



JOY ALLEN
DURHAM POLICE AND
CRIME COMMISSIONER

The Police & Crime Commissioner
DURHAM AND DARLINGTON



VICTIMS

DELIVERING A FIRST-CLASS SERVICE TO VICTIMS

TO MAKE OUR COMMUNITIES SAFER, STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT TO DRUG AND ALCOHOL RELATED CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR



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Disappointingly, according to the Victims' Commissioner's National Survey, victims' experiences of policing are mixed, she found:

- 46% of respondents disagreed that they were kept regularly informed by the police about the investigation.
- 30% of respondents agreed that the police investigated their allegations thoroughly.
- 15% of respondents recalled being referred or self-referring themselves to victims' services.
- 83% of those who had attended court said they would attend again.
- 33% agreed they had to wait too long for the case to come to trial.
- 25% disagreed that victims are given enough support during the court process.
- 30% disagreed that they were kept well informed about the progress of the case.
- 19% had heard of the Victims' Code of Practice.
- 8% were aware of the Victims' Rights to Review.

Victims Code

Victims' of crime are at the heart of everything we do and their needs come first and foremost.

To be truly effective, our justice system must be seen through the eyes of victims'. We will continue to involve them, so that we can listen and learn from their experiences to make the positive impact all victims of crime deserve.

As local criminal justice agencies working in partnership, we are committed to ensuring that all victims' of crime receive their rights and the standards of service expected within the Victims' Code of Practice. This will improve their experiences as active participants in the criminal justice system.

I will work with the Chief Constable and partners to:

- Ensure the police and commissioned services adhere to the Code of Practice for Victims' of Crime in England and Wales (Victims' Code) which set out the minimum level of service victims' can expect from criminal justice agencies.
- Ensure relevant agencies have suitable training to meet their code obligations.
- Implement a robust monitoring mechanism to improve delivery of the Victims' Code rights.
- Publicise the Victims' Code and ensure it's at the heart of police and partners decision making.
- Ensure victims understand their rights, including the victims right to review.
- Improve services to victims' and witnesses of crime as outlined under the Victims Code of Practice.
- Ensure service providers comply with the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024.
- Support calls for the Victims Code to include victims' of persistent anti-social behaviour.

Victims Voice

It is imperative, if we are to 'put victims first', that we genuinely listen to and hear their voices 'unfiltered'! This will ensure that victims' interests are fully considered at all stages of the criminal justice system and any proposals to change policies, practices and processes. My Victims' Champions, Policy and Commissioning Team and in-house victim' support services will collectively amplify the victim's voice from the perspective of their lived experiences, to ensure that criminal justice practitioners and policy makers take their views and needs into account when developing their respective agencies and services.

I will work with the Chief Constable and partners to:

- Support and promote the work of the National Victims Commissioner and my local Victims Champions.
- Lobby the Government for stronger laws and tougher policies and penalties where necessary which aim to provide better justice for victims.
- Ensure victims get the help they need and have a strong voice in shaping local services.
- Assist in the reform of the justice system to improve the victims experience by ensuring victims are kept at the heart of decision and policies.
- Ensure the lived experience of victims helps to share and improve criminal justice processes.
- Ensure views of victims are considered throughout an investigation.

- Create opportunities to listen to the voices of victims and witnesses and use their views to inform policy and the commissioning of local services and barriers to reporting or accessing support.
- Create an advisory panel of experts and local people with lived experiences to discuss victims care and victims' services to feed into discussions taking place at the new Victims' Mission Board.
- Develop a Victim's Charter for people affected by anti-social behaviour.
- Work with Police and partners to ensure information about victims' and witnesses' experience is accurately recorded and used to help services improve.

Victim Contact

Providing a high level of service is essential to maintaining the trust and confidence of victims of crime. It encourages reporting, supports the Constabulary's efforts to bring offenders to justice and ultimately contributes to a reduction in crime.

Contact with the police is the first part of the criminal justice process. It is vitally important victims have a positive experience to encourage their continued engagement with the process.

Victims often struggle to get information or updates about their case, which can leave them feeling unsupported and excluded from the process. Current victim attrition is high with 27% of police investigations closed because the victim does not support police action.

The Chief Constable and I will develop a first class victims service from the first point of contact with the police through the criminal justice system, with appropriate support provided throughout the process.

I will work with the Chief Constable and partners to:

- Ensure victims are referred to services which are tailored to support their needs.
- Fully exploit the benefits of the Victims Portal.
- Ensure that every victim of crime sees or speaks to a police officer regardless of how they contact the Constabulary.
- Support the Constabulary in enhancing and promoting the online reporting.
- Improve the reach and take up of victim services and provide greater clarity on who victims can contact for support, ensuring that they can do so in a way that best suits them.
- Understand and respond appropriately to vulnerable victims of crime while being aware of neurodivergent or mental health needs.
- Ensure victims are kept informed about support available to them and how their case is progressing with high-quality feedback.



- Introduce trauma-informed approaches to policing and ensure that this is replicated through my commissioned services.
- Carry out investigations with a focus on victim care and safeguarding and keeping victims informed in a timely way.
- Invest in appropriate responses and training to ensure all officers and staff treat victims appropriately.

