAC") / Multi-Agency Tasking And Coordination ("MATAC") Steering Group continues to review current arrangements, including meeting attendance and engagement by key stakeholders and to ensure learning from meetings is shared at an organisational level to continuously drive improvements, including inviting the Halo Project as a consultant and partner to the operational MARAC meetings where Illegal Cultural Harms is a factor, ensuring that the voice of Black and Minoritised women and girls are heard; toolkit aids are also being developed for professionals supporting victims or survivors with 'No Recourse to Public Funds'.

The MARAC/MATAC Steering Group is now developing case studies for victims that have been through the journey of MARAC to understand whether the outcome of the conference has been a positive or negative experience and to shape delivery through their experience ensuring a victim-centred approach is taken. A MARAC workshop was held on 17th June 2024, during Safeguarding Week, where both strategic and operational Leads from all participating partner agencies came together to explore current MARAC arrangements and discuss potential barriers to success and embed best practice across all areas where possible.

GPs now attend York Women's Centre on a fortnightly basis to offer support to women who may not be engaging with other professionals to ensure their health needs are met; the Women's centre also now offer a needle exchange service and a Smear clinic. This has resulted in women appropriately being referred and admitted to hospital where further treatment was required. A quarterly professionals women's group has also been established, led by Humankind to discuss case studies/good news stories, partnership work with other women's services, trends or patterns (support needs, offending behaviour) and challenges and opportunities.

Exploitation Risk Assessment Conferences ("ERACs") safeguard those involved in sex work, survival sex or at risk of sexual exploitation or County Lines, including 'cuckooing' to provide an offer of support; ERACs now identify and discuss on average 22 women per month, which is over three times as many identified per month on average last year. There are some significant and positive stories now emerging as a result of this multi-agency approach including:

- 'A' was No Fixed Abode on crash pad, being sexually exploited, alcohol dependant, but would not engage with professionals; they are now 40 days sober and on track to get a place in a hostel while she waits for her own property.

- ‘B’ was experiencing sexual and adult criminal; exploitation, substance use and declining mental health were contributory factors, and they were also a high-risk victim of domestic abuse from multiple perpetrators; they were supported to complete a managed move, with ongoing safety planning, and are now reducing their substance use.
- ‘C’ was a victim of Child Sexual Exploitation, with ongoing mental health issues, now a victim of adult exploitation, with substance use and declining mental health; more recently they were evicted from their property, and had begun a new relationship with a serial perpetrator of domestic abuse; working in partnership with the police Changing Lives were able to facilitate a Domestic Violence Disclosure (also known as a Claire’s Law disclosure) and complete safety planning with her around how she could exit the relationship safely; as a result she is now in temporary accommodation, attending Dialectical Behavioural Therapy skills groups, and has reported improved mental health and that they are no longer using substances.

Outcome 4.2: Improve the experiences of those going through Criminal Justice Processes

North Yorkshire Police’s Case Quality Review Team have led on developing and promoting the use of evidence-led policing approaches to support Evidence-Led Prosecutions (“ELP”) where appropriate. The team have assessed around 500 cases for referral to CPS over 12-months; of these 37 were identified as suitable for ELP. The Case Quality Review Team also work closely with the CPS including sharing videos from CPS around what a good ELP investigation looks like and a review of cases where the CPS took NFA submitted prior to May 2023 is underway; 19 cases have been assessed so far, of which 6 were presented as ELP but none had sufficient evidence to prosecute.

Steps have been taken to prompt ELP consideration including on the Domestic Violence Protection Notice template and case file checklist, and a new Outcome 16 template also requires information around why ELP is not being progressed where the suspect was identified, but the victim doesn't support (or has withdrawn support for) police action. ELP drop-in sessions have been held since October 2023 and ELP also features in every Crime Managers Meeting. North Yorkshire Police are also participating in academic research (led by the Open University) around the impact of ELP on victims and a workshop took place in York in March 2024 where initial findings were shared; these findings will be published in due course and will be used to inform North Yorkshire Police’s strategy to improve the charge and outcome rates for ELP for Domestic Abuse related offences specifically.

