

National operating model – explainer

Published on 9 July 2023 Written by Professor Katrin Hohl and Professor Betsy Stanko OBE

Katrin Hohl and Betsy Stanko OBE, lead academics for the programme, discuss the national operating model and how it is victim-centred, suspect-focused and context-led.

Explainer 3 mins read

The national operating model sets out an approach to rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) investigations that is victim-centred, suspect-focused and context-led.

The [investigator's journey](#) is central to this model and shows how policing can use this approach throughout the investigation.

Video Transcript

Betsy

The National Operating Model for the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences is here to support police forces nationwide to radically change and improve the way they investigate these offences and interact with victims.

Katrin

We want to change what officers do day to day. This change must happen throughout any one force, across Officer ranks, staff and even the organisation of specialist units such as those dealing with offender management and domestic abuse. Oversight from police and Crime Commissioners and the third sector must be informed oversight. The National Operating Model's mechanisms for assessment will assist senior police leaders, police and crime commissioners and the public to assess investigation improvements.

Betsy

At its operational core is the investigator's journey, which serves as a non prescriptive guide to investigation. There is also a range in this model of guides toolkits to support investigators to keep victims rights and needs at its heart.

Katrin

The National Operating Model was developed out of our frustrations that despite of decades of research reviews and attempts at reform, so few rapes result in a suspect being charged and victims continue to experience the investigation process as traumatic and unjust.

Betsy

Over the past two years, the police service and stakeholders have worked with us and developed a shared understanding of the kinds of corporate policing problems that hinder best investigations.

Katrin

Our mantra is that investigation should be suspect focused, victim centred and context led.

Betsy

Using these three principles, we have already seen improvements in the investigation outcomes of many participating forces.

Katrin

A victim centred, suspect focused and context led investigation represents a balanced and holistic approach to investigations. It centres the rights and needs of victims, focuses on sound investigation of all of a suspect's relevant offending behaviour, and considers the specific context of each case. These principles and materials contained in the National Operating Model are there to ensure that victim rights, needs and wishes don't get lost along the way.

Betsy

The principle of victim-centred underscores the importance of keeping victims at the heart throughout the entire investigation process. This should result in fair investigations with less room for rape myths and stereotypes to bias investigations. Research undertaken to underpin this model showed that investigations often over focused on scrutinising the credibility of victims and left victims feeling that they were under investigation, not the suspect.

Katrin

The suspect focus principle recognises the significance of conducting thorough and fair investigations that gather evidence and scrutinise the actions of suspects. The National Operating Model supports officers to develop and apply with confidence knowledge of sexual offending

behaviour to identify relevant lines of inquiry.

Betsy

The context-led principle acknowledges that wider circumstances provide the key frame within which rape or sexual offences happen. By considering the broader social, cultural and situational factors of relationships surrounding each offence, investigators can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved, the impact on the victim and assessing the suspect's offending behaviour when applying the legal standard.

Katrin

We created an evidence informed framework called the Five Pillars framework then morphed to six pillars based on a wealth of existing research, survivor voices and what we have learned through the years of UK-wide and global research and in Betsy's case, decades of working with and within policing. Then we conducted the largest ever research project on how police in England and Wales investigate rape to date.

Katrin

The national operating model is organised into five interconnected layers; the vision, flight deck, strategic layer, operational layer and foundational enablers.

Betsy

The layers of the national model are intricately linked and part of a holistic approach to improvement, and their successful implementation relies on the coordination and synergy between them. All layers work together and are critical to improvement in investigations going forward. Each layer serves a specific purpose within the police service. Investigators, supervisors and senior officers overseeing the strategic oversight will find useful practise and strategic guidance into what good looks like. The Community Oversight Boards will be able to ask good questions in the investigations in cases of rape and sexual offences. Police forces will be able to draw on resources to improve the wellbeing of officers and uplift their learning and development. The investigator's journey provides insight tools and guidance on RASSO investigations.

The materials that support the national operating model show:

- why this change is needed

- how forces can change
- how change can be measured

Victim-centred

Procedural justice principles underpin all officer interactions with victims. Victim rights and needs inform officer decision-making in RASSO investigations.

Suspect-focused

Specialist knowledge about sexual offending behaviour and its impact on victims informs RASSO investigations and offence prevention. Officers are bound to act consistently with the human rights of suspects and victims, as set out in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and incorporated into domestic law by the Human Rights Act 1998.

Context-led

Officers take the context of the offence into consideration from the moment the offence is disclosed to police.

This includes the:

- victim-suspect relationship context
- victim context, including whether they want an investigation
- suspect context, uncovered through a suspect-focused investigation

Structure of the supporting material for the national operating model

The material is designed with five interconnected layers, which are the:

- vision layer – sets out the overarching aims and objectives of the national operating model, providing a broad, transformational blueprint for action
- flight deck – measurement tools for forces to monitor progress towards the national operating model goals, informing continuous learning and improvement

- strategic layer – turning the vision into a strategic plan, providing policy guidance and actionable steps for realisation of the national operating model aims
- operational layer – provides practical tools, templates and guidance, supporting day-to-day operations and enabling the aims of the national operating model to be realised on the ground
- foundational enablers – offers essential learning resources and guidance for the strategic use of police data

Each layer is relevant to different stakeholders in policing, including investigators, supervisors and senior officers responsible for strategic oversight. The layers of the national operating model are linked and they should be used collaboratively.

Supporting material has information on achieving the vision of the national operating model including:

- strategic plans
- operational tools
- the need for foundational support, such as learning and development
- systemised procedural justice for victims
- effective utilisation of data and digital forensic capabilities

You should explore all layers of the national operating model, even those outside of your role. This will result in a shared understanding with everyone working towards the same aims. By recognising the connections between the layers you can see the impact of strategic decisions on frontline officers, victims and suspects.

Achieving the aims of the national operating model requires coordinated change across every layer and the active involvement of operational officers, senior leaders, police and crime commissioners, other oversight bodies and the public.

Using the national operating model

The [investigator's journey](#) is a 15-stage model investigation strategy from the perspective of an investigator. It offers guidance, legal assurance and consideration points when investigating a case. It shows how RASSO investigations can be victim-centred, suspect-focused and context-led at

every stage.

How the new national operating model was developed

The development of the new national operating model involved a comprehensive and collaborative effort between police and academics.

[Operation Soteria Bluestone](#) was funded by the Home Office, led by the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) and hosted by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC). Operation Soteria Bluestone worked with research team leaders from seven universities, academic experts in various disciplines, experienced professionals in violence against women and girls, and professionals in community sector studies.

The model was refined and informed by evidence-based research and insights gained from the participating pathfinder police forces (Metropolitan Police Service, Durham Constabulary, West Midlands Police and South Wales Police). Operation Soteria Bluestone used a multi-method research approach, including data analysis, case file reviews, observation, interviews, focus groups and document reviews.

- [Find out more information on the team behind the national operating model on Knowledge Hub \(you will need to log in\)](#)
- [Read the investigator's journey](#)
- [Find the materials that support the investigator's journey and make up the entire national operating model on Knowledge Hub \(you will need to log in\)](#)
- [Find out more about how the national operating model was developed and the academics and universities involved](#)

Additional resources for police officers and policing staff

- [Find further national operating model materials on Knowledge Hub \(you will need need to log in\)](#)

Tags

Rape and sexual offences