



Strategic Policing and Crime Board

22nd January 2019

Police and Crime Plan Priority: Supporting Victims of Crime

Title: Victims Code

Presented by: ACC Sue Southern

Purpose of paper

1. The purpose of this paper is to describe the performance of West Midlands Police (WMP) against the Police and Crime Plan priority 'Supporting Victims of Crime'. The paper specifically aims to explore how the force is delivering the Victims Code and should be read in conjunction with the previous papers delivered to Board on the 23rd January and 18th September 2018.

Background

2. The Victims Code forms a key part of the wider Government strategy to transform the Criminal Justice System by putting victims first. As statutory legislation, the Code sets out the minimum standard of service that must be provided to victims of crime by organisations in England and Wales. The Government's 2018 Victims Strategy is committed to strengthening the Victims Code and holding agencies to account for compliance with the Code through improved reporting, monitoring and transparency¹.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746930/victim-strategy.pdf

3. WMP places the victim at the forefront and provides support at every stage of the criminal justice process, from reporting a crime to post trial. Key responsibilities in line with the Code include providing updates during an investigation, supporting the court process, utilisation of Victim Personal Statements (VPS), support via enhanced entitlements /special measures and tailored aftercare.

Victims Code Compliance and Champions

4. Forcewide delivery against the Victims Code is being driven by a Subject Matter Expert (Superintendent level) and governed within the ACC Crime portfolio. The Victims Code is also discussed at both the Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID) and Criminal Justice, Quarterly Performance Review meetings (QPRs) to continuously enhance and improve the experience for victims.
5. The SME lead is supported by a network of Victims Code Champions who meet on a quarterly basis to improve WMPs overall performance against the Code. This meeting includes stakeholders from key internal departments as well as representation from partners including the OPCC and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).
6. Whilst the group are continuously striving to enhance performance in line with the Victims Code, WMPs crime recording systems make it difficult to accurately measure compliance, representing a key challenge for the force. To address this, the network commissioned a review ('deep dive') in 2018 of 200 random crime reports to assess the victims' overall end to end experience, which included contact with the victims. The Champions network reviewed each crime report to examine the following:
 - Level of contact made with the victim
 - Degree of explanation of the Victims Code
 - Suitability of support to the victim
 - Signposting to relevant partner agencies and Victims Support if required
 - Delivery of timely updates.
7. In those cases where the report was filed at source, consideration was given regarding the professional response by officers, timely updates and the signposting to relevant partner agencies. Overall feedback from the review suggests a strong level of compliance against the Victims Code with the primary

concern being method of communication i.e. victims wanting to receive a phone call update as opposed to email which is the method primarily utilised by WMP. Whilst this is important feedback for WMP and an issue which will be considered by the Champions network, this desire needs to be balanced against the requirement for timely updates and operational commitments.

8. All referrals to Victims Support are made by the attending or recording officer and are bespoke, dependent on the needs of the individual victim. If required, victims will be signposted to other support services through the Impact Pathways Website which will consider wider vulnerabilities including substance abuse and violence. Victims are also supported via the Witness Care Unit which is available for those cases where an individual has been charged. At the next Champions meeting on the 6th February, the OPCC will present the results of the Victim Support Independent Commission.
9. To further enhance the audit process and incorporate into business as usual, a regime of dip sampling has been implemented across key departments including Initial Investigations, Volume, Violence, Acquisitive (VVA) and Force Contact. The recent dip sample of 80 crime reports identified that 90% were compliant with the Victims Code and 95% delivered a 'good service' following review and assessment by an Inspector/Police Staff Equivalent or above. This methodology will be repeated across the core departments on a quarterly basis and any learning captured, and fed back via the Champions network.
10. Bespoke pieces of work linked to the Victims Code are also being undertaken across the force. In 2018, Witness Care and Force Response collaborated to increase the level of inclusion of Victim Personal Statement information in the initial evidential statement. This ensures information regarding impact on the victim is provided to the court at the earliest opportunity, particularly when cases are finalised at First Hearing. This presents an ongoing challenge for the force in terms of managing the expectations of victims for those crimes filed at source or where there is limited prospect of a positive outcome.
11. The completion of more detailed Victim Personal Statements (in support of those taken at the first point of contact by officers) and the MG2 application for Special Measures will soon be the responsibility of the Witness Care Unit. The team will be working alongside a Business Analyst to look at the "as is" picture and to identify any training requirements for the force moving forward.
12. The previous paper submitted in January 2018 identified challenges in the Witness Care Unit due to the removal of CPS support. CPS have now formally

