

WEST YORKSHIRE'S STRATEGY TO SUPPORT VICTIMS AND WITNESSES

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My Approach to Support for Victims and Witnesses

As the PCC for West Yorkshire I see it as one of my most important roles to champion the interests of victims and witnesses. I want them to be seen not as victims but individuals and communities harmed by crime who need to be empowered - to cope and recover, and get their voices heard. I want to see a much higher profile for the support services which already exist, increased resources to meet increasing demand and the development of new services to fill identified gaps.



In my oversight of West Yorkshire Police, I recognise the crucial role they play as the first point of contact with the criminal justice system for many victims. I will work drive up the public confidence needed to report and the levels of satisfaction with the service victims receive. The response must be based on the impact on the victim not the type of crime.

For victims who report crime, their journey only starts with the Police. As Chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board, I will monitor compliance with the Victims Code through the whole criminal justice system. I will lobby for the Code to be strengthened and for a new Victims Law. I will promote innovations to widen the range of options for victims such as restorative justice.

However it is vital to get greater understanding that you can access support without reporting to the Police. The victims support services I commission or fund through grants are open to self-referral and focussed on the needs of victims and empower them to cope and recover, including the most vulnerable and those with complex needs. The services need to be easily accessible via a number of key single points of contact: social media, website, telephone, and face to face at hubs.

I will have a particular concern about the most vulnerable victims, those living in high crime areas and those who are part of seldom heard communities such as girls and women, those from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, disabled people, LGBT victims and male victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

Other public services outside the criminal justice system have a very important role to play in supporting victims of crime. The five local authorities and NHS Commissioners and Trusts, working together through community safety partnerships, need to give a greater focus to the needs of victims in all the work they do. I will work to strengthen the referral pathways so that victims have access to the therapeutic support they sometimes need, recognising how traumatic the experience of crime can be.

I want people have an increasing influence over the design and delivery of services, with a mixed economy of providers whose support is available to all regardless of where they live, the age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. I want to see a holistic partnership approach to meeting needs, with strong links between generic and specialist services with mutual respect and understanding of each other's roles. I want to see greater integration of support services whoever funds or commissions them – PCC, MoJ, HO, NHS, Local authority, charitable trusts – and more joint commissioning where that is needed. Greater investment is needed in support services to meet the aspirations set out in this strategy.

Mark Burns-Williamson
Police and Crime Commissioner
Chair, West Yorkshire Local Criminal Justice Board

What do we know about Victims in West Yorkshire?

It is clearly important that the strategy should take account of the best information available about victims in West Yorkshire. The OPCC has been undertaking a needs assessment, which has identified the current state of knowledge and has identified a number of sources, not all specific to West Yorkshire. The main ones are

- West Yorkshire Police data, including the victim satisfaction survey carried out independently for the Police;
- Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), which includes victims who do not report to the Police including analysis undertaken by the Office of National Statistics (ONS);
- Data from the “Your views” survey undertaken by the OPCC;
- Data from victims’ services commissioned directly by the PCC;
- The conclusions of the Victim Support report published in late 2017 “Victim of the System”

The OPCC Needs Assessment has identified the need for further work, especially in making the best use of West Yorkshire Police data, to improve our understanding of the profile and needs of victims here. This will be undertaken as part of the next stage of this work.

However, it is possible at this stage to provide answers to some key questions which have informed the development of this strategy.

What is the impact of crime on victims?

It is important to acknowledge at the outset the harm crime and anti-social behaviour causes for direct victims, those who witness it, their friends and families. It can significantly impact on people’s health – both mental and physical. Research undertaken by the national charity Victim Support indicates that almost two thirds of the victims surveyed experienced negative health impacts. But it can also affect a victim’s relationships, income, housing and other aspects of their lives. The effects can be short term only or last for a long time, and crucially do not depend on how “serious” the crime was.

How many victims of crime are there every year in West Yorkshire?

In the 12 months to June 2018, West Yorkshire Police received 234,694 reports of victim-related crime. The ONS estimates that approximately 15% of these will be “repeat” victims, which means that we can estimate there were approximately 200,000 individuals who reported being the victim of crime to the Police in that period.

What about victims who do not report to the Police?

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) reports that approximately 57% of victims of violent crime (including domestic and sexual abuse) do not report the crime to the Police. There are also the significant number of offences that are not crimes, and victims of anti-social behaviour and road traffic incidents. It can therefore be concluded that the actual numbers of victims in West Yorkshire is much larger than the approximately 200,000 individuals who reported to the Police.

Are the number of victims of crime increasing?

Crime statistics released by the ONS show that crime has risen in West Yorkshire by 11% in the 12 months to June 2018, compared to the 12 months previously. West Yorkshire Police have analysed this rise to look at how much may be due to improved recording practices, and believe that 6% of this is due to an actual increase in crime.

