

To: Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel

Subject: Caring for Victims

Date: 21 July 2026

Introduction:

1. The care and support of victims of crime is a fundamental element of modern policing and the wider criminal justice system (CJS). In addition to investigating offences and bringing offenders to justice, the police have a responsibility to ensure that victims are supported, safeguarded, and treated with dignity and compassion.
2. This responsibility is underpinned by the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime](#) (Victims' Code), which sets out the minimum standards victims should receive, alongside Authorised Professional Practice from the College of Policing and relevant legislation such as the Modern Slavery Act 2015.
3. Victims are also at the heart of everything Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) do. PCCs ensure victims' voices are heard, advocate for their rights, and commission quality support services to help them cope and recover. The care and support of victims is therefore an integral part of the PCC's '[Cut Crime, Support Victims, Build Trust](#)' Police and Crime Plan .
4. In Kent, the approach to victim care is delivered through a whole-system model, combining:
 - the operational response of Kent Police;
 - multi-agency safeguarding arrangements; and
 - services commissioned by the PCC.
5. Together, these elements support victims from first report through to recovery and longer-term outcomes.

Background:

6. The Victims' Code sets out minimum standards for the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime. It outlines the services that must be provided to victims by the police and other organisations, ensuring they receive the appropriate support.
7. Under the Victims' Code, victims are entitled to:
 - be treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity, compassion and courtesy;
 - make informed choices that are fully respected;
 - have their privacy respected by service providers in accordance with obligations under the relevant privacy and data protection laws; and
 - have services provided to assist them and their family to understand and engage with the criminal justice process and that are offered in a professional manner, without discrimination of any kind.The Code also contains 12 specific Victims' Rights.
8. Locally, the Victims' Code is reinforced through the Kent Police Pledge, which includes the priority 'We will support and protect those that are victims and witnesses of crime, explaining our actions and keeping them informed of progress', and the values 'We will always act professionally and with integrity', and 'We will treat everyone with dignity and respect'.

The victim journey – police:

9. Victims have a right to be kept informed about the crime they are reporting and the progress of any subsequent case, including for example when there is an arrest, charge or the investigation closed. The police must: agree a preferred method and frequency of contact; provide updates at key stages; and explain decisions and outcomes clearly.

10. When a victim reports a crime to Kent Police, relevant information will be recorded and they will be provided with a crime reference number. They will also be asked if they wish to be referred to Victim Support; if they agree, their details will be provided to Victim Support so contact can be made. However, if a victim opts out, this does not prevent them from being referred, or seeking support from Victim Support at any point in the future. Where an officer attends, they will provide direct contact details and explain their role.
11. The information provided will then be reviewed and a decision made as to whether the report can be investigated further. If it is determined that it cannot, for example because there are no reasonable lines of enquiry, the victim will be contacted and the reasons explained. Where it is determined that it can be, an initial investigation will be conducted resulting in two possible outcomes - the investigation being closed, or the investigation being progressed - and the victim updated accordingly. If the latter, an investigating officer will be assigned and will act as the main contact during any subsequent investigation.
12. The investigating officer will agree communication preferences and the frequency of updates, ensuring that victims are kept informed of key developments such as arrests, police bail decisions and charging outcomes. A critical component of victim care is the Victim Needs Assessment which:
- Identifies vulnerability, intimidation and risk.
 - Determines whether victims are entitled to enhanced services.
 - Establishes the level of practical and emotional support required.

Under the Victims' Code, victims identified as vulnerable, intimidated, or affected by serious or repeat crime are entitled to additional protections and specialist support.

13. As Members will be aware, on 9 April 2026, HMICFRS' PEEL Inspection of Kent Police was published. The following is an extract from the report relating to the initial contact and service provided to victims, notably the Victims' Code and the mandatory use of the Victim Needs Assessment.

"The force provides a quality service to victims of crime.

