

London Victims' Board July 2022

Record of Meeting

Attendees

London Victims Commissioner - Independent Chair
Crown Prosecution Service - CPS
Judiciary - J
Victim Support - VS
Metropolitan Police Service - MPS
Her Majesty's Court and Tribunals Service - HMCTS
National Probation Service - NPS
Ministry of Justice - MoJ
National Health Service (England) - NHS
Bar Council - BC
London Councils - LC
Magistrates Association - MA
Victims Reference Group - VRG
Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime - MOPAC
Commission for Victims of Crime – Northern Ireland - CVC - NI
Department of Justice – Northern Ireland - J-NI

Agenda Items

1. Welcome, introductions, and apologies

The Chair welcomed all board members and welcomed the new Head of Policy for Victims, CPS. Apologies noted from London Heads of Community Safety (LHOCs), Citizens Advice and Parole Board.

2. Review of minutes and update on actions arising from the last meeting

Minutes from the last meeting held in May 2022 were accepted and the actions updated.

3. Partner Update: Strike Action and Meeting with Minister

The Bar Council provided an update on the current Criminal Bar Association (CBA) 5-day strike action, court backlogs, including a meeting with the new Minister, Sarah Dines. The CBA strike action is now in its 4th week. Initially 1-3% of the number of hearings were unable to progress. HMCTS informed both the CBA and Bar Council that the impact had increased significantly and is now in the lower 20% range. The CBA strike is moving into strike action that is now a week on – week off. There has been mitigation work carried out by the Judiciary and the HMCTS, looking at listings, however this intervention is limited in what it can do to mitigate the impact.

Meeting with Minister Sarah Dines MP

The Minister heard about the impact of underfunding on the Criminal Bar over many years and pushing for a 25% uplift to Advocates' Graduated Fee Scheme (AGFS), Crown Court Fees rather than the proposed 15%. The Minister stated that there is unlikely to be any resolutions before the 6th September, however she and her MoJ colleagues would stay in touch, continue to listen to the concerns and monitor the impact of the strike action.

4. VCOP Dashboard Presentation

The MPS have just launched a new internal dashboard that, which for the first time will provide a live overview of the number of victims they are working with and how well they are meeting key service standards including the Victims Code of Practice (VCOP). The Chair requested monitoring the victim withdrawal data and exploring whether this can be made available on the dashboard as there are discrepancies between the MPS and the Victims experience.

5. Victims Bill – Update

The MoJ stated that the draft Victims Bill and consultation response was published for pre-legislative scrutiny on the 25th May 2022. The MoJ are waiting for the findings and recommendations report from the Justice Select Committee. The Deputy Prime Minister is committed to moving on the formal introduction of the Bill after the summer recess. The information contained in the bill with the three main strands are; strengthening victims' entitlement, strengthening oversight and performance and improving victim support.

6. Portfolio Update from London's Victim Commissioner and Partners including MPS update on VAWG strategy and Baroness Casey Review

London Victims Commissioner - Chairs Update

Family Court Inquiry

The Chair raised an issue of a situation arising in the Family Courts, following the recent media coverage in the Observer about the use of unregulated experts appointed by the Family Courts who use the title 'psychologist', though they are not registered and regulated by the HCPC. This has raised several concerns for the Chair including how these unregulated experts influence court decisions relating to child contact and welfare issues. The Chair has written a letter signed by cross party MPs, including Anna McMorris MP, Caroline Nokes MP, Jess Phillips MP, Robert Halfon MP, and Sarah Champion MP to Dominic Raab, calling for an urgent inquiry into this issue.

The Chair discussed a recent article in the Observer which impacted on the MPS; when a Family Court Judge banned the MPS from not being able to interview two teenage children who disclosed abuse by the father, where an unregulated expert was involved central to the case. The MPS appealed the decision and won. The judgement was published on Friday 15th August 2022.

ICO report

At the end of May, the ICO released its report into excessive collection of personal information from RASSO victims. We hope that all partners have seen this and are working towards the recommendations in the report.

Visit to Hendon

The Chair spent a day in June visiting Hendon observing MPS training of new police recruits. The two-day training involves hearing directly from victims of crime and uses community facilitators to engage the recruits in meaningful conversations about victim care and support.

Witness Care Units

There is currently a review of MPS Witness Care Units (WCU) underway, with the establishment of a task and finish group in June 2022, to address the Chair's concerns regarding the letter templates and consistency of customer service standards. MPS, MOPAC, and the Victims' Commissioner's team have made recommendations to improvements in this area. within the witness care units. This work is progressing well and will be reporting back to the MOPAC/MPS Oversight Board in September.

