



Metropolitan Police's 2020 Consultation

A response by Victim Support

April 2015

Victim Support is the independent charity for victims and witnesses of crime in England and Wales. Last year we offered support to more than 1 million victims of crime and helped more than 198,000 people as they gave evidence at criminal trials through our Witness Service. Victim Support also provides the Homicide Service supporting people bereaved through murder and manslaughter and runs more than 100 local projects which tackle domestic violence, antisocial behaviour and hate crime, help children and young people and deliver restorative justice. The charity has 1,400 staff and 4,300 volunteers and has recently celebrated its 40th anniversary.

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About our response

Our consultation response focuses on those areas where we are most qualified to contribute: on winning and maintaining the trust of the public (particularly victims), the Met's performance on victim care, and opportunities for greater partnership working.

Questions

How can the Met ensure that it has a trusted relationship with all stakeholders and the general public?

The Met's most important stakeholders are those members of the public who have been victims of crime.

Maintaining the trust of the general public and maintaining the trust of individual victims of crime are related but distinct issues. The former is affected by general issues such as perceived force performance, media coverage, the fear of crime, trends in crime statistics, high-profile cases of malpractice, incompetence or corruption. The latter is simpler: are the police providing each victim with a good quality service and are they meeting their responsibilities as set out in the Victims' Code?

As of September 2014 the Met had the second worst victim satisfaction score of any force in England and Wales¹. Above all else the organisation's focus should be on addressing this poor performance.

Victim satisfaction with the police has four main drivers:

An accessible police presence: A visible and accessible neighbourhood police presence is key to successful crime prevention, maintaining public confidence in the service, and can be an important factor in whether or not victims report crimes to the police².

The recent shift to making neighbourhood police officers do work that has previously been carried out by response teams or investigators will reduce the capacity of these officers to identify and tackle the underlying causes of crime in their areas, and limit preventative partnership work with other agencies.

¹ See HMIC's *Crime and Policing Comparator* <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/crime-and-policing-comparator/>

² Victim Support *At Risk, Yet Dismissed* http://www.mind.org.uk/media/187663/At-risk-yet-dismissed-report_FINAL_EMBARGOED.pdf

A timely response: Home Office research³ has found that a timely response can be a key determinant of a victim's satisfaction with the police. Therefore it is worrying that there has been a decline in the number of forces who are meeting their own target times for responding to calls.

Good communication with victims: Under the Victims' Code, the police must set out to victims how often they will be updated on the status of the case following the initial contact. They also have specific duties to communicate major developments (within 5 days for all victims; within one day for those entitled to enhanced services).

From our research we know that victims are only kept updated about what is happening in their case to a satisfactory level in around half of all reported incidents⁴. In around a third of reported incidents the victim hears nothing more from the authorities after first contact with police. This equates to millions of victims left in the dark every year.

Respectful treatment: Again, the Victim's Code states that, "victims of crime should be treated in a respectful, sensitive and professional manner without discrimination of any kind"⁵. This should not be a controversial issue yet we know that this does not always happen.

Our research has demonstrated that this is a particular problem for victims with mental health problems. These victims are much less likely to be satisfied with the way they are treated by the police when compared to victims without mental health problems.⁶

In November 2014 HMIC concluded that the Met's response to victims "required improvement". The inspectorate stated:

*"...we found that there are areas for improvement in both officers understanding of their responsibilities to victim care and their commitment to genuinely placing the victim at the heart of the investigation."*⁷

³ Home Office *An Evaluation of the National Impact of the National Reassurance Policing Programme* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-evaluation-of-the-impact-of-the-national-reassurance-policing-programme>

⁴ Victim Support *Left in the Dark* <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/sites/default/files/Left%20in%20the%20dark.pdf>

⁵ P1, Ministry of Justice *Code of Practice for Victims of Crime* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254459/code-of-practice-victims-of-crime.pdf

⁶ Victim Support *At Risk, Yet Dismissed* http://www.mind.org.uk/media/187663/At-risk-yet-dismissed-report_FINAL_EMBARGOED.pdf

⁷ HMIC, Crime Inspection 2014: MPS, <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/metropolitan-crime-inspection-2014.pdf>

In addition to reviewing and revising its victim care strategies, the Met should seek to lead the way on this issue by being entirely open and transparent in its performance against the obligations established in the Victims' Code. The effectiveness and success of the Code as a tool to drive performance in the police – and across the criminal justice system – has been undermined by the lack of performance data from agencies (and the failure of successive governments to put in place a meaningful system of monitoring and enforcement). If the Met were to address this in a proactive fashion it would be a clear indication of a shift towards a more victim-focused culture in the force.

How can the Met better work with partners and stakeholders to ensure London's safety?

Victim Support works closely with the Met to ensure that all victims of crime in London get access to the support they need. However, there are new opportunities – particularly through digital innovations and the use of data – for that relationship to become more sophisticated and productive.

As an example, there are tens of thousands of victims of crime nationwide who come directly to Victim Support each year without going to the police. There needs to be a better understanding of why these people are making the decision to go down that route, and we must develop strategies that will help build confidence in those sections of the public and assure them that the criminal justice system is there to serve them too.

Similarly, digital innovations will allow us to better share the insights that we gain from support service provision.

This is particularly true of the issue of identifying and responding to vulnerability – an area where forces have been publicly criticised and which is the focus of HMIC's attention. From the data we receive through police referrals we know that there is a staggering difference in the rate at which victims are being identified as vulnerable. To give an indication, the most active force identifies vulnerability at over 100 times the rate of the least active force⁸. We also know from running the Witness Service that one in five vulnerable victims aren't identified as vulnerable until they reach the court building and meet Witness Service staff.

Victim Support can help in the efforts to develop a better response. We have more conversations with victims about their needs and issues than anyone else outside of the

⁸ The Met has the third highest rate of forces across England and Wales for flagging assessed victim vulnerability according to Victim Support data.

police. Last year we conducted more than 350,000 in-depth needs assessments. We subsequently gave emotional and practical support to more than 150,000. With all necessary safeguards in place, we believe there are ways in which our data can help forces improve their victim care.