"The force prioritises victim care. It reviews any outstanding victim updates, missing victim contracts or needs assessments during daily management meetings. Leaders are held accountable. The force has improved the use of Victim Needs Assessments through regular messages to the workforce that emphasise the importance of completing these assessments and listening to feedback received. We found that completion rates and the quality of Victim Needs Assessments had improved following the introduction of an app that allows officers to complete a simple online form. The system then automatically populates and links the relevant sections within the force's crime recording systems. There are mandatory sections to make sure the form is fully completed and in-built checks to improve the quality of the entries made. Officers and staff told us that the app had made the completion of victim needs assessments more efficient. In 48 of the 50 relevant cases we reviewed, we found that the force had recorded Victim Needs Assessments. This means that investigators had assessed whether those victims needed support and, if so, what type of support they needed and whether they were vulnerable or intimidated.

"The force identified and recorded a victim's entitlement to an enhanced service in 30 of the 31 relevant cases we reviewed. We also found that the force completed a victim contract in 53 of the 54 relevant cases we reviewed. The victim contract was adhered to in 52 of the 53 cases, and where appropriate, a Victim Personal Statement was considered in 8 of 8 relevant cases. Victims being assessed for needs and victims being updated are two of the rights in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime ('the Victims' Code'). It is essential for the force to comply with the Victims' Code to give victims a high-quality service."

14. Throughout the investigation phase, victims are supported to understand and engage with the criminal justice process.
15. A victim may be asked to make a witness statement. This is their written or video recorded account of what happened, what they saw, heard or know about the crime. The investigating officer will arrange a convenient time and place, explain the purpose of the statement, provide assistance where needed (including an interpreter), and ensure accuracy and understanding before it is finalised.

16. Victims will also be supported to provide a Victim Personal Statement (VPS), allowing them to describe in their own words, how the crime has affected them physically, emotionally, financially or in any other way. If someone is found guilty, the court will consider the VPS when deciding how to punish them ensuring the voice of the victim is heard.
17. For some specific offences, specialist Kent Police officers provide tailored support to victims. These include:
- Family Liaison Officer (FLO) - their role is to gather evidence and information from the family to contribute to the investigation and preserve its integrity. The FLO also provides support and information, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, securing confidence and trust of families of victims of crime (primarily homicide), road fatality, mass disaster or other critical incident, ensuring family members are given timely information in accordance with the needs of the investigation.
 - Sexual Offence Liaison Officer (SOLO) - plays a crucial role in the investigation of sexual offences, including acting as the first responder, gathering evidence, providing support and information to victims in a sensitive and compassionate manner, and accompanying victims for forensic examination at the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). They are trained to secure best evidence and work closely with partner agencies to ensure the right support is provided, including trauma-informed emotional support.
 - Prevent and Protect Team - provides training and guidance to help call takers and frontline officers respond to vulnerable victims of fraud, and ensures the service is regularly monitored. Fraud co-ordinators also give bespoke advice based on the victim's needs and any vulnerabilities.
18. In some situations, particularly domestic abuse, it is not uncommon for a victim to report a crime which they later decide they do not want to proceed with. In such circumstances, to safeguard the victim and ensure the offender is brought to justice, the police do not require the victim's consent to press charges, and equally, the CPS can, and frequently does proceed with a victimless prosecution. This reflects the principle that such offences are not solely private matters, but crimes with wider societal impact. Continuing prosecutions, even without the victim's cooperation, is seen as a way to:
- protect the complainant and others from further harm;
 - deter repeat offending;
 - send a message that domestic abuse will be taken seriously by the justice system.
19. The Victims' Right to Review Scheme further strengthens accountability by allowing victims to challenge a police decision not to charge a suspect (in appropriate circumstances).
20. To safeguard victims and prevent further harm, Kent Police uses a range of operational and legal tools. These include:
- arrest powers;
 - Domestic Violence Protection Notices and Orders;
 - Stalking Protection Orders; and
 - preventative disruption powers such as closure or dispersal orders.
21. Kent Police's Proactive Orders and Safeguarding Team focuses on the effective management of high-risk individuals and safeguarding those at risk of harm. They are responsible for managing and presenting applications to the courts for Domestic Violence Protection Notices/Orders, including action in relation to breaches, and also review the management of Stalking Protection Orders across Kent.
22. Kent Police is also focused on safeguarding victims of modern slavery and trafficking. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides the legislative framework to both prosecute offenders and protect victims. The police are responsible for identifying potential victims, safeguarding individuals at risk, referring victims into the National Referral Mechanism to access government funded support, and working with specialist partners to provide accommodation, healthcare and legal support. The Act also introduces powers such as prevention orders and risk orders to restrict offenders' behaviour and reduce the risk of further exploitation.
23. However, safeguarding activity is not limited to policing alone, and includes:
- referrals to social services and safeguarding hubs;
 - multi-agency collaboration to manage risk; and
 - early intervention to prevent escalation or repeat harm.

