

Royal Air Force Police

Rape, serious sexual assault and
domestic abuse investigations

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

Royal Air Force Police: Rape, serious sexual assault and domestic abuse investigations

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Summary

This inspection focused on how well the Royal Air Force Police (RAFP or ‘the force’) prevents domestic abuse¹ and rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO), and how well it investigates these incidents. Our terms of reference also asked us to examine how well the RAFP supports and safeguards victims of these crimes and how well it provides governance for these activities.

We conducted this inspection at the same time as inspecting the Royal Navy Police and the Royal Military Police against the same terms of reference.

While the three service police forces have unique operating contexts, they all form part of the UK armed forces, fall under the remit of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and have some of the same important processes and capabilities. Therefore, some of our findings and recommendations relate to all three service police forces.

Strategic leadership and governance

The MOD and the RAF should strengthen the oversight and governance arrangements they have in place for the RAFP, and the RAFP should improve its own internal governance arrangements. This would hold the RAFP more to account and promote improvements in its performance.

The MOD has produced a domestic abuse strategy for the military called [*No Defence for Abuse*](#) and an associated action plan. But it hasn’t set the RAFP, or the other service police forces, any actions relating to this.

As for RASSO, the MOD hasn’t produced an equivalent to *No Defence for Abuse*. This means that the MOD has few means available to hold the RAFP to account on matters such as prevention and victim care.

¹ The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) established a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time. Domestic abuse is behaviour between people aged 16 or over who are personally connected to each other that is either physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse or psychological, emotional or other abuse. For the purposes of this Act, two people are personally connected to each other if any of the following applies:

- (a) they are, or have been, married to each other;
- (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child; or
- (g) they are relatives.

Similarly, the RAF's Air Justice Board doesn't direct what the RAFF should do, doesn't set any performance measures or objectives for the RAFF, and we found little evidence of any form of robust governance. This means that the RAF has few means to hold the RAFF to account.

At a force level, the RAFF's governance meetings aren't always structured around the force's priorities, meaning that they might not always be discussed, and that progress made against these isn't always monitored.

We were, however, pleased to find that the Provost Marshal (RAF) has appointed senior officers to lead work on domestic abuse and RASSO. They have created separate strategies for domestic abuse and RASSO, which provide comprehensive guidance for the RAFF. This makes the force able to better respond to cases of domestic abuse and RASSO.

The RAFF produces an annual strategic threat assessment, which allows it to prioritise activity and to target education and intervention. However, several factors limit the force's understanding of the scale of offending:

- The ICT systems used by the RAFF, and the other service police forces, have significant problems making it difficult for users to report data and statistics accurately and highlight cases of domestic abuse. A replacement programme is underway, but it won't be operational before Autumn 2023.
- Home Office police forces are instructed to inform the military of any incidents in which the suspect or victim is a member of the military. We aren't convinced that this is happening in all cases.

This results in the RAFF setting its priorities with insufficient and poor-quality data, which will affect its ability to respond appropriately to incidents.

Prevention and encouraging reporting

The RAFF has a role in preventing domestic abuse and RASSO and encouraging the reporting of these incidents. While it has developed a RASSO awareness campaign that focuses on sexual consent, neither this, nor domestic abuse awareness training is mandatory for all RAF personnel. This means that prevention opportunities are being missed. We therefore recommend that the MOD should support the RAFF by mandating domestic abuse and RASSO awareness training across the RAF.

Handling calls and first reports of crime

The procedures and systems that the RAFF, and the other service police forces, use to record first contact about incidents need to improve. They don't use a centralised contact centre. As a result, calls can be missed, insufficient detail is often recorded, and police response can be delayed or ill-prepared. This adversely affects the level of service received by victims of domestic abuse and RASSO.

First response to domestic abuse and RASSO incidents

It is essential that first responders and their supervisors have the skills they need to do their jobs properly. We found that RAFP personnel who joined the force since 2020 received an adequate level of domestic abuse and RASSO first responder training as part of their initial training. However, those personnel who received their initial training before 2020 weren't trained to the same level on domestic abuse and RASSO, and therefore may lack the skills to respond as effectively to such incidents.

The RAFP has produced guidance documents for first responders dealing with domestic abuse incidents. But they are less comprehensive than the domestic abuse aide-memoires used by the Royal Navy Police and Royal Military Police. For example, they don't contain clear guidance for first responders on how they should risk assess domestic abuse victims or conduct a victim needs assessment.

What's more, first responders aren't conducting [risk assessments](#) or needs assessments in all appropriate cases. The force should start monitoring risk and need-assessment completion rates as part of an improved governance process, once the replacement for its current ICT is in place. The force should also monitor how consistently these assessments are completed; this will ensure that the force responds appropriately to victims who are at greater risk.

We found that the RAFP made early arrests in some, but not all, of the cases we reviewed where such action would have been proportionate and justified. This may put some victims at greater risk and means that some opportunities to secure evidence from the suspect, such as a forensic examination, are missed.

There is a network of independent sexual/domestic violence advisors (ISVAs/IDVAs) throughout the UK that supports service victims of sexual violence. However, we are concerned that in some overseas locations, no ISVA, IDVA or other similar services are in place that the service police can refer victims to. We would encourage the RAFP to consider how it might address this problem.

Investigations after first response

The RAFP investigates very few domestic abuse cases. Some of these are investigated by the specialist investigation branch (SIB) and some by general policing duties (GPD) personnel. All RASSO cases are investigated by the SIB.

During our case file review, we concluded that most SIB investigations were of a comparable or higher quality than in many Home Office or other civilian police forces (known as CIVPOL). This is partly a result of investigators having a lower caseload than their counterparts in CIVPOL.

Given the greater experience and training among SIB investigators compared to their colleagues in GPD units, and their capacity for additional work, we recommend that all criminal domestic abuse cases retained by the RAFP should be investigated by the SIB.

RAFP investigators compiled investigation strategies in all the investigations we reviewed. Most were produced at the outset of investigations and had regular updates, with appropriate lines of enquiry. But we found that some strategies in complex investigations could be improved. The absence of an overarching strategy and decision-making policy for important areas in such investigations means that lines of enquiry can be missed and evidence can be lost.

In all the force's domestic abuse case files we reviewed, the police decision to take no further action was appropriate. However, we couldn't find evidence that the RAFP investigators complied with a legal requirement to consult the Service Prosecuting Authority before making the decision to discontinue RASSO cases.

Forensic evidence collection should be done by specially trained crime scene investigators (CSIs). As the force only has six CSIs, who are based in southern England and serve the whole of the UK, their arrival at crime scenes can be delayed for several hours. We recommend that the provost marshals of all three armed services and the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) (NPCC) lead for forensics should jointly agree on procedures for Home Office police force CSIs to support service police investigations. This will provide opportunities for service police CSIs to gain further operational forensic experience and to speed up the initial forensic evidence gathering.

We found that the RAFP Digital Forensic Team (DFT) has enough forensically-trained personnel to maintain the [digital forensics](#) capability. It also has prioritisation procedures in place and most cases are dealt with quickly. However, we recommend that the provost marshals for all three service police forces should introduce 'cyber kiosks' to quickly gain access to and download material held on mobile digital devices. This will speed up investigations and allow the force to return such devices to victims and suspects sooner.

Victim contact

As part of their responsibilities to the people under their command, COs are responsible for appointing a victim support officer (VSO) to victims of domestic abuse and RASSO. We found that this doesn't happen in all cases. Sometimes the victim can be left without the support they need in the days and weeks after the offence. It can also deny the victim protection from intimidation and further abuse.

Victims from the three services confirmed that in the cases where a VSO was appointed, most didn't support them as they should. Some victims felt ostracised by their units while others suffered abuse on social media. We recommend that the MOD reinforce compliance of COs' responsibilities around VSOs, and monitor such compliance by reviewing data from COs and feedback from victims.

We were unable to assess the quality of [safeguarding](#) provided to victims after the initial safeguarding actions were carried out by the RAFP. COs have responsibility for this 'ongoing safeguarding', which is largely outside the control of the service police. Many interviewees, including senior officers and managers from the RAFP and welfare services, were concerned that nobody has oversight of the totality of safeguarding measures different parties' conduct in a case. We also found this to be a cause for concern.

We made a total of 30 recommendations and identified 21 areas for improvement. They appear at annexes A and B respectively.

Introduction

About HMICFRS

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services in the public interest. We conduct statutory inspections of police forces and other law enforcement agencies in England and Wales. We also inspect the service police (Royal Navy Police, Royal Military Police and the Royal Air Force Police) on invitation from the Secretary of State for Defence.

In preparing our reports, we ask the questions that citizens would ask, and publish the answers in an accessible form, using our expertise to interpret the evidence and make recommendations for improvement.

Our commission

In 2020, the Secretary of State for Defence invited us to inspect the service police forces. Our terms of reference were to examine how the three service police forces deal with rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO), and domestic abuse. Within this, we were asked to examine how the forces:

- prevent domestic abuse and RASSO;
- investigate domestic abuse and RASSO incidents;
- support and safeguard victims of domestic abuse and RASSO;
- pass on relevant information and intelligence to relevant agencies; and
- provide governance for these activities.

Limits to this inspection

All three service police forces have important roles in each of the areas highlighted in the terms of reference. But the forces operate as part of broader military structures and don't have the same wide-ranging responsibilities as civilian police forces in, for example, crime prevention and [safeguarding](#) victims. Responsibility for these activities lies primarily with the commanding officers (COs) of units across the wider military. As we don't have the statutory authority to inspect the broader military, this inspection focused on the service police's activity. Our inspection, therefore, examines only one important aspect of how the three armed services deal with domestic abuse and RASSO.

Throughout this report, we highlight issues that we believe should be examined as part of broader reviews of the military's approach to domestic abuse and RASSO.

A review of the actions carried out by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the broader military to prevent domestic abuse and RASSO is needed in order to properly assess their effectiveness. Similarly, there needs to be a comprehensive review of how domestic abuse and RASSO victims are safeguarded. This would need to examine the roles of COs, discipline units and welfare units, among others. And to determine why many reports of domestic abuse and RASSO don't result in prosecution would require a review of COs, the service police and the Service Prosecution Authority (SPA). We don't have the remit to undertake these reviews.

Our methodology and approach to this inspection

Our fieldwork for this inspection took place in late 2020 and early 2021. As a result of the pandemic, most of our fieldwork was conducted remotely. During our fieldwork, we:

- spoke to victims of domestic abuse and RASSO offences investigated by service police forces;
- conducted more than 80 interviews and focus groups of service police personnel at all levels of the three forces, based in the UK and abroad;
- interviewed more than 50 other interested parties, including personnel from other parts of the military, the MOD and civilian police forces;
- attended forces' governance and performance meetings; and
- reviewed the three service police forces' domestic abuse and RASSO investigation case files.²

We also reviewed more than 300 documents provided by the forces. These included self-assessments, policies, procedures, minutes of meetings and agreements with other organisations.

In reaching our judgments, we have, where appropriate, drawn on the College of Policing's guidance to police forces, known as authorised professional practice (APP). We also refer to findings from other inspection reports.

However, each of the three service police forces has a unique role, which is very different from that of civilian police forces. As such, we can't expect them to adhere to all elements of the APP, which was designed principally for civilian police forces working in different policing environments. We have, therefore, inspected the service police forces in their context. And we have been pragmatic when developing our recommendations and areas for improvement.

² This included all investigations that began in 2019. The Royal Navy Police, Royal Military Police and Royal Air Force Police investigated only a few cases. We therefore also reviewed a random selection of cases that were investigated by those forces in 2020. We chose to review 2019 and 2020 cases because investigations into newer cases wouldn't have progressed as far and wouldn't have provided us with evidence of the full investigative process.

The report

This is one of three reports we have produced for this inspection and focuses on the Royal Air Force Police. All three reports also include our findings relating to issues that affect all three service police forces and collaborative activities.

The report has seven chapters. The first chapter provides a background to the Royal Air Force Police, the service justice system, domestic abuse and RASSO.

The other chapters address the terms of reference, examining in turn:

- the relevant governance arrangements at the MOD, force and unit level;
- how the force tries to prevent domestic abuse and RASSO offences;
- how well the force responds to calls for service and records domestic abuse and RASSO offences, including passing on information and intelligence;
- how well the force conducts first response to domestic abuse and RASSO offences, including the quality of initial investigation and safeguarding; and
- how well the force conducts domestic abuse and RASSO investigations after first response.

We are grateful to those who gave their time freely and willingly to help us understand the full range of issues across the military.

About the terminology we use in this report

We recognise that there are discussions over the use of the terms ‘complainant’, ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’, and of ‘suspect’, ‘accused’ and ‘defendant’.

Throughout this report, the term ‘victim(s)’ is used to refer to those affected by rape. It incorporates other terms such as ‘complainant(s)’, ‘client(s)’ and ‘survivor(s)’, as referred to by focus groups and interviewees.

We have used the term ‘suspect’ to refer to a person accused of rape. It incorporates ‘offender’, ‘perpetrator’ and ‘defendant’. Other terms may be used when referring to published data or in quotes to maintain consistency with the original source.

The service police forces operate alongside other territorial police forces in the UK: the 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales, Police Scotland, the Police Service for Northern Ireland, as well as foreign police services. In this report we use the service police term ‘civilian police’ (CIVPOL) to refer to the UK territorial police forces.

1. The offences, the service justice system, the service police, their responsibilities and environment

In this chapter we provide a background to:

- rape and serious sexual offences, and domestic abuse;
- how the service justice system operates;
- the structure of the service police;
- the RAFP and service justice system;
- the service police forces' jurisdiction; and
- other recent independent reports about the service police forces and the way they deal with domestic abuse and sexual offending.

Rape, serious sexual offences and domestic abuse

Rape and serious sexual offending (RASSO) are among the most serious crimes. Rape is the offence contrary to [section 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003](#) and sexual assault (by penetration) is the offence contrary to [section 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003](#).

The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) established a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time. Domestic abuse is behaviour between people aged 16 or over who are personally connected to each other³ that is either:

- physical or sexual abuse;
- violent or threatening behaviour;
- [controlling or coercive behaviour](#);
- economic abuse; or

³ For the purposes of this Act, two people are personally connected to each other if any of the following applies:

- (a) they are, or have been, married to each other;
- (b) they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- (c) they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (d) they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- (e) they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- (f) they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child; or
- (g) they are relatives.

- psychological, emotional or other abuse.

Except for controlling or coercive behaviour, domestic abuse isn't a specific criminal offence. Police forces record offences that relate to domestic abuse under the respective offence that has been committed (for example, assault with injury). But the police must also record that an offence is domestic-abuse related.

The service justice system

The service justice system (SJS) establishes a legal framework that makes sure service personnel are subject to a single disciplinary code that applies wherever they serve. The disciplinary systems of the three services – the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force – were drawn together under a common system by the [Armed Forces Act \(AFA\) 2006](#).

The SJS is responsible for investigating and prosecuting the full range of offences against military law. Such offences include:

- discipline offences (for example desertion, mutiny and assisting the enemy) that can only be committed by members of the armed forces, or civilians subject to service discipline;⁴ and
- criminal conduct offences, which includes anything done anywhere in the world that, if done in England and Wales, would be against the civilian criminal law.

The SJS comprises commanding officers (COs), the service police, the Service Prosecution Authority (SPA), and courts marshal.

Royal Air Force COs – of wing commander or group captain rank – have wide-ranging responsibilities for the operational output, training, welfare and discipline of the personnel under their command (for example, an air station, or those deployed in a tactical wing).

The AFA 2006 places COs at the centre of the service justice system. The COs administer justice for most disciplinary offences and some criminal conduct offences through the summary hearing process, in which they investigate the allegation and determine whether the accused is guilty. A CO can also refer their cases directly to the SPA for court martial. COs can use their discretion about how most cases are handled. The exceptions are offences listed in Schedule 2 of the AFA 2006 or those that are committed in prescribed circumstances (such as death in custody). Generally, such offences are referred to as Schedule 2 offences. The CO must refer any such offences to the service police. Schedule 1 offences in the AFA 2006 are “criminal conduct offences that may be dealt with at a summary hearing”.

Almost all sexual offences under Part 1 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 are Schedule 2 offences. COs must therefore always report them to the service police. We explore this issue in detail in the next chapter.

⁴ An accused person may also elect for a trial before the court martial rather than a summary hearing.

Schedule 1 offences can be dealt with by COs and include theft, damage and assault. This means that, while all RASSO offences should be dealt with by the service police, some domestic abuse-related offences that aren't RASSO and involve, for example, theft, damage and/or assault, can be dealt with by COs.

Service police

The service police comprise the Royal Navy Police (RNP), Royal Military Police (RMP) and Royal Air Force Police (RAFP). In their police duties, the service police are independent of COs and the chain of command by virtue of section 115A of the AFA 2006, which prohibits interference or attempts to direct investigations by persons outside the service police. The service police must investigate and record the results in an initial disclosure of the prosecution case to the CO or the SPA.

Each service police force includes general policing duties (GPD) units, which provide, among other things, first response, and the Special Investigation Branch (SIB), which investigates most serious offences.

Based near Portsmouth, the Service Police Crime Bureau provides specialist support, such as intelligence, forensic and information management to the service police.

The RAFP

The RAFP is headed by an RAF officer of group captain rank, who holds the title Provost Marshal (RAF), appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. The Provost Marshal (RAF) is responsible to the Defence Council for conducting and directing all RAFP investigations.

The RAFP has over 1,200 personnel and is responsible for the security and safety of RAF aircraft and bases in the UK and across the world, and their personnel.

RAFP personnel are commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), including acting corporal, corporal, sergeant, flight sergeant and warrant officers (WO). RAFP-commissioned officers are pilot officer, flying officer, flight lieutenant, squadron leader, wing commander and group captain.

As well as a central headquarters function (Headquarters Provost Marshal (RAF))⁵ and a professional standards unit, there are six squadrons, each commanded by a squadron leader officer commanding (OC).⁶ These include the following:

- Four GPD squadrons. Personnel in these squadrons provide general policing for other units of the RAF. Their activities include patrol, first response and investigating some criminal offences. They carry out other roles that their counterparts in CIVPOL don't. Some GPD squadrons have established Unit Investigation Elements (UIEs). In those squadrons, UIE personnel conduct investigations while the remaining GPD staff (referred to as law enforcement (or LE) personnel) conduct the other GPD functions.

