



# HM Government

in association with

Association of Chief Police Officers

Crown Prosecution Service

Her Majesty's Court Service

National Offender Management Service

Voluntary and Community Sector

## Summary of Cross Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse

April 2007

# MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

Sexual violence and childhood sexual abuse are two of the most serious and damaging crimes in our society. For victims, these crimes represent a violation which can have significant and ongoing consequences for health and wellbeing. These individuals deserve to be supported, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to see their offenders brought to justice.

In the 2006 Criminal Justice Review Rebalancing the Criminal Justice System – cutting crime, reducing reoffending, and protecting the public, this Government emphasized the importance of tackling the most serious crimes and protecting the public from dangerous and violent offenders. This Action Plan, which sets out how we plan to deliver key objectives on sexual violence and abuse, represents an important step in taking forward this agenda. It is closely linked with workstreams addressing domestic violence, prostitution and trafficking and will underpin the new crime strategy when this is published in due course.

The Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse includes work from across the whole of Government, reflecting the wide-ranging implications of these crimes. As members of the Inter-departmental Ministerial Group on Sexual Offending, we are committed to working with our delivery partners and stakeholders to ensure the plan's effective implementation over the course of the coming year.

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Caroline Flint, Department of Health

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# BACKGROUND

1. Sexual violence and abuse have a devastating impact on victims, their families and friends, and wider society. Addressing these crimes and the harm they cause is a priority for the Government, and fits within agendas on public health, reducing crime and the fear of crime, bringing offenders to justice, safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, education and gender equality.
2. The Action Plan brings together the measures underway and planned over the next year to deliver our key objectives on sexual violence and abuse:
  - To maximise prevention of sexual violence and abuse
  - To increase access to support and health services for victims of sexual violence and abuse
  - To improve the criminal justice response to sexual violence and abuse,
3. The purpose of the Action Plan is to:
  - Tell our stakeholders and members of the public what we are seeking to achieve in relation to sexual violence and abuse
  - Identify the actions we are taking to deliver our objectives
  - Identify gaps in existing work which require further consideration
  - Increase transparency and enable us to be held to account on delivery of our objectives
  - Provide a platform for developing a more strategic and holistic approach to tackling sexual violence and abuse
4. The Action Plan is supported by an on-line implementation guide that sets out the roles and responsibilities of the following key delivery agencies and partnerships for work on sexual violence and abuse:

## Delivery agencies

- Police
- Crown Prosecution Service
- Courts
- National Offender Management Service
- Local Authorities
- Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs)
- Primary Care Trusts (or Local Health Boards in Wales)
- External Forensic Service Providers and Forensic Practitioners

## Local partnerships

- Crime Disorder Reduction Partnerships
  - Local Criminal Justice Boards
  - Local Safeguarding Children Boards
5. The over-arching Plan covers all forms of sexual violence and abuse, both recent and historic, and all those affected by these terrible crimes including women, men and children. It recognises the continuum of gender-based violence, which represents a major cause and consequence of inequality, particularly for women.
  6. The Plan, which will underpin the forthcoming crime strategy, represents a platform for a more strategic and holistic approach to addressing sexual violence and abuse. Over the course of 2007-08 we will be working with our stakeholders to consider what more we need to do in the longer term to make further progress on the delivery of these objectives, particularly at a local level, and how we can further strengthen links with work to address other forms of gender-based violence.

# WHY IS TACKLING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ABUSE A PRIORITY?

## **It's much more common than people think...**

- Around 21% of girls and 11% of boys experience some form of child sexual abuse
- 23% of women and 3% of men experience sexual assault as an adult. 5% of women and 0.4% of men experience rape.

## **The most vulnerable in society are disproportionately affected...**

- Child sexual abuse is more likely to be experienced by children with a disability, missing or looked after children and children from families experiencing domestic violence.
- Adult sexual violence and abuse is more likely to be experienced by people with a disability, people involved in prostitution, people who have been abused as children and young women who have been drinking.

## **It represents a form of gender inequality...**

- Most perpetrators are male and most victims are female. It is both a consequence and cause of gender inequality.