withdrawn their resources and the unit is solely staffed by WMP personnel. The Witness Care Unit are now co-located within the Criminal Justice Centre of Excellence Hubs located across three sites; Coventry, Lloyd House and Wednesfield and continue to offer a tailored service as they support victims through the criminal justice process

13. The Victims Code lead is also driving continuous improvement and has recently undertaken a review in collaboration with the Criminal Justice department to improve Restorative Justice outcomes through the Prisoner Intervention Prevention Team. This has been explored to identify if more restorative justice opportunities can be taken where offenders are identified.
14. The champions network will continue to drive forcewide performance against the Victims Code, whilst trying to overcome the challenges presented in terms of measuring compliance. Recent technological changes include the ability for victims to report online, will continue to improve performance as the portal is Victims Code compliant in terms of providing relevant information and advice as well as signposting victims to additional support services.
15. Future technological changes including the roll out of 'Connect' may also offer software opportunities to support performance against the Victims Code as well as measurement. Connect will replace 12 of the force's current IT systems with one single system. The system will include helpful prompts which will help users to input the correct data into fields, similar to other sites which guide the user through accurate data entry. This continues to be explored with the Connect project team via the Champions meeting.
16. The overall assessment by the Victims Code Lead is that WMP provides a good level of compliance and service against the Victims Code for all cases, in particular a high level of support in the most serious and complex cases.

Training

17. The importance of placing the victim at the centre of everything we do, is prioritised for staff entering the organisation. All new student officers, PCSOs and Police Staff Investigators receive classroom sessions incorporating the Victims Code of practice to enhance awareness and understanding.

18. The Victims Code is also embedded and referenced throughout the Detective Academy for new Investigators. A series of knowledge checks are completed during the Initial Crime Investigations Development Programme (ICIDP) in which questions are posed from the Victims Code. There are also classroom sessions incorporating the Victims Code of Practice with use of scenarios.
19. Victims Code training is a priority for the Champions network, particularly in terms of raising awareness to enrich the training detailed above. This ensures staff consider the wider implications when supporting victims of crime, including vulnerability, safeguarding, referral pathways and ultimately delivering a service that is tailored to the individual.
20. Training and wider awareness raising will be discussed as an agenda item at the next champions meeting in February 2019.

Future

21. Alongside the work of the Champions network, WMP will play a key part in the OPCC's newly formed Victims and Witnesses Delivery Group which will be focusing on Victims Code compliance throughout 2019.
22. As well as the challenges already identified in this report in terms of measurement, a key challenge for the force is ensuring that the most proportionate service is delivered to both vulnerable and priority victims. It has been identified through the application of the Victims Code, that there are some investigations where a suspect will never be identified, which means the victim may require less support from the police if there are no other vulnerability factors identified. The ambition of WMP is ensuring that resources are directed to providing a tailored service to victims through a full assessment as opposed to a 'one size fits all' provision.
23. The next Victims Code Champions meeting due in February 2019 will discuss the next steps for the Victims Code, including the requirement to capture activity as part of a wider delivery plan.
24. The Victims Code is one part of the force's wider response in delivering an end to end service for the victim. The force is committed to continuous improvement, ensuring best practise from other areas of the business is captured and shared to deliver a joined up response to all victims.

RECOMMENDATION

The board is asked to note the above updates.

Author(s): Staff Office