⁵ Since we conducted the fieldwork, this unit has been renamed Office of the Provost Marshal.

⁶ Officers commanding are not the same as commanding officers and have different responsibilities to COs.

- The RAFF SIB, which is based at RAF Cranwell and RAF Halton, is led by an OC, a deputy squadron commander (a flight lieutenant) and a WO. There are 25 investigators in each of the 2 regions, supervised by team leaders and a warrant officer. This unit provides investigative capability for serious or complex cases, or others that need to be investigated by specialists.
- The Counter-Intelligence and Security Squadron detects, identifies and understands threats posed by Hostile Intelligence Services, or by individuals engaged in terrorism, espionage, sabotage, subversion, crime or other types of threats.
- Each squadron is made up of flights, which are headed by an officer commanding of squadron leader rank. There is an RAFF GPD flight at each RAF base in the UK. In addition to officers, each section is composed of junior non-commissioned officers (JNCOs), senior non-commissioned officers (SNCOs) and WOs.

The RAFF also has a presence overseas. This includes the Joint Services Police and Security Unit, part of the British Forces South Atlantic Islands and, with the Royal Military Police, jointly commanding and staffing the Cyprus Joint Policing Unit.

All RAFF personnel (with the exception of a few civilians at headquarters) are both air force personnel and police officers, and as such they retain similar responsibilities and duties. As an RAF group, the RAFF is bound by the operational structure of the wider RAF and military doctrine, which makes its policing role more difficult.

Throughout this report, we highlight problems caused by the military concept of mission command: most decision making is delegated to the lowest level officer. This makes it difficult to guarantee that all sections approach training, assurance and other activity consistently.

The military personnel posting process also poses difficulties, which we highlight in detail later in this report. Under this process, personnel are posted into roles for a few years and then posted on to another role. This affects the experience and capability of specialist units and leads to 'skill fade', where operational knowledge is lost when people leave their post.

The SPA and the Military Court Service

The Director of Service Prosecutions is the head of the SPA. He and the SPA are independent of COs and the chain of command and operate under the guidance of the Attorney General. The SPA receives cases either from the service police or from COs and can prosecute these cases before the court martial. The SPA also advises the service police on the conduct of investigations before they are formally referred to the SPA.

The court martial has global jurisdiction over all service personnel and civilians who are subject to service discipline (for example, family members, civilian contractors, teachers, administrative staff when serving abroad). It hears all types of criminal case, including murder and serious sexual offences. In all cases, a judge advocate calls the defendant before a court and conducts the trial, which is similar to a civilian crown court trial, even for minor disciplinary or criminal offences.

Jurisdiction

The law and rules that set out the relative jurisdictional boundaries of service police, CIVPOL and law enforcement agencies in other jurisdictions are complex and at times confusing to some interviewees in the service police and CIVPOL.

In many cases, there is concurrent jurisdiction, meaning that cases could be investigated or prosecuted by the service police, CIVPOL or foreign authorities. Decisions about who has jurisdiction must take into account the principles contained in relevant protocols, in the Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) and in memoranda of understanding. The jurisdictional issue must be addressed before an allegation or offence can be investigated by the service police.

The [Prosecutors Protocol of November 2016](#) (which deals with prosecutions rather than policing) at paragraph 2.2(b) establishes that:

“offences alleged only against persons subject to service law which don’t affect the person or property of civilians should normally be dealt with in service proceeding”.

Therefore, in the UK the service police have jurisdiction for investigating all RASSO or domestic abuse offences in which the victim and accused are subject to service law. But in practice, this isn’t as straightforward.

In England and Wales, [Home Office Circular \(28/2008\)](#) underlines the jurisdiction of Home Office police forces, but it states:

“A flexible approach, based on consultation and agreement at local level, is encouraged, where the respective police forces discuss who is best placed to take action based on availability of resources, jurisdiction and the public interest.”

So, in some places these offences are dealt with by CIVPOL and in others by the service police. It also means that for some offences such as domestic abuse, the service police can cede jurisdiction even if the case involves just service personnel.

Service police forces have broader jurisdiction outside the UK. In other countries, the service police’s jurisdiction extends to include those offences conducted by persons subject to service law, where the victims are UK nationals who aren’t subject to service law. For example, CIVPOL would normally have jurisdiction if a civilian reported domestic abuse conducted by a service person based in the UK. But if the same civilian reported abuse by the same service person in a military base overseas, the service police would have jurisdiction.

While this is a basic explanation, there are many more complexities.

Other reviews

The service justice system has been subject to many reviews in the past few years. Similarly, the effectiveness of the service police forces’ investigations of rape and serious sexual offending have also been subject to external scrutiny.

Between 2017 and 2019, three independent reviews of the SJS took place.⁷ These made recommendations to improve processes and structures. In the *Service Justice System Policing Review*, potential areas of vulnerability were identified in how the service police investigated allegations of domestic abuse and RASSO. In this report, Sir Jon Murphy stressed that he was not criticising the forces for poorly investigating allegations, but that the forces' approaches and processes were inconsistent.

As a result of the Murphy review, there was a separate independent *Process audit of domestic abuse and serious sexual offences investigated by the service police*.

The audit found that the service police:

- conducted their investigations quickly and efficiently, showing professionalism and flexibility; and
- were focused.

But it also established that some processes and procedures could be improved.

Our commission wasn't to review the MOD and service police progress against the SJS reviews, SJS policing review and process audit recommendations, but there is inevitably some overlap between some of those recommendations and the areas examined in this report. We were surprised and concerned that the MOD couldn't provide us with a document that outlines what actions it has taken in response to each recommendation. It only gave us updates about what has been done in response to some of the recommendations.

⁷ [Service Justice System Review Part 1](#), HH Shaun Lyons, 29 March 2018; [Service Justice System Policing Review Part 1](#), Professor Sir Jon Murphy; and [Service Justice System Review Part 2](#), HH Shaun Lyons and Professor Sir Jon Murphy, 29 March 2019.

2. Strategic leadership and governance

This chapter evaluates:

- the governance arrangements in place for service police forces' domestic abuse and RASSO activity, at ministerial, individual armed service and service police levels; and
- how the RAFF prioritises domestic abuse and RASSO activity.

The Ministry of Defence

The MOD is responsible for the care and protection of approximately 29,000 people who serve in the Royal Navy/Royal Marines, 80,000 in the Army and the 30,000 in the Royal Air Force. The MOD is the government department responsible for all the UK armed services and therefore has responsibility for domestic abuse and RASSO policy for the military. It sets the strategic vision for tackling domestic abuse and RASSO for all three services.

Domestic abuse and RASSO

The MOD has policies in place for the military on domestic abuse and sexual offending. Its *JSP 913 Tri-Service Policy on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence* is the overarching policy. It contains instruction and guidance for the armed forces, the MOD and supporting welfare organisations that are responsible for dealing with violence and abuse within the military, both in the UK and overseas.

JSP 913 establishes the MOD's robust commitment to tackling domestic abuse and sexual offending, stating:

“Any form of domestic violence, domestic abuse or sexual violence committed by Service personnel isn't to be tolerated under any circumstances, nor should it be treated as a purely 'private matter' which is of little or no concern to the Service/MOD.”

The MOD is revising the policy to reflect recent legislation and to improve guidance. However, we found the MOD doesn't monitor the three armed services' compliance with it.

Domestic abuse

There is scope for the MOD to provide stronger governance on domestic abuse to the service police forces.

The MOD has established a workplace domestic abuse strategy called [No Defence for Abuse](#). It outlines the MOD's commitment to reducing the scale of domestic abuse and to increasing the safety and wellbeing of all those affected through prevention, intervention and working with relevant agencies. The strategy establishes that:

“Tackling domestic abuse requires a collaborative approach across Defence including the chain of command, welfare, medical services, service police, chaplains and policy makers.” (page 13)

It also establishes that the service police should be:

- supporting the criminal justice process, especially where the MOD or the service police have jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute (page 5); and
- engaging the Service Justice Review to ensure high standards and improve consistency of approach across the service police (page 11).

But it doesn't define the service police's role in achieving the strategy, nor are the service police mentioned or given a clear indication as to how they should carry out the strategy. And as we explain later, a lack of relevant data has limited the strategy's effectiveness.

The MOD has established a domestic abuse working group to oversee the armed forces' progress against the strategy. This working group has created an action plan. Service police forces and representatives of policy and specialist welfare units sit on the working group. But since the service police don't feature in the action plan, their activity isn't scrutinised by the working group. And the MOD also doesn't set any performance targets or objectives for the service police in relation to domestic abuse.

This is an oversight, given the important role that the service police have in tackling domestic abuse through intervention, prevention and victim care.

Recommendation 1

By 1 January 2023, the MOD should define the role of the service police in its *No Defence for Abuse* strategy and set clear actions for all three forces to achieve.

RASSO

For sexual offending, the MOD hasn't produced an overarching strategy equivalent to *No Defence for Abuse*.

Sexual harassment and sexual offending were examined as part of a [2019 MOD review](#) of inappropriate behaviours in the military. The report made 36 recommendations, but none was given to the service police. This means that the service police lack direction from the MOD and are absent from and have no defined

role in bringing about change, particularly in how they can reduce offending or prioritise policing enforcement activity.

Recommendation 2

By 1 January 2023, the MOD should develop an overarching strategy for sexual offending and within it, define the role of the service police and set clear actions for all three forces to achieve.

Royal Air Force

The RAFP sits on a newly formed Air Justice Board that brings together different elements of the RAF. At the time of our inspection, its recent focus had been on reducing cases of inappropriate behaviour and sexual offending. It promotes awareness training across the RAF, especially around the causes of crime, such as alcohol abuse.

We examined board papers and minutes from one meeting and found a good focus on prevention, education and culture. But the Air Justice Board doesn't direct what the RAFP needs to do, sets no performance measures or objectives for the RAFP and doesn't hold it to account.

Recommendation 3

By 1 June 2022, without interfering in the operational independence of the Provost Marshal (RAF), the Air Justice Board should set, in agreement with the RAFP, performance expectations for the force and hold it to account against these expectations.

Data problems

The service police and MOD lack the data that would give them a strong understanding of the scale of domestic abuse and RASSO in all three armed services. This means they can't effectively prioritise and focus prevention and enforcement work.

The service police forces, the MOD and the independent *Process audit of domestic abuse and serious sexual offences investigated by the service police* have all established that a lack of data has prevented them from developing wholly effective domestic abuse strategies, initiatives, governance and performance management at service police, single service and MOD level. We found the same.

Many factors make it difficult to quantify the scale of domestic abuse in the military.

Under-reporting

As in civilian life, many domestic abuse victims in the armed forces suffer in silence and don't report abuse to the authorities. This serious issue is further discussed later in this report.

Incidents reported to chain of command

Victims in the military who report domestic abuse often do so to someone in their chain of command. In the RAF, COs are responsible for investigating many of these cases, so COs don't have to refer them to the RAFFP. Since the RAFFP isn't aware of these cases, it can't fully understand the scale of domestic abuse offending.

As COs don't have to report domestic abuse incidents to the RAFFP, it makes it difficult for the force to establish whether the domestic abuse incidents it responds to form part of a pattern of abuse. It is also possible that COs' investigations may miss aspects that the RAFFP, which has a better knowledge of domestic abuse, would identify. Most of the senior managers we interviewed in this inspection told us that MOD policy should be changed to direct COs to refer all domestic abuse cases to the service police. The *Process audit of domestic abuse and serious sexual offences investigated by the service police* recommended this change, as do we. The MOD plans to implement this change in the redraft of JSP 913.

As RASSO offences are Schedule 2 offences, COs are already required to refer all such incidents to the service police. But the RAF doesn't have a mechanism in place to make sure that this happens.

When the new policy is introduced for domestic abuse cases, it is important that the MOD also introduces a checking or auditing process to make sure that COs refer all domestic abuse and RASSO incidents appropriately. Without this, it is possible that COs won't refer incidents if they don't classify them as such. In this respect, interviewees across the three service police raised concerns to us.

Recommendation 4

Once the new version of JSP 913 is operational, the MOD should introduce a checking process to make sure that COs refer all domestic abuse and RASSO incidents to the service police.

Incidents reported to the service police

For cases reported to the service police, the forces' databases don't facilitate accurate data reporting. The service police forces use a system called COPPERS to record notification of incidents. Unlike systems used by CIVPOL forces, COPPERS doesn't include a mechanism for users to highlight incidents as domestic abuse. And COPPERS wasn't designed to provide statistics. For a service police force to report how many domestic abuse incidents it recorded, someone must trawl through all the recorded incidents and tally them by hand, looking for mention of domestic abuse or indications of a domestic element in the free text. The same applies to domestic abuse investigations, as the database that records service police investigations, REDCAP, draws information about incidents from COPPERS.

There is a clear difficulty when it comes to generating data from the databases, and we witnessed this when requesting data for this report. We requested lists of all domestic abuse and RASSO cases the three service police forces investigated between 2017 and 2020 for our crime file review and to inform reporting on case

outcomes. When we compared the numbers of domestic abuse and RASSO cases on these lists with the [figures published by the MOD](#), they were different.

Clearly, the inability of COPPERS and REDCAP to highlight domestic abuse and easily report statistics is a major problem. It prevents the service police and the MOD from generating accurate data to properly assess the scale of offending. It also makes it difficult for the service police forces to identify repeat victims of domestic abuse and as a result, they can't accurately assess the risk posed to victims.

At the time of our inspection, work was being done to procure a system to replace COPPERS and REDCAP. Whichever system is chosen, it needs to be able to highlight cases of domestic abuse and repeat victims, and produce accurate data quickly and easily.

Recommendation 5

With immediate effect, the MOD, in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy), Provost Marshal (Army) and Provost Marshal (RAF), should satisfy itself that its replacement ICT system will be able to highlight incidents of domestic abuse and repeat victims, and produce accurate data quickly and easily.

Incidents reported to CIVPOL

On many occasions, victims report domestic abuse or RASSO incidents to the local CIVPOL force. We established that CIVPOL don't always inform the service police of such cases.

Home Office Circular 28/2008 requires CIVPOL to inform the military when the suspect or victim of an incident they deal with is a member of the military. Of the Home Office police forces we interviewed about this, most said they would inform the military, but some said they wouldn't. Some didn't know about Home Office Circular 28/2008.

This is another problem that prevents the MOD or service police from developing an accurate understanding of the scale of domestic abuse. More importantly, it also could present a significant risk to victims and to others.

Recommendation 6

With immediate effect, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) should remind all Home Office police forces of the requirement in Home Office Circular 28/2008 to inform the RAFF when the suspect or victim of an incident they deal with is a member of the RAF.

We have also heard that some foreign police forces don't always inform the military quickly about incidents they respond to that involve members of the UK armed forces.

RAFP

Priority setting

Every year, the RAFP sets out its priorities in its strategic threat assessment.

We examined the most recent version and found that it contained tables showing the number of offences by year and type. It also contained some analysis of the age, gender, rank and location of domestic abuse and RASSO suspects. This helped the force target its approach to education and intervention.

However, given the data problems outlined above, the force set its priorities against insufficient, poor-quality data. We were pleased to see the force has determined that sexual offending is its first-tier priority. However, as CIVPOL has responsibility for most domestic abuse investigations involving RAFP personnel, the force has designated domestic abuse as a second-tier priority. While this is a matter for the Provost Marshal (RAF), it is disappointing that the force doesn't classify domestic abuse as a first-tier priority.

After priorities are set, the Provost Marshal (RAF) requires squadron leaders of RAFP regions to align their activity with the stated first-tier priorities. The point of this is to focus the RAFP on the highest priorities and to hold squadrons to account at regular intervals.

Control strategy and strategic intelligence

Police forces should produce control strategies for their priorities that describe prevention, enforcement, and intelligence actions to reduce the volume of offences.

The RAFP has produced a control strategy describing how it will tackle domestic abuse and RASSO. We examined two comprehensive action plans outlining prevention, intelligence, enforcement, education, and culture work.

It has also produced problem profiles that covered information on RASSO suspects, victims, high-risk locations (RAF Halton and Cranwell – training establishments) and contributory factors such as alcohol. These profiles help the RAFP to define the patterns and trends of priority crimes and help it to focus its efforts. This means that the force can proactively prevent, disrupt and deter crime, as opposed to merely react to it. Responsibility for intelligence sharing with CIVPOL locally rests with RAFP flights, regional RAFP squadrons and their intelligence analysts. Intelligence is reviewed every day to determine what response should be given to it.

We were told that all RAF station commanders have agreed to inform SIB of all cases of inappropriate sexual behaviour. This will allow the RAFP to develop a better picture of problem stations so it can direct education and awareness briefings. The RAFP are also doing a sexual offences survey to get a better idea of the scale of domestic abuse and RASSO. This is good practice.

At the RAFP headquarters, the force Intelligence Management Unit collates intelligence from CIVPOL and checks military databases to develop intelligence. It is then passed on to investigators or other organisations.

To improve their understanding of problems, forces should identify gaps in their knowledge (intelligence requirements) and develop plans for filling them. We were told that an intelligence requirement, called Bannerman, had been set by the service police to improve knowledge and understanding of the scope and scale of domestic abuse and RASSO.

Few of the personnel we spoke to across the three service police forces knew about it and we were later told that it had fallen into disuse. Setting an intelligence requirement is an important element of the national intelligence model because it encourages the collection of information about priority crimes. A lack of such intelligence hinders the police from preventing crime and enforcing the law.

Recommendation 7

By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF), should publish a new intelligence requirement for domestic abuse and RASSO.

Governance meetings

We examined minutes of regular RAFP headquarters meetings and found that some questions were asked about progress against priorities. But the minutes were brief, and we couldn't see that RAFP priorities matched the meeting priorities. For example, there were no performance numbers or charts, or any information about victim care, safeguarding or policy compliance. This is a missed opportunity. Examining data for trends and themes in policing helps forces to better manage risk, to improve and to perform well.

