

The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
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Your ref: n/a
Our ref: SH
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Dear Home Secretary

I write in response to the HMICFRS inspection report: **Meeting the needs of victims in the criminal justice system: An inspection of how well the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Probation Service support victims of crime.**

I acknowledge the six recommendations made in the report and understand that one recommendation (recommendation 3, shown in the appendix to this letter) are directly applicable to Essex Police, and all forces.

The Chief Constable has provided a detailed response to me regarding recommendation 3, and assured me that it has been added to the force's register of HMICFRS recommendations. I am pleased to see that Essex Police is working towards compliance with recommendation 3, and expects to meet the deadline.

Recommendation 3 is a joint recommendation for Chief Constables, alongside both College of Policing (CoP) and the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC), and is reliant on partner activity. Essex Police is committed to adhering to the agreed minimum standards which are expected to result from the work undertaken by CoP.

Essex Police have recently adopted the Victim Closure Discussion (VCD) which has a focus on qualitative as well as quantitative data. It seeks to capture victim feedback, satisfaction levels and reasons for disengagement. It also reminds officers to discuss and review Victim Code of Practice (VCOP) rights, safeguarding and referrals into support services. Although not an initial victim needs assessment the VCD is still a needs assessment and provides qualitative data not previously available, regarding the victim's experience of the criminal justice process.

In December 2023 Essex Police launched a Victim Engagement Portal (VEP) which has been designed to provide victims with early details and signposting. The VEP makes it easy for officers and staff to send victims information via e-mail, including point of contact details, information on VCOP rights, as well as links to victim support services and provides bespoke links for offences such as domestic abuse, stalking and harassment, hate crime, rape and serious sexual offences and fraud and cybercrime. Victims have voiced through our feedback panels and surveys that not knowing who they can speak to about their case and not knowing their rights or level of support

available is a cause of frustration. The VEP aims to address these needs whilst providing frontline staff with a simple easy to use process.

The report says that most commissioners do not have a good understanding of how well they are meeting the needs of all victims and it is suggested that there is '*a patchwork of services, initiatives, funding and approaches to supporting victims of crime across England and Wales*'. We acknowledge that the inspectorate has not inspected commissioners and their provision of victim services and suggest these findings are without foundation. It is disappointing that these comments fail to recognise the benefits of an ability for services to be provided according to local need and to ensure that resources are directed to best address the needs of victims, which can vary according to crime type and location. One of the advantages of localism is that different services can be provided in different areas of the country. More information relating to the work we do to understand the needs of victims and commission interventions and services to meet those needs is set out in my Annual Police and Crime Report which can be found [here](#) and at <https://www.essex.pfcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/PFCC-Accounts-22-23-compressed.pdf?x52589>

Both the Chief Constable and myself recognise the impacts of delayed justice, particularly on victims, which includes additional stress and increased likelihood of withdrawing from the criminal justice process. This has to change. The main internal focus for the force is on the Witness Care Unit working to ensure witnesses remain engaged in the process despite these delays. I have also accessed an additional £1m of Ministry of Justice funding this year to supplement our local IDVA and ISVA capacity, recognising the challenge of keeping victims of domestic and sexual abuse engaged in the criminal justice process in the face of often unacceptably long waits for justice. Positively, at present we are not seeing a rise in victim and witness attrition in Essex.

The force has put forward representation that the current criminal justice delays are not a police, CJ or CPS process issue or lack of communication between those criminal justice agencies, but rather a lack of Judges, Barristers and Courts to deal with the sheer volume of cases, resulting in last minute and / or lengthy delays in trials with a knock on effect for victims and witnesses. An Early Advice Memorandum Of Understanding has been agreed between the force and the CPS which reinforces the commitment to communicate with lawyers early on in an investigation, to improve timeliness and quality of cases progressing through the CJ system. Essex Police has undertaken considerable work to improve the quality of case files. The force will continue to look at new ways of working to improve the service provided for victims and their experience of the CJ system. There are considerable benefits attached to the use of out of court resolutions, and we would be supportive of making greater use of these, which would relieve pressure on the Criminal Justice system.

Improving support for victims of crime is one of the priorities in my Police and Crime Plan. Whilst some of the key measures in that priority have shown signs of improvement (such as a reduction in the number of repeat victims) and Essex Police have implemented a number of practices to bring about positive change, we know that victim confidence is falling, court delays remain and more work needs to be done in this area.

I will continue to maintain close scrutiny of the work of Essex Police in this regard, and to hold the Chief Constable to account.

Yours sincerely



Roger Hirst
Police Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

c.c. Ben-Julian Harrington, Chief Constable, Essex Police

Appendix A – Recommendations

Recommendation 1

By 31 December 2024, the Ministry of Justice, Home Office and Attorney General's Office should work together to use this inspection as the basis for a broader and fundamental review of the experience of victims of crime, involving other Government departments and agencies as necessary.

Such a review could draw on evidence from this inspection, and look more broadly at how best to include information on all services available to victims of crime, seeking to improve the availability of access for victims and the consistency of the service they receive. It could also seek to promote better sharing of information about positive practice and initiatives aimed at improving the victim experience.

Recommendation 2

By 30 September 2024, the Ministry of Justice should develop Victims' Code performance metrics and reporting systems. These should include how criminal justice bodies engage with victims and the quality of the engagement. Performance metrics should also include measures of how well criminal justice bodies obtain feedback from victims and how well they use this to assess the quality of engagement and improve the quality of services.

By 31 March 2025, the Ministry of Justice should implement these performance metrics and reporting systems across criminal justice bodies.

Recommendation 3

By 31 December 2024, the College of Policing should work with the National Police Chiefs' Council and chief constables to develop minimum standards for the completion of victim needs assessments. These should include standards for timeliness of completion and clarity on the information to be recorded.

Recommendation 4

By 30 September 2024, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the Crown Prosecution Service should agree minimum standards and consistent processes for how witness care units or functions communicate with the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and victims to help effective, agile and timely information sharing so that victims' needs are met.

Recommendation 5

By 31 December 2024, the National Police Chiefs' Council should work with His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service to make sure all eligible victims are referred to the Victim Contact Scheme.

Recommendation 6

By 30 September 2024, the Probation Service should provide training on the work of the Victim Contact Scheme to all probation practitioners and those in training.

The learning should include:

- what is involved in the Victim Contact Scheme; and
- how probation practitioners work with victim liaison officers to keep victims safe.