24. As cases progress through the CJS, additional support is provided by the Kent Police Victim and Witness Care Unit (VWCU).
25. The VWCU acts as a single point of contact, ensuring continuity and coordination across agencies. Victim and Witness Care Officers (VWCOs) are responsible for updating and managing the expectations of victims and witnesses as the case progresses, whilst ensuring compliance with the Victims' Code. They will inform victims of upcoming court hearing dates, identify any concerns and prompt where necessary Special Measures Applications (e.g. to give evidence from behind a screen or via live link, or use of communication aids). They will identify and assist with areas such as childcare needs, travel issues, Restraining Orders (where applicable), Victim Personal Statement referrals and other court arrangements, including access to therapy dogs. They will also make referrals to other support agencies as needed, such as Victim Support services, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVAs), and Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs). After a trial, they will also update the victim on the outcome of the case.
26. However, pressures within the CJS, including the level and complexity of work entering, physical court capacity and staffing issues, are leading to a backlog in cases and delays to trials, with some victims withdrawing support before even reaching court. As a result, the VWCU is experiencing an increase in demand – the average caseload per VWCO is now in excess of 150 compared to 120 two years ago - and they are also providing support over a longer period of time. In order to reduce the impact upon victims, Kent Police has taken a range of actions, including (but not limited to):
- Additional capacity: investment in five additional Victim and Witness Care Officers for the past two financial years, with funding confirmed for 2026/27.
 - Robotic Process Automation (in final design development) to reduce administrative burden and refocus time on victim support.
 - Empowering Leadership and Reducing Bureaucracy Programme to remove unnecessary working practices, where appropriate.
 - Participation in the Home Office Review of Witness Care Units to influence and inform national recommendations.
 - Virtual Remand Hearings: pilot delivery in two custody suites in Kent, reducing court time for these cases and freeing capacity for trials.
27. Through a victim-centred approach, Kent Police ensures that:
- reports of crime are taken seriously;
 - victims' experiences and voices are recognised and valued; and
 - engagement is empathetic and tailored to individual needs.
28. Victim care is also delivered through strong multi-agency collaboration, recognising that victims often require support beyond the remit of policing alone. This includes: health services addressing physical and mental wellbeing; local authorities providing housing and safeguarding support; and voluntary sector organisations delivering specialist interventions.

Role of the PCC:

29. The PCC is responsible for commissioning many of the services that support victims as outlined in the Victims' Code. The services are designed to be:
- needs-led and trauma-informed;
 - accessible whether or not a crime is reported to the police; and
 - responsive to the diversity of victim experiences.
30. In 2025/26, 85,122 victims were referred for support across Kent and Medway; 96% or 82,064 received some kind of support. This was across 26 different organisations funded by the PCC to deliver 43 different services to victims. Services included specialist support for children and young people, therapeutic services, trauma counselling, stalking advocacy, sexual abuse and domestic abuse specialist support.
31. The PCC receives a grant of £3.9m from the Ministry of Justice for the commissioning of victim services, with £1.8m dedicated to those that support domestic abuse and sexual violence victims. In order to balance service provision with financial sustainability, some services are contracted and others grant funded.