Area for improvement 1

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should define expectations of performance against priorities that better illustrate qualitative activity and outcomes for victims.

Strategic leads

The Provost Marshal (RAF) has appointed senior officers to lead work on domestic abuse and RASSO. We spoke to these officers, one of which had created separate strategies for domestic abuse and RASSO. We examined these strategies and found them to be aimed at reducing offending, increasing reporting, and maximising victim safety. Both provided comprehensive direction for the RAFP to better manage domestic abuse and RASSO.

The strategic leads are the force's subject matter experts. They attend the Air Justice Board, are involved in policy development, and identify and develop in-house training. Their work helps provide the direction for how the force tackles domestic abuse and RASSO.

Other assurance mechanisms

We were told that all incidents of domestic abuse and RASSO are included on a daily crime briefing document distributed to the Provost Marshal (RAF) and senior leaders. The Provost Marshal (RAF) carries out a detailed review at 3 months or 100 days. These reviews look at the supervision and progress of the investigation and make interventions where necessary.

We are satisfied that there is enough governance and supervision of investigations by the RAFF headquarters to support their resourcing and assessment. But, with a relatively low level of offences, the investigative experience of some local supervisors and officers will be understandably limited. Care needs to be taken so that lines of enquiries aren't missed and quality standards, such as victim care, aren't ignored.

The RAFF Professional Standards Department conducts technical evaluations of each RAFF unit at least every two years. The focus is on compliance with policy and procedures such as victim support, against objective criteria. We assessed this process and found it to be largely effective.

Any themes found can be disseminated throughout the RAFF through changes to policy and training, as well as through update notes circulated to regional squadron leaders and articles in the RAFF portal on MOD ICT.

The Provost Marshal (RAF) produces annual security and crime reviews for senior RAF commanders responsible for air stations and training establishments. These highlight where most offending takes place and the respective RAFF investigations. The review also encourages commanders to work closely with RAFF to reduce the number of domestic abuse and RASSO cases. The Provost Marshal (RAF) also has quarterly meetings with the Chief of the Air Staff to update him on crime trends and investigative activity.

We were told that there used to be a 'lessons learnt' meeting with the SPA, as outlined in the *Protocol between the Royal Navy Police (RNP), Royal Military Police (RMP) the RAF Police (RAFF) and the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) relating to the provision of legal advice during investigations*,⁸ but that it hadn't met for three years. At that meeting, feedback would be given about rates of victim withdrawal and discontinuation, numbers of referrals and prosecutions and the rate of rape trials resulting in convictions. This information wasn't available to us. We were pleased to hear that the meeting has been resumed since we completed our fieldwork and now meets quarterly.

⁸ See "Guidance on the investigation and prosecution of allegations of rape and other serious sexual offences (RASSO)", Annex C to *Protocol between the Royal Navy Police (RNP), Royal Military Police (RMP) the RAF Police (RAFF) and the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) relating to the provision of legal advice during investigations*, Provost Marshal (Navy), Provost Marshal (Army), Provost Marshal (RAF) and Director of Service Prosecutions, 2016, p7 and "Guidance on the investigation and prosecution of allegations of domestic abuse", Annex D to *Protocol between the Royal Navy Police (RNP), Royal Military Police (RMP) the RAF police (RAFF) and the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) relating to the provision of legal advice during investigations*, Provost Marshal (Navy), Provost Marshal (Army), Provost Marshal (RAF) and Director of Service Prosecutions, 2016, p7.

3. Prevention and encouraging reporting

Preventing domestic abuse and RASSO is, by far, better than having to investigate it once it has occurred. Both the [Wigston report](#) and *No Defence for Abuse* highlight the value of prevention and recommend actions to prevent domestic abuse and RASSO.

Without working groups like those established by the Army, the Royal Air Force relies on the Air Justice Board and the RAFF to instigate and co-ordinate prevention activity across the RAF.

The RAFF developed a RASSO awareness campaign focused on sexual consent. Since 2017, more than 7,000 RAF personnel have received this training, including new recruits in training establishments. But it isn't easy for the RAFF to reach more than 29,000 air men and women, especially when the training isn't mandatory, and some COs don't invite RAFF to train their personnel. The pandemic led to far fewer training opportunities in 2020 than in previous years. But we were told that the training is having an effect and that people have come forward to report RASSO at the end of the training session.

No Defence for Abuse describes stressors associated with service life that affect family life and make victims more vulnerable to domestic abuse. The same factors may also create barriers to seeking support. These include frequent separation, high levels of family mobility, dependence on service housing and social isolation.

Personnel in some RAF units and roles have received domestic abuse awareness training, though this isn't mandated for all RAF personnel. While most domestic abuse is dealt with by CIVPOL, providing all personnel with awareness training could prevent some incidents and lead to others being reported.

More should be done, and the MOD should support the RAFF by mandating domestic abuse and RASSO awareness training across the RAF.

Recommendation 8

By 1 January 2023, the MOD should support the RAFF by mandating domestic abuse and RASSO awareness training across the RAF.

By contrast, we found very little prevention work about domestic abuse. Some RAF stations had supported wider national or Home Office domestic abuse initiatives such as the 16 Days of Action campaign, but the RAFF, unlike the RNP and RMP, don't use CIVPOL to supplement training on domestic abuse and RASSO to the RAF. This is a missed opportunity.

Area for improvement 2

The Provost Marshal (RAF) and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for domestic abuse should explore opportunities to work together on domestic abuse and RASSO prevention initiatives and training.

We found that a collaborative partnership between a charity based in Hampshire, [Aurora New Dawn](#), and the armed forces was in the final year of a three-year contract to develop an armed-force advocate project.

The main aim of the project is to give military personnel and their families access to specialist independent support about domestic abuse and RASSO. It also gives specialist training to armed forces personnel, especially those in policing and welfare related services, to raise awareness and improve their understanding of domestic abuse and RASSO.

Since 2018, the charity has given specialist training to over 500 military personnel across the armed forces and specialist support to over 130 victims and their children. A recent independent evaluation of this service noted its success and the need for it to continue. Representatives of Aurora New Dawn put us in contact with several victims. We echo the findings of the evaluation and commend the work done by the charity.

4. Handling calls and first reports of crime

First contact

The RAFP gets reports of domestic abuse and RASSO incidents from many sources, including victims' chain of command, SSAFA (the armed forces' charity), victims' friends or the victims themselves. Whoever reports the incident, it is crucial that the person receiving the report:

- is professional and polite and builds trust and confidence in the caller;
- gets as much information about the incident as possible from the caller;
- records the incident accurately both to support the police responding to the call and to any later investigation;
- searches force information systems to help them understand any previous victimisation and assess risk; and
- makes a first assessment of risk to the victim and other parties.

When a victim makes the report, the person receiving it must advise the victim how to stay safe while waiting for the police to arrive and what to do to preserve evidence.

In civilian policing, staff at each police force's contact centre are the first point of contact, either by a 999-emergency call, 101 call or other means. Procedures differ from force to force, but usually:

- staff at these contact centres are trained in receiving such reports and in identifying criminal offences;
- calls to contact centres are recorded and there are supervisory and auditing processes in place to evaluate the quality of call-handlers' activity;
- call handlers enter details of incidents immediately onto a dedicated computerised call-handling system that prompts them with questions to ask the caller, depending on the type of incident they are recording;
- call handlers complete an initial risk assessment on the system and prioritise the response accordingly;
- call handlers provide support and advice to the caller; and
- call handlers research databases for details of repeat offences and suspect details.

The service police forces don't use a centralised contact centre and lack most of the important processes that would underpin it. There is an operations room at the SPCB, but it isn't used as a contact centre and doesn't have the resources to act as a centralised contact centre. Instead, incidents are reported, in person or over

the phone, to the forces' personnel at their police stations or posts, or to the chain of command.

Personnel haven't had specific call-handling training. In inspections of CIVPOL, we have found that where untrained, inexperienced people engage first with victims of domestic abuse and RASSO this often leads to repeat traumatisation. It is therefore important that calls are answered by trained professionals.

Where calls are made, these aren't recorded. The absence of voice recording made it impossible for us to assess how well the first contact is handled. We couldn't evaluate how professional and polite call handlers were, how well they built trust and confidence in the caller, or how thoroughly they elicited information from the caller. The lack of audio recording also prevents the service police forces from auditing the effectiveness of first contact and can lead to the loss of evidence.

The service police forces don't have a dedicated computerised call handling system, or readily accessible lists of questions specifically for domestic abuse or RASSO incidents. In some instances, the person receiving the call enters details of incidents while they are on the call into COPPERS, while in others handwritten notes are then typed into COPPERS later.

In our case file review, we also found that personnel record little information about the first contact. While they record information about the incident on COPPERS, we found little detail about actions they took, or advice provided.

COPPERS and REDCAP don't have domestic abuse markers. It is therefore difficult for the person taking the call to identify quickly whether the victim is a repeat victim.

Personnel can search COPPERS and REDCAP to see if there are similar previous reports and can ask SPCB to conduct intelligence checks on the Police National Database. But we didn't find evidence that either is done consistently. We were told that they can't always get checks returned from SPCB quickly enough. Consequently, first responders are dispatched without all the information they need about the incident or enough to inform the safety of the first responders.

The procedures and systems that the service police forces use to record first contact about incidents need to improve. Developing a centralised service police call centre would address these problems. It could also serve as a single reporting hub for incident reports, which, when the replacement for COPPERS is introduced, could streamline data analysis. There are some essential characteristics for any such call centre:

- People reporting incidents should be referred to the call centre, rather than details being taken by personnel at local stations. This should apply to those people reporting incidents to the service police in person, as well as over the phone.
- Call centre staff should get the right training, like their CIVPOL counterparts do.
- The centre should use a dedicated call handling system like those used by CIVPOL. This should have the ability to:
 - link to incident recording systems and intelligence systems;
 - identify repeat domestic abuse victims and repeat suspects;

- provide question prompts for different types of incident;
- audio record calls; and
- allow performance management data to be produced.

Recommendation 9

By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army) should carry out a feasibility study for the establishment of a joint contact centre that reflects, as far as is reasonably possible, the capabilities of Home Office police forces. If the outcome of the study isn't for the establishment of a joint contact centre, the Provost Marshal (RAF) and the provost marshals of the other service police forces should implement another solution that resolves the call-handling problems explained in this report.

Incident and crime recording

When CIVPOL forces are informed about incidents, they have to record details in accordance with the [National Standard for Incident Recording \(NSIR\)](#). The principal aim of NSIR is to provide a common approach to be followed by police forces in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland in classifying calls. The service police don't have to comply with NSIR, but doing so would make sure that incidents are categorised consistently.

Similarly, CIVPOL forces in England and Wales must comply with the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) and [Home Office Counting Rules \(HOCR\)](#). This is designed to make sure that crimes are recorded consistently and accurately. But the service police don't have to comply with NCRS or HOCR. Under NCRS, a force is required to record all offences reported at the same time as separate offences with their own crime reference number. In the service police, if a victim reported three offences at the same time they would be recorded as one crime, with one crime reference number.

Consequently, if the same offences were reported to CIVPOL and to a service police force, CIVPOL would record more offences. As the service police don't comply with NCRS, it is difficult to compare their offence rates with those in CIVPOL. It also means data published by the MOD, such as [Sexual Offences in the Service Justice System 2020](#) isn't comparable with similar Home Office publications. Accurate recording also helps make sure that personnel don't downgrade cases or record them as 'no crime' arbitrarily.

The *Process audit of domestic abuse and serious sexual offences investigated by the service police* recommended that the service police forces review REDCAP and establish a system that complies with NCRS. Since that report, the three service police forces have agreed to fully comply with NCRS, HOCR and NSIR, once the replacement for COPPERS and REDCAP is introduced. The forces should make sure that this new system complies with all three, and once this is in place, introduce effective auditing procedures.

5. First response to domestic abuse and RASSO incidents

The police's first response to victims of domestic abuse and RASSO is critically important. The main objectives for the first responder at this stage are to:

- make sure that the victim is safe;
- secure and preserve evidence; and
- identify and arrest (or, if appropriate, voluntarily interview) the suspect.⁹

In this chapter, we outline the force's first response to domestic abuse and RASSO cases, examining:

- who conducts first response to domestic abuse and RASSO cases;
- the quality of first investigative response and [golden hour](#) investigative actions in domestic abuse and RASSO cases;
- what training, experience, and support first responders have to conduct their role;
- what guidance GPD personnel receive on how to conduct first response to domestic abuse and RASSO incidents;
- the use of body-worn cameras; and
- the quality of initial safeguarding of victims of domestic abuse and RASSO incidents.

Who conducts first response to domestic abuse and RASSO incidents?

Schedule 1 domestic abuse incidents

The RAFP receives reports of domestic abuse incidents in many ways. Some take the form of phone calls from victims or are from victims attending police stations. Others come through other police forces or are referrals from commanding officers. Some of these reports relate to crimes that are occurring at the time, while others relate to historical abuse. Incident reports can be made in the UK or at military bases throughout the world.

⁹ See [A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape – Phase one: From report to police or CPS decision to take no further action](#), HMICFRS and HMCPSP, 16 July 2021, p22.

These factors affect the type of first policing response to these incidents. In cases where the RAFF are informed about an ongoing or recent domestic abuse incident in the UK, CIVPOL provides the immediate emergency response. Overseas, RAFF GPD personnel are usually the first on the scene. Some reports make it necessary for the RAFF to deploy personnel to the scene, while others don't.

RASSO incidents

Sometimes a member of the SIB is the first person to get a report of a RASSO incident, for example, when a padre or station commander reports the incident directly to the SIB office. In such cases, a member of the SIB is the first to arrive at the scene. Aside from these cases, GPD personnel are usually first responders to RASSO incidents.

In most CIVPOL forces, several response officers are trained sexual offences liaison officers (SOLOs). They provide first response to RASSO incidents. But they aren't always available and other response officers have to take on this role.¹⁰ Unlike CIVPOL forces, the service police forces don't have SOLO-trained first responders. Instead, they have a team of SOLO-trained investigators. In the RAFF most SOLOs are in the SIB.

So, typically, a member of GPD personnel will inform the SIB duty officer of a RASSO incident, then dispatch to the incident and deal with the initial actions until a SOLO or SIB personnel can arrive to take over. These arrangements differ from location to location, depending on how far the nearest SIB unit is from the incident. Before SIB personnel arrive at the scene, they usually direct the GPD first responders over the phone (see section 5 below, [Support for first responders from the SIB](#)).

This section of the report will focus on how GPD personnel conduct first response actions in domestic abuse and RASSO incidents.

Behaviour and attitude of first responders

The way police behave when they arrive at the scene of domestic abuse or RASSO is vital. It is crucial that they support the victim and are empathetic to gain their trust. We haven't been able to evaluate how well GPD personnel do this in our case file reviews or in interviews with practitioners. The RAFF also doesn't currently have processes to monitor this. We therefore suggest that the force adds questions about first responders' attitude and empathy to its victim survey (see section 7 below, [Victim feedback](#)). Police forces that issue personnel with [body-worn video](#) (BWV) cameras can dip-sample footage to assess the behaviour and performance of first responders. As the RAFF doesn't issue body-worn cameras to its personnel, it is unable to do this.

Quality of the GPD personnel's golden hour enquiries

In our case file review, we found that personnel responding to incidents usually make appropriate golden hour enquiries. In general, they make arrests when appropriate and take timely initial witness statements. But SIB personnel told us that the quality of GPD personnel's first investigations needs to improve.

¹⁰ As before.

There is a clear contradiction between the evidence from our case file review and from many of our interviews. One reason for this seems to be the accuracy of the data recorded on COPPERS. There is often a delay between GPD personnel's first response and these actions being recorded on COPPERS. If supervisors identify problems (for example, if first responders hadn't acted appropriately in the golden hour or if actions weren't thorough) they can be put right before case file details are recorded on COPPERS.

In the cases we reviewed, we didn't find any evidence to suggest that poor-quality first response actions resulted in failed investigations. This isn't to minimise the importance of getting first response right. If immediate actions aren't right, it can lead to investigative opportunities being missed and cause delays that affect investigations and victims.

Training, experience, and support for GPD personnel responding to domestic abuse and RASSO incidents

For domestic abuse and RASSO incidents, all police forces should dispatch personnel with the right training and experience. This will enable them to act appropriately in the first hour, secure and preserve evidence and provide victim care.

Training

GPD personnel don't get consistent training on how to deploy to domestic abuse and RASSO incidents as first responders.

Mandatory training provided by Defence School of Policing and Guarding (DSPG)

New service police recruits get adequate domestic abuse and RASSO first responder training as part of their Joint Police Initial Course (JPIC) training introduced by DSPG in 2020. This course covers a broad curriculum including:

- legislation (including controlling or coercive behaviour);
- scene management;
- how to build rapport with victims;
- risk assessment processes (see [section 6](#) below);
- RASSO initial response proformas (see section 5 below);
- safety planning; and
- initial safeguarding (see [section 6](#) below).

Students must also pass the domestic abuse and sexual offences environmental package. Students must show that they are competent at dealing with the whole first response process in role-play scenarios, where actors take on the roles of victims and witnesses.

Before the DSPG introduced its JPIC, it gave bespoke initial training to the three service police forces. After the *Service Justice System Review* was published, the DSPG and service police forces reviewed this training and significantly changed and expanded the domestic abuse and RASSO elements of the new course. Among the changes was the inclusion of RASSO first responder training.

At the same time, the DSPG also rewrote and expanded on the domestic abuse and RASSO content in the training courses Volume Crime Investigation Course (VCIC) (which corporals receive after two to three years in rank) and in the Serious Crime Investigation Course (SCIC) course (taken by those wanting to join the SIB). This is a good development.

While a few young-in-service personnel have attended the new JPIC course, most personnel haven't. Those who had their initial training course before 2020 didn't get RASSO first responder training or training on several other parts of the new curriculum. This is a significant gap that can't simply be filled by refresher and awareness training.

The force and DSPG should make sure that personnel with first responder duties who haven't had structured domestic abuse and RASSO first responder training, including environmental training, get it.

