



ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE BOARD

25th March 2025

Victims and Witnesses

Presented by: Assistant Chief Constable Matt Welsted

1. Police and Crime Plan

- 1.1. Improving the service and support we provide to victim's and witnesses' is a golden thread that runs throughout the Police and crime plan, with references to the victim's code, the provision of specialist support to vulnerable victims, and improving our response to crime that target the characteristics of vulnerable people.
- 1.2. This report outlines our approach to supporting victims and witnesses of crime, and how we are improving the service we offer. Supporting victims and witnesses is directly linked to our strategic goal to be 'Small enough to care' and directly linked to the public's confidence in West Midlands Police.
- 1.3. West Midlands is one of the most diverse regions in the UK, with a rich cultural mix of ethnicities, languages, and backgrounds highlighting the need for us to pay particular attention to individuals and communities with differing needs, ensuring that the service they receive is compassionate, respectful, and fair.
- 1.4. West Midlands Police works with our partners and OPCC commissioned services to deliver victim support at multiple levels, ensuring referrals are timely, care is specialised where necessary and delivers genuine help to victims and witnesses throughout the criminal justice process, ensuring they are informed, involved and not re-victimised.

2. Achievements and Challenges

Achievements:

- 2.1. A victim's journey map has been developed to ensure that we understand exactly when, how and by whom we will deliver the activity that complies with the victim's code. This has informed a series of workstreams, and outcomes specifically designed to improve the consistency of our delivery of the victim's code. For example, Automated Victim Updates: We have implemented automated SMS updates for victims to improve compliance with the Victims' Code, ensuring that victims receive timely updates on the progress of their investigation in line with the legislation. This is completed at carefully selected points within the investigation and in line with the victim's contact preferences.
- 2.2. Victim Care Webpage Launch: We have developed and launched an accessible Victim Care webpage, consolidating information on victim rights, available services, and step-by-step guidance on navigating the criminal justice system. This webpage is designed to help the public understand their rights also

includes information relating to the Victim Right to Review scheme.

- 2.3. Victims' Code Compliance Dashboard: We have introduced a dashboard for investigators and supervisors that tracks adherence to the Victims' Code, monitoring the aspects of the victim's code the police have responsibility for and identifying areas for improvement. This has improved accountability within the force by showing the % of compliance for each right under the victim code.
- 2.4. Enhanced Victim Support Pathways: We have strengthened referral mechanisms and engagement with victim support services, ensuring that victims receive timely specialist intervention. Using OPCC commissioned services we have embedded Domestic Abuse Advisors into our initial response to Domestic Abuse victims during the initial investigation by videocall and more recently within our 999-call centre in line with "Raneems Law".
- 2.5. Restorative Justice (RJ) Expansion: We have Increased RJ referrals by 11% through targeted awareness initiatives and strengthened partnerships with victim support services. This has included officer training to improve awareness and confidence in discussing RJ options with victims, as well as enhanced victim engagement through information campaigns and direct outreach. Additionally, improved referral processes have allowed for earlier and more consistent consideration of RJ in appropriate cases. This expansion has resulted in more victims engaging in restorative processes, promoting closure, reducing reoffending rates, and increasing victim satisfaction with the criminal justice system.

Challenges:

- 2.6. Victim Engagement and Trust in the Criminal Justice System is heavily influenced by the national narrative often relating to backlogs in courts, prisoners being released and challenges with police partner information sharing relating to vulnerable victims. Locally, we have worked hard at improving our local partnership working, through the Local Policing Model and have secured a series of high-profile successful convictions that have been well received in local media.

Our efforts to improve our volume crime service, in answering the phones, getting officers to the scene, making arrests and improving our crime investigations is dramatic and setting us apart from our most similar forces. However, despite these improvements, there remains the very real possibility that some victims may feel disconnected from the justice process and have low confidence that justice would be delivered to them if they needed it.

