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**Item 7**

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| **Report to:** | Police and Crime Panel |
| **Date:** | 12th September 2025 |
| **Subject:** | Police and Crime Plan Priority Three: Supporting Victims and Witnesses |
| **Report of:** | Alison Lowe, Deputy Mayor of West Yorkshire |
| **Author:** | Policy Team Policing and Crime – West Yorkshire Combined Authority |

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   1. This paper will explore the priority of Supporting victims and witnesses featured in the Mayor’s Police and Crime Plan. We will first look at why this is a priority as evidenced by the results of the Police and Crime Plan consultation and Needs Assessment, before outlining the work we will undertake to achieve this priority during the Mayor’s second term. The paper then details the activities of several workstreams since the Mayor was re-elected that fall under this priority. This includes several strategic actions such as implementation of the Victim’s Code, innovations alongside partners such as restorative justice and out of court resolutions, improving the services offered to victims of crime, and ensuring justice is accessible for all through interventions such as special measures.
   2. **Why is this a priority?**

* 95.7% of respondents described this priority as ‘important’ to them and 92% of partners agreed.
* Support for victims of all crimes received the most responses, followed by child criminal exploitation and driving improvements in the criminal justice system. This priority had the most balanced results with other areas of focus also receiving support.
* Child Criminal Exploitation featured in the Needs Assessment and as a performance measure in the Mayor’s first Police and Crime Plan. The understanding of this issue by all agencies, including the police, led to a rise in reporting that is now stable.
* The role of the Local Criminal Justice Board was highlighted as the way in which the Mayor can work with criminal justice partners to drive improvements in the criminal justice system that benefit victims of crime.
* The West Yorkshire Combatting Drugs Partnership Board was highlighted, emphasising the need for a coordinated response from key partners.
  1. **What we will do:**
* Work with WYP and criminal justice partners to ensure that all victims benefit from their rights under the Victim’s Code.
* Use our convening powers to bring together Combatting Drugs Partnerships across West Yorkshire to ensure consistency of response.
* Lead the Local Criminal Justice Board to make necessary improvements to the services offered to victims of crime, within delivery parameters set out by central government.
* Make sure that justice is accessible for the most vulnerable victims and the most marginalised communities in West Yorkshire.

1. **Strategic Action 1:** Work with WYP and criminal justice partners to ensure that all victims benefit from their rights under the Victim’s Code.
   1. This section outlines the work undertaken in collaboration with WYP to ensure that the rights set out in the Victims’ Code are upheld. It also highlights the implementation of interventions, such as out-of-court resolutions and restorative justice, which support a victim-focused approach.
   2. **Implementation of the Victims Code**

The Victims Code of Practice measures was made statutory following the Victims and Prisoners Act becoming law in May 2024.  This section of the act is likely to be enacted in Summer 2027. Significant work to establish a compliance process for use nationally by Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners will take place in the intervening period.

The Victims’ Code was last updated in 2024. Victims of crime are entitled to the rights in the code and WYP monitor compliance with the code. Compliance data is brought to the LCJB Victims and Witnesses' group and is also dealt with through the Mayor’s Governance and performance meetings with the Chief Constable.

The victims code applies to all CJ agencies. The methodology used to measure compliance by each agency against the relevant code(s) is complex. It is suggested that compliance will be measured against Metrics, a self-assessment narrative and a national Victims survey.

The Mayor will have a statutory responsibility to measure compliance and send a report regularly to the Home Office and the Victims Commissioner (amongst others). Timescales estimated at mid-2027 are slipping.

* 1. **WYP Compliance with the Victim’s Code**

Following the HMICFRS PEEL inspection published in 2024, it was identified the forces were required to take remedial action to address several areas for improvement (AFI’s). One of the AFI’s was that West Yorkshire Police needs to make sure that the requirements of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime are complied with.

When the force was previously inspected there were 6,900 cases where the victim had not received an update for more than 42 days.  The force made the decision to move back to the previous regularity of contact at 28 days, significant improvements have been made and the figure reduced to 2088 victims of crime who have not received an update within28 days. 

Current compliance around victim needs assessment for crimes that are 7 days old is at 96.8%, for the 3.2% outstanding, a digital worker will then send a reminder to the supervisor and officer. The Force is committed to continue making improvements in this area with performance being scrutinised via the reassurance board, weekly reporting to relevant senior leaders, via crime accountability meetings and Operation Review audits VCOPs compliance.