Recommendation 10

By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy), the Provost Marshal (Army) and the Defence School of Policing and Guarding, should make sure that all first responders are trained to the new Joint Police Initial Course standard.

Refresher and awareness training – overview

The RAFF's refresher and [continuing professional development \(CPD\)](#) training are ad hoc, inconsistent and need to improve.

In CIVPOL forces, police officers usually get some degree of structured CPD training. But this doesn't always happen in the service police.

Across the service police forces, refresher training, aside from the VCIC and SCIC courses, is the responsibility of parent units, and, apart from the RAFF, isn't centrally directed from force headquarters or training units.

The RAFF requires that squadron training staff are responsible for ensuring that online CPD training is completed on 15 subjects, including domestic abuse and RASSO. But squadron commanders have delegated authority for this, in line with the military's doctrine of mission command. We were told that only 4 of the 15 subjects need to be covered each year.

Apart from annual technical evaluation visits (see section 5 below), the RAFF headquarters doesn't monitor whether units are providing this training, the training is of good quality or that the right people get it. Instead, this is the responsibility of each unit's command chain to manage. Each unit is meant to maintain comprehensive training records, but this doesn't seem to happen everywhere.

This was summed up to us as:

“The squadron training manager will give broad requirements but the details are down to the stations. The training given at each flight is to some part driven by the whims of the local flight manager, albeit with direction from squadron training manager.”

We found some flights had devised their own training, which they provided on dedicated training days. For example, RAF Northolt had provided training on coercive or controlling behaviour. While this is good, we found that no other flight had done this. This leads to inconsistencies between units. Such locally-devised training also only tends to reflect the problems faced by the flight or squadron, but not the wider force.

Because the officer commanding a unit wouldn't be aware of the extent of the domestic abuse or RASSO problem the force faces, they can't be expected to know what training is needed.

Refresher and CPD training – RASSO first responder training

Since not all RAFP GPD personnel have RASSO first responder training as part of their initial training, the force instructs units to close the training gap. This hasn't been complied with by all units. And where it has been applied, it is inconsistent.

Although most on-duty shifts will have some personnel who have received RASSO first responder training as part of their VCIC or SCIC course, it is important that RAFP give all GPD personnel a level of training on how to respond to such incidents.

The RASSO lead and head of the SIB has developed training and circulated presentations to first responders. And some units have arranged for [independent sexual violence advisers \(ISVAs\)](#) to provide personnel with informal refresher training. But this is at the request of the local command team, not pushed from the centre.

Refresher and CPD training – domestic abuse first responder training

In the absence of mandatory training, the force's SIB has developed some training initiatives, such as domestic abuse risk assessment training. Personnel apply to attend these training days or are nominated by their chain of command and are expected to pass on information from the training to their colleagues. The force doesn't monitor whether this happens.

Training – conclusion

Domestic abuse and RASSO training are too important to be dependent on the whim of local commanders. There needs to be more consistency, resilience, and oversight of domestic abuse and RASSO training. Developing centralised, annual training for policing competencies including domestic abuse and RASSO first response, provided by qualified trainers, and with central assurance, would address some of these problems.

Area for improvement 3

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should develop centralised, annual training for policing competencies including domestic abuse and RASSO first response, provided by qualified trainers, and with central assurance.

In the longer term, the service police forces should work with the [College of Policing](#) to find a way to use the College's CPD training in way that meets the forces' operational context, role, and career pathways.

Inexperience of first responders

A lack of experience among many GPD NCOs compounds the problems caused by inconsistent training. Many interviewees told us the inexperience of the first responders can be a problem.

The first posting of a RAFP JNCO after completing basic training is with a RAFP flight at an air station. After three years, they are posted to their next role, or sooner if they are promoted. This churn of personnel leads to limited experience at junior ranks.

Section commanders usually dispatch the most experienced JNCOs on duty to a domestic abuse or RASSO scene. However, as there are few experienced JNCOs in many sections, inexperienced JNCOs often attend such scenes.

There is also the potential for skill fade during a JNCO's initial GPD tour. There are lots of opportunities for GPD personnel, and operational and exercising requirements will take them away from their role for short periods. But there is no structured refresher training when they return. Consequently, a GPD NCO could go on a security course for three months, and then be dispatched straightaway to take a victim statement when they arrive back at the GPD flight.

The problem of inexperienced JNCOs is, however, limited to the UK. Inexperienced RAFP personnel aren't posted to overseas units in Cyprus and the Falkland Islands. There are also SOLOs at those bases who can help GPD personnel and local police at first response.

Support and supervision from the command chain

As many first responders are inexperienced, they rely on direction and support from the command chain when attending domestic abuse and RASSO incidents. JNCOs in some flights told us that they get good support from their section commanders. Before the JNCOs are deployed to the scene, section commanders brief them on what they need to do and ask. Commanders stay on the radio to talk them through their first response actions. While this can provide guidance for the first responders, given the inexperience of first responders, we recommend supervisors or section commanders accompany JNCOs when attending domestic abuse or RASSO incidents.

Area for improvement 4

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure supervisors or section commanders accompany inexperienced junior non-commissioned officers when attending domestic abuse or RASSO incidents.

This system can help provide the guidance that first responders need. Clear direction and strong supervision aren't a substitute for training and experience. But they can reduce the effect of having an inexperienced first responder. Although, this depends on people in the command chain having the right experience themselves. If the first responders are inexperienced and there isn't an experienced command chain in place, then the system doesn't work because the direction needed isn't provided.

It is difficult for the RAFP to maintain suitably experienced section or duty commanders, supervisors, and command chain throughout all GPD sections and flights. RAFP personnel have very varied careers that include policing roles, operational tours, and postings in specialist roles (for example, force protection, headquarters and training). People can spend many years in non-policing roles before being posted back to a GPD unit in a supervisory role. Consequently, there are section commanders with less recent policing experience than the acting corporals they are directing, and sergeants in supervisory roles after five years or more away from policing roles. The situation is similar at commissioned officer ranks, where, after having policing roles at the beginning of their career, they can spend years in non-policing roles before returning as a GPD commander.

Despite the regular churn of personnel, there is no mandatory refresher training for personnel returning to policing roles.

In CIVPOL, many response constables and sergeants stay in their roles for large parts of their career and develop considerable experience. Replicating this in the service police isn't possible without wholesale change. Military careers focus on promotion and the RAF requires personnel who aspire to be promoted to have operational exposure and to manage staff in an operational environment. Therefore, personnel are 'rotated' so they can build their portfolios and have the best possible chance to tick the boxes they need to step up to the next rank.

Many RAFP personnel we interviewed highlighted the skill fade caused by the RAF career management process as a problem. It is a problem that we also found in investigation quality (see [section 6](#) below).

The service police forces and the MOD should examine whether there are ways to mitigate skill fade. At the very least, refresher training should be developed and mandated for personnel returning to policing roles.

Some GPD flights and sections have introduced more assurance processes, but as with local training, these are local management initiatives rather than central direction and are at the whim of company command.

Support for first responders from the SIB

As mentioned above, GPD personnel also receive support from the SIB, especially when being deployed to RASSO incidents. This works best in those units where the SIB and the GPD flight are co-located, where the two units also give informal training and support to each other.

But GPD personnel at non-co-located units told us that it is often difficult to contact SIB out of hours. They don't have access to the duty SIB's contact details and must call the SPCB for this information. The process is inefficient and occasionally doesn't work smoothly as the SPCB don't always know about the RAFF SIB's call-out procedures and don't always have the right contact numbers.

Given the problems with GPD first response, mandating SIB first attendance at all RASSO scenes would be beneficial, given their greater skills and experience. But this wouldn't be possible unless SIB's geographic footprint and personnel establishment were to be expanded and it operated as a 24/7 unit. The cost of doing so may be too substantial to make it a viable prospect.

Another option would be to cede first response and initial investigation and safeguarding to local police. But this wouldn't always be the best solution in the UK. And in most overseas locations it wouldn't be possible and would mean that personnel deployed to overseas bases would have even less experience of conducting these roles.

Instead, the SIB should attend when it can, with the onus being on the force to make sure that its GPD personnel are equipped and supported to conduct first response to a consistently high standard.

Guidance for first responders to domestic abuse incidents

The RAFF has developed guidance for first responders attending domestic abuse incidents. It outlines procedures to follow in the domestic abuse and child protection section of AP1722.¹¹ To aid first responders, it has also produced a flowchart for first response to domestic abuse incidents. However, this is very basic and doesn't compare favourably with the domestic abuse aide-memoires that the other service police forces have developed for their first responders.

Unlike the other service police forces, the RAFF also doesn't issue first responders with a proforma, checklist, or guide that they must complete.

Area for improvement 5

The RAFF should issue first responders with a proforma, checklist, or guide that they must complete when responding to domestic abuse incidents.

The Royal Navy Police issues first responders with the College of Policing's *Domestic Abuse Initial Response Guide*, which they must complete in every case. This is a

¹¹ AP1722 Section 12: Domestic Abuse and Child Protection, RAFF. Unpublished – Official Sensitive.

comprehensive guide, including evidence and actions checklists, places for details about victims, suspects, and witnesses to be recorded and a body map where injuries can be marked. In contrast, while the AP1722 mentions that RAFP first responders should read its guidance in conjunction with the College of Policing's guide,¹² RAFP personnel aren't instructed to complete the guide and we found no evidence that this happens.

The RMP issues its first responders with a Domestic Incident Proforma which, while not as comprehensive as the College of Policing's guide, includes checklists of the most important golden hour actions and helps guide the first responder through many of the actions they need to take.

Neither the College of Policing's guide nor the RMP proforma are perfect for service police forces. The College of Policing's guide includes elements that can't be applied in the service police context, and the RMP proforma doesn't include all the useful parts of the College's guide. Consequently, it may be beneficial for the three forces to work together to develop new aide-memoires and a tri-service domestic abuse initial response guide that better meet their needs. While the content of the College of Policing's guide could form the basis of this, it could also combine the best parts of the force's current aide-memoires and proformas, while also including bespoke elements to reflect each force's different processes and operational contexts.

Recommendation 11

By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should publish tri-service domestic abuse aide-memoires (which, to meet each service's needs, may include additional information to reflect local differences).

Guidance for first responders to RASSO incidents

The RAFP's policy and procedure for first responder actions in RASSO cases is outlined in the investigation of sexual offences section of AP1722.¹³

In addition to the guidance available in AP1722 and on the Provost Portal (the service police's intranet site), the force has developed an *Initial Contact Sexual Offences Booklet*. The booklet must be completed in all RASSO cases.

We consider the introduction of the booklet to be good practice. It includes forms where first responders can log information about the victim, incident, suspect, witnesses, clothing, and actions taken. The questions included in the booklet will help guide the first responder through most of the actions they need to take and things they need to consider.

The RMP and RNP have also produced RASSO logs or booklets to be completed by their first responders. But the three documents are quite different. For example, the

¹² As before, p3-3-12-9.

¹³ *BR 9969 Chapter 10: First response to sexual offences*. Unpublished – Official Sensitive.

RMP's *Sexual Offences First Responders Log* includes a checklist of the most important golden hour actions, but this checklist doesn't feature in the RAFF's booklet.

There is scope for the forces to work together to develop new aide-memoires and a tri-service RASSO initial response booklet or log. These should combine the best parts of the forces' aide-memoires and proformas and include bespoke elements to reflect each force's different processes and operational contexts.

Recommendation 12

By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should standardise RASSO first responders' logs and booklets (which, to meet each service's needs, may include additional information to reflect local differences).

In our crime file review, we found that first responders completed an *Initial Contact Sexual Offences Booklet* in most but not all RASSO incidents. However, we conducted a dip-sample of more recent RASSO case files, which found that compliance had improved, with completed booklets appearing on all case files.

First responders' use of body-worn video cameras

Body-worn video cameras (BWV) can be beneficial when used to capture images following reports of domestic abuse. As the College of Policing's [Body-Worn Video Guidance](#) states:

"The recording provides an immediate and exact record of the disturbance throughout the scene and the emotional effect on the victim and their family or other immediate witnesses.

Where an offender is present, a BWV recording captures evidence of their demeanour and language, any continuing offending behaviour such as further abuse directed towards the victim, and evidence of any difficulty in restraining the offender if they are particularly hostile.

Using BWV in such instances can significantly strengthen a prosecution case, drawing attention to the true extent of the offending. The recording can provide evidence that supports grounds for an arrest and, where a victim or witness is reluctant to provide a written complaint, it may also be useful in determining when to proceed with a case without the victim's support. Such images may strengthen a case even further by changing the mind of an initially reluctant or hostile victim, so that they agree to support a prosecution."

We support the use of BWV by first responders to domestic abuse incidents, describing it in one of our previous reports as "essential for evidence gathering",¹⁴ while – in another of our reports – recognising that introducing BWV involves

¹⁴ [The police response to domestic abuse: An update report](#), HMICFRS, 26 February 2019, p27.

“substantial investment in both the equipment itself but also the download and storage facilities”.¹⁵

The RNP is the only service police force to use BWV. While the RAFP has trialled its use, the force hasn't prioritised its introduction.

Recommendation 13

By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should prioritise the introduction of BWV and monitor its use when attending domestic abuse and RASSO incidents.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding involves protecting an individual's health, wellbeing and human rights, enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect.

There are different types and patterns of abuse and neglect and different circumstances in which they may take place. Abuse can occur in any relationship and any setting and may result in harm or exploitation of that individual and in many cases the abuse may be a criminal act.

The actions taken by police at first response to a domestic abuse or RASSO incident are crucial in providing initial safeguarding to victims. In this section, we assess how effectively the RAFP does this and how it and other parties provide ongoing safeguarding.

Responsibility for safeguarding in the military

The service police have an important role in providing safeguarding, but they don't hold overall responsibility for safeguarding in the military.

[JSP 834 Safeguarding](#) sets out the MOD's framework for safeguarding in the military. It defines safeguarding in accordance with the Care Act 2014 and stipulates that: “All commands / commanders / heads of establishment in the UK are responsible for the safety and welfare of all personnel” (part 1, page 12).

As part of their responsibilities to the people under their command, COs are responsible for appointing a victim support officer (VSO) to all victims of serious offences, persistently targeted victims, and vulnerable and intimidated victims. This includes victims of domestic abuse and RASSO.

Unless the victim has decided that they don't want a VSO, COs should appoint one as soon as practicable after the complaint is made.

¹⁵ [Increasingly everyone's business: A progress report on the police response to domestic abuse](#), HMICFRS, 15 December 2015, p53.

The VSO is an officer, WO or senior NCO appointed to look after the day-to-day support of a vulnerable victim. Their duties are to:

- keep in regular contact with the victim;
- give the victim moral support;
- make sure the victim isn't being intimidated or ostracised in the unit;
- help the victim access service and/or MOD guidance (on bullying and harassment, conduct and discipline, etc), and establish internal subject matter experts to help guard against victimisation; and
- make sure the victim has information about the internal and external organisations that can support them.

While COs and VSOs have important roles in safeguarding victims, we were told that they receive scant safeguarding training. We also found that COs don't appoint VSOs in all cases. Sometimes, the victim can be left without the support they need in the days and weeks after the offence. It can also deny the victim protection from intimidation and further abuse. Victims from the three services confirmed that, in the cases where a VSO was appointed, most didn't support them as they should. Some victims felt ostracised by their units while others endured abuse on social media. This is worrying.

Recommendation 14

With immediate effect, the MOD should reinforce CO compliance with JSP 834 as regards their responsibilities around VSOs, and monitor such compliance by reviewing data from COs and feedback from victims.

The quality of initial safeguarding of victims of domestic abuse and RASSO incidents

Many of the means available to CIVPOL forces to provide initial safeguarding to victims of domestic abuse and RASSO aren't available to service police forces. These include bail, Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) and Domestic Violence Protection Notices (DVPNs). These tools can prevent unwanted contact between the suspect and victim and thereby reduce the risk of repeat victimisation. The service police don't have these powers, but they can instigate other actions, usually in conjunction with commanding officers, that can be just as effective.

First responders are responsible for assessing and addressing initial safeguarding needs. An important element to this is assessing the risk to victims.

Victim needs assessment

Requirements

[The Armed Forces Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) entitles victims to have a timely needs assessment. The victim needs assessment (VNA) determines the kind of support that service police (or commanding officers) may need to give victims in order for them to provide the best possible evidence.

The assessment identifies whether the victim is either:

- a victim of the most serious crime;
- a vulnerable or intimidated victim; or
- a persistently targeted victim.

If they meet any of the above criteria, they are eligible for enhanced entitlements under the code. Enhanced entitlements include any measures that the victim believes will help them during the investigation (special investigation measures), or at court ([special measures](#)).

[JSP 839](#) includes a list of actions and guidance that service police should adhere to when making VNAs. It stipulates that the VNA “must be timely” (paragraph 5.7a). This generally means that the VNA should be completed before taking the victim’s statement.

RAFP policies and AP

The VNA guidance in the RAFP’s technical instructions is unclear. AP1722 explains what a VNA is but doesn’t say when it should be conducted or by whom.¹⁶

SIB officers and NCOs told us that SIB is responsible for making VNAs in RASSO cases once they arrive at the scene. Some GPD personnel agreed, but others told us that it was their responsibility.

Recommendation 15

By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should revise policy document AP1722 so that it is clearer and reflects the need to act quickly when carrying out a victim needs assessment.

Compliance

In our case file review, we found that RAFP conducted VNAs in most, but not all, domestic abuse and RASSO cases.

Area for improvement 6

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that victim needs assessments are completed in all domestic abuse and RASSO cases and monitor their completion.

Risk identification and assessment in domestic abuse incidents

The RAFP has procedures in place to identify and assess risk at first response to domestic abuse incidents. But these procedures aren’t very clear, and the force needs to improve how these initial [risk assessments](#) are done.

¹⁶ AP1722 Section 12: Domestic Abuse and Child Protection, RAFP. Unpublished – Official Sensitive.

Risk identification is a fundamental element of the first police response to domestic abuse. If done correctly and with immediate safety planning, it should safeguard the victim and facilitate a good handover to specialists. It also provides a wealth of important evidence about the behaviour of the suspect and what effect it has had on the victim. Responding officers have a crucial role in first identifying and assessing risk, whether the incident is later investigated by the service police or is taken on by CIVPOL.

