



Strategic Policing and Crime Board

21<sup>st</sup> January 2020

**Police and Crime Plan Priority: *Supporting Victims of Crime***

**Title: *Victims Code Compliance***

**Presented by: ACC Meir**

**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 paper delivered to Board on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2019.

**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 transparency<sup>1</sup>.

**MoJ Victims Code Compliance Framework**

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/746930/victim-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746930/victim-strategy.pdf)

3. During autumn 2019 WMP were proactive in supporting the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) consultation to introduce a revised Victims Code and a joint return was submitted in conjunction with the OPCC Victims Strategy Officer. This focussed thinking and provided recommendations particularly in support of:
  - Strengthening support to victims of crime in non-prosecuted cases
  - The role and support provided by the Victims Support Service (VSS)
  - The taking of Victims Personal statements (VPS)
4. A revised Victims Code of Practice embracing feedback from all force and partners is expected in the early New Year.
5. 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.

### **Prioritising a Victims Culture**

6. The SME lead is supported by a network of Victims Code Champions who meet on a quarterly basis to improve WMP's overall performance against the Code. This meeting includes stakeholders from key internal departments as well as representation from partners including the OPCC.

### **Driving Standards & Improvement**

7. The group is striving continuously to enhance performance in line with the Victims Code, to improve compliance and identify effective practice. To further enhance the audit process and incorporate into business as usual, a program of dip sampling has been implemented across key departments including Initial Investigations (IIT), Volume, Violence & Acquisitive Investigations (VVA), Force Contact, Force Response, Public Protection (PPU), Criminal Justice, Witness Care, Restorative Justice (RJ) and Learning and Development (L&D). The purpose being the development a more comprehensive data set, moving from key question of compliance and satisfaction to quarterly review of a minimum of 240 crime reports to examine the following:
  - Do you think this has been Victims Code Compliant?
  - Do you think a good level of service was provided?
  - Did the victim receive a written acknowledgement that a crime was reported?
  - Was the victim assessed and, if found to be in need, referred to support services, within 2 days of the crime being reported?

- Are the updates the victim receives on the investigation, suspects and outcome present, made within 5 working days\*, and of an appropriate quality? (\* within 1 day if enhanced service victim)
  - Is the victim informed of the end of their CJS journey (e.g. stop investigation, drop charges, sentence, out of court disposal)?
  - Was a VPS taken?
  - Was the VPS used?
  - Was this reported back to the victim?
8. In those cases where the report was filed at source, consideration is 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 offering different methods of communication i.e. victims wanting to receive a phone call update as opposed to email which is the more effective method primarily utilised by WMP. The improvement in this work has been driven by FCID from the IIT where enhanced training has been delivered to IIT police officers and staff to improve qualitative interactions with victims, embracing an empathetic, caring approach.

### Latest Victims Code Survey Results

Do you think a good level of service was provided?	84%	
Do you think this has been Victims Code Compliant?	75%	
Does the victim receive a written acknowledgement that a crime was reported?	100%	All receive letters, texts or emails
Is the victim assessed and, if found to be in need, referred to support services, within 2 days of the crime being reported?	100% 33%	Where the data range is the lowest of 33% this is when response officers who have attended the initial incident and spoken to the victim. Where the data range is the highest of 100% this is when Force Contact or IIT have spoken to the victim. The reason for focus is on demand and make an assessment that secondary investigation will manage the victims' needs.
Are the updates the victim receives on the investigation, suspects and	80%	This is being worked through by FCID due to the demand on investigation teams and volumes of crimes/calls for service there is in essence a backlog meaning that officers

outcome present, made within 5 working days*, and of an appropriate quality? * within 1 day if enhanced service victim		are unable to meet the SLA. However officers recognise the importance of the timely updates that are required. This is continually being reviewed and is subjected to governance processes in place at force executive level. We are unable to answer if this is contributing to attrition of certain crime types.
Is the victim informed of the end of their CJS journey (e.g. stop investigation, drop charges, sentence, out of court disposal)?	91%	From Witness Care data.
Was a VPS taken?	100%	Where we have engaged with CPS with a view to obtain a successful conviction and they request a VPS to be taken we have 100% compliance. This is not due to inefficiencies more to do with a VPS not being taken until we are confident of a prosecution. For example if a crime report is going to be filed after primary investigation then a VPS would not ordinarily be taken. However in 20% of these cases a VPS is provided as this may where this is the case a witness has provided a statement at the time and this is due to WMP not routinely taking VPS at the time of recording the crime.
Was the VPS used?	No Data	CPS data to follow.
Was this reported back to the victim?	91%	From Witness Care data. Dip sample also show 87 % good service provided.

