



## **Norfolk's Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCO) response to inspections published by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS)**

Section 55 of the Police Act 1996 (as amended by section 37 of the Policing and Crime Act 2017) requires local policing bodies to respond and publish comments on all inspection reports pertaining to your force within 56 days of report publication.

### **Inspection Title:**

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

### **Published on:**

19 December 2023

### **Publication Types:**

Criminal Justice Joint Inspections and Joint Inspection

### **Police Forces:**

All local forces in England and Wales

### **Link to Report:**

[An inspection of how well the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Probation Service support victims of crime \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

### **Section 55 Response Deadline:**

13 February 2024

### **Key Findings**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) jointly inspected whether the Police, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the Probation Service understand what victims need, whether they meet those needs and whether they provide a good quality service.

The inspectorates found that instead of trying to meet the needs of victims, the three bodies focused on whether they complied with the twelve rights set out in the Victims' Code. This focus on complying with the letter of the Victims' Code, rather than the victim's individual needs, has resulted in an emphasis on process rather than quality. The

inspectorates also found that compliance with the twelve rights also varied between the three bodies inspected.

The inspectorates found that a lack of good-quality information and poor communication between criminal justice bodies added to the problems of an already overstretched criminal justice system. They suggested that criminal justice bodies need to work more collaboratively and focus on the quality of their contact with victims, and not just on the process.

During the inspection it was found that none of the three organisations had an effective way of measuring how well they meet the needs of victims. Furthermore, it was found that in some cases each of the criminal justice bodies inspected were technically complying with the Victims' Code, but they were not necessarily fulfilling the spirit of the Victims' Code by providing empathetic support or considering individual victim's experiences. The inspectorates found that local criminal justice boards did not always have access to clear and reliable data from criminal justice bodies. This meant that the boards could not accurately assess the quality of services to victims and take action to improve it.

The inspection found that national oversight of how well criminal justice bodies meet the needs of victims in England was not working as it should. For many reasons, there is a lack of accurate data about the service being provided. Some aspects of the services the police, the CPS and the Probation Service provide to victims are process-driven. This process does not always result in the best experience for victims.

The inspectorates spoke with many officers and staff who told them high workloads and being taken away from their main duties were having a negative effect on the ability of police forces to investigate the types of crimes looked at in this inspection. This was compounded by high numbers of inexperienced police officers and a lack of supervision.

The inspection found that the police did not always complete victim needs assessments for victims. When they were completed, they often lacked important details. The inspectorates consider the victim needs assessment to be the bedrock of the police response to victims.

It found that the quality of case files the police send to the CPS needed to improve. The inspectorates also found that in many cases, when the file didn't meet the required standard, the prosecutor didn't provide feedback to the police. This meant that opportunities to improve case file quality were lost.

For those victims who were allocated a victim liaison officer under the Victim Contact Scheme, the inspection found that the quality of the work was good. Overall, victims were kept informed at all stages and were helped to make contributions to licence conditions. Victim liaison officers worked well with other criminal justice bodies and acted as a consistent point of contact for the victim. However, the inspectorates found a lack of knowledge in the Probation Service about the Victim Contact Scheme. The inspectorates suggested that more training for probation practitioners about the Victim Contact Scheme is needed.

## **Recommendations**

Six recommendations were made within the report, one of which was directed at Chief Constables. This is detailed below using the same numbering from the report itself:

### **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.

## **Areas for Improvement**

No areas for improvement were put forward.

## Chief Constable response to report and any Recommendations/Areas for Improvement

This report entitled "Meeting the needs of Victims in the Criminal Justice System" assesses how well criminal justice agencies, including the police, meets the needs of victims from when an offence has been reported, to after an offender has been convicted.

This was a joint inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation. The inspection assessed whether the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Probation Service understand what victims need, whether they meet those needs, and whether they provide a good quality service. They found that for many victims this wasn't the case.

The inspection resulted in six recommendations, one of which was directed at all Chief Constables across England and Wales:

### 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.**

Norfolk Constabulary accepts this recommendation.

When a crime is recorded in Norfolk the investigating officer is required to undertake a needs assessment with the victim. The question set which is completed allows the officer to identify any support need that a victim may have and whether they are eligible for enhanced rights under the Victim's Code of Practice (VCOP). The Constabulary monitors the completion of the victim needs assessment question set as part of a dashboard suite of metrics which has been developed to monitor compliance with the Victim's Code. Completion of the victim needs assessment has been a priority area of focus for the Constabulary. The latest data from the dashboard shows that assessments were completed in 84.22% of crime investigations that were recorded in the last 12 months.

The above recommendation is for the College of Policing to work with the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) and Chief Constables to develop a set of minimum standards for victim needs assessments. As this national work develops the Norfolk and Suffolk Constabulary Victims Lead, and the Head of Joint Justice Services, will remain engaged with the NPCC Strategic Lead through the national Criminal Justice network to offer professional opinion in any consultation which is undertaken, and to ensure that we are prepared to implement the standards once they have been agreed.

Compliance for all areas of the Victim's Code, including victim's needs assessment completion, is monitored through our internal Supporting Victims Group. This group is chaired by the Head of Joint Justice Services and reports to the Norfolk Force Performance meeting, chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable. Once the national set of minimum

standards has been developed and adopted, performance against the standards, including the timeliness of completion and the clarity of the information that is recorded, will be monitored through these force meetings.

## **PCC response to report and any Recommendations/Areas for Improvement**

I welcome this report: "An inspection of how well the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Probation Service support victims of crime". I comment both as PCC Norfolk and as the chairman of the Norfolk and Suffolk Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB).

I would suggest that there seems to be a significant omission in the report in that His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) does not seem to have been included in the inspection. The criminal justice system (CJS) should operate as a single system but, as the report correctly identifies, the CJS tends to function as a series of separate organisations. Many of the issues in the CJS experienced by victims (and witnesses) are related to court backlogs, consequent delays in listing cases, and subsequent trial adjournments. HMCTS' problems are largely resource driven, for example, shortages of judges and shortages of barristers, but they create pressures elsewhere in the CJS. Arguably, the focus on the letter of the twelve rights set out in the Victims Code of Practice rather than a focus on the needs of individual victims reflects the additional burden imposed on victim support units by HMCTS' difficulties and the former's inability to subsidise HMCTS because of their own resource constraints. The effect is thus the often sub-optimal service provided to victims as is correctly identified by the report.

I note that Norfolk Constabulary was not one of the forces inspected during the fieldwork conducted by the inspectors. I also note my Chief Constable's positive response to the one (of six) recommendation directed at chief constables.

### **For Office Use Only:**

- Response submitted to the HMICFRS Monitoring Portal.
- Response forwarded to the Chief Constable.
- Response forwarded to the Norfolk Police and Crime Panel.
- Response published on the OPCCN website.