

Question:

Surrey Police were said to have the lowest charge rates for rape. Using your figures, can we discuss the reasons for this, and 'What is the Commissioner doing to improve the outcome rate for rape cases in Surrey and their alleged victims?'

Response:

It's important to recognise that the reported rape figures include both intimate and non-intimate crimes – that is, when the offence of rape is committed by someone known to the victim, or by a stranger. The former is far more common and will often be disclosed as part of a wider investigation, such as in cases of domestic abuse.

During the investigation of abuse against an adult or a child, the police will always seek to ascertain if an individual has ever been forced to engage in sexual activity against their wishes. If disclosed, this can lead to an additional recording of rape.

Rape is an extremely traumatic crime and understandably an individual can find it extraordinarily difficult to talk about their experience. For many, the thought of pursuing a charge and giving evidence in court can be a daunting prospect, and this can result in victims not feeling able or ready to support progression of the case. Sadly, the evidential difficulties this creates greatly reduce the likelihood of a charging decision and this is reflected in national data.

However, both Surrey Police and the OPCC have a clear duty to provide victims of these horrific crimes with the best support possible, to help them cope and recover from their experience whilst creating an environment in which they feel empowered to seek justice.

The data referenced in the question relates to 2021/22, and 2022/23 has seen an improvement in the number of charging decisions made, as per the table below.

Year	Rape Charge Rate
2021/22	4.9%
2022/23	5.2%

The 'lowest charge rates' previously reported in the media relate to a small selection of data provided to the Home Office in support of the Criminal Justice Scorecards.

A like-for-like comparison is provided above based on the full data for the respective periods, but more recently published data from iQuanta provides a wider, more detailed view. This shows that Surrey has the lowest number of reports for both rape and serious sexual offences across England and Wales (0.69 and 1.69 per 100,000 population respectively). The current national ranking for solved outcomes is 22nd for rape offences and 23rd for serious sexual offences (5.56% and 7.27%).

These improvements are part of significant and ongoing work taking place within the Sexual Offences Investigation Team (SOIT). This takes evidence-based good practice to improve working practices, victim care, timeliness of investigations and solved outcome rates. Actions taken include:

- Investing in more dedicated investigators, with specialist training and supervision within our SOIT.
- Embedding good practice from the national programme known as Op Soteria within SOIT.

- Incorporating feedback from the child and adult survivors voice feedback group into our working practises.
- Sharing information and intelligence held across agencies through RASSO (Rape and Serious Sexual Offences) to identify offending patterns, repeat offenders, and locations of risk and initiate suitable preventative measures and targeted interventions.
- Supporting victims throughout the investigation and criminal justice processes through dedicated specialist SOLOs (Sexual offence liaison officers).
- Specific training to improve the initial response to sexual offences for first responders. This has been delivered to response teams and is currently underway with staff and officers from Contact.
- Closer working with the Crown Prosecution Service to seek early advice on investigations to improve the quality of cases presented for charging decision.

None of these charges would have been possible without the bravery and determination of the victims and survivors.

More generally, Surrey Police continues to progress its Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, helping to harmonise and develop a consistent approach across multiple areas including domestic abuse, sexual offences, peer-on-peer abuse in schools and Harmful Traditional Practices. The full document can be downloaded here:

<https://www.surrey.police.uk/police-forces/surrey-police/areas/au/about-us/priorities-and-direction/>

In terms of my office, we continue to commission dedicated services for adult and child victims of rape and sexual assault, including a helpline, counselling and Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs). ISVAs can often be key to helping victims understand their legal options whilst empowering them to make informed choices. In cases where individuals progress with a case, ISVAs will also attend court with them to provide ongoing support. During 2022/23 my office has invested over £700,000 into support for victims of rape and sexual assault.