



Supporting Victims & Witnesses

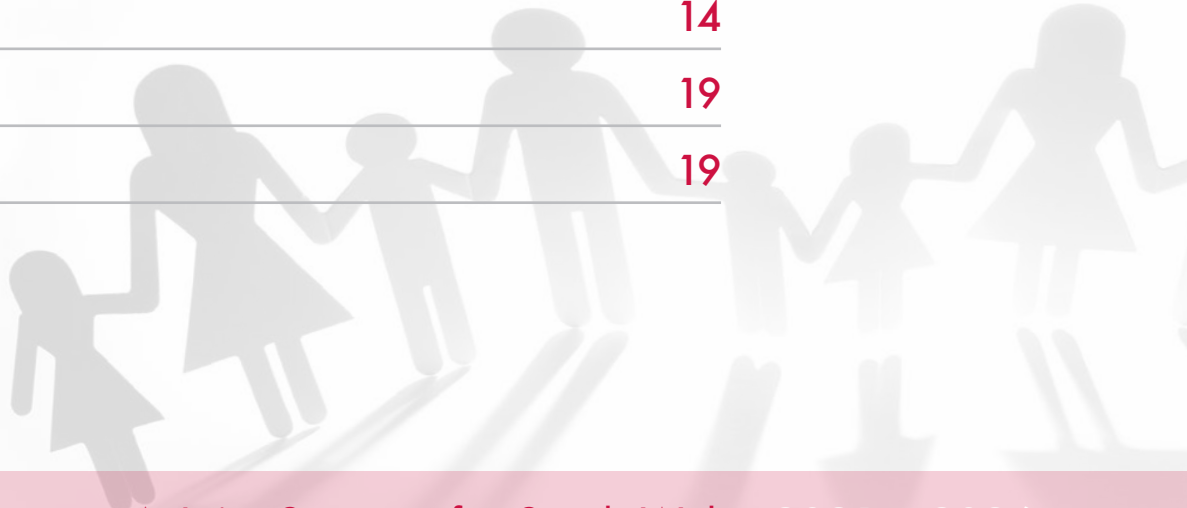
A Joint Strategy for South Wales
2021 – 2026





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Joint Foreword

We have put victims firmly at the heart of the South Wales Police approach for several years – protecting the vulnerable, supporting victims and helping to protect people from becoming victims in the first place. The emphasis on improving outcomes and enhancing the service given by officers and staff has been widely welcomed, and it made a difference - South Wales moved up from the worst performing force in England & Wales in terms of victim satisfaction to one of the top ten nationally. Witnesses are often affected adversely by crime even if they are not directly a victim personally and can also suffer from the experience of giving evidence in a court. That is why our strategy seeks to support witnesses as well as the direct victims of crime.

Victims and witnesses have remained at the core of the Police & Crime Plan since 2012. We share a passion for early intervention and prompt, positive action. We are cooperating closely with other agencies and working to make the local Criminal Justice System efficient and effective, preventing crime and reducing reoffending.

The culture of South Wales is positive and forward-looking. Responding through detection, tackling criminals, arresting those who break the law and exploit people will always be important. But so is reducing the volume of crime committed, listening to the experience of victims, encouraging people to report and understanding individual needs and vulnerability.

“ I welcome the introduction of the *JOINT Victim & Witness Strategy for South Wales Police by the Police & Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable. It provides clear purpose and direction, focusing the police and partners on the delivery of vital services and support to communities, a priority that has been evident within the South Wales Police & Crime Plan for a number of years.* *“This represents a positive step forward for victims and witnesses in South Wales and it is pleasing to see that the strategy recognises the importance of listening and learning from the direct experience of victims and witnesses, acknowledging that each person is unique and that the individual impacts have to be truly understood in order to deliver the service and support they need.* **”**

Dame Vera Baird QC
Victims Commissioner for England & Wales

We are proud of the way our officers and staff strive for continuous improvement and work with other agencies and voluntary organisations to support vulnerable people.

In order to support victims and witnesses it is vital to listen to them and learn from their direct experience. We are very conscious that the range of crimes experienced by victims is enormous. They range from sexual violence, domestic violence and abuse, exploitation of vulnerable people, hate crimes and people trafficking through to anti-social behaviour and low-level vandalism and incivility. But the evidence tells us unequivocally that the type of crime is not the sole indicator

of the harm on an individual. Each person is unique, so the individual impact needs to be truly understood so they can be offered a local service tailored to their own personal support needs.