Presently, processes are in place in West Yorkshire Police to remind officers to complete their updates in line with the Victim’s Code. Data is captured on a weekly basis and shared with force leads. The data shows a break-down across Districts, teams and individual officers, allowing them to measure compliance. This data allows supervisors to assess whether there are certain departments, officers or staff within the organisation who need support and/or development in this area, which will help improve the overall compliance rates in the future.

Regarding the AFIs, the Deputy Mayor maintains regular contact with the Chief Constable to remain informed about the Force’s response to the identified areas and to gain assurance that all possible measures are being taken to address them.

* 1. **Collaboration between criminal justice partners**
  2. **Out of Court Resolutions**

In West Yorkshire Police, Out of Court Resolutions offer a practical and efficient method for addressing investigations, allowing for timely justice for victims.  These resolutions are particularly appliable for first time or infrequent offenders who show potential to change. Rather than proceeding to court, or where no further action is taken due to the public interest test is not being met, offenders can opt to fulfil specific conditions that are reparative, rehabilitative, diversionary or punitive, which are managed locally.  This strategy not only serves the interests of both victims and suspects but also benefits the broader community by aiming to lower crime rates and foster rehabilitation. Between April 2024 and May 2025, the following numbers of Out of Court Resolutions were recorded:

* Youth Conditional Caution: **179**
* Adult Conditional Caution: **1801**
* Youth Conditional Caution: **6163**
* Outcome 22 - No further action Diversionary and educational intervention: **2538**

Out of Court Resolution perpetrator courses funded by the Combined Authority include:

* Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Course - CARA (Cautioning and relationship abuse)
* Hate Crime Awareness Course
* Violent Crime Awareness Course
* Restorative Justice – Letter of Apology
* Women’s Pathway

The Criminal Justice Team at WYP are actively seeking to collaborate with service providers to provide a range of online therapy programmes developed by specialists and clinical psychologists. These programmes will complement existing in person services and provide additional options for officers and victims.  Furthermore, a new ‘suspect needs assessment’ is being developed to ensure that offenders receive the most suitable interventions tailored to their specific offending behaviours.

The Criminal Justice Team facilitates a quarterly Out of Court Resolution scrutiny panel with lay members, such as Magistrates, representatives from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and Youth Justice Services (YJS). The panel reviews up to thirty-two cases, split between adult and youth cases, focusing on Conditional Cautions, Community Resolutions and Outcome 22. Each case is examined to ensure compliance with the OCR legislation, adherence to force policy and overall appropriateness of conditions.  Insights from the panel are used to guide the Criminal Justice Team in identifying areas of concern, seeking to improve outcomes for victims.

* 1. **Restorative Justice**

Restorative Justice is a victim-focused approach that empowers victims of crime by giving them the opportunity to communicate with the person responsible provided by the Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin.

It is a valuable opportunity available to victims in appropriate cases, providing them with a platform to express their feelings, pose questions to offenders and contribute to the resolution of the harm they have experienced. Research indicates that the use of restorative justice lowers reoffending rates and mitigates harm within our communities.

The Criminal Justice team at West Yorkshire Police has implemented an ‘opt-out’ model for victims seeking restorative justice, featuring an automated referral process along with a new digital worker that facilitates the transfer of data directly from Niche to specialist Restorative Justice practitioners to deliver this service.

This system guarantees that every crime victim has automatic access to restorative justice services at three distinct points, while also allowing them the option to ‘opt-out’ whenever they chose.  It is acknowledged that some victims may not be prepared to engage in Restorative Justice immediately after reporting a crime.  Therefore, in accordance with the victims and witness strategy, a mechanism to ‘opt back in’ as the investigation evolves has been integrated into the following stages: the initial needs assessment of the victim, documented at the time the crime is reported; the stage of the suspect interview; the finalisation stage of the crime.

At the second and third stages, WYP also document the suspect’s willingness to participate in the process.  This aspect had not been previously recorded, which posed practical challenges as restorative justice meets its full potential when both parties are involved to meet the victims’ needs effectively. During the period of 2024-25, there were 7699 referrals made, with 1670 victims participating and 218offenders involved.