## **It causes fear in communities...**

- Women are more worried about rape than any other crime

## **It can cause severe and long lasting harm to victims...**

- Direct physical health consequences of sexual violence and child sexual abuse include physical injury, sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy.
- Long-term consequences of sexual violence and child sexual abuse include post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and panic attacks, depression, social phobia, substance abuse, obesity, eating disorders, self harm and suicide, domestic violence and in some cases, offending behaviour. Child abuse can also impact on educational attainment and school attendance.

## **...and to society...**

- The overall cost to society of sexual offences in 2003-04 was estimated at £8.5 billion, with each rape costing over £76,000. Much of this cost is made up of lost output and costs to the health service resulting from long term health issues faced by victims. Addressing problems early should help to prevent these long-term costs.

## **Victims don't always get the support they need...**

- 40% of adults who are raped tell no one about it. 31% of children who are abused reach adulthood without having disclosed their abuse. This means that victims don't get the support they need to deal with the abuse or violence they have experienced.
- Where victims do try and access support, it hasn't always been available. We need to increase the capacity in support services to deliver services for those who need them.

## **It is an important and dangerous element of domestic violence...**

- Many people believe that adult sexual violence and child sexual abuse is normally committed by a stranger. In fact, perpetrators are normally known to the victim and many are partners or family members. Rape is associated with the most severe cases of domestic violence, and is a risk factor for domestic homicide.

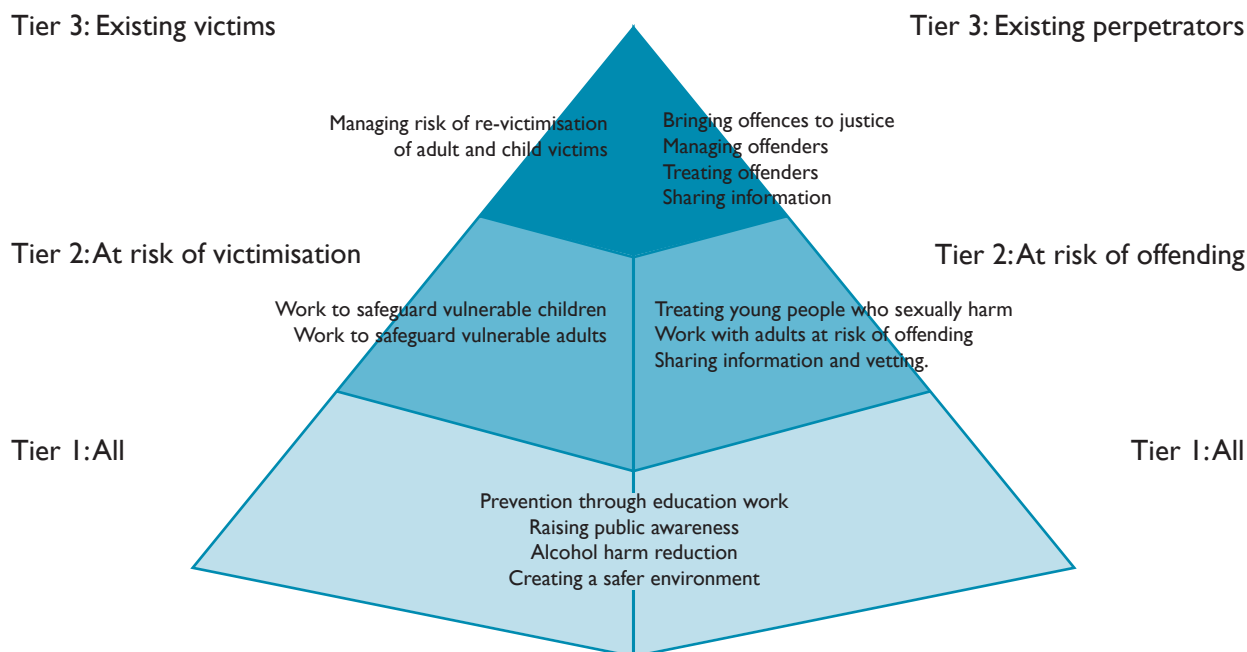
## **Offenders have been getting away with it....**

- Only 15% of serious sexual offences against people 16 and over are reported to the police and of the rape offences that are reported, fewer than 6% result in an offender being convicted of this offence. This means that those who commit these very serious crimes may continue to pose a risk to the public.