More victims of VAWG offences have benefited from special measures at court as a result of North Yorkshire Police’s Special Measures Advisor pilot within the Witness Care Team which started in February last year; this Advisor takes a proactive approach to reviewing cases pre-charge, and if it is felt that special measures are needed then they will reach out to the officer in the case (“OIC”) to advise on an application for the identified special measures required, which will in turn raise overall awareness of suitable Special Measures to be applied for in future cases.

The Special Measures Advisor has developed a new booklet which officers can give to victims and witnesses should they have questions; this is also available for use by external partner agencies such as the Witness Service and the ID/SVA services and has had positive feedback from those who have used it so far with some officers stating it has helped them and victims to understand the options available to them and the process involved in applying for special measures at court. North Yorkshire Police also now have a new and more detailed MG2 form used by officers which provides an explanation of what each type of special measure is and highlights crucial differences locally such as how the screens can vary from court to court; this has also had positive feedback

with officers confirming that the increased detail has made it more victim focused and is more informative and makes the process easier for victims to understand.

A pilot commenced in April 2023 for Domestic Abuse Practitioners (also known as an IDVAs) to be available 'on call' to attend plea hearings at York Magistrates Court should somebody need support in-court, whether or not they are an existing IDAS client; this pilot is overseen by the IDAS Court IDVA (see below for further information) providing vital support to victims during criminal proceedings, acting as an ideal opportunity to link in with both prosecution and probation to assist in impact considerations for the purposes of sentencing and victim safety. There are on average 5/6 listings per week split across both morning and afternoon sittings and around half of these are known to IDAS so they can add value to these cases (even if they are not currently receiving services from IDAS). The remaining 2-3 victims not known to IDAS, usually reside out of area and IDAS do not have any contact details (or consent) to contact them. As victims are not present at these plea hearings, the other key function provided through the pilot is contacting victims to ensure they are aware of the hearing and that IDAS will be attending to feed in on their behalf and to update victims on the outcome afterwards, and where possible, re-offer a full support package, including support for any trial and/or sentencing hearings and beyond through the community-based teams. On average 3-5 active clients being supported through the pilot at any one time following initial plea hearings; to date, 6 victims have been supported via the pilot all the way through their Criminal Justice journey from initial plea hearing through to full trial and/or sentencing. We are working with IDAS to explore how this approach could potentially be rolled out at other courts throughout North Yorkshire.

The Court IDVA is now a member of the Justice Participation and Engagement Group Panel for Crime, chaired by the HM Courts and Tribunal Service; the aim of this group is to bring the voices of victims to the attention of the panel in order to discuss new ways of working and responses to domestic abuse.

Outcome 4.3: Improve the experiences of those going through Civil and Family Court Proceedings

The OPFCC secured Ministry of Justice funding for IDAS to employ a dedicated Domestic Abuse Practitioner (also known as an IDVA) who provides specialist support to victims of domestic abuse going through Family Court processes (until March 2025). The Court IDVA also ensures that learning and best practice is embedded throughout the wider support teams through weekly Practitioner Drop-ins for all IDAS staff to provide specialist advice and guidance to practitioners to enable them to better understand and therefore support their clients through the civil and family court processes. To support this, the Court IDVA coordinates a team of Family Court Champions across IDAS, with a designated practitioner from each of the locality and specialist teams taking part in regular key training and forums to share that knowledge and awareness and embed best practice within their own teams.

The Court IDVA also holds their own caseload of those more complex cases providing a Specialist Family Court Support package directly to between 25 and 30 victims of domestic abuse going through Family Court processes at any one time; this support tends to be focussed on more practical advice and support for navigating the family court systems such as special measures applications and liaison with key professionals such as Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service ("CAFCASS") and the Court Clerks. One client shared:

"This sort of support is remarkable; it is really unbelievable. The impact it has had on me and will have on others is unmeasurable. To think that support is available when you feel so fragile and vulnerable, trying to keep things together for the kids, is just life changing for me. I mean, how do you ask for help when you don't know why or understand what's happening and when the system is

so overwhelming? Coming to terms with abuse and making sense of that is frightening. For me being alone in a country that was not my place of birth and with no family and no one to turn to has been exhausting. I have had no one, but then IDAS came along and have given me hope again and I feel like I am getting myself back”.

