



Strategic Policing and Crime Board

16th February 2021

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 21st January 2020.

Background

2. The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime is one of the most important documents for victims of crime, setting out in law the services and information victims are entitled to receive as they interact with the Criminal justice system. The code states what each criminal justice agency must do for victims and the timeframe in which they must do it.

Prioritising a Victims Culture

3. 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 and Victim Support.
4. To ensure that we prioritise and promote a victim's culture, we must seek out and amplify the victim's voice in all that we do. Across the crime portfolio, victims are given the chance

to tell us what they think of WMP through the Service Standards survey. Whilst PPU remains on the peripheral of this work given the risks involved with direct victim contact through surveying platforms, there are a number of alternative pieces of work underway to obtain qualitative feedback. This includes plans in Coventry to embed IDVA services into the PPU to work with victims alongside WMP and provide the opportunity for impartial feedback upon case closures. We also intend to introduce a high risk victim's feedback model in 2021/22, which will actively monitor outcomes for high risk victims in a way we have never done before. The success of these individual projects will define their further roll out into other areas of PPU business. Alongside this work, WMP regularly engages in community-based sessions, often accompanying the OPCC and working collaboratively to ensure that when feedback is given, it is heard, and it is addressed. This commitment to community-based work will continue as the Victim's Code amendments are embedded.

5. WMP Citizen Charter and service standards set out the minimum the public can expect from us and what we can deliver. Over the next three years, WMP will be working hard to further improve the quality of the service we provide which is a pledge in our WMP strategy 'This Work Matters'. The first step in this journey was to set the minimum standards WMP will deliver. We did this by listening to what the public told us they expected for victims of crime. The charter and service standards also described the rights of how people we stop and search, submit freedom of information requests, the victim's code and PACE in relation to how we treat people in custody. They replace the old Contact Counts documents from several years ago.
6. 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. Investigative teams consider the victims code and their obligations and seek to comply, but greater emphasis will be placed on this including considerations for victims and families who are entitled to enhanced rights. New FCID and PPU SLT leads for Victims Code have been appointed with alignment to the Citizen Charter.

Driving Standards & Improvement

7. The Champions network continues to drive force wide performance against the Victims Code, and seeks to measure compliance. The Victims and Witnesses Delivery Plan 2019 drives improvement and capture the service offer from each department in line with national standards. The core themes are:
 - 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.

This was recently reviewed in November 2020 and shows progress against these milestones.

