



**Vulnerability Knowledge
& Practice Programme**



**College of
Policing**

NPCC
National Police Chiefs' Council

National Vulnerability and Public Protection Strategy

A common framework approach to vulnerability including public protection.

January 2025

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Foreword

The landscape of recognising and responding to vulnerability and public protection related risk is complex. The Police service has in many areas responded positively to meeting this challenge, but we know and accept there is more to do.

Policing must be able to recognise and understand vulnerability related risk, across its various forms. Identification of why a person is vulnerable means we can intervene earlier to prevent escalation and be more focused in directing the correct support. It must also focus on those who seek to cause harm, to understand the motivators of that crime and how we can best disrupt that behaviour.

Despite all that policing has learned in this journey and the evidence we have in responding to vulnerability, there remains no clear single approach. Too often the service has created specific, but separate plans, that focus on single thematic areas without recognising the commonality that exist across them.

The increasingly busy but fragmented landscape across policing and in particular public protection needs to be coordinated better so we do not miss the opportunity to focus our efforts. We know Vulnerability and Public Protection is everyone's business and having consistency in our response is needed to ensure that all areas of policing work together across vulnerability and public protection. This will help everyone recognise the part they play, be that in the initial response or the specialist work needed with victims and suspects.

Policing introduced the National Vulnerability Action Plan (NVAP) to bring that overarching approach to understanding and responding to vulnerability. Forces saw the benefit having a framework to build their approach to vulnerability and the time is now to build on what we have learned to continue to drive forward our ambitions to reduce vulnerability and harm in our communities.

The next step is to introduce this National Vulnerability and Public Protection Strategy so that policing has a single overarching method for the identification, response and partnership working for vulnerability.

This strategy provides a consistent framework for National Leads, Chief Officers, Public Protection leads and operational teams to work together. It builds on the work of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Soteria and is at the centre of our approach, as we seek to identify and tackle the wider causes of vulnerability and public protection threats. It will be central to the coordination of work driven through the National Centre for VAWG and Public Protection.

Temp/CC Blyth



Strategic Intent

Context

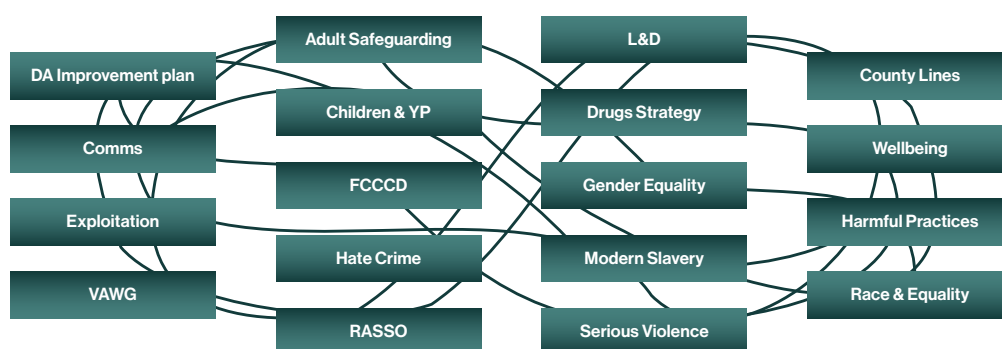
In its response to vulnerability, policing has developed many programmes of work to improve its effectiveness in the identification, response and prevention of harm. Much of this has been led by those leading and working within specialist Public Protection teams, however vulnerability and public protection is everyone's business and not the sole responsibility of a small section of policing.

Reviews such as the 2020 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire & Rescue Services report 'A Call for Help' (HMICFRS, 2020) also highlight that 'while demand involving individuals experiencing vulnerability is increasing both in volume and complexity, the policing response is inconsistent'.

This fragmented approach is further evidenced by the work of programmes such as Operation Soteria who reviewed the issue of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) focusing on the response and capability of policing. The evidence and learning from this work led to the development and use of a framework approach (6 pillars). This has been used by forces and shown improvements in the way policing has responded to issues of RASSO identified in the Operation Soteria Bluestone Year One Report 2021-2022 (Operation Soteria 2022).

The reduction of vulnerability is not a Police response alone and one where the work with both partners and the community is required, for example as seen in the development of Violence Reduction Units and Community Safety Partnerships. Taking this whole system¹ approach aims to drive long-term change through integrated and aligned planning and delivery. To achieve this however there needs to be greater consistency from policing.

A local case study



¹ A strategic integrated approach to planning and delivering services.

Vision

This strategy will simplify the often-complex vulnerability landscape to help policing prioritise its response to vulnerability, avoid duplication of effort and reduce missed opportunities. By doing so policing will more effectively identify vulnerability, respond to it and work with others to prevent harm in our communities.