The Court IDVA has developed strong working relationships across York, Harrogate and Scarborough Family Courts, working closely with the Legal Team Manager as well as Security, Ushers and Court Clerks, and they have a weekly drop-in desk at two of these courts with IDAS materials on how to access support and family courts FAQ distributed by the Courts in all hearing packs provided. They delivered a training programme on the impact of domestic abuse to all court staff from February to June 2024. Through regular attendance at hearings to support their clients, they have also established an excellent reputation with the local Judiciary; within a recent court transcript it was recorded that Judge Boorman stated that:

“your work is being recognised, don’t always see you myself but I know you are out there in the waiting areas helping those who need you, so thank you”

The Court IDVA attends the Local Family Justice Board meetings, including the Domestic Abuse Sub-Working group to raise awareness and increase knowledge across the range of professionals working with those going through the family courts. They are also a member of the Family Law Panel chaired by HM Courts and Tribunal Services, to ensure the voices of victims are heard and to inform the design of a new client facing system that will allow for position statements to be submitted, the legal system to be navigated more easily and for updates to be received and documents viewed. This system will also allow for IDAS to support Litigants in Person to submit evidence and documents as well as download their orders. The Court IDVA links in with the Family Court Advisory Teams and attends monthly Child And Family Court Advisory Support Service (“CAFCASS”) staff meetings to share good practice around cases of domestic abuse and family court proceedings.

The Court IDVA has also established good working relationships with local Solicitors and Barristers to increase the number offering pro-bono support for clients in the York and Scarborough areas. They have established quarterly Family Court ‘access an IDVA and a Family Law Solicitor’ drop-ins which are well attended and provide an opportunity to link in with Solicitors supporting IDAS clients and discuss key issues and next steps. ‘Family Courts Café’ sessions at York St. John University have recently been established with local Solicitors to meet with clients alongside their IDAS support worker in a friendly, supportive and safe environment.

Objective 5: Enhancing Support Services for Victims

Outcome 5.1: Ensure high quality services are available to everyone at their time of need

Need and demand continues to grow for specialist support services for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence in particular, with 10,857 victims and survivors supported through the OPFCC’s commissioned support services in 2023/24 including specialist Domestic Abuse Practitioners (also known as an IDVAs) and ISVAs, Exploitation Services and Counselling; however we recognise that these figures do not include those accessing support through non-commissioned services and other local charities, and there will be many more victims and survivors who are not accessing support at all for a variety of reasons.

VAWG Survey responses will be analysed in more detail, particularly those who reported not receiving any offer of support and compared to the Police Domestic Abuse Survey and national Op

Soteria Victim Experience Survey responses to identify common themes or barriers to accessing support and agree actions to be taken to address this moving forward.

The Halo Project's ID/SVA 'By and For' Black and Minoritised Women, funded via the Ministry of Justice National ISVA/IDVA Fund secured by the OPFCC (until 31st March 2025), continues to provide specialist support to women and girls who are victims, or are at risk, of illegal cultural harms. Although providing support to small numbers, Halo have seen a 725% increase in the number of victims supported in York and North Yorkshire from 6 in 2022/23 to 66 in 2023/24.

In 2023/24 the OPFCC secured Home Office Safer Streets funding to purchase and install Video Doorbells (with a 12-month subscription) for victims of post separation domestic abuse and/or stalking; as at July 2024, 52 video doorbells had been provided. The doorbells are distributed by IDAS as a target hardening measure alongside specialist advice and safety planning to improve feelings of safety and to capture any evidence of offences including breach of non-molestation/restraining orders.