The RAFF, along with the other service police forces use a [domestic abuse, stalking, harassment \(DASH\) risk assessment form](#) to help personnel assess risk in domestic abuse incidents.¹⁷ This is a nationally-accepted process that assesses several factors in identifying risks to a victim.

Guidance and instruction

RAFF's AP1722 doesn't contain enough guidance on how first responders should make DASH risk assessments. It explains what the DASH process is, when it should be done and what should happen once it is complete but is confusing and lacks useful information on how personnel should complete it.

AP1722 states that first responders should implement the DASH process at the scene. AP1722's guidance on the timing of actions at the scene of the incident seems to contradict a flowchart contained as an annex in the document.

AP1722 states that: "It is anticipated that all RAFF personnel employed on law enforcement (LE) throughout the force will have received some form of DASH awareness training and specific training in completion of the DASH checklist."

But, unlike other service police forces' guidance, AP1722 doesn't state that only personnel who have had domestic abuse training should record DASH assessments.

Recommendation 16

By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should improve the guidance in policy document AP1722 on DASH assessments.

DASH form

The three service police forces' DASH proformas include the same 27 principal questions that feature in the DASH form published in the College of Policing's *Domestic Abuse Initial Response Guide*. But the three forces' forms differ in format, length, and some detail. A tri-service DASH form would help make the service police forces' approach to assessing risks to domestic abuse victims in the military more consistent.

¹⁷ [Risk-led policing of domestic abuse and the DASH risk model](#), Amanda Robinson, Andy Myhill, Julia Wire, Jo Roberts and Nick Tilley, September 2016.

Recommendation 17

By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army) should publish a single DASH form to be used by all three services that allows for any requisite local differences to be retained.

The RAFF's DASH form says that the user should use professional judgment and that the number of questions they have answered 'yes' to determines whether the form should be referred on to CIVPOL or welfare services for immediate intervention. This is better than grading the level of risk solely on the number of yes responses, which the College of Policing doesn't support.

However, AP1722 doesn't include any specific guidance on how to decide an appropriate DASH risk grading, or the importance of professional judgment as well as ticks. It refers to the DASH form as a checklist throughout rather than emphasising that it must not be a tick-box exercise.

Compliance

The RAFF needs to improve compliance with its DASH processes and make sure that first responders routinely complete DASH forms when they attend domestic abuse incidents. Of the seven cases we examined where a DASH form should have been completed, only four case files included evidence that it was. Of those cases, three of the four forms were completed at the time of interview or later, rather than at first response. First responders must assess risk while they are at the incident if they are to protect the victim and keep them safe.

Area for improvement 7

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that DASH forms are completed in all domestic abuse cases and monitor their completion.

The RAFF doesn't routinely monitor whether its personnel complete DASH forms for all domestic abuse incidents, or routinely collect or review any other data about DASH assessments. Because of limitations with COPPERS and REDCAP, it is difficult and time consuming to extract this data.

A force's success in tackling domestic abuse shouldn't be measured by the completion rate of the DASH form. But, given our findings, the force should start monitoring it as part of an improved governance process once the replacement for COPPERS and REDCAP is operational. This should also monitor the proportion of DASHs scored as standard, medium, and high risk to highlight whether scoring is consistent.

We didn't review domestic abuse incidents that were initially attended by the RAFF but investigated by CIVPOL, so couldn't determine how often the force made DASH assessments in such circumstances.

Quality

Completing a DASH form isn't enough on its own. The quality of the assessment and personnel's ability to identify risk are both important.

Personnel making risk assessments should know about the possible risk factors for domestic abuse. They should use skill and professional judgment to apply these factors to individual cases. In all cases, personnel should consider the wider context of the relationship and any history of abuse. They should also consider the nature of the incident, which may form part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.

RAFP personnel have received training on [risk factors for domestic abuse](#) and those who have received their initial training since 2015 have also been trained on controlling or coercive behaviour. Despite this, first responders' knowledge and experience is inevitably not as great as many of their CIVPOL counterparts.

The DASHs we reviewed were of variable quality and not all were complete. We are concerned that, in the cases we reviewed, RAFP first responders didn't always consider the risks to others, particularly children, when making their DASH risk assessments.

Getting the risk assessment right is the first and perhaps one of the most important steps in safeguarding a victim.

Supervision

The force's DASH form states that it should be passed to supervisors and includes a section for the OC of the police flight to record their assessment of risk and their rationale. This is good. But there is no mention of RAFP supervision of the process in AP1722 or its flowchart.

Most, but not all, of the DASH forms we reviewed had management oversight. But it appears that this oversight isn't robust enough, given the problems we found with some of the assessments we reviewed.

Referral

When a DASH or VNA is completed, where the risk is high, then a supervisor can decide whether an immediate intervention is necessary, to protect the victim, their children and anyone else at risk. This can be in the form of referral to CIVPOL and early engagement with unit and local welfare authorities.

SIB personnel are responsible for referring [high-risk domestic abuse](#) victims to the local CIVPOL and multi-agency safeguarding meetings. In the UK, such victims are referred to [multi-agency risk assessment conferences \(MARACs\)](#), and to military safeguarding meetings in cases that occur overseas. This seems to happen where it should, but we have been made aware that RAFP isn't always informed about MARACs relating to RAF personnel that are arranged by CIVPOL.

We also found that the RAFP generally has a good working relationship with the armed forces charity, SSAFA. RAFP personnel also refer domestic abuse and RASSO

victims to SSAFA where appropriate and SSAFA then work with local [multi-agency safeguarding hubs \(MASHs\)](#) and MARACs.

At each RAF station, in the UK or overseas, a station welfare committee chaired by an officer from the personnel management squadron meets to discuss risks and safeguarding for relevant cases. Representatives from RAFP, SSAFA, the local medical branch and discipline group are usually present.

AP1722 dictates that the RAFP are to raise any safeguarding concerns immediately with the chain of command to make sure safeguarding and welfare measures are established and managed by the unit. A list of support agencies in the local area should also be available for victims. We found this to be the case.

Positive action – arrest

Police first responders have a duty to take positive action¹⁸ when they deal with incidents of domestic abuse and RASSO. While CIVPOL deal with most domestic abuse cases they may not always be the first responders. This often means arresting the suspect, if there are grounds for doing so and it is a necessary and proportionate response.¹⁹ RAFP policy clearly sets out this duty for domestic abuse cases, but it isn't as clear for RASSO cases.

We found that the RAFP made early arrests in most but not all cases we reviewed where such action would have been proportionate and necessary. Failing to do this puts the victim at greater risk and misses opportunities to secure evidence from the suspect, such as a forensic examination. There should be greater emphasis on a positive arrest strategy in domestic abuse and RASSO cases, not only to secure evidence but also to safeguard the victim.

Recommendation 18

By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should reinforce and monitor a positive arrest strategy in domestic abuse and RASSO cases, not only to secure evidence but also to safeguard victims.

Referral to specialist agencies

ISVA role

[Independent sexual violence advisers \(ISVAs\)](#) have an important role in providing specialist tailored support to victims of sexual violence. The nature of the support varies from case to case depending on the needs of the person and their circumstances. ISVAs give continuity, advocacy and impartial advice and information to a victim. They also give information on other services that victims may need, for instance to help improve their physical and mental health, overcome addiction, or help with questions about social care, housing, or benefits.

¹⁸ See [Authorised Professional Practice: Major investigation and public protection: Arrest and other positive approaches](#), College of Policing.

¹⁹ See [The police response to domestic abuse: An update report](#), HMICFRS, 26 February 2019, p31.

In the recent [joint thematic inspection of rape in the criminal justice system](#) we conducted with Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, we found victims of rape are more likely to continue to engage with the police and support an investigation that involves an ISVA. Although we haven't analysed this specifically for cases investigated by service police forces, it would be reasonable to assume that the same would apply in such cases. It is therefore important that the service police refer all RASSO victims to ISVAs.

IDVA role

[Independent domestic violence advisers \(IDVAs\)](#) also have an important role in providing specialist tailored support to victims of domestic abuse. Serving as a victim's primary point of contact, IDVAs normally work with their clients from the point of crisis, to assess the level of risk, discuss the range of suitable options and develop safety plans.

ISVA and IDVA provision

There is a network of ISVAs and IDVAs throughout the UK that supports service victims of sexual violence. Interviewees felt the level of provision was enough to meet demand.

In some overseas locations, the service police can refer victims to local services who can perform a similar role to UK ISVAs and IDVAs. However, in others there is no ISVA or IDVA or similar services that service police can refer victims to.

Area for improvement 8

The Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should ensure that all domestic abuse and RASSO victims are provided with contact details for UK-based IDVAs and ISVAs respectively.

Guidance and policy

*The Guidance on the Investigation and Prosecution of Allegations of Rape and other Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO)*²⁰ and the *Guidance on the Investigation and Prosecution of Allegations of Domestic Abuse*²¹ stipulate that the service police will make sure that victims are referred to local specialist support services, including, where available, ISVAs in RASSO and IDVAs in domestic abuse investigations respectively.

This is partially reflected in RAFFP policy. *AP1722 section 12: Domestic Abuse and Child Protection* reminds personnel that victims should be referred to IDVAs, where

²⁰ Annex C to *Protocol between the Royal Navy Police (RNP), Royal Military Police (RMP) the RAF Police (RAFP) and the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) relating to the provision of legal advice during investigations*, 2016. Unpublished.

²¹ Annex D to *Protocol between the Royal Navy Police (RNP), Royal Military Police (RMP) the RAF Police (RAFP) and the Service Prosecuting Authority (SPA) relating to the provision of legal advice during investigations*, 2016. Unpublished.

available, at the start of an investigation. The requirement to refer RASSO victims to ISVAs is, however, not mentioned in AP1722.

Compliance

In most but not all cases we reviewed, we found evidence that the RAFF referred victims to ISVAs and IDVAs and communicated with advocates during the investigation.

Area for improvement 9

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should improve the force's guidance on the use of ISVAs and IDVAs, and monitor compliance with the guidance.

Victim support and victim of crime leaflets

In over 80 percent of the cases we reviewed, the RAFF provided victims with a victim of crime leaflet in a timely manner. And the RAFF routinely asked victims whether they consented for their details to be passed on to victim support at first contact and forwarded victims' details where appropriate.

Separating parties

The RAFF doesn't have the power to instruct suspects to maintain a certain physical distance from victims. However, in practice, responsibility for this lies with COs, who can give suspects lawful orders to avoid contact with victims or move suspects or victims to other units to prevent further offending. In making such decisions, the CO will consider the risk to the victim and assess whether taking such action would reduce the unit's operational capability. The RAFF's role in these matters is purely advisory.

For example, RAFF policy instructs first responders who attend incidents where the suspect is living in service family accommodation to consider consulting the suspect's CO about whether the suspect can be temporarily excluded from this accommodation. We were pleased to find that RAFF personnel did this in the relevant cases we reviewed.

However, there are clear limitations to this procedure. If the suspect is a civilian or if the accommodation is private or rented, then the CO can't use powers to exclude. We were told of examples where alternative accommodation was found for victims and suspects were temporarily posted to avert further offending. This is good practice, but we found such measures aren't routinely taken.

In this respect, the RNP differs from the RMP and RAFF. Where they identify a safeguarding risk, RNP policy²² enables RNP personnel to issue a lawful order to the suspect, rather than relying on the CO to do this. The RNP can use these orders to separate parties during an investigation and when a victim doesn't want to make a complaint but wants harassment to stop.

²² *Technical Instruction 13*, RNP. Unpublished – Official Sensitive.

Area for improvement 10

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should explore opportunities to enable the RAFP to issue lawful orders similar to those available to the Royal Navy Police, that is, to order suspects to do, or not to do, certain specified things, in furtherance of safeguarding victims, for example, not to approach or make contact with victims.

Evaluation

We found that initial safeguarding by RAFP personnel was generally quite good, up to and including when they interview the victim. We heard of good examples of initial safeguarding, where, for example suspects were confined to RAF stations and victims were rehoused.

However, we also heard from victims about cases where insufficient initial safeguarding was put in place by COs. This led to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, as well as chance meetings with the suspect in the case. In addition, intimidation from, and being ostracised by, colleagues was also reported to us.

The quality of ongoing safeguarding of victims of domestic abuse and RASSO

We were unable to assess the quality of ongoing safeguarding provided to victims after the initial safeguarding actions were carried out. After the police make initial risk assessments, they should revisit this risk assessment throughout the investigation, including at the points of crime recording, arrest, charge and trial. We didn't find evidence of this in most of the cases we reviewed.

Assessing the quality of ongoing safeguarding is difficult. Because COs have responsibility for safeguarding and responsibility for specific actions, risk assessments and oversight are largely outside the control of the service police. Many interviewees, including senior officers and managers from RAFP and welfare services, were concerned that nobody has oversight of the totality of safeguarding measures different parties conduct in a case. We have the same concern.

Since not all safeguarding actions and decisions are recorded or open to review, this could cause problems for the military in any public inquiry or domestic homicide review.

We can't evaluate how well the units and agencies are safeguarding domestic abuse and RASSO victims or recommend solutions. This is because we don't have the remit to inspect the actions of commanding officers, VSOs, welfare services, and other relevant individuals and organisations. But there is a risk to victims posed by this lack of a co-ordinated approach to safeguarding and this needs to be addressed. This was brought out in the comments from victims and other interviewees.

The MOD needs to review ongoing safeguarding in the military by all parties, including how victims of domestic abuse and RASSO are safeguarded from the point the incident is reported. It also needs to develop processes to make sure that safeguarding is effective and that there are robust review and oversight procedures in place.

Recommendation 19

By 1 January 2023, the MOD should conduct a review to improve safeguarding in the military by all parties, including how victims of domestic abuse and RASSO are safeguarded. Following such a review, the MOD should develop processes quickly to make sure that safeguarding becomes more effective, and that robust review and oversight procedures are in place.

6. Investigations after first response

In this chapter we evaluate the RAFF's policies and practices in domestic abuse and RASSO cases when it comes to how well it:

- allocates and investigates cases;
- interviews victims;
- obtains victim personal statements;
- provides investigatory supervision and oversight;
- conducts forensic investigations; and
- provides intelligence support to investigators.

Finally, we assess the quality of decision making in domestic abuse and RASSO cases and the timeliness of such investigations.

Are cases allocated appropriately and investigated thoroughly?

Domestic abuse investigations

The RAFF offers CIVPOL the opportunity to investigate most domestic abuse cases that occur in the UK. Consequently, the force investigates very few domestic abuse cases per year.

Year	Number of domestic abuse investigations, including Schedule 2 offences	Number of domestic abuse investigations that didn't include Schedule 2 offences
2017	9	9
2018	5	3
2019	5	2
2020	1	1

Note: Given the difficulties in extracting accurate data from COPPERS and REDCAP, these figures may not be accurate

All criminal offences reported to the RAFF that involve domestic abuse and aren't investigated by other forces should be investigated by the RAFF. We aren't aware of any instances where this hasn't happened. But, because of the difficulties in extracting accurate data from COPPERS and REDCAP, we can't confirm this.

Domestic abuse incidents that involve Schedule 2 offences (including RASSO incidents) are investigated by the force's SIB. GPD personnel investigate most other domestic abuse cases.

Investigative quality

The difference in structures and processes for first response across the GPD squadrons and flights is mirrored in how GPD personnel investigate cases. In most flights, the GPD personnel who make the first response and initial investigation retain the case throughout the investigation. In a few flights, usually at the larger air stations, however, first responders hand all cases to personnel in Unit Investigation Elements (UIE), who investigate. This arrangement is beneficial as, in the bigger stations with more investigations, first responders, or law enforcement (LE) can get on with their patrol job while UIE personnel focus on investigations.

Not all GPD personnel who investigate domestic abuse cases have had specialist investigation training. Acting corporals in UIE and the wider GPD units don't get VCIC training unless promoted to corporal. Some UIE personnel are eligible for SCIC training, but it isn't mandatory. Personnel in the wider GPD units don't get SCIC training. Consequently, domestic abuse investigations can be made by personnel who haven't received either VCIC or SCIC training. To address this, supervisors in some flights look to pool experience so that experienced investigators can support those who haven't been trained.

Local GPD commanders have a delegated authority to determine what training their personnel get on top of the mandated trade training courses. Only some LE and UIE personnel get extra training in investigating domestic abuse, depending on their flight unit.

Structured and mandatory continuous professional development training would improve this situation. The service police forces should contact the College of Policing about this and should explore whether GPD personnel could receive the [Professionalising Investigation Programme](#) (PIP) level 1 CPD training. This would be useful to help give GPD personnel more training on conducting investigations of any type. Our case file review examined the two non-RASSO domestic abuse cases conducted by GPD personnel in 2019 and 2020²³. As these cases are so rare, very few of the GPD personnel we interviewed had any experience of investigating domestic abuse offences.

There was a difference in the quality of the two cases we reviewed. One investigation was poor, while the other was well supervised. Given the very small numbers of Schedule 1 domestic abuse cases the force investigates, and the greater experience and training among SIB investigators compared with their GPD colleagues, we recommend that all criminal domestic abuse cases retained by RAFP should be investigated by the SIB rather than LE or UIE personnel.

²³ The other non-RASSO domestic abuse case was investigated by SIB.

Recommendation 20

With immediate effect, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should instruct the SIB to investigate all criminal domestic abuse cases retained by the RAFF.

Rape and serious sexual offence investigations

Year	Number of RASSO investigations
2017	4
2018	7
2019	15
2020	14

All incidents of RASSO reported to the RAFF that aren't investigated by other forces must be investigated by RAFF. We aren't aware of any instances of this not happening. But as with domestic abuse, as a result of the difficulties in extracting accurate data from COPPERS and REDCAP, we are unable to confirm this.

All RASSO cases are allocated to the right investigative unit. AP1722's sexual offences investigation chapter reiterates that Schedule 2 offences (which includes RASSO offences) are to be investigated by the SIB. We are pleased that the RAFF complies with this for RASSO offences. SIB personnel have conducted all the RAFF's RASSO investigations started since at least January 2017.