# KEY AREAS FOR ACTION DESCRIBED IN THE PLAN

## Prevention

7. The ultimate aim of work on sexual violence and abuse is to reduce its prevalence and associated outcomes. Maximising prevention is therefore a key objective of the Action Plan. The model below summarises the various actions underway and planned to prevent sexual violence and abuse of adults and children. The model reflects the different levels of intervention that are required to prevent sexual violence and abuse, depending on level of risk, both of victimisation and perpetration.

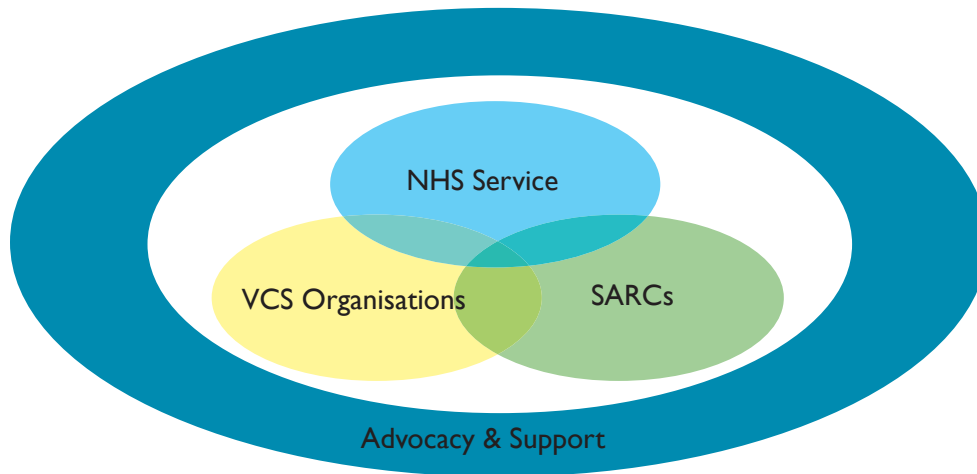


### Key actions on prevention for 2007-08

- Management of sex offenders through Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements.
- Implementing new strategies for treating adult sex offenders and young people who sexually abuse.
- Implementing a new vetting and barring scheme to make sure all those who work with children are safe to do so.
- Implementing guidance published last year on Working Together to Safeguard children and the new Common Assessment Framework to identify and intervene to help Children with Additional Needs.
- Working with schools to implement new standards on sexual and mental health promotion through the Healthy Schools programme.

## Health and Support

8. Sexual violence and abuse have major mental and sexual health implications and consequently, addressing these is an important public health issue. However, access to appropriate services to address these needs, such as Sexual Assault Referral Centres (which provide health and support services to victims in the immediate aftermath of an assault), is currently limited. The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) provide valuable longer-term support and therapeutic services to victims of sexual violence and abuse, but the capacity of this sector is stretched and sustainability is a major issue.
9. Our second objective is therefore to increase access to support and health services for victims of sexual violence and abuse. The diagram below illustrates the importance of co-operation, in terms of strategy and service provision between Statutory Health Services (including A & E, Sexual Health Services, GPs, Mental Health services), VCS and SARCs if victims are to receive a holistic and co-ordinated response. Building capacity in these services and co-ordinating the provision of a holistic response to the needs of individual victims through the provision of advocacy form the key elements of this objective.