The OPFCC, North Yorkshire Council and City of York Council have jointly commissioned a new package of support services to deliver a 'Whole System Approach' to Domestic Abuse from April 2024; collectively investing over £8m over the next four years to provide a holistic package of enhanced support services for everyone affected by domestic abuse across North Yorkshire and the City of York. The new services include specialist support for children and young people affected by domestic abuse within their family alongside support for those young people displaying abusive behaviours themselves towards family members or other young people as a result of the domestic abuse they have experienced. The new services will enable victims and survivors, and their children, to better cope with the immediate impacts of domestic abuse, empowering them to make informed choices about their safety, and rebuilding resilience to move forward from the harm experienced.

The OPFCC continue to work with police colleagues to ensure that victims of sexual offences receive an appropriate and timely offer of support. A pilot is currently taking place whereby victims of sexual offences are automatically referred into the [Supporting Victims Team](#) who will offer a referral to an appropriate support service to meet their needs, including but not limited to ISVA, Women's Centre or Exploitation Services.

The OPFCC has commissioned a new Exploitation Support Service which commenced on 13th May 2024, delivered by St. Giles Trust. The new support service will work with those aged 10-25yrs and will offer gender-specific support for women and girls. The new service model will offer support to those who have been victims of exploitation and also have a focus on prevention and early intervention.

We continue to see growing need and demand for more timely mental health support for victims and survivors; pathways have now been established with 34 "first contact workers" who are mental health professionals based in 74 GP surgeries across North Yorkshire offering up to 4 sessions of support. The OPFCC has also continued to secure additional funding from the Ministry of Justice Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Fund (until 31st March 2025) for both commissioned and non-commissioned specialist support services to provide additional counselling, trauma therapy and EMDR sessions in 2024/25.

The OPFCC has signed up to the 7-force 'Transparency in Supply Chains' Statement in respect of procurement and commissioning. The Modern Slavery Partnership Terms of Reference were refreshed in 2023, including governance and accountability arrangements, to ensure it supports effective identification and offer of support for victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

The Partnership now produces quarterly reports to feedback to Community Safety Partnerships and has contributed content to Safeguarding Week 2023 and campaign for Anti-Slavery Day 2023.

The National Referral Mechanism is the national framework for identifying and referring victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. The Single Competent Authority administers it, which is part of the Home Office. North Yorkshire Police are fully engaged in the National Referral Mechanism for both adults (with consent) who are referred to the national Single Competent Authority and for children (no consent required) who are discussed via a local multi agency panel, acting on behalf of the Single Competent Authority.

Objective 6: Facilitating Behaviour Change by Perpetrators

Outcome 6.1: Increase availability of interventions for perpetrators of VAWG offences that focus on both enforcement and rehabilitation

The OPFCC piloted a support offer for low-risk perpetrators who are willing to voluntarily address their stalking behaviours from January 2022 until March 2024; the OPFCC funded a Stalking Project Worker who was co-located with the North Yorkshire Police specialist Stalking Team to identify and contact 16 suitable individuals, supporting the three of which who agreed to engage with the +Choices Perpetrator Programme, with one successfully completing the programme.

A Stalking Perpetrator Problem Profile has been completed by North Yorkshire to inform commissioning options of a new specialist stalking perpetrator behaviour change programme, including options for this to be delivered as a (mandatory) Positive Requirement attached to Stalking Prevention Orders. The OPFCC are also working with Commissioners across the wider Yorkshire and the Humber Region to identify options for a regional approach to increase service accessibility and resilience and provide greater value for money.

The recently commissioned new +Choices: Services for Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse from April 2024 now includes an offer of support for perpetrators who pose a high risk of serious harm, and who are willing to engage through a new bespoke 1:1 behaviour change programme based on the Respect accredited Drive model.

The OPFCC is now focussed on commissioning and funding opportunities to deliver a pilot provision of a mandatory brief intervention for low risk perpetrators of domestic abuse. This will include an Out of Court Resolution route for North Yorkshire Police to issue Conditional Cautions for standard risk domestic abuse offences. We hope to have this in place from early 2025; in the interim North Yorkshire Police will continue to issue Simple Cautions for standard risk domestic abuse cases where appropriate alongside voluntary referrals (with consent) into +Choices: Services for Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse and/or the Crossroads Diversion Scheme.