Investigative quality

During our case file review, we were pleased to find evidence that domestic abuse and RASSO investigations by the RAFF's SIB are generally of a high standard. From the evidence in the case files, we concluded that most investigations were of a comparable or higher quality than in many CIVPOL forces. This is, in part, a result of investigators having a lower caseload than their counterparts in CIVPOL.

Choice of who investigates cases

Some RASSO victims told us that they would have preferred their investigations to have been conducted by CIVPOL rather than by the RAFF. They were concerned about their cases being investigated by people who lived on the same base as them and "who they would see in the pub", rather than CIVPOL officers who would be strangers. Some also mentioned that they would prefer their case to be heard in a criminal court, rather than in a court martial.

All Service personnel have the right to report serious crimes alleged to have been committed in the UK, including rape and sexual assaults, to CIVPOL as well as the

service police. Commanding Officers are required to ensure this right is widely disseminated, particularly among service police, medical and welfare staff.²⁴

We believe that when victims tell service police that they want the case to be investigated by CIVPOL, the service police should do its utmost to facilitate this. According to the victims we interviewed, this doesn't happen. They had all been told that, as military personnel, their cases must be investigated by service police.

We believe that all victims of domestic abuse and RASSO, which often involve serious crimes, should be allowed to choose whether they want the investigation to be conducted by people within the small military community, or from an outside CIVPOL force. Victims wouldn't know whether they would get a better investigation from CIVPOL or the RAFF, so their decision would be based on other factors. But they should still be given the choice.

The RMP has addressed this problem. Its sexual offences investigations log, introduced in August 2020, instructs personnel attending RASSO incidents in the UK, or speaking to victims, to tell them that they have the right to ask for CIVPOL to investigate their case. This is good practice, and we recommend that all service police forces introduce similar policies for all domestic abuse and RASSO victims.

This could be recorded in victim statements, or VNAs and should be signed by the victim.

Recommendation 21

By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should establish a policy that requires first responders to ask all service victims of domestic abuse or RASSO offences committed in the UK whether they want the service police or CIVPOL to investigate.

There is no national guidance for CIVPOL forces to ask victims at first response whether they would prefer the service police to investigate when there is concurrent jurisdiction. Offering victims the choice of who investigates their case would give them the same rights set out in the above recommendation to victims of incidents initially attended by service police.

Area for improvement 11

The College of Policing should develop a policy that requires all Home Office police forces to ask all victims, in cases where concurrent jurisdiction exists, whether they want the service police or CIVPOL to investigate.

²⁴ *Defence Instruction and Notices 2020DIN01-065*, Ministry of Defence. Unpublished – Official Sensitive.

SIB training

All SIB investigators receive RASSO investigation training, and the force is trying to develop a more experienced, specialist investigative group.

All RAFP SIB personnel will have gained experience in GPD sections or flights, have had their VCIC course and must have taken the SCIC course to join SIB. The SCIC course has been designed by the military and draws on elements of College of Policing courses adapted to service policing. All SIB personnel also receive regular online training and training in RASSO on local training days.

SIB management also tries to make sure that enough of its personnel are trained in specialist roles, to maintain organisational competency. This includes sexual offences investigation training and specialist investigatory training. All such specialist training is provided by external bodies and, in most cases, by the Home Office or CIVPOL. But as it isn't a contracted partner, RAFP isn't prioritised for training. This has resulted in a significant shortfall in training since 2019. If this shortfall continues, this will affect the capability of the RAFP.

To improve and standardise continuous professional development for specialist investigators, the service police forces should, with the College of Policing, examine whether the SIB could receive the College of Policing's Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP) level 2 CPD training.

Recommendation 22

By 1 January 2023, service police forces and the College of Policing should establish whether service police personnel could receive College-accredited CPD training, including first responder and Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP) 1 CPD for GPD personnel and PIP 2 for SIB personnel.

Secondments

In order to become an effective specialist investigator, both experience and training are needed. The force arranges for SIB personnel and officers to take secondments in CIVPOL specialist sexual offences units. These placements give secondees valuable experience of busier specialist units.

Tenure

However, the RAF's military assignment process prevents personnel developing the same degree of experience and expertise of some of their counterparts in CIVPOL. In civilian policing, an officer can spend most of their career in investigatory roles, developing their skills and experience in criminal investigation departments and specialist investigatory units (for example, in sexual offending units).

This can't happen in the RAFP, as RAF career managers post personnel into the SIB for a two to five-year tour. At the end of the tour, they are posted to another role elsewhere in the RAFP, and someone else is rotated in.

Consequently, investigators with a few years' experience must leave the squadron, often to be replaced by someone who has never conducted an investigation. As a result, only a few personnel have enough experience to conduct a RASSO investigation. Unlike CIVPOL unit managers, SIB command can't stop or delay a person leaving the squadron even if this means they don't have anyone with the requisite skills. And it is financially inefficient to provide specialist training courses to personnel who routinely leave the post after a relatively brief period.

The squadron's command has recently introduced a new training structure, with three categories of investigator: basic practitioner, specialist, and expert. For each category, the individual receives training and then must show they have used the skills before progressing to the next level. This is a good initiative, but again is subject to the two to five-year rotation.

It would improve the RAFF's efficiency and effectiveness if SIB personnel could spend longer in post. This would allow them to further develop their skills and experience and in turn enhance their competencies.

We recognise that there is an organisational benefit in regularly deploying people out of SIB into GPD roles, as they can share their knowledge and skills with their GPD colleagues. However, the disadvantages may outweigh the advantages.

But since rotational postings are central to the British armed forces' employment and promotion processes, staying in post for longer could affect a person's career prospects and would make it very difficult for them to be promoted. This is clearly complicated, but the current arrangements adversely affect the RAFF's and other service police forces' operational effectiveness (as detailed above).

Recommendation 23

By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should enter into discussions with the MOD in an effort to resolve the problems caused to the force both by the military assignment process and the short tenure of personnel in SIB.

Military personnel can have several SIB postings in their career. To prevent skill fade, the RNP gives CPD refresher training to people returning to the SIB. We consider this good practice and is something the RAFF may want to consider doing.

Area for improvement 12

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should provide CPD refresher training to people returning to the SIB.

Interviews

Interviews of victims are a crucial part of investigating domestic abuse and RASSO offences.

Victims of sexual offences and domestic abuse are entitled to special investigation measures. These include:

- being interviewed by specially trained professionals;
- having their interviews carried out in specifically-designed or adapted premises;
- the opportunity to have a person of the same gender conduct the interview if they are a victim of sexual violence, gender-based violence, or domestic violence (any request should be met when possible unless doing so would prejudice the proper handling of the investigation); and
- having the same person, where possible, conduct all the interviews (unless doing so would prejudice the proper handling of the investigation).

Trained interviewers

In the cases we reviewed, all RASSO victims were interviewed by appropriately trained personnel.

The RAFF's AP1722 cites Home Office guidance, which establishes that, aside from the initial account, interviews of sexual offences must be conducted by experienced trained investigators in accordance with [Achieving Best Evidence](#) (ABE) guidelines.²⁵ All units in the two SIB flights have sexual offences investigation trained (SOIT) officers, who have been trained as part of the SOIT course. Our case file review showed that these personnel conducted all interviews of RASSO victims.

SOIT officers acknowledge that they would benefit from a more joined-up approach to maintaining their skills. They have recently established a reflective practice group to exchange experiences and to update ABE guidance. The force has also arranged for an external expert to give updates on ABE to all the SOIT officers, with the aim of developing quarterly training sessions. But SOIT officers find it difficult to be operationally competent, given their other investigatory roles.

There is no requirement to have SOIT officers at the RAFF-led Joint Services Police and Security Unit (JSPSU) in British Forces South Atlantic Islands. Victims are usually offered interviews in accordance with ABE back in the UK. If they want to stay in the South Atlantic, and there is no SOIT officers in the JSPSU personnel, then JSPSU can arrange for the ABE to be conducted by the Royal Falkland Islands Police.

²⁵ AP1722 Section 3: *Investigation of Sexual Offences*, RAFF, para 19. Unpublished – Official Sensitive.

Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews

There is no requirement for the service police forces, or CIVPOL, to conduct ABE interviews for all domestic abuse victims. In service police-led cases, ABE interviews are only mandated in cases where:

- the victim is vulnerable;
- the victim is intimidated;
- the offence warrants an ABE interview (for example, a RASSO offence); or
- the service police use the VNA process to determine whether the victim is either vulnerable or intimidated (the definitions for vulnerable and intimidated victims used in the VNA are in line with those outlined in the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999).

In domestic abuse cases that don't need an ABE interview, GPD personnel can interview the victim once they have taken their basic interview training course.

Appropriate premises

In all the cases we reviewed, RASSO victims were interviewed in locations that have the equipment needed for interviews in line with ABE.

In the UK, the RAFF can access CIVPOL ABE suites which are specially designed for this purpose. In Cyprus, the Cyprus Joint Policing Unit (CJPU) also has its own ABE facilities.

The situation for domestic abuse ABE interviews is the same as for RASSO interviews.

Gender of the interviewer

The RAFF doesn't always offer victims of RASSO offences the opportunity to be interviewed by someone of the same gender.

Most of the force's SOIT officers are men. The force, therefore, can't always deploy a female SOIT officer when the victim would like them to.

Conduct of interviews

Some of the service RASSO victims we interviewed told us that their ABE interviews were arduous experiences. One victim told us that interviews lasted for more than 12 hours on 2 consecutive days. Another told us that "I wish they'd been a bit more caring during the process and taken more account of my feelings".

Interviews are traumatic experiences for victims, who have to relive their experiences. Investigators from all service police forces should look after victim wellbeing during interviews and try to keep the effect on the victim to a minimum.

All victims – victim’s entitlement to be accompanied at interview

[JSP 839](#) includes other guidance for victim interviews including:

“You should allow the victim to be accompanied by a person of their choice unless you make a reasoned decision to the contrary. Any person that the victim wishes to accompany them must not have been involved in or a witness to the offence ... [this isn’t to] help them in providing the account.” (paragraph 5.8(f))

This isn’t reflected in the force’s AP1722 and there is evidence that victims were accompanied in only a small proportion of cases we reviewed. Having a friend accompany them in such a traumatic procedure can provide valuable emotional support.

Recommendation 24

By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should update policy document AP1722 to reflect JSP 839’s guidance on allowing victims to be accompanied by a person of their choice.

Victim personal statement

The RAFF doesn’t give all domestic abuse and RASSO victims the opportunity to make a victim personal statement (VPS). It should always give such victims this opportunity.

[JSP 839](#) instructs the service police that they must “offer all victims the opportunity to make a VPS when they make their initial statement of complaint” (page 23). Making a VPS gives the victim an opportunity to describe the wider effects that the crime has had on them, express their concerns and say whether or not they need any support.

The RAFF has produced guidance about the VPS scheme for its personnel. It reflects the same guidance set out in JSP 839, which states that the victim will be given the chance to make a VPS when a witness or evidential statement is taken. It also establishes that the victim will have the opportunity to make a further statement at any time before the suspect appears at court.²⁶ The requirement to offer a VPS also features in its *Investigator’s Victim Liaison Guide* checklist.

Despite this, the RAFF’s compliance with its VPS obligations needs to improve. In approximately a third of the RASSO cases we examined, there was no record of the RAFF offering victims the opportunity to make a VPS. Nor did we find any evidence that VPS had been offered in either of the non-RASSO domestic abuse cases we examined.

²⁶ AP1722 Part 3, Chapter 4: Victims and Witnesses, section 1: Victims of Crime and Victim Personal Statement Scheme, RAFF, para 24. Unpublished. Official – Sensitive.

Area for improvement 13

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that investigators give victims the opportunity to make a victim personal statement in all appropriate cases.

Investigatory supervision and oversight

It is important that supervisors or managers give personnel conducting investigations the direction they need. In every case, this should be stated in an investigation strategy that outlines clear aims, objectives, and action. Personnel should be given direction throughout the course of investigations, through structured supervisory reviews and continuing oversight.

Investigation strategies

A comprehensive investigation strategy that is developed at the start of enquiries, kept updated, and subject to supervisory review helps investigators follow all lines of enquiry. It also helps bring the investigation to a swift conclusion.

The force's AP1722 clearly states that investigators should generate an investigation strategy at the start of their investigation, with input from the chain of command. The strategy should be maintained by both the investigator and the chain of command and reviewed at stages during the investigation.²⁷

RAFP investigators compiled investigation strategies in all the investigations we reviewed. Most had been produced at the outset of investigations, but there had been delays in 2 of the 18 RASSO cases we examined.

In most of the cases we examined, investigators had regularly updated the strategies, had outlined all appropriate lines of enquiry, and had detailed the rationale for them. But two of the RASSO investigation strategies didn't include all relevant lines of enquiry.

We also found that strategies in complex investigations could be improved. CIVPOL use policy books to set out overarching strategies and decision-making policy in complex investigations. The RAFP doesn't use policy books and we found that overarching strategies and decision-making policies for important areas aren't in place in such investigations.

Area for improvement 14

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should introduce policy books for senior investigating officers to use during linked series and complex cases. This would help them to record the overarching strategy and supporting rationale and give evidence of decision making.

²⁷ AP1722 Section 8, RAFP, para 43. Unpublished. Official – Sensitive.

Digital strategies

In domestic abuse and RASSO investigations, following reasonable lines of enquiry often involves obtaining and analysing communication data from digital devices belonging to the suspect, the victim, and sometimes third parties.

Investigators should only seize digital devices if it is necessary and proportionate to do so. To facilitate this, they should create a digital investigation strategy in which they carefully consider the facts of a case to decide which devices they need to seize and what information they want to examine. A blanket approach, whereby investigators seize all digital devices from victims and suspects and seek to examine everything on them, isn't always efficient. As the Court of Appeal found in *Bater-James and Another [2020] EWCA Crim 790*, "the loss of such a device for any period of time may itself be an intrusion into [...] private life, even apart from considerations of privacy with respect to the contents".²⁸

In our crime file review, we found that while some RAFF's cases included digital investigation strategies, in most instances these were just generic documents. RAFF investigators don't give enough consideration to how digital investigation would help the specific case they are working on. Consequently, in most cases they tend to go out and seize victims', witnesses' and suspects' mobile phones, because that is what they have been told to do. This happens whether or not the devices' seizure and examination is advisable.

Area for improvement 15

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should introduce formal digital investigation strategy training for investigators to help them better understand when they should seize and examine digital devices.

Media and social media strategies

The development of media and social media strategies are important elements of the investigation process and can be crucial for public appeals, minimising community impact and maintaining public confidence. Not developing these strategies can also seriously hamper investigators' abilities when it comes to developing a full investigative strategy in the future.

In our case file review, we found no evidence of a media or a social media strategy being produced for any investigation.

Several investigators we spoke to were frustrated by not being able to access the media to appeal for information in relation to RASSO cases, highlight crime or safeguard potential future victims. The focus on maintaining the RAF's high public reputation should be balanced with the value of using the media in certain investigations.

²⁸ Quoted in [Rape and Sexual Offences – Chapter 3: Case Building](#), Crown Prosecution Service.

Recommendation 25

By 1 June 2022, the MOD should agree procedures with the Provost Marshal (RAF) for the RAFF's direct access to the media, so that they can use it to support an investigation (for example, via appeals for information) and to publicise prevention messages.

Supervision

Most of the RAFF SIB investigations we reviewed were subject to good supervision and oversight. As we recommend that all the RAFF's domestic abuse offence investigations should, in future, be conducted by SIB, and given the small number of domestic abuse offences investigated by the force during the period we reviewed, this section focuses solely on supervision of SIB investigations.

The force's AP1722 states that the "RAFF chain of command must carry out periodic reviews of investigation strategies within their units in order to ensure that they are being implemented and followed". But it doesn't stipulate when such reviews should occur, or who should conduct them.

In most of the cases we reviewed, there was evidence that supervisors regularly reviewed strategies. But this didn't always happen. There was no evidence of the supervisor reviewing the investigation strategy in one SIB RASSO case. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the vague instruction, some supervisory reviews occurred at 7 days and some at 14 days.

We found similar problems with investigation managers' reviews. These happened in most but not all SIB cases; some took place at 14 days and others at 28 days.

There are other investigatory oversight arrangements in place besides formal reviews. Each flight has weekly case file conferences. SIB case management unit also monitors cases and does auditable dip tests.

Despite these arrangements, the force should make sure that all cases involve supervisory and managerial review.

Area for improvement 16

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that supervisors and managers conduct robust oversight of all investigation strategies at defined intervals.

Training

All the RAFF's commissioned officers receive management of investigation course training as part of the officer training package. They also receive regular training in post, although this varies from section to section. All SIB officers also receive specialist training, which includes training on RASSO investigations.

However, at commissioned officer level, direct entry officers don't usually have investigatory experience. And officers who have been commissioned from the ranks have often been out of investigation or policing roles for a long time.

The situation is similar for SNCOs, especially those in GPD sections and flights. Many will have very varied careers that include policing roles, operational tours, and postings in other specialist areas (for example, in counter-intelligence and in headquarters) and can be out of policing roles for many years. As with commissioned officers, they don't get any structured refresher training when they are posted into a role that involves supervising or managing investigations.

In the SIB, skill fade is partly addressed by requiring all SIB SNCOs to have SIB experience. But, unlike the RNP, the RAFP hasn't established structured refresher training courses for those re-joining the SIB.

Area for improvement 17

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that newly-posted supervisory staff should receive any refresher training they need to effectively supervise investigations.

Since many officers don't have direct investigatory experience and experience in SNCO ranks is variable, they often have to oversee large swathes of work. They could give a better service if they were in post longer, rather than being redeployed every two to three years.

Forensic investigations

Forensic evidence plays an important part in investigations of domestic abuse and RASSO. Examining the victim, the scene of the crime and the suspect can prove or disprove who was involved and help determine what happened.

MOD guidance to COs and victims²⁹ outlines how forensic evidence can be preserved, how a sexual assault referral clinic (SARC) can support a victim and how such arrangements work overseas.