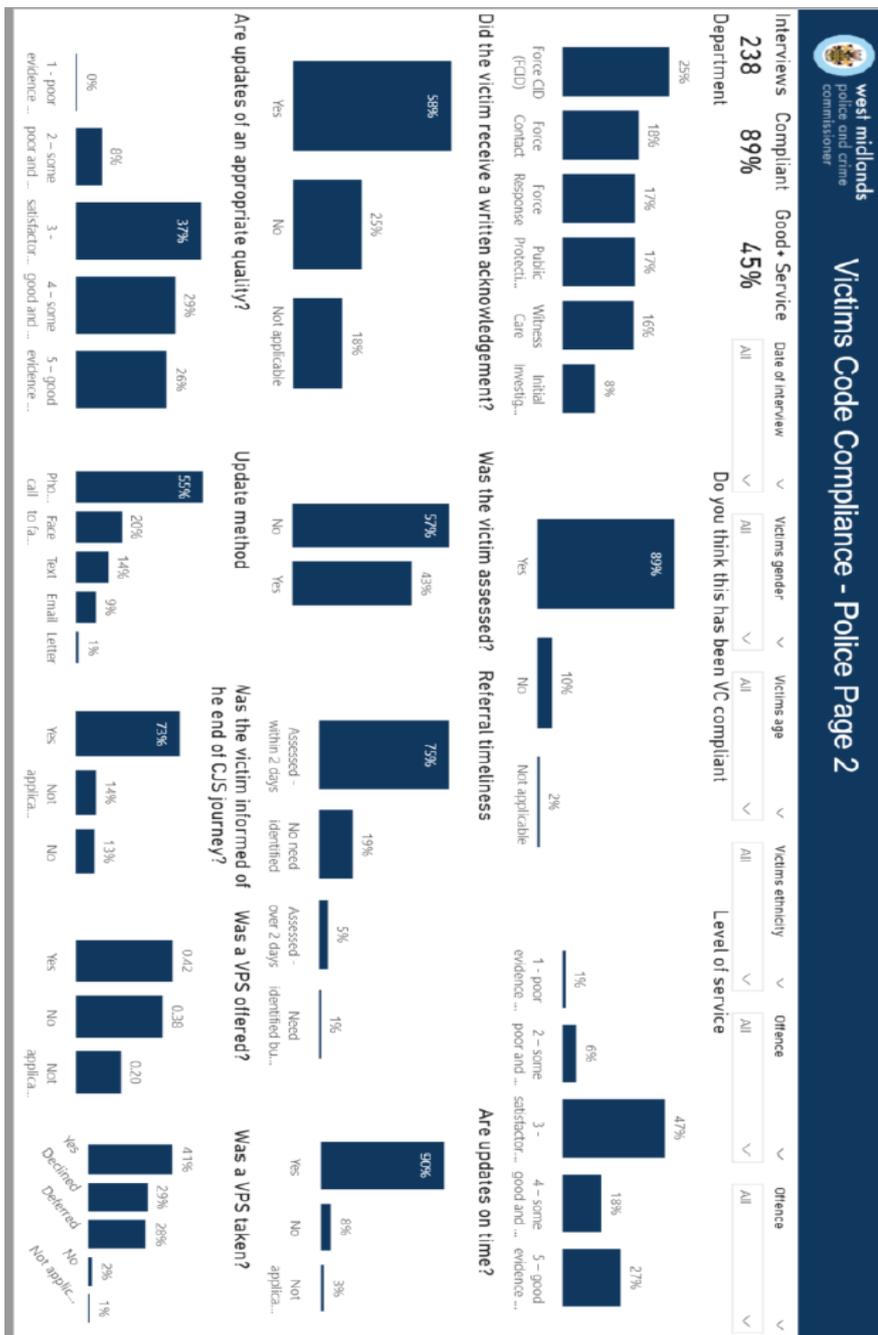
8. WMP has continued to complete Victim Code audits against the criteria set by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). WMP has maintained a program of dip sampling across key departments including Initial Investigations (IIT), Volume, Violence & Acquisitive Investigations (VVA), Force Contact, Force Response, Public Protection Unit (PPU), Criminal Justice and Witness Care.

The audit continues to focus on our key responsibilities in relation to the Victims Code and supporting victims:

- 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?
9. The overall assessment by the Victims Code Lead is that WMP provides a good level of compliance and service against most areas of the Victims Code. The force has developed a new audit process and dashboard which will capture a wider range of information and allow for more in-depth assessment and targeted areas of work.

10. The most recent (Nov 2020) dip sample in of 238 crime reports identified that 89% (previous survey 75%) were compliant with the Victims Code and 90% (previous survey 84%) delivered a 'good service' following review and assessment by an Inspector/Police Staff Equivalent or above. The performance data indicates that more work needs to be done to improve our performance for Victim Personal Statements (42%) and victim assessment (57%). Additional information now captured as part of the audit shows that where an assessment was not considered, an appropriate rationale is reflected on the crimes portal such victim refusal and already receiving support.

Diagram 1 - Victim Code Compliance Dashboard



11. The dashboard was developed with the support of the OPCC and now focuses on vulnerability such as Domestic Violence, Burglary, Robbery and Hate Crime. The audit also provides data which will enable WMP and the OPCC to assess impact and disproportionately against gender, age and ethnicity. The dashboard will enable the force to better embed the Victims Code within the assessment of victim's needs, acknowledging how individual circumstances can mean that our response needs to be different and tailored not to the crime type but to take into account vulnerability of citizens and 'doing the right thing' for them.
12. The force recognises that more work needs to be done to improve the awareness and use of Victim Personal Statements. An improvement plan has been implemented with Victim Support, the PCC and other agencies to deliver a programme of events over a week commencing the 26th January 2021 to highlight the use of Victim Personal Statements as part of court proceedings. To explain to officers/staff:
 - Raise awareness and understanding amongst officers and staff so they can feel more confident about the use of them in prosecutions.
 - How to approach victims satisfactorily about the use of VPS and how the process works, including updates.
 - Promote the value they have.

Training

13. 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
14. 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.
15. The Victims Code is also embedded and referenced in the Detective Development Programme (DDP) which replaced the ICID for new investigators. A series of knowledge checks are completed during the Detective Development Programme (DDP) in which questions are posed from the Victims Code. There are also classroom sessions incorporating the Victims Code of Practice with use of scenarios.

