

Joanne McCartney AM, Chair of the Police and Crime Committee

London Assembly
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London, SE1 2AA

Bola Fabunmi
Ministry of Justice

10 May 2013

Dear Bola,

Improving the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

The London Assembly's Police and Crime Committee welcomes the opportunity to comment on changes to the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. Earlier this year, we completed an investigation of the service received by victims of crime in London. Our report, which I have enclosed for your information, made recommendations to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the London Criminal Justice Partnership.

I am pleased to report that the revised code attempts to address some of the issues that we identified during our investigation. If these approaches were adopted consistently they would go some way to improving the service received by victims of crime. I have identified below some of the findings from our report where they relate to the issues identified in your consultation.

Needs assessments

The requirement for the police to carry out a needs assessment of all victims of crime seems a positive step. Our investigation found that the police are not always good at responding to the different needs of victims, nor identifying vulnerability. We were concerned to see results from an MPS employee survey that found that almost three in ten employees think that some victims are more deserving of a good service than others. A requirement to assess needs in a structured way may help to ensure that services are appropriately tailored to needs, improve police awareness of the different challenges facing victims and overcome prejudices. However, this will only be effective if police officers have effective and quality training in how to carry out such assessments.

See pages 15 and 16 of our report

Enhanced service

It is useful to see that an enhanced service is being considered for some victims of crime. The categorisation appears to cover many of those victims that we heard do not have their needs met (such as young people and victims of domestic abuse). However, its effectiveness will depend on the definition of vulnerability and how effectively this is used by those expected to identify this vulnerability. In our investigation, we found that many victims who identify themselves as vulnerable

do not feel the police have identified this and these victims have much lower satisfaction. For some crimes, such as harassment or domestic violence, it is important that victims are identified early and therefore the restriction to victims of 'serious' crimes must not prevent early intervention. There must be flexibility to the use of criteria; some victims of crimes not identified as serious may require more intensive support and therefore the criteria should not be applied in an excessively rigid way.
See page 11 of our report

Repeat victimisation

Repeat victimisation can be particularly damaging and therefore we welcome its inclusion in the definition of vulnerability. However, we question whether the police effectively identify repeat victims; this definition is reliant on the police taking reports seriously, identifying a pattern and effectively recording incidents. When this is not the case, victims may become reluctant to approach the police to report crimes in future.

See page 17 of our report

Victim personal statements

The Ministry of Justice already recognises that victim personal statements can increase victim satisfaction with the police and criminal justice agencies. We welcome its inclusion in the victim code, but are concerned previous commitments have not been honoured and question whether its inclusion in the code will improve performance on this issue. All victims should already be offered the opportunity to make a victim personal statement, but in London only 29 per cent of victims recall being offered this. Therefore a commitment alone is not enough to improve performance; we suggested that MOPAC include a target about this in its performance monitoring of the MPS to ensure accountability, which we are disappointed it has failed to put in place. This could be a legitimate role for Police & Crime Commissioners in their performance monitoring role.

See page 16 of our report

Children and young people

It is important that any approach to victims considers the specific needs of children and young people. We know that young people are disproportionately the victims of crime and it is therefore concerning that young people report lower satisfaction with the police. Young people's specific needs should be considered in the victim code, particularly as targeted services are currently lacking. We would also urge better monitoring of young people's perceptions; currently MPS monitoring does not seek the views of people under the age of 16, which means a significant gap in their knowledge of victims' experiences.

See pages 29 and 33 of our report

Police and Crime Commissioners

We believe that police and crime commissioners (PCCs) should be included in the revised code. PCCs are responsible for engaging victims and for holding the police to account for performance. A key measure of the success of PCCs will be their effectiveness at driving improvements in the service provided to victims. In future, as noted, PCCs will be responsible for commissioning victim services; when this responsibility comes into force it would be inconceivable for them not to be bound by this code. We will be holding MOPAC to account for the quality of victim services when it assumes this responsibility. Our efforts to ensure MOPAC's accountability would be strengthened if MOPAC were required to comply with the code and were subject to the associated complaints procedure.

I trust that these views will prove useful as you develop the victim code. I also urge you to read the full report, which provides an overview of the difficulties facing victims of crime in London and makes recommendations designed to improve victim care. Although the MPS has the lowest satisfaction rate in the country, many of our findings will no doubt be relevant in other areas.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. McCartney'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Joanne McCartney AM
Chair of the Police and Crime Committee