In April 2015, the Ministry of Justice gave responsibility to Police & Crime Commissioners for the funding and delivery of some victim services. In South Wales, we have focused on ensuring that direct experience drives delivery and that people can continue to receive support for as long as they need it. Our local service ‘South Wales Victim Focus’, is delivered by Victim Support

and builds on their wealth of experience by providing a localised, victim-centred approach through three geographically based Victim Focus Teams, prioritising the most vulnerable in our communities and extending support to those who have witnessed incidents. The approach is focused on swift engagement, recognising initial contact as a crucial first step in helping people to begin their recovery.

“ Some time ago, as a member of the *Home Affairs Select Committee, I asked the Chief Executive of Victim Support “What do victims really want?” Her reply stayed with me and drives our approach: “What victims want, other than not to have been a victim in the first place, is to know that it’s not going to happen again.”*

Our aim is to work tirelessly for excellence in victim care – giving the immediate and proportionate support that people need – but also doing all we can to stop the offence being repeated. This approach is complementary to our efforts to prevent harm in the first place, reflecting the priority set by Sir Robert Peel that the first responsibility of the police is to prevent crime. To put it another way, success in policing is reflected by the absence of crime not by the presence of activity. Please look at the opportunities available: Can you help to support this strategy and the development of victim and witness services across the communities of South Wales? **”**

Rt Hon Alun Michael
South Wales Police & Crime Commissioner

That is our core offering of support to victims and witnesses but we also fund supplemental services, supporting voluntary groups that develop innovative ways of helping people to recover from their experience. Voluntary community initiatives often provide very special and personal support to victims and the challenge is for all of us to work together to effectively support those affected by crime.



Jeremy Vaughan
Chief Constable South Wales Police



Alun Michael
Police & Crime Commissioner for South Wales

South Wales Context

South Wales Police has a fundamental responsibility to victims of crime.

Jointly with their Criminal Justice partners they must treat victims of crime fairly and empathetically, while pursuing outcomes in their best interest and providing an effective and efficient policing service. South Wales Police must continue to be accessible, respond appropriately to crime and disorder, while conducting effective investigations and providing regular updates through internal and external partnership networks. A joint working approach is utilised with our statutory and third sector service providers, which places victims at the heart of our approach across South Wales. Both the South Wales Police and Crime Plan and the Chief Constable’s Delivery Plan that flows from it, seek to ensure that South Wales Police are committed to being the best at understanding and responding effectively to the needs of our communities.

The Police and Crime Commissioner also has responsibilities to victims and witnesses of crime, including the requirement to undertake a victim needs assessment and to ensure victims and witnesses have access to free, confidential needs-led help and support (funded by the Ministry of Justice). In South Wales this service is delivered on behalf of the Commissioner by Victim Support and is known as South Wales Victim Focus; in addition specialist services such as those for domestic abuse and sexual violence are also funded by the Commissioner as a priority within the South Wales Police and Crime Plan. The Commissioner is clear that victims must remain at the heart of all we do.

The Joint Strategy for Supporting Victims and Witnesses is reliant upon the provision of support services for individuals, who often tell us they find the Criminal Justice System a complex and confusing place. This strategy will seek to improve the experience of victims and witnesses throughout their Criminal Justice Service journey, while supporting them to navigate a complex journey through the system. It is clear the South Wales Police and

stakeholders have a responsibility to ensure there is a consistent and seamless service between agencies. Developing and maintaining positive relationships is essential to the success of every aspect of policing, effective communication stems from interacting with communities, listening to their views and acting upon them in a way that improves our service delivery. It is also important that we ensure victims, and their families, are provided with the necessary support at what can be a traumatic time. There are many staff within South Wales Police

departments working hard to make sure victims receive the best service delivered consistently by police officers, to strengthen the difference we can make by working together.

The Commissioner has a statutory responsibility to hold the local Criminal Justice System to account, and is working hard within Criminal Justice in Wales to achieve a joined up approach in support of victims and witnesses.