9. The most recent dip sample of 240 crime reports identified that 75 % (previous survey 90%) were compliant with the Victims Code and 84% (previous survey 95%) delivered a 'good service' following review and assessment by an Inspector/Police Staff Equivalent or above. Whilst this shows a reduction in service from the previous dip sample this can be attributed to broadening the sample across a wider range of departments and presents the opportunity to drive improvements to the standard and better capture data. The lower satisfaction levels are attributable to Force Response and an improvement (55% to 70% and 75% to 85%) has been seen following awareness raising and better data capture. The next review is due in February 2020 and should see an increased level of performance.
10. This methodology is repeated across the core departments on a quarterly basis and any learning captured, and fed back via the Champions network.

## **Victims and Witnesses Delivery Plan**

11. The Victims Champions have also devised a Victims and Witnesses Delivery Plan to drive improvement and capture the service offer from each department in line with national standards. This is due for update in February 2020 and will show progress and milestones The core themes are:

### *Support vulnerable victims and witnesses through the Criminal Justice System*

- We will raise awareness of special measures
- We will support the use of registered intermediaries
- We will ensure staff are equipped, trained and skilled to Achieve Best Evidence
- We will work with CJ partners to redesign the victim and witness journey post charge

### *Build the confidence of victims and witnesses to report and remain engaged with the Criminal Justice process*

- We will abide by the Code of Ethics, treating victims with dignity and respect, empathising and listening to them
- We will focus on the quality of the service provided
- We will focus on staff having the right behaviours and attitudes
- We will use victims' experiences to shape our service delivery
- We will ensure the training and learning to staff is fit for purpose
- We will work with CJ partners to redesign the victim and witness journey

12. 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 (WCU) which is available for those cases where an individual has been charged.
13. The completion of Victim Personal Statements (in support of those taken at the first point of contact by officers) and the MG2 application for Special Measures has been the responsibility of the WCU and this has seen an improvement in both quality and application (CPS).
14. The WCU is co-located within the Criminal Justice Centre of Excellence Hubs located across three sites; Coventry, Lloyd House and Wednesfield and offers a tailored service to support victims through the criminal justice process

15. The Champions's network continues to drive force wide 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, which will continue to improve performance as the portal is 100% Victims Code compliant in terms of providing relevant information and advice as well as signposting victims to additional support services.
16. 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 twelve 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.
17. Connect has been designed with the victims code in mind and will make WMP more efficient with regards to audit processes. This also supports compliance of the Victim's Code. It will provide prompts in relation legislation to ensure victims are treated accordingly. Management data will be available that will enable performance data to be retrieved. This continues to be explored with the Connect project team via the Champions meeting. Connect is anticipated to go live in 2020.
18. 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. This was borne out by feedback and comparison at a National Victims meeting.
19. The importance of placing the victim at the center 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.
20. 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.
21. 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.
22. The Champions network have also been working closely with Learning and Development and will soon see Victims Code practice and advice feature on mobility devices and force systems 'Go to' Guides. This will allow practical advice

and reference material to be available to all officers and staff, providing guidance and prompts which will continue to drive improvement.

23. There is ongoing work with Victims Support Service (VSS) to clarify their service offer, to raise awareness to officers and staff and ensure victims receive the support they need. There will involve a series of training inputs predominantly targeting Contact and Investigation departments, particularly recognising the support to victims once police activity has concluded. There will be an internal media awareness raising piece, featuring effective practice and a case study.
24. Work is ongoing to embed the National Victims Help Line into Major incident Contingency planning and critical incident response to provide support.

### **The Future**

25. Alongside the work of the Champions network, WMP play a key part in the OPCC's Victims and Witnesses Delivery Group.
26. 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.
27. The Victims Code Champions will meet next on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020. The OPCC are looking to identify a replacement to former Victims Strategy Lead who left post in November 2019 and forms a key part of the group
28. The Victims and Witness SME – Superintendent Richard Agar is also involved in the Victims Journey portfolio overseen by Chief Superintendent Richard Fisher which 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.

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