Aim

This strategy builds on the NVAP and the significant developments in areas such as RASSO, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and Child Abuse and Exploitation. It provides a framework for the direction of Central Policing Services, Chief Officers and Public Protection leads, and wider policing to help focus on:

- Learning and Development
- Evidence and Evaluation
- Workforce and Culture

Objective

This strategy provides a framework approach that can be used across thematic areas of threat and risk to help forces assess their response to vulnerability. Using this will identify areas for improvement and target resources effectively.

By establishing a common understanding of the requirements in the response to vulnerability, central support through organisations such as the National Police Chiefs Council or College of Policing can identify future development of training and continual personal development or the strategic links to partner agencies.

Importantly this will also support the National Centre for VAWG and Public Protection to identify where emerging practice is developing, take this learning to share it and shape wider delivery. When applied this strategy will:

- Enable the provision of a coherent approach to vulnerability by:
 - ensuring a whole-systems approach
 - reducing duplication thereby increasing available resource
 - providing an overarching framework for delivery informed by the NVAP, Soteria Programme and VAWG
- Drive long-term change with:
 - decisions made against evidence-based principles and objectives
 - a clear vision for the future
- Improve policing's response to vulnerability through:
 - improving victim confidence thereby increasing legitimacy
 - preventing offending / re-offending
 - bringing more offenders to justice

Definition of vulnerability

The Police Foundation's Strategic Policing Review identified safeguarding vulnerable people as the second key function of policing, in order for them to perform their core role of promoting public safety by maintaining order and upholding the law (The Police Foundation, 2022, p. 11).

The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) and the College of Policing have adopted the definition of vulnerability which states that:

'A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation.'

(Wolpert et al., 2014)

In addition to this broad approach to vulnerability, this strategy recognises that some groups are always considered as vulnerable.

Policing identifies that all children up to the age of 18 are vulnerable and therefore potentially at risk, with a child centred approach required in all interactions with them. All officers must have regard to their safety, welfare, and well-being as required under Section 10 and Section 11 of the Children Act (2004) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2010).

Children and young people between the age of 18-24 are described as in transition to adulthood. Transitional Safeguarding describes the need for, 'an approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives' (Holmes & Smale et al., 2018)¹.

Likewise, adults who are identified under the Care Act 2014 as at risk and receiving care in the community will be seen as vulnerable. The Care Act defines those who need support as "any person aged 18 years and over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental health issue, learning or physical disability, sensory impairment, age or illness or who is or may be unable to take care of him/herself or unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or serious exploitation.

Definition of public protection

Public protection is about ensuring the safety of and preventing harm to vulnerable groups within society who are in danger of becoming victims of crime (NHS Lothian, n.d.; HMICFRS, 2023). The NPCC Violence & Public Protection Portfolio have defined public protection as;

Public Protection is a core policing function to prevent and reduce harm through safeguarding, investigation, tackling perpetrators and working in partnership. It incorporates 14 threat areas with particular focus on Violence Against Women and Girls.

Adults at risk, Child abuse, Child Exploitation, Domestic Abuse, Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Honour Based Abuse, Missing, Modern Day Slavery, MOSOVO, Rape & Sexual Violence, Sex Work, Stalking & Harassment, Vulnerability to Radicalisation.

1 Transitional Safeguarding (Christine Cocker, Dez Holmes and Adi Cooper)

What is the National Vulnerability Strategy Framework?

This strategy sets a framework for the standard setting and professionalisation, progressed under the leadership of the Violence and Public Protection portfolio and aligned to the work of the Centre for VAWG and Public Protection. This will help policing understand consistently its capacity, capability and competence of its response to vulnerability.

This strategy does not set prescribed models and recognises the need to allow the autonomy and flexibility of forces to manage the risks in a way that meets their needs and local arrangements. The framework helps forces to set the vision for the response to vulnerability and align corporate improvements to support this work through areas such as the provision of training, learning and knowledge with good practice quickly shared and the shaping of a positive culture.

Governance

Vulnerability is everyone's business; however, it is essential that there is clear oversight at an executive level. Good governance is a dynamic and continuous process. It must be informed by performance, not led by it and forces must strike this balance by having clear accountability at all levels. It can also help to shape and drive a positive culture, one where staff are not fearful of mistakes or blame but are part of a process that supports evolution and learning.

The vision and direction of vulnerability should be set at a senior strategic level and direct the effectiveness of the delivery based on a thorough understanding of capability, capacity and competence of the force. This should aim to have a positive impact on the service provided and the overall performance of the force. The role that good governance plays is recognised within the 'Police Assessment Framework' process used by HMICFRS.