 **South Wales Victim Focus**
Ffocws Dioddefwyr De Cymru

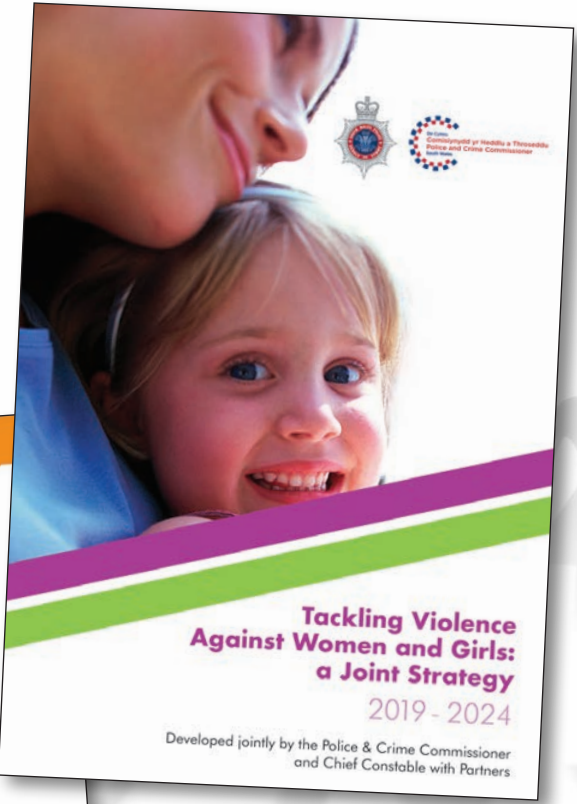
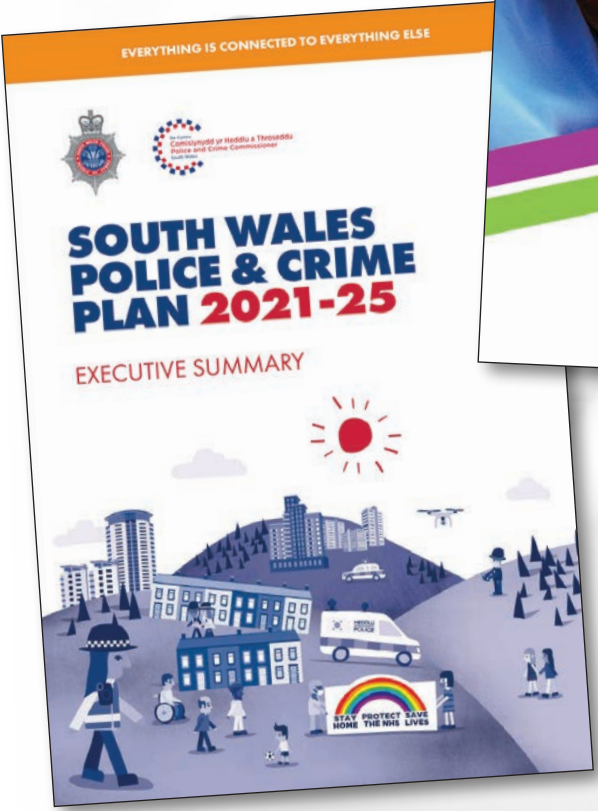
He strongly supports the ‘Statement of Purpose’ that has been adopted and endorsed by Criminal Justice in Wales. In the past, different agencies have looked at the needs of victims from their own perspective – the needs of the victim in the court system, or the needs of victims during an investigation – whereas the needs of the victim start at the time of the offence and may continue long after the processes of investigation and prosecution have been completed. Our approach is to recognise the need for consistency and long-term support.

This strategy has been developed taking into account priorities and actions outlined in:-

- The South Wales Police and Crime Plan
- The Chief Constable’s Delivery Plan
- The Insights Strategy
- Tackling Violence against Women and Girls strategy developed jointly by the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable with Partners
- South Wales Police Domestic Abuse Control Strategy

“ The voices of victims and witnesses are at the heart of our work and it’s important for them to know beyond doubt that they are not alone and that support is available to them. **”**

Rt Hon Alun Michael
South Wales Police & Crime Commissioner



Our Vision

We have a duty to ensure that victims have the confidence to report crime, with the knowledge that they will be supported and updated throughout the investigation. We will achieve this by ensuring that we treat victims according to their needs, and ensuring that their rights under the Victims Code are not compromised. We will seek the views of victims, and act on their feedback to ensure that they have an effective voice in developing and improving how justice is delivered. We will have a particular focus on repeat offending and while we will do all we can to prevent people becoming victims in the first place, we will seek to reduce repeat offending. We will encourage victims to know that their contribution will be valued and appreciated.