RAFP policy reiterates MOD guidance giving extra detail on scene preservation and crime scene investigators (CSIs), how SARCs can be accessed through CIVPOL, and the use of early evidence kits, which enable police to collect and preserve certain types of forensic evidence from sexual assault complainants, in advance of the full medical forensic examination. Early evidence kits are available to personnel in UK and overseas units, though we found that not all personnel that we spoke to had been trained in their use.

²⁹ 2014DIN01-209 *Guidance to commanding officers and victims when dealing with allegations of serious criminal offences including sexual offences*, Ministry of Defence. Available as Annex B to [JSP 839](#).

Area for improvement 18

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that all relevant personnel receive training to use early evidence kits.

Crime scene investigators

Forensic evidence collection should be done by specially trained CSIs. RAFP Scientific Support Unit (SSU), based at RAF Henlow near Bedford, consists of six CSIs, two of whom are also qualified crime scene managers. We were told that there are always at least two CSIs on call, but since the SSU covers the whole of the UK, response times can be long. We found that there were sometimes delays of several hours before a CSI arrived at a scene.

To mitigate this, CSIs give telephone advice to a unit on how best to preserve evidence and we found that units have equipment to collect and store evidence. All RAFP investigators have had some forensic evidence training and some have completed CSI training. This is particularly true in overseas bases such as the Falkland Islands and Cyprus.

The SSU and CSI-trained personnel told us that while there was adequate training, the low numbers of domestic abuse and RASSO crimes needing forensic examination meant that CSI experience was limited and so skills fade was inevitable. Although RAFP personnel have forensic advice available to them and can secure scenes for a long time waiting for CSI attendance, long delays risk losing evidential opportunities, as some types of forensic sample degrade over time. Using CIVPOL CSIs, especially in places furthest from Henlow, would reduce response times of CSIs, and secondments of RAFP CSIs into CIVPOL would improve skills and experience.

Area for improvement 19

The Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy), the Provost Marshal (Army) and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for forensics should establish procedures for Home Office police force crime scene investigators (CSIs) to support RAFP investigations and to provide opportunities for RAFP CSIs to gain further operational forensic experience.

Forensic medical examiners and sexual assault referral centres

Forensic medical examiners are trained to examine victims of RASSO at sexual assault referral centres. Unlike CIVPOL, RAFP don't have direct access to forensic medical examiners, nor have they been able to train RAF medical personnel to carry out that role. In the UK, the RAFP relies on agreements with CIVPOL to provide these specialist services. This seems to be an efficient and effective arrangement. But in our case file review, we found at least two investigations where there was no referral to a sexual assault referral centre. This prevented potentially important evidence from being found, support to the victim being given and a prosecution being strengthened.

In the Falkland Islands, where there is no sexual assault referral centre, the local police force and service police use the military medical centre where personnel have been trained in forensic medical examination.

Digital forensics

As we mentioned earlier (digital investigation strategies), in many investigations, digital devices such as mobile phones, tablets and computers can hold important evidence. This is particularly true for domestic abuse and RASSO. Communication in intimate relationships often takes place using digital devices, and they are often used in making threats, intimidation, control, and in making, sending and storing sexual images. RAFP policy directs how such evidence should be collected.

We found that the RAFP Digital Forensic Team (DFT), also based at RAF Henlow, has enough forensically trained personnel to maintain the digital forensics capability. The DFT also has an analyst on call 24/7 to give advice to GPD personnel and investigators and help answer queries about seizing digital media and preserving digital evidence. The DFT is working towards gaining accreditation to [ISO 17025](#) standard.

We spoke to personnel about how they prioritise devices for examination and were told that serious offences take priority. The DFT analyst guides them as to which devices are likely to contain the best evidence.

The lead investigator later visits the DFT to conduct an early case assessment. This involves sifting through the data that has been downloaded from the device by the DFT to identify evidence of the offence that needs examining further. The DFT completes a report that can be added to the investigation case file. This is good practice.

We were told that there is no discernible waiting time for most digital forensic results and priority cases can be completed in two weeks. But we found two investigations that had lasted over 100 days and were still awaiting digital forensics.

In most, but not all, domestic abuse and RASSO cases, investigators need to examine the victim's mobile phone.³⁰ When it is needed "the investigators should consider whether the digital material can be reviewed without taking possession of the device. If a more extensive enquiry is necessary, the contents of the device should be downloaded with the minimum inconvenience to the victim and, if possible, returned without any unnecessary delay".³¹ Victims from the three armed services told us that this doesn't always happen. For example, we heard about investigators seizing a victim's phone before they had the chance to write down the phone numbers of friends or family they needed to contact. CIVPOL have introduced equipment and facilities in police stations, commonly known as 'cyber kiosks'. These allow officers to access and download material held on mobile digital devices without having to refer to the high-tech crime unit, thus speeding up the process. We recommend that the service police implement similar technology.

³⁰ Exceptions may include RASSO offences conducted by strangers and some historical offences.

³¹ [Rape and Sexual Offences – Chapter 3: Case Building](#), Crown Prosecution Service.

Recommendation 26

By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should introduce the capability (on a shared or individual basis) to quickly access and download material held on mobile digital devices.

Intelligence support for investigations

Force Intelligence Management Unit personnel provide access to intelligence for investigators through the Police National Computer and Database (PNC/D) building suspect and victim profiles, including communications data and guidance from the National Crime Agency.

Passing on information from investigations to other forces

Details of service police investigations held on REDCAP are uploaded to the PNC/D every day. This gives CIVPOL useful information in the event they encounter military personnel. However, REDCAP uses a separate operating system from the service police intelligence system. There is no interface between the two systems, which limits effectiveness. The new integrated ICT system (mentioned earlier) is likely to resolve this issue.

Outcomes and quality of decision making about case progress

There are several possible outcomes for a service police investigation. It can:

- be discontinued by the police;
- be discontinued ('non-directed') by the prosecutor; or
- result in a charge for the offence referred, or an alternative offence.

Only a small proportion of domestic abuse and RASSO reports that CIVPOL or the service police receive results in a charge. And only a proportion of these end in conviction. This is a problem of significant public interest.

Of those domestic abuse-related crimes investigated by service police forces in 2018 and 2019 in England and Wales, at least 40 percent resulted in a suspect being charged.³² This is considerably higher than the charge rate in the civilian criminal justice system. In the year to March 2020, 12 percent³³ of domestic abuse-related crimes recorded to CIVPOL in England and Wales resulted in a charge, or out-of-court action (such as cautions and community resolutions).

Proportionally more RASSO cases investigated by service police result in charge than is the case for CIVPOL investigations. At least 35 percent of service police RASSO investigations conducted in 2018 and 2019 resulted in a charge,³⁴ while only about

³² Some of these investigations are still ongoing and have not reached charging decision.

³³ [Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales: November 2020 – Appendix tables](#), Office for National Statistics, table 3.

³⁴ Some of these investigations are still ongoing and have not reached charging decision.

4 percent of rapes reported to CIVPOL resulted in charge.³⁵ While a comparatively high proportion of domestic abuse and RASSO offences reported to service police forces result in a charge, a charge still doesn't happen in 33 percent of cases.

The only cases in which the police can take no further action (NFA) are those that don't meet the evidential standard for them to refer a suspect to the prosecutor for charge. The service justice system and the civilian criminal justice system apply different tests to determine whether a case meets this standard. In the service justice system, the police have to refer to the SPA all cases that meet the criteria established in its Evidential Sufficiency Test:

“(a) a service policeman considers that there is sufficient evidence to charge a person with a service offence that is not a CO offence;³⁶ or

(b) a service policeman considers that there is sufficient evidence to charge a person with a service offence that is a CO offence and is aware of circumstances of a description prescribed by regulations under section 128 for the purposes of this paragraph.” ([Armed Forces Act 2006 116 \(2\)](#))

This is a lower standard of proof than the Evidential Sufficiency Test used by civilian police forces.³⁷ If identical cases were investigated by both the service police and civilian police, the civilian police would discontinue some cases in accordance with their test, while the service police would refer them to prosecutors. Consequently, no accurate comparison can be made between the proportion of domestic abuse and RASSO cases discontinued by the civilian police and the service police.

With RASSO cases, there is another difference between the service and civilian systems. Civilian police forces are expected to make the decision to take no further action on a RASSO case that clearly can't and won't be able to meet the appropriate evidential standard. However, the RAFFP has a legal duty to consult the SPA before discontinuing almost any case³⁸ where it is been suspected, at any stage, that a RASSO offence (or any Schedule 2 offence) has been committed.³⁹ This isn't outlined in the RAFFP's AP1722 and our case file review didn't find evidence that the RAFFP routinely consulted the SPA in all RASSO cases it discontinued.

Area for improvement 20

The Provost Marshal (RAF) should:

- remind investigators of the legal requirement for consultation with the SPA in all RASSO cases before discontinuation; and
- monitor investigators' compliance with the legal requirement.

³⁵ [A joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's response to rape – Phase one: From report to police or CPS decision to take no further action](#), HMICFRS and HMCPSP, 16 July 2021, p13.

³⁶ A Schedule 1 offence that can be dealt with by a commanding officer.

³⁷ See [The Code for Crown Prosecutors](#), Crown Prosecution Service, paras 4.1–5.11.

³⁸ The exception to this is historic investigations, where the reported offence occurred before the passing of the Armed Forces Act 2006.

³⁹ [Armed Forces Act 2006 s116 \(4–4a\)](#).

There is no legal requirement for service police investigators to consult the SPA before discontinuing domestic abuse cases that aren't otherwise classified as Schedule 2 offences, although this does happen in some cases.

In all the force's domestic abuse case files we reviewed, the police decision to take no further action was appropriate. The rationale for doing so was appropriately recorded in all the domestic abuse case files we reviewed. And in all cases where the RAFF consulted the SPA before deciding to NFA the case, it did so in a timely manner.

Communicating the decision to take no further action to the victim and victims' right to review

It is important that decisions to take no further action are explained sensitively to victims. The way a decision is communicated can greatly affect whether a victim understands and can come to terms with a decision.

The Victims' Right to Review Scheme enables victims to seek a review of a police or prosecutor's decision not to bring charges. The scheme was introduced in June 2013 for SPA decisions and extended to cover police decisions in November 2015. The MOD produced *Guidance on the Service Police Victim Right to Review Scheme*. The RAFF, and the other service police forces have incorporated this into their policy and guidance.

Under the guidance, service police must write to victims in qualifying cases to explain there hasn't been a referral to the SPA in their case and to tell them of their right to request a review of the decision (paragraph 3.1). In our case file review, we found that the RAFF complied with this in most, but not all, cases.

Cases discontinued by the SPA

We don't have the remit to inspect the SPA and can't review whether they are discontinuing appropriately.

Our recent [joint thematic inspection of the police and Crown Prosecution Service's \(CPS\) response to rape](#) found that in most cases examined, the CPS decisions not to charge were in line with the [Code for Crown Prosecutors](#) Test. So, it is possible that this may also be the case in the service justice system. The SPA isn't subject to statutory inspection, although it can invite Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPPI) to inspect its processes. There are distinct benefits in investigating and prosecuting agencies being subject to independent inspection.

There are three specific questions we examined relating to cases that weren't directed by the SPA because they affect service police responsibilities. These are:

- whether the SPA consults the police before discontinuing cases;
- whether the police were given the chance to appeal the SPA decisions; and
- how the SPA and the police give victims the right to review the decision to discontinue cases.

Consulting the police before discontinuing cases

In the civilian justice system, CPS prosecutors should consult the police if the prosecutor is planning to terminate all or part of a case.⁴⁰ This provides an opportunity for the police to give more information that may affect the prosecutor's decision, such as extra witness statements that resolve evidential problems, or background information not included in the file that may have a bearing on the public interest.

Domestic abuse cases

There is a similar duty for SPA prosecutors in domestic abuse cases. *The Guidance on the Investigation and Prosecution of Allegations of Domestic Abuse* states:

“Where the prosecutor proposes to discontinue the case or substantially reduce the charge the prosecutor will consult with the Service Police to ensure that there is no further action that can be taken.”⁴¹

This isn't happening in all cases.

Non-domestic abuse cases

SPA prosecutors don't have to consult with the service police before discontinuing other cases and we were told by SIB personnel throughout all three forces that they aren't consulted in such cases.

Appeals to SPA decisions

In the civilian justice system, the police can appeal any decision made by a CPS prosecutor after a case is referred.⁴² In the service justice system, service police haven't been granted the right to do the same. Consequently, the SPA and service police are unlikely to discuss and revise a decision, which ultimately could affect whether a victim receives justice or not.

Victims' Right to Review

The SPA's obligations under the scheme are set out in its [Victim's Right to Review Policy](#). The policy states that:

“Victims will be notified of any qualifying decision and, briefly, the reasons for that decision. The notification will indicate that the victim is eligible to seek a review under the VRR scheme and to whom they should direct their request.” (paragraph 8)

But it is unclear whether the SPA or someone else should notify the victim. Joint SPA and service police guidance on investigating and prosecuting domestic abuse cases

⁴⁰ The exceptions to this are:

- (1) the acceptance of pleas where charges were preferred in the alternative;
- (2) minor adjustments which don't go to the substance of the case, and which are unlikely to affect disposal or penalty; and
- (3) where local agreements specify that consultation is unnecessary.

⁴¹ *Guidance on the Investigation and Prosecution of Allegations of Domestic Abuse* (annex D to 2014DIN01-209).

⁴² [Charging \(The Director's Guidance\) – sixth edition](#), Crown Prosecution Service, para 4.31.

says that the SPA should “personally deliver an explanatory letter to the victim which also informs the victim of their right to a review of the decision”.⁴³ But there isn’t corresponding guidance for other types of cases.

We have been told that, in some RASSO cases, the SPA instructs service police SOIT officer to send the letter to the victim, as they are assumed to have a rapport with the victim and are better placed to give the news. In other RASSO cases, the SPA issues the letter. We have also heard that in some non-RASSO cases, the commanding officer, or a victim liaison officer (VLO) is given the task.

Without clear responsibilities for this role, there is the potential that decisions aren’t communicated to some victims and their rights are consequently not explained to them or are overlooked. We believe that the SPA is best placed to inform victims if they are discontinuing their case and to inform them of their right to seek a review of the decision.

Recommendation 27

With immediate effect, the Director of Service Prosecutions should ensure that the SPA:

- informs victims if it decides to discontinue their case; and
- informs victims of their right to seek a review of its decision to discontinue.

Timeliness of investigations

Criminal investigations should be thorough, but they should also be conducted as quickly as reasonably possible, without unnecessary delays. When a case takes an unnecessarily long time to reach a conclusion, it is unfair to the victim and may add to their distress. This can also undermine trust in the system. Delays in service investigations and prosecutions can also “reduce the quality of evidence, undermine the morale of individuals and units, distract service personnel from their duties and impact on operational effectiveness”.⁴⁴

Investigations can be delayed for many reasons. Many more serious cases often need forensic testing and analysis of physical evidence, for medical evidence and third-party data to be examined and for digital data to be recorded and reviewed. As stated in the [Service Justice System Review \(Part 2\)](#): “These actions, dependant as they are on other authorities, necessarily delay the process of referral and aren’t under the control of the SP” (paragraph 214).

We were told that there are occasionally delays in getting witness statements. This has happened in situations where commanding officers haven’t encouraged their personnel to report to service police and provide statements, and where personnel have been posted to other countries.

⁴³ SP/SPA Protocol: Annex – *Guidance on the Investigation and Prosecution of Allegations of Domestic Abuse*, para 34.

⁴⁴ [Practice in the Service Courts Collected Memoranda: Memorandum 13. Better Case Management in the Court Martial - BCM\(CM\)](#), Office of the Judge Advocate General, 2016, para 13.1.

There is also the potential for avoidable delays as a result of poor investigatory practice, unnecessary requirements being posed by prosecutors and investigators making unnecessary enquiries.

Better case management

To reduce delays in bringing cases to a conclusion, the Office of the Judge Advocate General introduced *Better Case Management in the Court Martial (BCM(CM))*, as set out in [Memorandum 13 Better Case Management in the Court Martial – BCM\(CM\) 2016](#). This was later amended by [Memorandum 3 Better Case Management in the Court Martial – BCM\(CM\) 2020](#).

To achieve better case management, the service police have to “ensure that investigations are concluded more expeditiously, that time isn’t wasted on unnecessary work, and that case files are built according to the needs of the case”.⁴⁵

To this end, rather than sending a comprehensive case file to prosecutors for every case, BCM(CM) instructs the service police to send a report to the SPA containing the initial details of the prosecution case⁴⁶ once the evidential standard test has been met, with a target in straightforward cases of 21 days after the offence being detected or reported.⁴⁷ The [2020 memorandum](#) is clear that BCM(CM) applies to all straightforward cases and that “a serious case such as a rape where consent is the sole issue will often be straightforward” (paragraph 1.2). Complex cases and those needing forensic or expert evidence in the initial investigation aren’t bound by BCM(CM) and are likely to need a bespoke approach.

The [2020 memorandum](#) also stipulates that submitting the initial detail of the prosecution case to the CO or the SPA shouldn’t be delayed for:

- full transcripts of ABE interviews to be prepared; handwritten summaries written by the monitoring officer during the interview will suffice at this stage;
- full transcripts of interviews under caution to be prepared; a summary reflecting the suspect’s account will suffice at this stage; legible handwritten witness statements are acceptable;
- continuity statements or statements producing interviews, exhibits or dealing with arrest, photographs etc; and
- medical evidence (unless crucial to deciding the level of charge); an indication of likely medical evidence will be contained in the referral; it also outlines what the SPA has to do to expedite cases (paragraph 2.4).

⁴⁵ As before, para 13.5.

⁴⁶ The IDPC must include:

- the Service Police Case Referral (SPCR) which will include a summary of the circumstances of the offence and any account given by the defendant in interview, whether contained in that summary or in another document;
- any available supporting statements;
- previous convictions and disciplinary record;
- CCTV if available; and
- any other documents which are then available upon which the prosecution intend to rely.

⁴⁷ [Memorandum 3 Better Case Management in the Court Martial – BCM\(CM\)](#), Office of the Judge Advocate General, 2020, para 1.5.