32. Examples of contracted services include:

- Victim Support - Kent Advocacy and Support Service: provides trauma informed, needs and risk led support to all victims of crime resident in Kent and Medway, including children and young people regardless of when the crime took place. Support is also available to close relatives (spouse, partner, relatives in direct line, the siblings, and the dependants of the victim) particularly where the victim is aged 18 years and under. This service also includes a dedicated Stalking Advocacy Service and separate Hate Crime Advocacy Service.

In January to March 2026, 14,173 victims were referred for support. As shown opposite, improvements were seen in all outcomes measured by the distance travelled survey for victims engaged in the service, with the exception of experience of CJS. The survey tracks their position at the start of support [inner ring] and end of support [outer ring] against the six outcomes.



80 clients were also referred for Independent Stalking Advocacy Caseworker (ISAC) support.

Victims of crime can access help and support from the [Kent Victim Support team](#) on 0808 168 9276.

[My Support Space](#) is an online resource designed by Victim Support to help manage the impact of a crime. It contains interactive guides, and is also available to those supporting someone after they've experienced crime or trauma, for example friends, family members, colleagues or neighbours.

- Kent Sexual Assault and Abuse Service (KSAAS): became the PCC's new provider for the ISVA Service and the separate Therapeutic Service for sexual violence victims from March 2026. Both services are available for adults and children in Kent and Medway, regardless of when the crime took place. Support is trauma informed and tailored to the individual's needs and can include advocacy, advice, information and therapeutic support.

In January to March 2026, under the previous provider, 162 adult ISVA clients reported being better able to cope with aspects of everyday life. Risk assessments were also conducted on 119 ISVA and Child ISVA clients.

For more information about the services provided, please visit [KSAAS support](#).

- Restorative Solutions – Restorative Justice and Mediation Service: provides a trauma informed, needs and risk led approach accessible to all victims of crime who are resident in Kent, regardless of when the crime(s) took place.

The service consists of the following elements:

- Direct, indirect, and informal RJ interventions.
- Adolescent to Parent Violence and Conflict (APVC) interventions.
- Mediation for repeat and persistent neighbour and community based ASB and crime issues.

As at 31 March 2026, the service had 69 active cases.

For more information about the service, please visit [our local RJ website](#) or call freephone 0800 783 1583.

33. Examples of grant funded services include:

- Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) – to provide advocacy and support for families bereaved by domestic abuse related homicide, suicide/unexplained death and fatal domestic abuse.
- Choices Support – to provide intensive support for victims of hate crime with learning disabilities, mental health needs, and autism.

- Dandelion Time – to provide a trauma-informed therapeutic service for children aged 6-13 impacted by physical, emotional or domestic abuse and their carers.
- Oasis Domestic Abuse Service – to provide a Young Person IDVA Service to deliver specialist, trauma-informed advocacy and psycho-educational mentoring for 18–25-year-olds.
- SignHealth – to provide support to deaf victim-survivors aged 16+ living across Kent and Medway who have experienced domestic abuse or sexual violence.
- Lookahead – to provide the MIDAAS (Men's IDVA and Domestic Abuse Advocacy Service), including provision of the 'Go Ahead' online recovery programme.
- Rubicon Cares – to provide free, confidential, 1:1 specialist trauma counselling to domestic abuse and sexual violence victims.
- Health Action (HACO) – to provide specialist domestic abuse support for African men aged 18 and over experiencing abuse from a current or former partner.
- Hourglass – to provide specialist IDVA and ISVA services for older people (aged 60+), and support individuals of all genders experiencing domestic abuse, coercive control, sexual violence, or related forms of harm.
- Salus – to deliver a structured, evidence based, trauma informed DA specific resilience programme to children and young people.
- The Daisy Chain Project – to provide free, specialist legal advice and representation to victims of domestic abuse.

34. A full list of contracted and grant funded victim services commissioned by the PCC can be found on the [OPCC website](#).

35. All services, regardless of whether they are contracts or grants are subject to oversight and governance by the PCC's Commissioning Team. This is to ensure they operate to an appropriate standard, the impact can be fully understood, and delivery remains aligned to victims' needs. However, caseloads continue to increase for victim services, particularly IDVAs and ISVAs due to the complexity of cases and delays within the CJS.