The Halo Project have been awarded Community Fund to redevelop their [‘Talk, Listen, Change’](#) programme for delivery in York and North Yorkshire; this will be co-produced with survivors of Illegal Cultural Harms, into a trauma informed community education perpetrator programme which will be piloted in York and North Yorkshire to a minimum of 10 perpetrators.

Outcome 6.2: Increase availability of interventions for those with Dual Status and those with Multiple Unmet Need

Crossroads offers a Gender Specific Diversion Scheme and uses a gender specific needs assessment for women who offend to identify common intersectional needs; the latest cohort report shows that those women who have completed Crossroads in a Planned way saw a 70% reduction in (re)offending and those who exited in an unplanned way saw a 57% reduction in (re)offending.

The OPFCC secured funding through the Ministry of Justice Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Fund for a StopSO registered therapist (until 31st March 2025) to offer counselling to adult survivors of rape, sexual assault or child sexual abuse who are also perpetrators of sexual offences, including those who have made or downloaded or shared indecent images of children as well as contact offences. The OPFCC continue to explore interventions and funding options for perpetrators of sexual offences, particularly online sexual offending.

Partners have committed to working together to develop a ‘Whole System Approach for Women’ across North Yorkshire and City of York with the aim of improving the response to women with multiple unmet needs, those who have been victims, or at risk of violence and those who are involved with, or at risk of involvement with the Criminal Justice System. Additional funding has been secured through the Home Office Safer Streets Fund for a Coordinator post until March 2025 who will coordinate the development of the Whole System Approach including reviewing Hub and Spoke services in line with any changes in local need and demand and supported by Outreach Workers. Home Office Safer Streets Funding has also been secured to purchase materials to enhance the drop-in sessions which have been established.

A steering group has been established as part of the Whole System Approach to Women to lead on the development of a trauma-informed, end-to-end dedicated pathway for women who offend. In September 2024, a Whole System Approach Strategic meeting was held at HMP Askham Grange which was attended by a wide-range of partners who came together to agree a set of shared outcomes which will focus on women in the Criminal Justice System, gender-specific substance use provision, increased provision and parity of support and trauma-informed care.

The OPFCC will continue to monitor individual outcomes for women supported through the Crossroads Gender Specific Diversion Scheme to identify common intersectional needs and improve the local evidence base of underlying and contributory factors to women offending, responding to the distinct needs of women, including any VAWG offences they may have been subjected to.

How can you support the VAWG Strategy?

- Participate at the VAWG Summit on 25th November – invitations to be sent shortly
- Promote and raise awareness of the VAWG Survey: [What should be done to STOP Violence Against Women and Girls?](#)
- Promote and encourage licensed premises, restaurants and other local businesses to sign up for the free ‘Safer Streets’ training - [Safer Streets - Business & Night Time Economy - Free Online Training Courses](#)
- Promote and raise awareness of OPFCC Funded Projects and Initiatives aimed at reducing VAWG and other violence:
 - [Serious Violence Duty Funding – Projects](#)
 - [Community Safety Services Fund - Projects](#)
 - [Community Fund - Projects](#)

York and North Yorkshire Victims’ Centre

Background

The new Victims’ Centre will include the York and North Yorkshire’s Sexual Assault Referral Centre (“SARC”) and Child Sexual Assault Assessment Services (“CSAAS”) facilities, alongside

two new Video-Recorded (“VRI”) Interview suites will be utilised by North Yorkshire Police to take statements from these and other vulnerable victims and witnesses including children and young people.

The purpose of a SARC is to co-ordinate and simplify the pathway for victims of rape and sexual assault to access wider healthcare, social care, and criminal justice processes to improve individual health and well-being, as well as criminal justice outcomes. SARC (for adults) and the CSAAS (for children) typically provide three main services following disclosure of an offence:

- immediate healthcare;
- forensic examinations and collection of evidence; and
- visually recorded interviews, supporting Achieving Best Evidence (“ABE”) guidelines.