The Criminal Justice team is collaborating with Restorative Solutions to introduce a ‘letter of apology’ as a restorative condition which may be applied to Out of Court Resolutions such as Community Resolutions and Conditional Cautions, enhancing the restorative practices that have been in place for many years.  Additionally Restorative Solutions offer Violent Crime Awareness Courses, and WYP are one of the few forces granted permission to conduct Hate Crime Awareness Courses as part of a national pilot.

1. **Strategic Action 2:** Use our convening powers to bring together Combatting Drugs Partnerships across West Yorkshire to ensure consistency of response.
   1. This strategic action explores the work of the West Yorkshire Combating Drugs Partnership Strategic Board.

Drug and alcohol users can be some of the most vulnerable members of our communities. Important work to encourage more people to enter treatment for their substance use is being carried out across West Yorkshire districts by local Combating Drugs Partnerships. At West Yorkshire level, the Deputy Mayor chairs a Combating Drugs Strategic Board, comprised of district public health representatives and police representatives.

During the year, this group has taken a particular focus on establishing a Synthetic Opioid Working Group to facilitate multi-agency collaboration in developing our local response to the emerging threat of potent nitazenes in the local drug market.

The Board has also acted to build links to the Local Resilience Forum (as part of the response to nitazenes) and supported WYP in initial discussions on an illicit drug checking initiative in partnership with the University of Leeds. In the year ahead, the board hopes to develop new pathways into drug treatment for people coming into contact with the criminal justice system and receiving cautions for low-level or first-time offences.

The Board has also collaborated with West Yorkshire Police to pilot the deployment of Naloxone among officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) as an emergency overdose reversal treatment. Naloxone is deployed as a nasal spray and is carried by volunteer officers in a pocket-sized kit. The pilot programme project is currently being evaluated, and it is hoped that the coming year will see Naloxone coverage extended to all districts of West Yorkshire.

1. **Strategic Action 3:** Lead the Local Criminal Justice Board to make necessary improvements to the services offered to victims of crime, within delivery parameters set out by central government.
   1. The West Yorkshire Criminal Justice Board comprises all criminal justice agencies in the region, alongside a range of partner organisations that support the process and/or victims throughout their journey. Together with West Yorkshire Police, all members are committed to delivering an effective and efficient criminal justice system across West Yorkshire.

The last reporting year marked a period of steady performance and consolidation across the West Yorkshire criminal justice system, with the majority of indicators showing minimal change (typically less than ±1%). While performance across many areas remained stable, there were a number of key areas of notable strength including triage acceptance rates and a continued reduction in repeat victims of domestic abuse. The below highlights key areas of performance.

* 1. **Repeat victims of domestic abuse**

The proportion of repeat victims fell for the second consecutive year to 41.4%, down from 48.8% in 2022/23 and 44.1% in 2023/24. This marks the lowest rate since 2016/17, demonstrating sustained progress in victim safeguarding and engagement.

* 1. **Triage Acceptance at First Hearing**

West Yorkshire consistently ranked second out of 43 forces nationally, with 89.2% of police files accepted by the CPS at the first presentation. Only 0.8% of volume cases required a third or subsequent submission, significantly outperforming the national figures of 68.3% and 11.6%, respectively.

The triage acceptance process demonstrates how West Yorkshire Police, in collaboration with the CPS, have implemented systems designed to expedite investigations, resulting in earlier and increased positive charging decisions. The victim, rightly, remains at the heart of the criminal justice process and it is the joint working with partners at all levels that have given positive results in areas such as domestic abuse and rape.

While volumes of outstanding cases and some key outcomes such as conviction rates present ongoing challenges, West Yorkshire has demonstrated resilience and strong comparative performance. Particularly in early file quality, repeat victim reduction, and court backlog management, the region continues to perform above national standards. Targeted improvements in trial effectiveness, Crown Court convictions, and victim engagement will support further progress into 2025/26.

* 1. **Charging decisions in Rape cases**

The Data Delivery Dashboard by the MoJ notes that there is a significant improvement in charging decisions from the CPS in relation to Rape cases, up 8% to 72%. Increased use of early investigative advice (EIA) is helping the creation of improved files at an earlier stage leading to reduced timescales.