Victim Support

16. WMP continues to work closely with Victim Support to improve officer/staff awareness including developing a new project (Children and Young People's Service) to support vulnerable young people and raising awareness and understanding of what support the VS Multi-Crime is able to offer especially during major incidents. This needs developing and forms part of any future training considerations. This was specifically included in recent training delivered to officers/staff which focused on raising awareness about the importance of VPS. The sessions were delivered by Victim Support and CPS and included trauma-informed considerations when completing a VPS. This will form part of any training plans for the relaunch of the VC in April 21.
17. Victim Support's Children and Young People's Service (CYP) works with vulnerable young people across West Midlands who present with a range of complex needs. In some instances young people will present with competing needs when referred to our services. This project sets out the referral pathways available for young people in the unfortunate circumstance who are victims or witnesses of serious crime. WMP is delivering a six month pilot working with Project Guardian in Walsall, Coventry and Birmingham. The parameters are violent victim based crime including attempts and threats (violence with injury, threats to kill & robbery). This piece of work is owned by the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and will be instrumental in WMP understanding the support available for victims of serious crime, especially those under 25.

The Future

- 18 A revised code will be launched in force in April 2021. The force will develop a new action plan which will focus on **'delivering a good quality and consistent service to victims and witnesses'** by ensuring all victims as defined by the Victims Code are:
 - Treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity, compassion and courtesy.
 - Supported to make informed choices that are fully respected.
 - Have their privacy respected by service providers in accordance with their obligations under the relevant privacy and data protection laws.
 - Provide services to assist victims and their family to understand and engage with the criminal justice process.

MoJ Victims Code Compliance Framework

19 In April 2021, following two rounds of consultation, the streamlined and simplified Victims' Code of Practice will be implemented. The new code is designed to be streamlined and simplified to improve victims' access to it and provides greater clarity over the expectations of agencies. It is designed to be more 'user friendly' and will be accompanied by practitioner guidance for all relevant agencies.

20 The notable change is that entitlements have now become **RIGHTS**. In conjunction with the launch, the MoJ will be revisiting their Code compliance framework with the ambition to broaden the scope forces are already required to report on via their Police and Crime Commissioners. WMP will work to understand what this means in terms of measuring compliance, working with the OPCC and WMP Partners to develop a compliance framework in line with this new version.

21 The revised Code is an opportunity to refresh our existing practices and as such we will develop a new action plan which will focus on ***'delivering a good quality and consistent service to victims and witnesses'***.

The plan will includes activities to further;

- a. Improve data collection and audit process with greater emphasis on compliance.
- b. Improve service to victims by ensuring they are kept informed and ensuring referral to support services remain.
- c. Training to raise staff awareness and encourage adherence to the code.
- d. VPS to ensure victims are being offered the opportunity to make a statement but more discretion on when the VPS is take.
- e. Review referral process and list of organisations to refer to.

22 FCID will be implementing victim focus and public confidence boards to review data and performance including learning, feedback and excellent practice on geographic areas and centrally reviewed for performance and compliance. This will incorporate Victims code and Citizen satisfaction data . Homicide bespoke obligations for victims' families will be shared with all FLO's and incorporated into future training with courses recommencing from Jan 2021. Homicide have nominated a victim/family focus Inspector lead for their portfolio to ensure compliance with this.

- 23 PPU have plans for a departmental communications campaign which will incorporate the Citizen's Charter, Service Standards and Victim's Code as a universal way of working. They will be nominating Service Champions at ground/front line level to push the messaging and ensure that compliance and review are matters for BAU and not retrospective oversight.
- 24 Development of the Victims' Code App on the Go to Guide is underway. The app is primarily designed for use by the 6,255 users who have access to the app via their mobility devices. A desktop version of the device is available that all employees can access. The full Victims' code app is due to be available from March 2021 which will coincide with the launch of the revised code and be rolled out as part of a wider training plan for the force.
- 25 In April 2021 WMP will role out Connect which will support performance improvement against the Victims' Code as well as measurement. Connect will replace nine of the force's current IT systems with one single system. The system will include decisions tree which will help users to correctly crime incident in line with HOCR and will enable signposting to partner agencies in relation to Victim Support. It will provide prompts in relation to the code to ensure victims are treated accordingly. Management data will be available that will enable performance data to be retrieved.

Recommendation

The board is asked to note the above updates.

Author(s): Staff Office