

Peer review of active risk management (ARMS) plans

A peer review process to identify and share best practice for active risk management (ARMS) completion for registered sex offenders across the North West region.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Reoffending
Topic	Child sexual exploitation and abuse Offender management Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	North West
Partners	Police Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Health services Local authority
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	August 2023
Scale of initiative	Regional
Target group	Adults Children and young people

Aim

This initiative aims to:

- encourage forces in the North West to collaborate, review, and offer independent critique of risk management practices
- build a repository of best practice by sharing skills and knowledge

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- increase the body of evidence around 'what good looks like' when utilising the national ARMS quality assurance (QA) tool question set
- improve the quality of risk management across operational policing teams responsible for managing sex offenders
- improve the governance of review processes for registered sexual offender (RSO) risk management plans
- improve the identification of training needs for officers and staff completing ARMS plans

Description

Previous inspections by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) identified that numerous forces within the North West had gaps in their review processes for registered sexual offender (RSO) risk management. Feedback highlighted that forces should improve the quality of work within the sex offender management unit (SOMU) and improve

the governance around reviewing this. However, there was no guidance or repository of good practice to assist police in improving this.

A regional peer review network was proposed to address this feedback. To enable this, a regional violent and sex offender register (ViSOR) user group was created that aimed to identify relevant contacts across the six forces within the North West region. Previous area attendees and police force leads were contacted to establish the relevant department and area leads, such as SOMU leads. They were then invited to an initial meeting that led to reinvigorating the group. Through the user group, buy-in was sought for the peer review process. This was achieved by including it as an agenda item, explaining the plan for the network, and highlighting the benefits, evidencing that forces across the region are collectively seeking continual improvement to risk management.

Process

Each quarter, details of four RSOs are requested from each force; one individual from each risk category (low, medium, high, and very high risk) that have had an ARMS completed in the previous quarter. A different force is allocated to review the ARMS each quarter and monthly reminders are sent out to the staff from this force to complete the review.

The review entails using the national quality assurance (QA) tool which provides a question set to help assess the quality of an ARMS. Staff answer each question in the QA tool and rate their answer based on the tool scoring guide, depending on the evidence they find in the ARMS they are assessing.

At the end of each quarter, the reviews are collated and submitted into a single spreadsheet for the region, with a separate tab for each force. Each question has a colour-coded box aligned to the HMICFRS gradings:

- outstanding - yellow
- good - green
- requires improvement - amber
- inadequate - red

Individual feedback for each question from the QA tool is also copied into the spreadsheet. This simple visual overview enables quick identification of patterns, repeat failures, or areas which are working well and may have promising practice that could be shared across the region.

Governance

The practice is led by Cheshire Police and is contributed to by Greater Manchester, North Wales, Lancashire, Merseyside, and Cumbria Police. The group meets quarterly on Microsoft Teams for approximately 30 minutes, with representatives from each of the six regional force SOMUs. The meetings are designed to give attendees the opportunity to review and discuss any findings with the force that reviewed their work, ironing out any issues and clarifying the review findings where needed. Regular emails in the months between meetings are used to track progress against deadlines, and for circulation and review of plans by the regional forces.

The practice has continued despite several staffing changes since inception.

Each force takes the information from specific reviews and responds accordingly. For example, Cheshire Police have used findings from the review to feed into force-wide continued professional development (CPD) to improve how offender managers operate.

Costs

No costs were identified in setting up or maintaining this practice.

Overall impact

Since the peer review network has been set up, over 430 ARMS plans have been reviewed. As a result, forces within the region have been able to easily identify issues within the teams when completing ARMS plans. This has enabled forces to conduct individual or team-wide training where necessary and improve CPD training. This has improved the quality of risk management.

Examples of training opportunities identified include:

- giving additional support to an individual who was repeatedly completing specific questions poorly
- providing a CPD event for another force that had persistent problems with writing up actions
- creating an action plan for a SOMU officer whose risk assessments required improvement and reviewing their work

- changing force processes to ensure compliance with adding actions from a sex offender visit to the relevant section of ViSOR

Additionally, forces have been able to utilise the network by asking for guidance, support, or information sharing on how other forces implement good practice identified through the reviews. The six forces are frequently in touch and see the benefit of having this process in place.

This process has enabled a repository of best practice, to aid forces in addressing the gaps identified by HMICFRS in their review processes for RSO risk management plans, and to enable continual improvement through review of the work being undertaken.

Learning

- It was difficult to get the initial buy-in for the peer review network, as the practice is time-consuming to administrate. However, this was partially solved once forces were able to see the value of the process and the results.
- Strong relationships and good communication were identified as enablers for this practice, particularly around emphasising that the purpose of the feedback is to enable continuous improvement and is not intended to be critical.
- Delays caused by late submissions from forces are minimised by monthly chaser emails and contact made through the regional user group, which builds co-operation and compliance as area leads get to know each other.
- The peer review process has been successful through continual contact via email and forging relationships, despite subsequent staffing changes and a handover of the governance and management of the network.

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