* 1. **Victim attrition in Rape cases**

In Rape cases, West Yorkshire has one of the lowest percentages where the investigations are closed because the victim does not support further police action, 26% lower than the national return. The number of prosecutions stopped post charge because the victim does not provide evidence or has withdrawn support has more than halved from 39% to 18%.

* 1. **Court delays and outstanding cases**

Court delays are a national issue and have been for a number of years. Whilst increases in court outstanding cases are increasing in the West Yorkshire Crown Court, albeit smaller year on year, increases are significantly lower than in some other police force areas.

* 1. **Magistrates Court**

In the Magistrates Court there is an emphasis on first hearings to get the case to court as soon as is possible. This has led to slightly longer trial dates. However, recent changes to list domestic abuse cases to a strict timescale ensure they are heard promptly and therefore reach an earlier conclusion.

1. **Strategic Action 4:** Make sure that justice is accessible for the most vulnerable victims and the most marginalised communities in West Yorkshire.
   1. This final section looks at the work undertaken to ensure justice is accessible for all, such as the implementation of special measures for vulnerable victims and witnesses, continued work on the Police Race Action Plan across the region, and the convening of survivor panels.
   2. **Special Measures**

A targeted focus on enhancing the availability and awareness of Special Measures has led to significant improvements in practice over the past year. WYP employs a dedicated Special Measures Advisor who provides specialist training to officers and staff, supports casework in collaboration with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), and drives process improvements. This work is recognised nationally as the best practice and plays a vital role in ensuring that vulnerable victims, witnesses, and children are supported to give evidence effectively and access the justice they deserve.

A key component of the special measures that the CPS can make an application to the court for victims or witnesses, is for the permission to give their evidence through a live video link into the court. In West Yorkshire there are three live link suites, in Wakefield, Leeds and Calderdale. The use of the court live links is monitored through the LCJB Victims Group.

* 1. **Police Race Action Plan (PRAP)**

One of the key workstreams of PRAP is safety and victimisation. The analytical capability of the VRP will provide a holistic, multi-agency approach to many areas of this workstream such as hate crime reporting, mental health concerns and crimes that all adversely impact Black communities. As a result of the work already completed to date throughout the workstreams we have seen victim satisfaction within Black and Black heritage communities increase by 7.5% in the last 12 months to 69.7%.

* 1. **Survivor Panels**

The Deputy Mayor has developed survivor Panels for both women and men, The panels access limited funding through proceeds raised through the Police Property Act Fund, to provide an opportunity for victims and survivors harmed by the most serious crimes to speak to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor directly and about their experiences of the Criminal Justice System and thoughts on Criminal Justice policy, informed by their lived experience. The panels will meet regularly across the year, including the opportunity to meet the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in person.

* 1. **Victims’ Voices: Child Sexual Exploitation and the Casey Review**

Non-recent and group-led offences against children have particularly been in the national spotlight during the first months of 2025, with the Home Secretary committing to a further report on this issue (following Prof. Alexis Jay’s ‘Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse’, 2022). Baroness Casey’s subsequent report contained important recommendations which call for a renewed commitment in the national effort to seek justice for the victims of child sexual exploitation.

Central to this work will be a proposed ‘national inquiry’ into non-recent CSEA (NRCSEA). In September, the Mayor will consult with local survivors of abuse, representatives of the VSCE services which support victims, and our local MPs, on what we hope the inquiry will deliver on behalf of CSEA victims here in West Yorkshire.

In February, the Mayor lent her support to WYP’s application for Home Office ‘Special Grant’ funding for extra resources to conduct NRCSEA operations during 25/26. This highly complex work has delivered important results for victims; WYP’s specialist teams have helped to convict over two hundred suspects between 2015 and 2024, achieving custodial sentences totaling over 2,200 years (up to January 2025).

Following an inspection of West Yorkshire Police’s response to NRCSEA by representatives from His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, West Yorkshire Police received an increase in Home Office funding, and were awarded a further £2.4 million to support its successful operations against the perpetrators of non-recent CSEA.

An example of the Mayor’s scrutiny of WYP’s work on child safeguarding can be found at our recent [Community Outcomes Meeting](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbAPOFe1IW8) which took place during January 2025.

1. **Recommendation**
   1. That this report is noted by the Police and Crime Panel

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