How are victims distributed geographically across West Yorkshire?

The Bradford and Leeds districts have the most crimes reported to the Police per 1000 population. However, these figures conceal significant variations within each district. All five districts include at least one ward which (taking account of population) are amongst the 10 wards in West Yorkshire with the highest level of crime.

How are victims distributed by ethnicity and age?

In December 2018 the ONS published some facts and figures derived from data in the CSEW for the previous three years. A higher percentage of people from some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups said they were victims of crime compared to white people; and younger people were more likely to say they were victims of crime than older people.

What about gender, disability and sexual orientation?

From April 2018, the Ministry of Justice has required that all PCCs report to them using a common framework. This will in future enable the OPCC to give a total figure for the number of victims supported, including a breakdown by gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and disabled people. Early indications suggest only a small proportion of victims access the support available, and that female victims are more likely to take up the offer of support than males. As further data is gathered it will enable wider conclusions to be drawn to inform the strategy.

How satisfied are victims with the support they get from West Yorkshire Police?

Overall satisfaction with the whole experience for the 12 months to June 2018 stands at 75.1% across the whole range of service users who were contacted through the victim satisfaction programme. This is down from 76.1% in the previous 12 months. A similar decrease has been seen in the OPCC's Your Views survey with regard to the specific questions that relate to victims. In the Police victim satisfaction programme, the gap in levels of satisfaction between white and BAME victims has narrowed.

How satisfied are victims with how they are treated in the rest of the criminal justice system?

The evidence available suggests that victims often feel they have not been treated properly by the rest of the criminal justice system. Recent national research conducted by the national charity Victim Support has concluded that satisfaction levels are directly related to the extent to which organisations meet the obligations set out in "The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime" (Victims Code). Victim Support concludes that there is a need for improved monitoring and enforcement of the Code. It is envisaged that PCCs will play a key role in respect of this in the future.

What are the next steps in improving our understanding of the issues?

Our knowledge and understanding of the issues facing people harmed by crime needs to be improved, especially those who are particularly vulnerable and are repeat victims. It is intended that discussion of the strategy will assist in identifying other sources of information, as well as gaps in our knowledge that need to be addressed. Feedback about the comments in this section of the strategy are very welcome.

Draft Strategic Priorities

1. Raise awareness of the PCC's approach to supporting victims and witnesses, putting people and communities at the heart of practice, service development, policy and strategy
2. Get the initial response to victims right first time every time
3. Work hard to give victims the support they need to cope and recover, tailored to their individual needs, whether or not they pursue action through the criminal justice system
4. Increase the confidence victims have in the criminal justice system and empower them to take up the different options available to them through it
5. Address the additional vulnerabilities and complex needs that compound the barriers to coping and recovering and often result in repeat occurrences
6. Identify and take action to fill gaps in services to victims and achieve greater consistency in West Yorkshire

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Strategic Priority 1**Raise awareness of the PCC's approach to supporting victims and witnesses, putting people and communities at the heart of practice, service development, policy and strategy***Analysis*

Knowledge of the support available to victims, especially if they do not wish to report to the police immediately, is low. This is the most significant barrier to accessing these services. Those who do report often feel marginalised within the processes of the criminal justice system. Outcomes are poor for both victims and offenders. Community safety partners and the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (third) sector have a vital role to play in addressing these issues.

Actions

- Coordinate awareness campaigns for maximum impact
- Target specific crime types and communities at different times of the year
- Review the Help For Victims website to learn lessons from its operation
- Work with partners to raise awareness and build on the Victims Hubs in every district
- Give priority to seldom heard communities in neighbourhoods experiencing high levels of crime
- Maintain and develop the strategic relationship with the third sector
- Establish a victims and witnesses advisory group made up of individuals and organisations with direct experience
- Organise round table discussions with particular communities and groups of victims
- Contribute to the overall needs assessment to better understand the needs of victims and communities

Measures

- Public opinion surveys to check levels of awareness e.g. Your Views
- Surveys of targeted communities and groups of victims

Strategic priority 2**Get the initial response to victims right first time every time***Analysis*

Many victims of crime find it hard to report to the police or anyone else for a variety of reasons. It is vital that whoever they do report to gives them the right advice. The Police and CJS, Councils, the NHS and the third sector have a vital role to play to ensure their staff are equipped to respond to a report made to them. The response should be based on the impact of the crime on the victim, not the crime type.