All three service police forces have adopted BCM(CM), and it forms part of the RAFF's AP1722. This section of AP1722 was last amended in 2019 and the force should update it to reflect the changes made by the 2020 memorandum.

Recommendation 28

By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should update policy document AP1722 to reflect the changes made to Better Case Management (BCM).

Complying with BCM

Our case file review showed that BCM isn't being followed in many domestic abuse and RASSO investigations. Many service police investigators told us that they don't follow BCM because SPA prosecutors request full files in all cases so they can assess all the evidence before deciding on a charge. While a few investigators told us that prosecutors accepted BCM-compliant files in some straightforward cases, this seems to only happen in a few cases.

As we don't have the remit to inspect the SPA, we suggest that any future inspection of the SPA's prosecution of domestic abuse and RASSO cases examine this issue.

Timeliness post-referral

During the inspection, many interviewees from all three service police forces told us that frequent delays occur once cases have been referred to the SPA. We can't mandate the SPA to give us data on the timeliness of cases, so we can't substantiate or refute these claims. To provide swift justice, all elements of the service justice system must operate in a timely manner. Therefore, this should form part of the multi-agency review of how the service justice system investigates and prosecutes sexual offending and domestic abuse.

7. Victim contact

Victim contact during the course of the investigation

Statutory instruction and guidance

[The Armed Forces Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) (the Code) entitles “all victims to be informed of events as the investigation and any subsequent judicial proceedings into their case progresses”.⁴⁸ The accompanying guidance to the Code – [JSP 839 Victim Services](#) – instructs the service police to update victims on the investigation at intervals agreed with them, and to tell victims about specific events during the course of the investigation. Such events include:

- the arrest of a suspect;
- the release of the suspect from pre-charge custody;
- any decision to cease the investigation;
- any decision to refer or not to refer the case to the commanding officer or Director of Service Prosecutions; and
- the referral of the suspect for charge.

RAFP policy

AP1722’s victim and witness chapter instructs all personnel to comply with the relevant parts of JSP 839.⁴⁹ The force has also produced a one-page *Investigator’s Victim Liaison Guide* to remind personnel that they must notify victims at pertinent points in the investigation and that they keep records of such contact.⁵⁰ The guide lists the contact mandated by JSP 839 and investigators have to tick off each line to say they have completed the action and updated REDCAP accordingly. We found this a useful aide-memoire for investigators.

Complying with guidance

In our crime file review, we found that the RAFP made an initial agreement with victims about contact frequency in most, but not all, appropriate cases (80 percent). This is disappointing. The force should make sure that personnel make such agreements in all cases and record them on REDCAP.

⁴⁸ [JSP 839 Victims’ Services](#), para 25.

⁴⁹ AP1722 chapter 4, section 1, paras 12–15. Unpublished – Official Sensitive.

⁵⁰ AP1722, page 3-3-13-A1. Unpublished – Official Sensitive.

Recommendation 29

With immediate effect, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that personnel make an initial agreement with victims about contact regularity in all cases.

We were pleased to see that, in all the cases where an initial agreement was made, the RAFF updated victims in line with the provisions established in the agreement and in accordance with the other requirements set out in JSP 839.

Victim contact after referral of case to prosecutor

The service justice system's arrangements for victim contact post-referral to the SPA need to be improved as they are letting victims down.

Civilian police forces must maintain contact with victims beyond the point at which cases are referred to the CPS. Investigators retain responsibility for victim contact until the CPS makes a charging decision and at this point responsibility is transferred to forces' witness care units.⁵¹

There is no such obligation on the service police. Instead, [JSP 839](#) states that the commanding officer of the suspect for the crime that has been committed is responsible for allocating a VLO to the victim. It is then the VLO who is responsible for updating victims once cases have been referred to the SPA. This includes updating victims at specific points in proceedings, as well as providing "regular updates on the investigation or criminal proceedings at intervals agreed with the victim by the commanding officer" (paragraph 4.3).

Informing the victim of these post-referral events must be agreed with the victim and commanding officer so that there is no confusion. The victim should always know who their point of contact is.

JSP 839 sets out the rationale for this arrangement, telling the service police that:

"It is recommended that an agreement is reached with the commanding officer of the suspect to pass the responsibility to the VLO for the passage of information to the victim regarding case events post-referral. This is because the commanding officer will always be informed of the progress of the case through the Service Justice System when it is being considered by the SPA or being scheduled for pre-trial hearings or trial by the Military Courts Service, whereas you won't. Passing the responsibility to the VLO on behalf of the commanding officer at this stage will therefore ensure that the victim remains fully informed and compliance with the Code is maintained."

This arrangement is problematic. First, despite outlining the importance of the victim knowing who their point of contact is at all times, JSP 839 also instructs the SPA to inform the victim directly about some matters, as well as routing other information via the VLO. This alone can lead to two channels of reporting information to the victim.

⁵¹ [Authorised Professional Practice: Prosecution and Case Management – Victim and Witness Care](#), College of Policing.

Second, the VLO isn't always best placed to perform this role. We couldn't interview VLOs to get their perspective, but we have heard from people throughout the service police that not all VLOs get training for their role. VLOs are occasionally posted to other units and aren't replaced, and they can be located far from the victim, even in another country. We don't have the remit to examine VLO files to assess whether they comply with their responsibilities to contact victims.

Finally, in small units, the VLO would inevitably know the suspect and, understandably, victims don't always feel this is appropriate.

While the SPA has a role in this process, we don't have the remit to examine SPA files to determine compliance.

RAFP instruction, policy, and compliance

The RAFP's policy in this area aligns with JSP 839. AP1722's victim and witness chapter doesn't mention arrangements for post-referral victim care and the last line of the *Investigator's Victim Liaison Guide* states:

"An agreement should be reached with the CO of the suspect to pass responsibility to the Victim Liaison Officer for the passage of information to the victim regarding the case."⁵²

Despite this, we were told by senior RAFP personnel that this doesn't apply in RASSO cases, and that SOIT officers maintain close contact with victims through to trial and often after, alongside VLOs. We were also told that this can be problematic as SOIT officers' ability to update victims post-charge is dependent on them receiving updates from the SPA, which they said aren't always forthcoming. This suggests that SOIT officers continue to update victims after cases have been referred. But we didn't find any evidence of SOIT officers continuing to contact victims post-referral in the case files we examined.

In fact, service personnel RASSO victims we spoke to told us that once service police refer their case to the SPA, they stopped getting frequent updates from anyone. These victims hadn't received updates about their case for many months. For some, the first update they got after the case was referred to the SPA was to inform them that the case had been discontinued. Therefore, in these cases neither the RAFP, VLOs nor the SPA routinely updates victims. This is a serious shortcoming: these victims, and potentially many others, don't get regular contact, aren't informed about the progress of their case and feel ignored.

For domestic abuse cases, RAFP personnel told us that their victim contact responsibility ends when the case is referred for charge. Although we haven't spoken to non-RASSO domestic abuse victims, given the lack of contact some RASSO victims have had from VLOs or the SPA, it is likely to be a problem for victims of other crime types.

This is clearly not a problem that rests primarily with the service police.

⁵² *Investigator's Victim Liaison Guide*, RAFP. Annex at AP1722 page 3-3-13-A1. Unpublished – Official Sensitive.

Recommendation 30

By 1 June 2022, as part of its review of policy document JSP 839 the MOD should decide whether VLOs and the SPA are best placed to conduct victim contact post-referral or whether this responsibility should pass to service police.

The [Service Justice System Review Part 2](#) recommended that:

- the role of VLO should solely be undertaken by the service police in investigations carried out by service police GPD personnel or the SIB;
- formal training and continuous professional development should be established for the role of VLO; and
- the role of a tri-service VLO Co-ordinator should be created.

We support these recommendations and believe that the VLO best sits with the service police. If the service police take on this role, processes need to be developed to make sure that COs, the SPA and other partner agencies give them all the information they need to keep victims informed.

Victim feedback

The service police forces should look to standardise the way they monitor victims' satisfaction with the services they provide.

All three service police forces have produced feedback surveys that they issue to victims of crime, including domestic abuse and RASSO victims. All three use a different set of questions, and none includes questions that cover the whole victim experience from first contact. For example, the RNP survey is the only one with questions about victim needs assessments, while ISVAs and IDVAs are only mentioned in the RMP survey. None of the surveys asks whether first responders were empathetic and professional.

The service police, the SPA, MOD and other important partner agencies should also consider whether questions are viable about the victims' services received from all military service providers after their incidents. This could provide valuable feedback on how well the military safeguard and communicate with victims.

Area for improvement 21

The Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army) should increase the scope of their victim feedback surveys, to include the whole victim experience from first contact to case conclusion.

Annex A – Recommendations

Strategic leadership and governance

1. By 1 January 2023, the MOD should define the role of the service police in its *No Defence for Abuse* strategy and set clear actions for all three forces to achieve.
2. By 1 January 2023, the MOD should develop an overarching strategy for sexual offending and within it, define the role of the service police and set clear actions for all three forces to achieve.
3. By 1 June 2022, without interfering in the operational independence of the Provost Marshal (RAF), the Air Justice Board should set, in agreement with the RAFFP, performance expectations for the force and hold it to account against these expectations.
4. Once the new version of JSP 913 is operational, the MOD should introduce a checking process to make sure that COs refer all domestic abuse incidents to the service police.
5. With immediate effect, the MOD, in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy), Provost Marshal (Army) and Provost Marshal (RAF), should satisfy itself that its replacement ICT system will be able to highlight incidents of domestic abuse and repeat victims, and produce accurate data quickly and easily.
6. With immediate effect, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) should remind all Home Office police forces of the requirement in Home Office Circular 28/2008 to inform the RAFFP when the suspect or victim of an incident they deal with is a member of the RAF.
7. By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF), should publish a new intelligence requirement for domestic abuse and RASSO.

Prevention and encouraging reporting

8. By 1 January 2023, the MOD should support the RAFFP by mandating domestic abuse and RASSO awareness training across the RAF.

Handling calls and first reports of crime

9. By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army) should carry out a feasibility study for the establishment of a joint contact centre that reflects, as far as is reasonably possible, the capabilities of Home Office police forces. If the outcome of the study isn't for the establishment of a joint contact centre, the Provost Marshal (RAF) and the provost marshals of the other service police forces should implement another solution that resolves the call-handling problems explained in this report.

First response to domestic abuse and RASSO incidents

10. By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy), the Provost Marshal (Army) and the Defence School of Policing and Guarding, should make sure that all first responders are trained to the new Joint Police Initial Course standard.
11. By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should publish tri-service domestic abuse aide-memoires (which, to meet each service's needs, may include additional information to reflect local differences).
12. By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should standardise RASSO first responders' logs and booklets (which, to meet each service's needs, may include additional information to reflect local differences).
13. By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should prioritise the introduction of body-worn video (BWV) and monitor its use when attending domestic abuse and RASSO incidents.
14. With immediate effect, the MOD should reinforce CO compliance with JSP 834 as regards their responsibilities around VSOs and monitor such compliance by reviewing data from COs and feedback from victims.
15. By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should revise policy document AP1722 so that it is clearer and reflects the need to act quickly when carrying out a victim needs assessment.
16. By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should improve the guidance in policy document AP1722 on DASH assessments.
17. By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army) should publish a single DASH form to be used by all three services that allows for any requisite local differences to be retained.
18. By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should reinforce and monitor a positive arrest strategy in domestic abuse and RASSO cases, not only to secure evidence but also to safeguard victims.
19. By 1 January 2023, the MOD should conduct a review to improve safeguarding in the military by all parties, including how victims of domestic abuse and RASSO are safeguarded. Following such a review, the MOD should develop processes quickly to make sure that safeguarding becomes more effective, and that robust review and oversight procedures are in place.

Investigations after first response

20. With immediate effect, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should instruct the SIB to investigate all criminal domestic abuse cases retained by the RAFFP.
21. By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should establish a policy that requires first responders to ask all service victims of domestic abuse or RASSO offences committed in the UK whether they want the service police or CIVPOL to investigate.
22. By 1 January 2023, service police forces and the College of Policing should establish whether service police personnel could receive College-accredited CPD training, including first responder and Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP) 1 CPD for GPD personnel and PIP 2 for SIB personnel.
23. By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should enter into discussions with the MOD in an effort to resolve the problems caused to the force both by the military assignment process and the short tenure of personnel in SIB.
24. By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should update policy document AP1722 to reflect JSP 839's guidance on allowing victims to be accompanied by a person of their choice.
25. By 1 June 2022, the MOD should agree procedures with the Provost Marshal (RAF) for the RAFFP's direct access to the media, so that they can use it to support an investigation (for example, via appeals for information) and to publicise prevention messages.
26. By 1 January 2023, the Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should introduce the capability (on a shared or individual basis) to quickly access and download material held on mobile digital devices.
27. With immediate effect, the Director of Service Prosecutions should ensure that the SPA:
 - informs victims if it decides to discontinue their case; and
 - informs victims of their right to seek a review of its decision to discontinue.
28. By 1 June 2022, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should update policy document AP1722 to reflect the changes made to Better Case Management (BCM).

Victim contact

29. With immediate effect, the Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that personnel make an initial agreement with victims about contact regularity in all cases.
30. By 1 June 2022, as part of its review of policy document JSP 839 the MOD should decide whether VLOs and the SPA are best placed to conduct victim contact post-referral or whether this responsibility should pass to service police.

Annex B – Areas for improvement

Strategic leadership and governance

1. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should define expectations of performance against priorities that better illustrate qualitative activity and outcomes for victims.

Prevention and encouraging reporting

2. The Provost Marshal (RAF) and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for domestic abuse should explore opportunities to work together on domestic abuse and RASSO prevention initiatives and training.

First response to domestic abuse and RASSO incidents

3. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should develop centralised, annual training for policing competencies including domestic abuse and RASSO first response, provided by qualified trainers, and with central assurance.
4. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure supervisors or section commanders accompany inexperienced junior non-commissioned officers when attending RASSO or domestic abuse incidents.
5. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should issue first responders with a proforma, checklist, or guide for completion when responding to domestic abuse incidents.
6. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that victim needs assessments are completed in all domestic abuse and RASSO cases and monitor their completion.
7. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that DASH forms are completed in all domestic abuse cases and monitor their completion.
8. The Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army), should ensure that all domestic abuse and RASSO victims are provided with contact details for UK-based IDVAs and ISVAs respectively.
9. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should improve the force's guidance on the use of ISVAs and IDVAs, and monitor compliance with the guidance.
10. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should explore opportunities to equip the RAFFP with powers similar to those available to the Royal Navy Police, that is, to order suspects to do, or not to do, certain specified things, in furtherance of safeguarding victims, for example, not to approach or make contact with victims.

Investigations after first response

11. The College of Policing should develop a policy that requires all Home Office police forces to ask all victims, in cases where concurrent jurisdiction exists, whether they want the service police or CIVPOL to investigate.
12. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should provide CPD refresher training to people returning to the SIB.
13. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that investigators give victims the opportunity to make a victim personal statement in all appropriate cases.
14. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should introduce policy books for senior investigating officers to use during linked series and complex cases. This would help them to record the overarching strategy and supporting rationale and give evidence of decision making.
15. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should introduce formal digital investigation strategy training for investigators to help them better understand when they should seize and examine digital devices.
16. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that supervisors and managers conduct robust oversight of all investigation strategies at defined intervals.
17. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that newly-posted supervisory staff should receive any refresher training they need to effectively supervise investigations.
18. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should ensure that all relevant personnel receive training to use early evidence kits.
19. The Provost Marshal (RAF), in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy), the Provost Marshal (Army) and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead for forensics should establish procedures for Home Office police force crime scene investigators (CSIs) to support RAFP investigations and to provide opportunities for RAFP CSIs to gain further operational forensic experience.
20. The Provost Marshal (RAF) should remind investigators of the legal requirement for consultation with the SPA in all RASSO cases before discontinuation; and monitor investigators' compliance with the legal requirement.

Victim contact

21. The Provost Marshal (RAF) in conjunction with the Provost Marshal (Navy) and the Provost Marshal (Army) should increase the scope of their victim feedback surveys, to include the whole victim experience from first contact to case conclusion.

Annex C – Glossary of abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviation	Long form
ABE	Achieving Best Evidence
AFA	Armed Forces Act 2006
AP1722	Air Policy (1722)
APP	authorised professional practice
BCM(CM)	better case management (court martial)
BWV	body-worn video
CIVPOL	civilian or Home Office police forces
CJS	criminal justice system
CO	commanding officer
COPPERS	service police's incident reporting ICT system
CPD	continuous professional development
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CSI	crime scene investigators
DASH	domestic abuse, stalking and harassment
DFT	digital forensics team
DIP	domestic incident proforma
DSPG	Defence School for Policing and Guarding
EEK	early evidence kit

Abbreviation	Long form
FME	forensic medical examiner
GPD	general police duties
HMCSI	Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate
HMICFRS	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
HOCA	Home Office counting rules
ICT	information communications technology
IDVA	independent domestic violence advisor
ISVA	independent sexual violence advisor
JPIC	joint police initial course
JSP	joint services policy
LE	law enforcement units
MARAC	multi-agency risk assessment conference
MASH	multi-agency safeguarding hub
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NCO (JNCO & SNCO)	non-commissioned officers (junior and senior)
NCRS	National Crime Recording Standard
NFA	no further action
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
NSIR	national standard for incident recording
OC	officer commanding
PIP	Professionalising Investigation Programme
PNC/PND	Police National Computer/Database

Abbreviation	Long form
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAFP	Royal Air Force Police
RASSO	rape and serious sexual offences
REDCAP	crime investigation ICT system
RMP	Royal Military Police
RNP	Royal Navy Police
SARC	sexual assault referral centre
SCIC	serious crime investigation course
SIB	special investigation branch
SJS	service justice system
SOIT	sexual offence investigation trained
SOLO	sexual offence liaison officer
SPA	Service Prosecuting Authority
SSAFA	armed forces charity
SSU	scientific support unit
UIE	unit investigation element of RAFP GPD
VCIC	volume crime investigation course
VLO	victim liaison officer
VNA	victim needs assessment
VPS	victim personal statement
VSO	victim support officer
WO	warrant officer

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