Definition:

'Governance encompasses the set of responsibilities, practices, policies, and procedures exercised by an agency to provide strategic direction, achieve objectives, manage risks, and use resources responsibly, with a clear leadership and accountability structure.' (VKPP Governance in Policing Review 2024)



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Recent reports, such as the Casey Review (2023) and the Angiolini Review (2024), have highlighted disparities and inequalities in policing practices and outcomes based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. The framework must seek to build trust and confidence by seeking not only to understand the issues but be part of a commitment to challenge bias, prejudices and discriminatory behaviour. This strategy through its Equality Impact Assessment not only recognises this but holds it as a core part of delivery across the approach to vulnerability.

Partnerships

Policing plays a critical role in protecting children and adults who are at risk of harm. It cannot achieve the reduction of harm alone and the prevention and detection of crime should form part of a broader and more systemic approach across our partnerships and other organisations may more naturally lead due to their role or skill.

This framework will support policing to look beyond the skills it requires of its officers in prevention and problem solving as a single approach but how it works with others, to look at the causes of problems. It highlights the role executive and senior leaders play in ensuring that at a strategic level there is clarity with a strong partnership, recognising that some agencies will have different ways of working.

Chief Officers working with other senior strategic leaders must deliver beyond our statutory responsibilities across our partnerships to ensure there is not only a shared understanding of vulnerability, safeguarding and public protection but that those partnerships are effective in their single and joint approach. It is the role of senior leaders across organisations to bring that governance and accountability jointly. This must then be linked back into policing, so our response supports, and challenges where necessary, our colleagues to increase the safety of those who need it most.



Framework

This strategy has been developed from the learning policing has gained over recent years. It recognises that areas of Vulnerability and Public Protection are included in the Strategic Policing Requirement and that the response to this must be as robust as it is within Serious Organised Crime and Counter Terrorism. In order to improve the response to vulnerability and public protection that change needs to be embedded across policing. The 4P's framework identifies key principles that are required across this delivery and specifically takes much of this learning from the well-developed delivery framework of the VAWG task-force and the approach of Operation Soteria.

4P's

The use of Prevent – Prepare – Pursue – Protect has been adopted by policing in several areas and is well used by many forces and thematic areas. The principals across these when mapped encourage a strategic whole system response to Vulnerability and Public protection.

The Soteria National Operating Model (NOM) sits within the strategy, predominantly within the Pursue strand.

Summary

This strategy aims to improve the policing response to vulnerability and public protection by setting standards of delivery. It supports forces and policing to do this, aligning with the approach of the HMICFRS who measure the standards set through the National Police Chiefs Council and College of Policing.

Available to help forces are several documents to assist with implementation, make available previous learning through a comprehensive evidence base, a clear Equality Impact Assessment and the future development of a tool-kit of support. This is the start point for the strategy and as policing learns and understands vulnerability and public protection it will enable further enhancement of this response.



Vulnerability and Public Protection Strategy Principles

Governance

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Data and Performance

Prevent

Work collaboratively with statutory and non-statutory partners at operational and strategic levels.

Information sharing agreements across partnerships are in place.

A multi-agency referral and decision making process is in place with clear escalation processes.

Referrals are made to ensure vulnerable people are safeguarded and/or supported.

Seek a jointly accountable whole systems approach to prevent harm.

Steps taken to safeguard vulnerable people using effective problem solving approaches.

Prepare

Build a workforce with a core knowledge, skills & attitude to be professionally curious, confident & effective in responding to vulnerability related harm.

Have the well-being of our workforce at the heart of service delivery.

Develop leaders who are able to maintain an open & supportive culture which:

- Promotes diversity, equity, inclusion & the code of ethics.
- Challenges inappropriate behaviour, language and ineffective decision making.

Prepare supervisors with the capacity & capability they need to be able to manage risk, demand & be effective in their role.

Identify and recognise the risks of digital harm to vulnerable people.

Develop the technical knowledge base of our workforce, so they can confidently respond and protect those at risk of digital harm.

Equip our workforce with tools, strategies and resources to gather necessary and proportionate evidence from victims and from suspects.

Pursue

An investigative mindset is used by call takers & first responders, to ensure the victim's evidence is captured i.e. digital forensics, safeguarding & investigative strategies.

Suspect focused, context & evidence-led approach taken for investigations strategies.

Crimes are allocated to those best equipped to deal with them at the earliest opportunity, enabling good quality investigations & file prep.

High risk, high harm & repeat perpetrators identified & prevention and disruption opportunities are utilised, using partners where appropriate.

A problem-solving approach used to tackle the causes of offending & reduce harm & demand.

Protect

A victim-centred, trauma-informed approach is taken, where victims are listened to with informed and open belief, and the victim's code is applied.

Assure procedural justice for all victims.



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