Actions

- Ensure all agencies are aware of the Victims Code, the Witness Charter and the responsibilities set out in them
- Think beyond the Code and Charter to actions that can be taken locally in its spirit
- Champion the rights of victims, lobby to strengthen the Victims Code and for a Victims Law
- Provide clear accessible information such as the Police Victims Information Card
- Explore options for including on Make Every Contact Count (MECC)
- Promote as many routes to reporting as possible including self-referral – over the telephone, face to face, on line
- Make sure victims are aware they can self-refer to support services such as Victim Support, Restorative Justice, domestic abuse support services and the SARC

Measures

- Levels of victim satisfaction with initial response from the Police and victims services
- Increasing numbers of self-referrals to victim support services
- Monitoring of compliance with the Victims Code

Strategic Priority 3

Work hard to give victims the support they need to cope and recover, tailored to their individual needs, whether or not they pursue action through the criminal justice system

Analysis

The impact of crime on victims is well documented and evidenced. Victims will have both immediate and longer term needs relating to their physical health, mental health, employment, housing, family relationships, and wish to provide evidence to assist prosecution. The support services available are provided by the Police and CJS, councils, the health service, third sector and offender management services.

Actions

- Provide single points of access for all victims regardless of crime type, location, or personal circumstances
- Make sure there are strong referral pathways between services so that victims get to the service they need regardless of their first point of access
- Focus on the development of important areas of service where improvement is needed – for example therapeutic support
- Establish greater consistency in services for victims of crime across West Yorkshire
- Work to resolve cross boundary issues between agencies that can get in the way eg when responding to major incidents such as the Manchester Arena attack

Measures

- Consistent use of the before and after outcome star model
- Referral pathways communicated effectively and well understood by front line staff and partners
- Levels of victim satisfaction with the support / treatment received

Strategic priority 4**Increase the confidence victims have in the criminal justice system and empower them to take up the different options available to them through it***Analysis*

Too many victims fear that engagement with the CJS will cause them more harm than good. As a result they do not report or disengage after making an initial report. The outcomes for victims are often not as good as we would like. Re-victimisation is a real and ever present risk. Victims are not aware of the range of options available, and these options may not be consistently available to all victims. These might include out of court disposal, restorative justice, compensation and reparation, as well as prosecution of the offender

Actions

- Provide clear information about all the options available early in the process
- Continue to develop alternative options such as restorative justice and out of court disposals
- Provide support and advice to victims at all stages of the victims' journey about the options available.
- Make it easier for victims and witnesses to give evidence
- Make sure every opportunity is taken to make sure the victims point of view is heard
- Ensure victims can opt back into support services whenever they need to do so for example at the end of a trial
- Work to overcome the barriers that undermine confidence and disempower victims
- Challenge popular myths about the criminal justice system
- Maintain and develop the strategic relationship with the Criminal Justice Board at national level and Local Criminal Justice Board at West Yorkshire level

Measures

- Monitoring of CJS compliance with the victims code
- Attrition rates as victims / witnesses drop out of the CJS
- Opinion surveys testing confidence levels

Strategic objective 5**Address the additional vulnerabilities and complex needs that compound the barriers to coping and recovering and often result in repeat occurrences***Analysis*

Some people are victims of crime not just once but multiple times, either the same crime repeated with the same offender or different crimes with different offenders. The prejudice and discrimination faced by certain groups – for example protected groups as defined by the Equality Act – may be one factor. Some communities are concentrated in the wards in West Yorkshire where most crime is committed. Victims often report that they are suffering from mental health or other problems that make them more vulnerable to crime. Age can also be a factor, for both children and older people.

Actions

- Develop the skills of victim services to recognise and deal with complex needs
- Undertake multi-agency planning to develop care plans to meet the needs of repeat victims
- Improve referral routes to other services for example mental health
- Promote the navigator model for supporting people with complex needs to engage with services
- Engage better with victims, listening and responding to their lived experience
- Improve information sharing arrangements

Measures

- Repeat victim rates for specific crime types – recognising that an increase may be positive
- Monitoring of the specific needs of service users

Strategic Priority 6

Identify and take action to fill gaps in services to victims and achieve greater consistency in West Yorkshire

Analysis

There are specific gaps in services, because of historical patterns of service development, funding, eligibility criteria and levels of resources. The PCC's aspiration is inclusive and universal, that all victims of crime and anti-social behaviour should have access to the support they need, regardless of where they live in West Yorkshire, their age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, income or gender identity. This cannot be achieved with the resources directly at the PCC's disposal, it needs a concerted effort from all stakeholders and the community safety partners in every district, deploying both funding and support in kind.

Actions

- Maintain and develop the strategic relationship between the PCC and community safety partnerships to develop services
- Develop support services for businesses who are victims of crime, especially micro-businesses employing a handful of people
- Work with intermediary organisations e.g. Business Crime Networks, Federation of Small Business, Chambers of Commerce
- Develop services for people who are victims of anti-social behaviour
- Commissioning approach for West Yorkshire to achieve greater consistency
- Learn from best practice in other PCC areas, extending and developing services as resources permit

Measures

- Surveys of businesses and third sector organisations experience of crime directed against them
- Development of new services