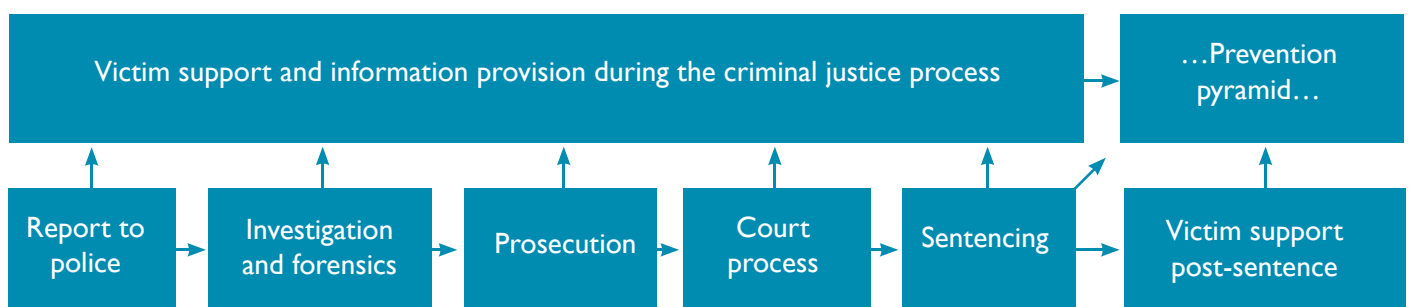


### Key actions on increasing victim access to health and support for 2007-08

- Through the Home Office Victims Fund, providing an additional £1.25m to voluntary sector organisations providing services for victims of sexual violence and abuse.
- Expanding the network of Sexual Assault Referral Centres which provide medical care, a forensic examination and counselling in the aftermath of a sexual assault (there were 5 centres in 2003 and should be around 40 by the end of 2008).
- Evaluating 38 Home Office-funded Independent Sexual Violence Advisor schemes, which provide advocacy and support for victims of sexual violence and abuse.
- Producing guidance for Primary Care Trusts on commissioning services from the sexual violence and abuse voluntary sector, and on commissioning child specific sexual abuse services.
- Through the Victims of Violence and Abuse Prevention Programme, developing national service guidelines on responding to the needs of child victims of sexual abuse, adult survivors of child abuse and adult victims of recent sexual violence.

### Criminal Justice Response

10. Attrition rates in sexual offence cases, and rape in particular are very high. Sexual offences are very difficult to report and to prosecute, but notwithstanding this, we need to do more to improve the criminal justice response to sexual offences, and in particular to increase reporting and improve the way in which sexual offence cases are investigated and prosecuted. Work in relation to delivering these objectives can be broken down into a number of key stages, illustrated in the diagram below, each of which must be underpinned by support for victims. Bringing more offences to justice and sentencing offenders appropriately feeds directly into the prevention of further sexual offences.



## Key actions on improving the criminal justice response for 2007-08

- National roll-out of training for specially trained officers who gather evidence and liaise with victims of sexual offences.
- Strengthening the capacity of specialist rape prosecutors and rape co-ordinators to ensure the best cases are built.
- Introducing sexual offences training for all barristers prosecuting in serious sexual offence cases.
- Introducing a new performance management framework for criminal justice agencies on sexual offences and a joint Home Office/Association of Chief Police Officers operational support team to assist forces with the implementation of recommendations from the rape inspection Without Consent.
- Expanding special measures to make it easier for vulnerable victims to give evidence and rolling out the use of intermediaries to help vulnerable witnesses with communication/understanding needs, including children, give evidence.
- Extending the network of Sexual Assault Referral Centres and piloting Independent Sexual Violence Advisors to obtain high quality evidence and provide support throughout the criminal justice process.
- Extending the use of Victim Personal Statements and introducing advocacy arrangements to enable victims to put forward their views when the Parole Board is considering offenders' cases.

## Monitoring implementation

11. The plan includes a number of diagnostic indicators relating to each objective. We will take account of these indicators when assessing the Government's progress on implementation of the Action Plan. As the plan brings together work from across government, there are also a number of performance management frameworks that will provide levers for driving performance of the various delivery agencies.
12. The implementation of the Action Plan will be overseen by the Inter-departmental Ministerial Group on Sexual Offending. Progress reports will also be provided to the Cross-Government Stakeholder Advisory Group on Sexual Violence and Abuse. A full progress report will be published at the end of 2007-08 following consultation with key stakeholders.

The Implementation Guide and Action Plan are available at:

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/sexualoffences/sexual03.htm>.

