



Listening and learning: improving support for victims in London

Introduction:

The report was researched and written by the victims' services advocates (VSA) project. The VSA project was commissioned by the former Victims Commissioner in anticipation of the arrival of the Police Crime Commissioner (PCC).

Introduced by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, elected PCCs will replace police authorities across England and Wales from November 2012.

This report aims to:

- summarise current support for victims
- identify what victims need from local services
- propose a course of action by the PCC to meet these needs.

Purpose and methodology:

The report was commissioned to look particularly at the needs of the following groups:

- victims of antisocial behaviour
- victims of domestic abuse
- victims of sexual violence
- victims of hate crime
- people bereaved by murder and manslaughter
- young victims of crime.

Information sources:

Five sources of information contributed to the findings of this report:

- a mapping exercise to identify current services for victims and the contribution of local stakeholders and partner organisations
- focus groups and interviews with victims and witnesses of crime
- a review of statistical data from the British Crime Survey
- existing local evidence and research on victims of crime

This information told us:

- Mapping of services for victims across London found that inconsistencies arose due to the different commissioning models in the 32 different boroughs. For example there were wide variations in the hate crime and domestic abuse support available by ethnicity and sexual orientation. It also found a significant London-wide lack of provision of services to young victims.
- While this report was commissioned to look in depth at certain crime types, a clear message emerged that victims' needs cannot be assumed from the type of offence they had experienced. Victims told us that they want the police to both to recognise that they are victims, to respond to them as individuals, and to offer a level of service based on an understanding of their vulnerabilities, not just the crime type they have experienced.
- A review of existing research produced by police bodies, academics and the voluntary sector¹ found a strong call for more focus on the individual needs of victims and the risk of harm they face. This should be done through

¹ A full list of references can be found in chapter 7.

developing a greater understanding of victims' needs and vulnerabilities and a more strategic, coordinated response.

- The statistical data we analysed highlighted issues such as:
 - London has a higher incidence rate than the national average for both personal and household crime, meaning more demand for support for victims
 - Victims in London are in almost every respect less positive about and less satisfied with in the police and Criminal Justice System than non-victims
 - The vast majority of London victims, and more than the national average, have never heard of the Victims' Code of Practice
- Stakeholders told us they want to work with the MOPC to ensure there is proper analysis of victims' needs across London to ensure support services are adequately commissioned and resourced to meet them. They also want to work more in partnership with the police and other statutory services to protect victims.

The needs of victims and witnesses:

Looking in more depth at the needs of victims and witnesses in the key crime categories, we further identified that:

- There is a need for better communication about what will happen when a victim reports both criminal and non-criminal ASB. This must be in place for all members of the community even before they become victims. Access to independent support services is also too dependent on this distinction between criminal and non-criminal ASB, as well as the type of housing the victim lives in.
- Victims of rape and sexual assault want the police to take them seriously, to believe them, to investigate their case properly and to keep them updated throughout the case. They also need on-going access to emotional support.
- Victims of domestic abuse want the police to respond quickly, even if they have dialled 999 before, and to take action to protect them. They also want the police to work more closely with support agencies to help them to access information about what can be done to protect them.
- People bereaved by murder and manslaughter in London have the same need for consistent provision of support as victims of any other crime and there is a need to support young victims in particular. It is important that police recognise all bereavement, both within and outside the family.
- Hate crime needs to be better understood, especially less well-known forms such as learning disability hate crime. It should be recognised that some victims prefer to receive support from specialist organisations for victims with certain characteristics, such as ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. The same is true for non-police reporting, the full potential of which has not yet reached the levels envisioned by the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in 1999. More tailored consultation and communication with a wide range of hate crime victims is also needed.
- External research that we have reviewed² has begun to expose the extent of crime experienced by young people and the link between victimisation and becoming a perpetrator, particularly in relation to gang and serious youth violence. A more integrated approach by police and services is needed to ensure early identification of risk factors and intervention to prevent harm to young people.
- Young people told us they want the police and other services to develop a deeper understanding of their needs, to communicate with them in a more age-appropriate and empathetic way, and for the police to work with young people, support organisations and schools to carry out more preventative work.

² A full list of references can be found in chapter 7.

Proposed actions:

Taking into account our findings and the duty on the PCC to obtain the views of victims of crime before setting their policing plan, this report proposes the following actions to address the issues identified in this report.