- 2.7. Accurate Hate Crime Reporting and Data Collection: Ensuring that hate crime incidents are properly recorded and addressed remains a challenge, particularly in cases where victims may be reluctant to come forward due to fear of reprisals or lack of trust in the system.
- 2.8. Victim Needs Assessment: We have had several issues developing a method to record the needs of the victim accurately due to issues with our records management system. Our initial approach was not favoured by the HMIC so we have had to redesign this to ensure it is fit for purpose and assists officers in

capturing the victim's needs and identifying the requirement for support or special measures when giving evidence.

- 2.9. Social media Related Hate Crime: The increase in online hate crime presents legal and operational challenges, particularly in balancing freedom of expression with the need to protect victims from harmful content and harassment. This is a national issue with an international element when high profile individuals make comment of social media platforms. WMP take a proactive approach to any offences seeking the arrest and prosecution of offender wherever possible.
- 2.10. Victim satisfaction levels are not routinely gathered in WMP which presents a significant intelligence gap, and an opportunity cost when it comes to improving our service. This is mitigated where possible, with various departments and functions are gathering small pockets of feedback and acting on it, overseen by the Victims Thematic Board. This is being directly addressed through our work to procure a victim insights platform.

3. Actions Undertaken

To address these challenges, we have taken the following steps:

- 3.1. Governance and accountability is strong and effective. A victim's thematic board, chaired by ACC Change, Operation Vanguard chaired by ACC Local policing and the Vulnerability improve Board chaired by ACC Crime are examples of the level of focus and scrutiny invested in this area over the last 18 months. WMP are in the process of consolidating this governance to recognise the improvements that have been made and the mainstreaming of the activity.
- 3.2. Victim Communication: A redesign of our communication tools has been completed to ensure the language and tone as well as the delivery mechanism are in line with our victims' strategy.

This included the introduction of the automated updates and a victim-focused website to improve and simplify information for victims and callers, ensuring victims receive regular case updates in line with the Victims' Code. This initiative has anecdotally helped reduce victim anxiety and improve confidence in the justice process.

Through doing this we have reduced our investigations where victim contact is overdue from circa 10,000 to 700 since July 2024.

- 3.3. Map of the Victim Journey: This initiative identifies key touchpoints in the victim's journey for feedback collection and ensures compliance with the Victims' Code. It is a continually evolving document that keeps victim experience central to our processes.
- 3.4. We have mapped existing feedback mechanisms and host 'Deep Dive' sessions where departments share insights and improvements made based on feedback. This is overseen by the Victims Thematic Board and the learning is submitted to the Risk and Organisational Learning department to identify best practices and create a centralised repository of responses.

- 3.5. Examples of existing feedback mechanisms include forums such as Op Soteria, MARAC Survivors Voice, and Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs). Partners like Remedi (Restorative Justice) and Victim Support analyse victim experiences to identify trends and drive organisational learning.
- 3.6. Communication, Education, and Training for Staff: We have developed additional training to upskill officers and staff on the Victim Needs Assessment within the Victims' Code. This training ensures they can accurately determine victim needs, make timely and appropriate referrals to partner agencies, and provide the necessary support. It also helps identify vulnerable or intimidated victims and witnesses at the earliest opportunity, ensuring they can give their best evidence through special measures
- 3.7. Training on the Victims' Code of Practice has been completed by 95% of the force, delivered through the College of Policing. Additional internal training for staff has been developed and delivered, with 75% of the target audience completing it. Throughout these sessions we deliver comprehensive insights for officers and staff on the Victims' Code, Restorative Justice, and victim needs assessments. This training ensures that officers understand their legal obligations and can provide effective, empathetic support to victims.
- 3.8. Our Communication Strategy ensures clear and consistent internal and external messaging. This approach reinforces staff understanding of victim rights, the Victim Needs Assessment process, and their role in delivering a victim-centred service while improving overall engagement with victims.
- 3.9. Community Partnerships: Strengthened collaboration with OPCC-commissioned services, victim advisory groups, and third-sector organisations to enhance victim support services. This has included working closely with local charities and specialist victim services to provide tailored support.
- 3.10. Right Care, Right Person Implementation: Established a dedicated Vulnerability Desk to triage and manage mental health-related incidents, ensuring that appropriate referrals are made to partner agencies instead of defaulting to police intervention. This approach reduces strain on policing resources while ensuring victims receive appropriate care.
- 3.11. Specialist Support: Embedded Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) within response teams to provide immediate support and intervention for domestic abuse victims. This has helped improve victim outcomes and reduce repeat victimisation.
- 3.12. Restorative Justice Expansion: Strengthened referral pathways for RJ by increasing awareness among officers, improving training on how RJ can benefit victims, and implementing digital solutions for streamlined case referrals. This has led to a significant rise in RJ participation.
- 3.13. Hate Crime Performance: West Midlands Police monitors hate crime performance through Operation Biotas, chaired by ACC Bell, recognising the impact of global and national events on community tensions.