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Our Aim

The aim of this Victim and Witness Strategy is to place the needs of victims of crime at the heart of policing in South Wales, provide them with the support they need throughout their engagement with the Criminal Justice System and in seeking the help they need to aid their recovery and resilience. The strategy will ensure there is a systematic process in place by which appropriate support and advice is consistently available throughout the Criminal Justice process, by our key partner agencies. Central to this strategy is our collective commitment to seeking the views of victims and witnesses, while ensuring there are opportunities to place the needs and views of victims at the centre of policy and practice improvement.

Strategy Drivers and Influencers

In September 2018 UK Government published their Victims Strategy, setting out a Criminal Justice wide response to improving the support offered to victims of crime and incorporating actions from all Criminal Justice agencies, including the Police, Crown Prosecution Service and Courts. The details of these commitments have been summarised later on in this document. The Victims Strategy is influenced by the principles of The Victims Code of Practice and the Witness Charter, published in 2013. These documents set out the minimum level of service that victims and witnesses should expect from agencies within the Criminal Justice System. In April 2019, the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) Victims and Witnesses 2019-2021 Strategy was launched. This strategy provided a framework for operational policing to develop their local approach to victims and witnesses, and address their commitments under the Governments Victims Strategy. This strategic context creates a framework within which this victims and witness joint strategy will be delivered across South Wales.



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The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

The Victims Code of Practice sets out the minimum level of service that victims should receive from the Criminal Justice System. Police and Crime Commissioners and police forces are amongst the organisations required to deliver services set out in the Victims’ Code. Police and Crime Commissioners must ensure that Criminal Justice agencies have due regard to a minimum set of standards when supporting victims and witnesses through each stage of the criminal justice process. Some of the fundamental standards must ensure that victims receive timely referral to appropriate support services, have opportunities to make a personal statement, also referred to as a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) and must ensure that they receive regular updates and enhanced communication from agencies throughout each stage of the process.

In order to comply with the Victims Code of Practice monitoring requirements set by the Ministry of Justice, Police and Crime Commissioner’s facilitate the compliance monitoring process through the quarterly data provided by each of the listed responsible authorities. The listed authorities required to comply with the Victims Code of Practice through quarterly dip sampling include the Police, Witness Care Units, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Her Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) and Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). Each agency will receive a small and specific amount of compliance questions under the five Key Entitlements for victims with some additional questions that cover the 12 rights outlined in the revised Code of Practice, which is monitored through a generic framework and reported annually to the South Wales Criminal Justice and Integrated Offender Management Board by the Police and Crime Commissioner. Working across South Wales and working within Criminal Justice in Wales,

we will do our best to ensure that the work of all the different agencies involved are complementary and mutually supportive.

Responding effectively to victims and witnesses of crime and underpinning principles:

We recognise that the way in which we respond to victims and witnesses of crime is important and will influence their subsequent Criminal Justice journey. Each experience of crime and its impact on the victim is unique.

We are therefore committed to ensuring that all victims and witnesses will receive a needs assessment to ensure we are able to tailor our services appropriately, providing them with the tools they need to recover from the impacts of crime. We will ensure that victims and witnesses are supported and empowered at a time when they feel at their most vulnerable, by providing information about appropriate services, and the support that is available to them.



Summary of Victims’ Rights

Right 1

To be able to understand and to be understood

You have the **Right** to be given information in a way that is easy to understand and to be provided with help to be understood, including, where necessary, access to interpretation and translation services.

Right 2

To have the details of the crime recorded without unjustified delay

You have the **Right** to have details of the crime recorded by the police as soon as possible after the incident. If you are required to provide a witness statement or be interviewed, you have the **Right** to be provided with additional support to assist you through this process.

Right 3

To be provided with information when reporting the crime

You have the **Right** to receive written confirmation when reporting a crime, to be provided with information about the criminal justice process and to be told about programmes or services for victims. This might include services where you can meet with the suspect or offender, which is known as Restorative Justice.

Right 4

To be referred to services that support victims and have services and support tailored to your needs

You have the **Right** to be referred to services that support victims, which includes the **Right** to contact them directly, and to have your needs assessed so services and support can be tailored to meet your needs. If eligible, you have the **Right** to be offered a referral to specialist support services and to be told about additional support available at court, for example special measures.

Right 5

To be provided with information about compensation

Where eligible, you have the **Right** to be told about how to claim compensation for any loss, damage or injury caused as a result of crime.

Right 6

To be provided with information about the investigation and prosecution

You have the **Right** to be provided with updates on your case and to be told when important decisions are taken. You also have the **Right**, at certain stages of the justice process, to ask for decisions to be looked at again by the relevant service provider.