- **The MOPC should adopt an approach to victims of crime based on their needs as individuals. This approach should apply both to how the police respond to crime and ASB, and how victims' support services are provided and delivered in the capital.**

This means treating victims both as victims and as individuals, with different risks of harm. There should be no "one size fits all" response to victims, as each experiences crime differently. An individual's risk of harm will be a result of their particular circumstances and vulnerabilities, as much as of the crime type experienced.

Victims of those crimes perceived to be least serious are not necessarily those in need of the least support; we know the cumulative effect of minor offences can be devastating.

Adopting a harm-based approach also means developing a more thorough understanding of victim vulnerabilities and consequently intervening to address the on-going risk of harm a victim faces.

Police and other statutory services can develop this understanding through effective training, and through listening to victims and their advocates. Insight into how vulnerability might affect victims' behaviour will allow the police to work in partnership with agencies to support victims, increase their safety and ensure more effective prosecution of perpetrators.

This proposed action is relevant to all victims of crime and ASB but particularly those who are more vulnerable and repeat victims.

- **The MOPC should pro-actively develop a victim consultation strategy that aims to learn about what victims' needs are and whether these are being met. It should go beyond process-orientated goals.**

This means planning and coordinating ways to open up consultation options to more groups of victims, including ASB victims, young people, older people, the sexually-exploited, those with insecure immigration status or without English as a first language, a wider range of hate crime victims, and victims with disabilities, including learning disabilities.

The MPS should consider extending the group of victims included in the User Satisfaction Survey.

This will also mean closer working with victims' services as a way of garnering victims' views. Many victims' services hold information about the needs of their service users, as well as information about the prevalence of crime that is never reported which can help the MOPC develop a more informed picture of how best to consult victims in London.

The MOPC should examine MPS' performance in this area more closely, looking at indicators beyond the User Satisfaction Survey such as complaints against police for incivility.

This proposed action is relevant to all victims of crime and ASB.

- **The MOPC should ensure that all new initiatives on communication with victims are designed to meet victims' evidenced needs, and that the MPS are publicly held to account on them.**

Such initiatives must go beyond the Victims' Code of Practice to include commitments not only to frequency but also quality of communication.

Examples would include tailoring letters and phone calls to those with communication difficulties, using plain English and avoiding jargon.

There should also be a high-profile awareness-raising campaign on the standards victims can expect from Total Victim Care when it is rolled out in 2012 including but not limited to their rights under the Victims' Code of Practice, and regular public reporting back on how the MPS are performing on these obligations.

This proposed action is relevant to all victims of crime and ASB, particularly those with learning disabilities, English as a second language and young people.

- **The MOPC should oversee the development of a London-wide analysis of victims' and witnesses' support needs and services' capacity to meet them. Steps should then be taken to address unmet need.**

This means that the MOPC should work with statutory and voluntary sector services to develop a detailed picture of victims' needs across London. Service providers hold information about levels of crime and barriers to reporting unless actively sought, might not come to light. They also have an in-depth understanding of victims' needs that should add to the MOPC's own consultation strategy.

This, combined with information gathered on active services and their coverage, by area, crime type, victim demographic and on-going capacity to meet identified needs, should provide an analysis of need across London. This is especially important in the current economic climate as it will enable those responsible for commissioning to efficiently resource support services where they are needed.

This analysis should be done at borough and city-wide level as although some crime types will not require specific services at a very local level, there will be cumulative need for a London-wide support service. One example may be for victims of trafficking. It should also be kept up to date so that emerging gaps are quickly identified and addressed.

This proposed action is relevant to all victims of crime and ASB.

- **The MOPC should lead on a strategy to ensure London-wide access to appropriate non-police reporting services. All services must ensure that appropriate support is offered to help victims reporting crime this way.**

This means ensuring that face-to-face and 24-hour services are available and properly funded as needed. It also means ensuring adequate provision for victims who would prefer to be supported by services specific to certain client groups, when reporting.

It also means ensuring that the MPS works with all services to develop best practice in both handling the information and supporting the victims.

This builds on the recommendation made in the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, by going beyond race-related hate crime and by emphasising the need for victims to be supported when reporting. At present there is inconsistent availability and practice in non-police reporting across London, meaning that some victims may not receive an appropriate service; some may not even be able to access non-police reporting in certain areas or outside office hours at all. The fact that neither the MPS or the Home Office apparently keep track of non-police reporting services in London may have contributed to this patchy provision.