The Forensic Science Regulator (“FSR”) ensures that the provision of forensic science services across the criminal justice system (including SARC and CSAAS) is subject to an appropriate regime of scientific quality standards. In 2020 a new requirement for all SARC/CSAAS to be accredited by the UK Accreditation Service (“UKAS”) under ISO 15189 was announced. Failure to meet the accreditation standards by October 2025 must be disclosed in any subsequent criminal justice proceedings; this accreditation deadline was extended from October 2023 as publication of the revised ISO and supporting Code of Practice was delayed until late 2022/23. Non-compliance would result in increased risk of unsuccessful prosecution of sexual offences, decreased public confidence in the justice process and in turn the possibility of fewer disclosures by victims of rape and sexual assault.

Creating a new dedicated Victims’ Centre for York and North Yorkshire will:

- ensure our SARC/CSAAS facilities will be able to achieve UKAS Accreditation;
- ensure continued delivery of these services for victims of rape and sexual assault to support them to recover, heal and rebuild their lives;
- provide accessible facilities for those with mobility needs;
- improve the overall experience of all victims using these facilities;
- support officers in achieving best evidence when interviewing victims and witnesses by helping them feel more assured and comfortable; and
- assist North Yorkshire Police in effectively meeting the requirements of Sections 27 and 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 in respect of facilitating video recorded interviews, cross-examination and re-examination of witnesses.

Progress to Date

A commercial property was purchased in May 2022 which could be refurbished to meet the operational and accreditation requirements for both SARC/CSAAS and VRI facilities; the new premises are located in a small private business park on the outskirts of York, close to key transport links. The building has private outside space and a car park, with a designated, accessible parking bay; the building also has a lift and accessible toilets and will be compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 1999.

There will be two dedicated forensic examination suites providing age-appropriate environments for the (Adult) SARC and Child Services (CSAAS); consisting of a forensically clean waiting room, medical examination room and shower room with toilet facilities along with separate family/visitor waiting rooms with ‘kitchenette’ and toilet facilities. There will also be a non-forensic medical

examination room for non-recent cases. There will be designated office space and ample storage for use by the SARC/CSAAS provider/s, including secure storage and freezer facilities for forensic samples collected for self-referral (Adult only) clients.

There will be two self-contained VRI suites, also with separate family/visitor waiting rooms with 'kitchenette' and toilet facilities, and dedicated office space and storage for use by North Yorkshire Police.

There will also be a meeting room, hot desk facilities and a 1-to-1/Quiet room which can be utilised by other partners and support service providers such as Social Workers, ISVAs or Counselling services. There will also be staff shower facilities, kitchen and break-out areas that can be used by all staff using the building.

Consultation workshops were initially held in June 2022 with key stakeholders including North Yorkshire Police, Regional Scientific Support, NHS England, ISVA Service Managers, current SARC/CSAAS provider and Registered Intermediary Services to review the Architects' concept drawings. The OPFCC have continued to work closely with these stakeholders and national subject matter experts including the FSR and National Police Chiefs' Council's Forensic Capability Network to input into architectural and design plans to ensure the new facilities will both meet the UKAS accreditation requirements and provide welcoming, modern facilities to better meet the needs of victims and vulnerable witnesses to support them to recover, heal and rebuild their lives.

A revised ISO 15189 was published in December 2022, and updated FSR Codes of Practice and supporting guidance issued in March 2023 which resulted in several re-designs to ensure the facilities would be compliant with essential forensic requirements. This has delayed planned progress and lengthened implementation timeframes overall.

The Building Contract was awarded in December 2023, and work having commenced on site in February 2024, is now well underway and due to be completed in December 2024. However, issues identified on site once works commenced have necessitated further revisions to the design plans to ensure Building Control compliance, with increased costs incurred as a result.

We are now finalising a revised Mobilisation Plan in partnership with the North Yorkshire Police Estates Team and current SARC/CSAAS provider to ensure all other operational requirements will be in place, including furnishing and decorating the Centre and ensure a smooth transfer from the existing facilities. This includes exploring appropriate opportunities to consult with victims and survivors in a trauma-informed way on proposed colour schemes, furniture options and other items to help make them feel more comfortable.

We anticipate the new Victims' Centre will be open and able to accept victims from January 2025.