Victim Support

Victims who receive appropriate support may be less vulnerable to future victimisation and less likely to suffer ongoing trauma. Not only is this beneficial to their wellbeing, but it reduces the future demands on other public services such as health and social care.

Victims of crime are at the centre of everything I do as Commissioner, and I have made it clear since my election in 2021 that I will spare no effort in ensuring their needs are met.

The sweeping changes introduced have delivered exceptional results, with Durham highlighted on national platforms as an example of best practice in many key areas.

The decision to bring our Victim Care and Advice Service (VCAS) under the management of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) has enabled me to have better oversight of the services provided and promote closer working relationships between partners and Durham Constabulary.

In addition, my 'Victims Champions' for Crime, Domestic Abuse and Anti-Social Behaviour have helped to increase the voice of victims, enabling their experiences to improve future services.

Many of our services, including the pioneering Community Peer Mentor Scheme, have been rewarded with national and local awards and recognition.

Going forward, I intend to strengthen these services further, with targeted support available to all those who need it.

I will work with the Chief Constable and partners to:

- Support the Government's ambition to halve the number of victims of violence against women and girls by focusing on reducing the number of repeat and prolific perpetrators.
- Make better use of protective measures to keep vulnerable victims safe.
- Ensure that all victims who meet the MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) criteria are being provided with access to the full range of interventions MARAC can offer.
- Prioritise the investigation of young victims and witnesses of crime and specialist support services, recognising that children are victims in their own right.
- Improve the victim's experience by using technology to create an end-to-end service for victims.
- Following the introduction of the Victims Act, collaborate with local criminal and justice board and local authorities when commissioning support services for victims.
- Ensure victims receive a high-quality service at every stage of their case and that all entitlements under the Victims Code are delivered consistently.
- Continue to address gaps in support for victims of the most serious traffic incidents and ASB.
- Improve accessibility to support services paying particular attention to seldom heard groups.
- Ensuring those who live in rural and isolated communities have their needs met through appropriate victim support services.



Stages of the Victims' Journey



Victims' Journey

We know many survivors, particularly those of rape and sexual violence, continue to experience extremely poor justice outcomes including re-traumatisation due to long delays in seeking justice due to court backlogs.

A well-functioning criminal justice system will ensure that victims remain engaged in the process of improving justice delivery and providing the outcomes they are seeking.

As Chair of the Local Criminal Justice Board, I will drive the work with partners to improve the victim's journey through the criminal justice system by:

- Undertaking work to identify the impact of the court backlog on victims and witnesses and the services who support them.
- Commissioning research to understand why some victims of crime do not engage with the criminal justice system.
- Encouraging HMCTS (His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service) to review its systems for communicating court listings to make it easier for everyone to access and understand.
- Ensuring criminal justice agencies collect consistent sets of data on victims to ensure they are meeting their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. This will also identify if there are specific groups of victims withdrawing from the criminal justice system in disproportionate numbers.
- Ensuring the police and the wider criminal justice system improves their recognition and response to the personal impact on employees of crime and ASB committed against businesses.
- Improving integration between the police and the witness care unit.
- Improving victims' experiences of the criminal justice system by enhancing the way we capture and respond to feedback on interactions with the police, CPS and other bodies as part of a victim-led approach.
- Ensure the Constabulary has systems in place to identify vulnerable and repeat victims and put in place safeguarding measures to protect them.
- Embedding recommendations from Operation Soteria and improve the standards of investigation and support for victims of rape and sexual assault.
- Working with partners to drive forward the new duty to collaborate – a commitment to ensuring my Office and local authorities and the Integrated Care Board come together to ensure better commissioning and support for victims.
- Advocating for transformational reform to the court system to address backlogs.

- Ensuring the Chief Constable makes proactive use of the tools and powers such as Domestic Abuse Protection Orders and Stalking Protection orders to further safeguard the public and prevent victimisation.
- Maximising the best use of technology available to drive improvement in services for victims.

Victim Satisfaction

Victim satisfaction with the police is crucial for building trust and confidence the overall justice system. They must know that they are at the very centre of everything we do.

Their ability to cope and recover from their experience depends to a great extent on the service they receive, while increased reports of victim satisfaction encourages other victims of crime to come forward. In turn, this means more victims and witnesses will cooperate with investigations which brings more offenders to justice, helping to prevent crime and promote the justice process.

I will work with the Chief Constable and partners to:

- Track victim satisfaction with the Constabulary/Criminal Justice System (CJS) and commit to understanding the ways in which satisfaction can be improved.
- Closely monitor victim satisfaction rates and ensure victims are provided with regular updates in relation to their cases.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice gives victims the chance to meet or communicate with the offender to explain the real impact of the crime they committed. It empowers victims by giving them a voice. It also holds offenders to account for what they have done and helps them to take responsibility and make amends.

Government research illustrates that 85% of victims who take part in restorative justice find the process helpful and it is proven to cut crime – research shows that it reduces reoffending by 14%.

I will work with the Chief Constable and partners to:

- Deliver the new restorative justice approach to enhance the support to organisations to work with restorative practices to give victims a voice and offenders understanding of the impact of their actions.
- Provide the opportunity for victims to explore restorative justice options that might help gain closure and lead to offenders understanding the impact of their action.
- Promote, strengthen and increase the use of restorative practice.



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