The challenge of providing 24-hour reporting services may appear particularly daunting if interpreted as a need to fund face-to-face services around the clock, but telephone helplines can be an effective way to meet demand outside office hours as long as there are appropriate referrals to ensure that victims' support needs are adequately met. Existing face-to-face services might also be resourced to add out-of-hours services, perhaps using volunteer capacity.

This proposed action is particularly relevant to victims who face more barriers to reporting, often as a result of historical poor relationships between the police and certain groups of victims, including young people, gang-associated victims, victims with learning disabilities, LGBT victims, victims of rape, victims working in prostitution and those with insecure immigration status.

This list is not exhaustive, as any individual may find themselves vulnerable and in need of additional support to report a crime, making this recommendation relevant to all victims of crime and ASB.

- **The MOPC should ensure that services to support victims, including consortia and multi-organisation partnership working, are properly resourced. Resources should be allocated on the basis of a service or partnership's demonstrated ability to meet victims' and witnesses' identified needs.**

This means recognising there are multiple victim needs in any given area and no single agency or service delivery model can provide for all victims; this is a way for the MOPC to ensure that both universal and more specific support remains available as needed. Many such partnerships and consortia are already in existence and can evidence their ability to meet the diverse needs of local victims.

This also means giving organisations appropriate time to complete funding bids in order to ensure the best bids from a variety of individual organisations or group bids. Funding should be awarded to organisations or partnerships with an evidenced ability to meet victims' needs.

This proposed action goes hand in hand with previous recommendation to work in partnership with organisations to develop a thorough analysis of victim need in London. It is relevant to all victims of crime and ASB, including those who wish to receive support that is specific to certain characteristics, such as their ethnicity or sexual orientation.

- **The MOPC should ensure the MPS works with all boroughs to develop and publicise a comprehensive guide to reporting ASB.**

This must help victims to understand the differences between how criminal and non-criminal ASB is treated, and to ensure that they still receive appropriate support even when experiencing the latter, despite the fact that the Victims' Code of Practice does not apply.

It should cover who is responsible for dealing with both forms, how to report, what actions can be taken, how vulnerable and repeat victims will be identified, how victims will be kept updated under the new approach, how

the agencies involved are held accountable, and details of local services that can offer independent support, advocacy and advice.

It also means the MPS working with boroughs to ensure that all Londoners are aware of the guide, including socially-housed residents, private tenants and owner-occupiers, and that all are referred to appropriate, independent support services.

The proposed action is relevant to victims of ASB; since there is often crossover between ASB and crime such as low-level hate crime and domestic abuse, it applies to these victims too.

- **The MOPC should work with the MPS to coordinate a public awareness-raising campaign around the law on all forms of violence against women and girls, homophobic and transphobic abuse and hate crime.**

This means the MOPC should build upon previously successful MPS and voluntary sector awareness-raising campaigns to pro-actively target groups at higher risk of more hidden crimes.

The law in these areas is not always well understood by victims or perpetrators, for a variety of reasons, including cultural factors, language barriers, age and a lack of clarity between offences and non-offences. Some victims do not even know that the treatment they have experienced could constitute a criminal offence, and consequently do not report it to the police or other services either quickly or at all. Information should therefore be available in different languages so that those without English can be made aware of the law, accessing help from the police and wider support available.

Raising awareness should result in an increase in referrals to the police and other services allowing victims to access support earlier. It should of course be recognised that this will have a knock-on effect on the level of need for services.

This proposed action is particularly relevant to victims of all forms of violence against women and girls, male and transgender victims of all forms of domestic and sexual abuse, victims of forced marriage, victims who do not have English as a first language, foreign nationals and victims of all forms of hate crime, particularly the least-understood forms such as learning disability hate crime.

- **The MOPC should place early intervention with young people at risk of victimisation on an equal footing as work with those at risk of offending.**

This means the police and other agencies developing a better understanding of the vulnerabilities of young people and the nature of exploitation. It means a commitment to working together to identify risk factors and take action to intervene early to prevent victimisation.

It also means the MOPC making a commitment to support services that carry out preventative and educational work, especially in schools, to develop programmes that help young people, parents and teachers to recognise risk factors for victimisation.

Such work is particularly important in order to prevent young people becoming perpetrators of crime in an effort to protect themselves, or seek revenge in situations where they feel unprotected, or that they did not receive justice.

This proposed action is relevant to young victims and potential victims of crime, including young perpetrators of crime who are or have been victims too.