- 3.14. Following the August 2024 disorder, ongoing community initiatives have strengthened police-community relations. WMP has also reviewed its hate crime strategy, introducing a revised governance framework focused on victim outcomes.
- 3.15. To address underreporting from transgender and disabled victims, Hate Crime Champions have been appointed across LPAs to develop accessible reporting centres with local partners. A Disability Independent Advisory Group (IAG) is also being established to create a victim support network.
- 3.16. Challenges include data quality, as ethnicity is not mandated in incident recording, impacting analysis. Additionally, social media hate crime remains complex, with WMP working closely with the CPS to clarify the distinction between freedom of speech and criminal offences under new College of Policing guidance. Local audits of hate crime reporting have been introduced to enhance performance.

4. Future Work

We aim to:

- 4.1. Victims Voice Strategy: A comprehensive strategy has been developed to supplement the existing Victims' Strategy. It provides additional detail about current approaches, challenges being tackled, and future plans. This is due to be released to the force imminently to reflect the progress made.
- 4.2. Develop and implement AI-driven a real-time Victim Insight Platform focused on accountability and improved victim experiences is being implemented: The platform will utilise AI and advanced analytics to gather actionable insights from victims. Feedback will be collected via WhatsApp, SMS, email, or video to make it easier for victims to share their experiences. These insights will then be sent to relevant personnel for action if required. This is currently in the procurement phase and work is ongoing. This is also being developed collaboratively with the OPCC to understand public perception.
- 4.3. Expand victim service accessibility by working closely with OPCC and third-sector organisations to improve outreach to vulnerable communities, including expanding multi-language resources and culturally tailored support services. We will do this by working with the Victims Commission and the local and national Victims Commissioner.
- 4.4. Implement a streamlined digital referral mechanism for RJ services, reducing delays in victim engagement and participation, ensuring seamless integration with case management systems.
- 4.5. Improve oversight and compliance monitoring for the Victims' Code, ensuring all officers understand and adhere to statutory requirements to enhance victim experience, with regular performance reviews and dedicated compliance officers.
- 4.6. Implementation of the Victims and Prisoners Act & Operation Encompass: West Midlands Police has strengthened its approach under Operation Encompass, ensuring compliance with the Victims and Prisoners Act, which

mandates notifying educational institutions when children witness or experience abuse. While this was already in practice, improvements have been made to better identify children needing referrals.

In late 2024, the force delivered refresher training to all staff on their statutory obligations through briefings and education sessions. Additionally, School Intervention and Prevention Officers (SIPOs) continue to work closely with schools and family workers to safeguard young people and support positive outcomes.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Procurement is ongoing for a Victim Feedback and Citizen Experience Tool. Market engagement is taking place in the coming weeks, which will inform the business case. Final potential costs and funding routes need to be addressed in this business case.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. Our Victim Strategy aligns with statutory obligations, including compliance with the Victim's Code and the new requirements under the Victims and Prisoners Act.
- 6.2. Enhanced processes ensure we meet legal standards while maintaining a victim-centred approach to criminal justice.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. Ensuring access to victim support services is central to our strategy. Efforts are ongoing to address disparities in service provision, particularly for minority ethnic communities, disabled victims, and LGBTQ+ individuals.
- 7.2. The force is proactively working to reduce barriers to reporting crime and accessing justice through enhanced engagement, training, and policy development.

Matt Welsted
Assistant Chief Constable