36. Compass House is a further PCC commitment to supporting victims of crime. It was established in 2015 and is based in Ashford. In total, 12 victim service organisations utilise the facilities available at Compass House including Victim Support and the Kent Police VWCU.

37. The name 'Compass House' was chosen by a victims panel and reflects what the centre does – points people in the direction of the help they need. The facility offers comfortable and welcoming therapy rooms for one-to-one support and counselling, and video link suites for vulnerable witnesses who cannot attend court in person. It also has a training suite/meeting room that offers in person and online facilities, and hot desk facilities that can be used by partnership agencies that support victims.

38. In February 2023, to raise awareness of victims' rights and collate relevant information in one place, the PCC also launched [Victim Voice](#). Accessible via the OPCC website and as a pamphlet, it provides information about the Victims' Code, the rights victims have in the CJS, how to contact the police, and how to access independent advice and support, with useful contact numbers.

Oversight:

39. The PCC receives regular updates on victim satisfaction from the Chief Constable via the quarterly Performance and Delivery Board. The most recent meeting was held on 4 June 2026, where the following was reported in the Police and Crime Plan paper:

- The victim satisfaction rate for rape has seen a marginal decrease. For the rolling year to March 2026, 95.2% of rape victims were satisfied with the overall service, which is down -1.0 from 96.2%. The most recent quarter has also seen a decrease with 95.7% of victims satisfied with the service received, down -2.9 from 98.6%.
- The victim satisfaction rate for domestic abuse has seen a small decrease for the rolling year March 2026, down -3.1 to 90.3% being satisfied with the service they received from Kent Police. The most recent quarter has also seen a decrease on the previous year, down -2.9 percentage points from 95.9% to 93.0%; although down on last year, the satisfaction rate has improved from the previous quarter (October – December) where it was 89.6%.

40. More broadly, as Chair of the Kent Criminal Justice Board (KCJB), the PCC has an important leadership role in driving improvement across the CJS.
41. Under the auspices of the KCJB, the aims of the Victim and Witness subgroup are to:
- Ensure compliance with the Victims' Code.
 - Monitor, respond to, and improve victim/witness satisfaction levels.
 - Encourage collaborative working to ensure victims' voices are heard and acted upon.
42. Activity is currently focused on the collation of victim satisfaction data from all agencies, and improving access to, and the information available to victims around entitlements and accessing support.
43. Earlier this year, the sub-group also contributed to a Ministry of Justice consultation on proposed updates to the Victims Code aimed at enhancing the rights and ensuring clearer, more consistent minimum service standards. Under the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, monitoring compliance with the Victims' Code is also moving from local, voluntary assessments to a formalised statutory process that will be the responsibility of PCCs. The sub-group is therefore working to ensure processes and mechanisms are in place to deliver on this requirement, which is expected to be introduced from April 2027.
44. Currently, there is also uncertainty around the Government's wider policing reform programme and the planned abolition of PCCs from 2028. While the Government has stated support for victims will continue under future governance arrangements, there is limited detail and so the implications are not yet clear. As a result, providers face uncertainty around commissioning structures, governance arrangements and longer-term funding models. It is important any disruption during the transition period is avoided, and the new arrangements preserve the independence of victim services, maintain local responsiveness, and ensure effective accountability. This is critical to maintaining public confidence.

Conclusion:

45. Caring for victims is fundamental to public confidence in policing and the wider CJS.
46. While Kent Police and the PCC have established a comprehensive framework of support, there are significant challenges, particularly the impact of criminal justice delays and the wider policing reform programme.
47. Partnership working, effective commissioning and robust oversight are essential to ensuring that victims receive the support, information and protection they are entitled to throughout their journey.
48. Despite the uncertainty of future arrangements, the PCC and his office are committed to ensuring the voice of victims continues to be heard, continuity of commissioned services is maintained, and victims receive timely and effective support.

Recommendation:

49. The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel is asked to note this report.