VAWG Strategy

The Mayor's new [VAWG Strategy](#) was launched in June, championing a public health approach to ending violence against women and girls. It places a stronger emphasis on partnership working, prevention and education across a wide range of services in London and targets the behaviour of those who perpetrate abuse with various schemes of work including the 'Have a Word' campaign including sharing toolkits with schools and the education system to address attitudes and challenge behaviour. The Mayor has invested an additional £17.7m in support services—including a specialised response to support all victims to have equal access to justice and services and taking action to rebuild trust and confidence in the police and criminal justice system to ensure victims are supported and empowered to get justice. The link to the Mayor's Have a Word campaign is available online at <https://www.london.gov.uk/content/have-a-word>.

MPS Update

Victims Voice Survey (formerly the High Harm Survey) MPS

The 'High Harm Survey' is now rebadged as the Victims Voice Survey and was published in early July. The MPS stated they need at least 500 responses from victims of any crime type to be able to analyse and extract the data. The MPS welcome partners help to promote, distribute and amplify the survey link available online at <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/victims-survey>

MPS VAWG Action Plan, Casey Review, New Commissioner, HMIC Engage Phase

MPS updated partners on the review being carried out by Baroness Casey when she was appointed in February 2022 including meeting with London's Victims' Commissioner Claire Waxman as part of her review process. The MPS VAWG action plan has various strands of work being led by MPS leads. The ICO have conducted an audit and the MPS are awaiting the report. In regards to 'Rebuilding Trust'. The MPS has opened up channels internally for staff to report in their concerns on MPS culture. The MPS Deputy Commissioner has spoken to the 700 newly promoted Sergeant's, embedding the professional standards that are to be expected including the return of Sir Mark Rowley as the newly appointed MPS Commissioner.

The MPS provided an update on the HMIC Engage phase and stated that the latest PEEL inspection report is yet to be published. The Engage phase takes place quarterly where there is more focus and scrutiny on the performance of the MPS and to help with good practice. The Commissioner will attend the quarterly meetings to report on the action plan.

The MPS have finally received funding for SFR Medical which will allow the MPS to obtain medical evidence from the previous 67 days to 10 days and 5 hours in urgent cases which from a victims and VAWG perspective will help to move cases forward. This will be implemented from Autumn 2022 and is a positive step forward.

CPS Update - National Victims Transformation Work

CPS is leading on a large long-term transformation programme to improve the way the CPS communicate and engage with Victims. Crest Advisory's research on behalf of the CPS which sets out the needs of victims has now

been published by the CPS with their statement of intention which is available online at <https://www.cps.gov.uk/stories/transforming-our-service-victims-cps>

CPS will work with Crest Advisory as their strategic partner for the next 6 months to develop their plans and programme of activity. CPS want to improve their direct communication with victims, including the information and relationships they have with other service providers who communicate with victims on behalf of the CPS, as well as aligning with the wider victim care hub model. CPS will be looking at re-designing their operating model and will provide further updates at the board meetings, including the opportunity to carry out testing locally.

LVWS Update

The volume of monthly victim referrals the LVWS receives from the MPS varies between 8,000 to 9,000 and 10,000 in the busiest months. In June 2022 it went over 10k, with the majority being victims of DA and then violent crime as the next crime category. The impact of the surge has affected the IDVA teams, with 43% more referrals this year than the same period last year.

LVWS were successful in the MoJ funding round for 10 more posts to bolster the capacity of the teams, with specialist posts of 5 IDVAs to work with BAME victims, 1 male IDVA, a disability focussed IDVA and 3 to work with children. There is work currently taking place to mobilise and recruit for these roles.

LVWS digital update is that they are currently overhauling their website to make it more intuitive and mobile friendly with a potential launch in September and continuing to develop the 'My Support Space' with new modules on Terrorism, which can be accessed via the LVWS website which is available online at <https://londonvws.org.uk/mysupportspace>

Any other business (AOB)

MOPAC Head of Partnerships discussed the new revamped governance structures. The LCJB is strategic and now chaired by DMPC Sophie Linden with 5 sub-boards which now have draft outcomes and sit below the LCJB. The Victims Board is one of the five sub-boards so if there are any issues, the Victims Board can now escalate them up to the LCJB or other boards. The CJS Effectiveness Board is focussed on operational issues that were previously discussed at the LCJB. The terms of reference and outcomes align with the PCP and plans of the partners.

Close of meeting.