To make a Victim Personal Statement

You have the **Right** to make a Victim Personal Statement, which tells the court how the crime has affected you and is considered when sentencing the offender. You will be given information about the process.

Right 7

To be given information about the trial, trial process and your role as a witness

If your case goes to court, you have the **Right** to be told the time, date and location of any hearing and the outcome of those hearings in a timely way. If you are required to give evidence, you have the **Right** to be offered appropriate help before the trial and, where possible, if the court allows, to meet with the prosecutor before giving evidence.

Right 8

To be given information about the outcome of the case and any appeals

You have the **Right** to be told the outcome of the case and, if the defendant is convicted, to be given an explanation of the sentence. If the offender appeals against their conviction or sentence, you have the **Right** to be told about the appeal and its outcome.

Right 9

To be paid expenses and have property returned

If you are required to attend court and give evidence, you have the **Right** to claim certain expenses. If any of your property was taken as evidence, you have the **Right** to get it back as soon as possible.

Right 10

To be given information about the offender following a conviction

Where eligible, you have the **Right** to be automatically referred to the Victim Contact Scheme, which will provide you with information about the offender and their progress in prison, and if/when they become eligible for consideration of parole or release. Where applicable, you also have the **Right** to make a new Victim Personal Statement, in which you can say how the crime continues to affect you.

Right 11

To make a complaint about your Rights not being met

If you believe that you have not received your **Rights**, you have the **Right** to make a complaint to the relevant service provider. If you remain unhappy, you can contact the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

Right 12

What underpins effective services for victims and witnesses?



Timely and Accurate Information and Communication



Fair Treatment during the Justice Process



Effective Multi-Agency Working



Professional, Targeted Victims's Services

Victims Needs Assessment

A comprehensive Victim Needs Assessment undertaken by Cordis Bright on behalf of the Commissioner (March 2019) has provided a clear picture of both victim need (including current unmet need) and demand upon services in South Wales. This assessment provides:

- Recommendations to address under-reporting or low take up of services
- The voices of individuals affected by crime, their experiences of accessing support services and their reflections on what could be improved
- The views of local stakeholders in the victim services landscape on what works and where improvements could be made
- A set of recommendations to inform future service provision and funding decisions

Victims who participated in the consultation helped us to identify and understand what was important to them which was focused upon access to services locally and in person, available whenever needed, and for however long they were needed them. Victim and stakeholder feedback highlighted three key areas of support.

- 1 Emotional support.** Having someone to talk to was highlighted by most victims we consulted as being one of the most important aspects of support and it was also seen as one of the most important types of support among survey respondents.
- 2 Counselling and mental health support.** Consultation with victims and stakeholders also identified support with mental health, including counselling, as a key need. This was particularly the case for victims who had experienced significant trauma as a result of sexual violence or domestic abuse.
- 3 Support through the criminal justice system** was highlighted by stakeholders to be crucial, and victims responding to the survey reported that having help reporting the incident and communicating with the police, understanding the criminal justice process and help with the court process would be helpful. However, comparatively few victims reported having been able to receive support on these elements.





Thematic Areas

This strategy provides an opportunity to develop and monitor a framework which will assist South Wales Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner, Criminal Justice partners and specialist services to better support victims and witnesses of crime. We will monitor the progress of this strategy through the extended efforts to monitor compliance under the Victims Code of Practice.

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To achieve the aim in this strategy, it is divided into six main thematic areas:

1 Raise awareness of the support available to all victims and witnesses.

Awareness and knowledge of the support available to all victims and witnesses needs to improve, whether they wish to report to the police or not.

However, this also extends beyond victims and witnesses to the wider community, taking the form of ‘bystanders’ and is based on the premise that both men and women collectively have the capability and responsibility to prevent, intervene or signpost as pro-social bystanders when they identify inappropriate behaviour.

Alongside our partners, we have an important role to play in this. We will therefore commit to the following:

- Coordinate awareness campaigns, while developing a Communications Strategy.
- Work with victims and witness services in alliance and promote media campaigns on how to access these services.
- Target specific crime types and communities during certain periods using an evidence based approach.
- Promote surveys that gain public opinion and measure awareness.

2 Deliver a professional and consistent service to victims and witnesses of crime whether they wish to report or not.

We will aim to increase public confidence to report crime. We will ensure that victim’s needs are assessed, and subsequently ensure that they are referred to the appropriate support services. It is a fundamental part of the Victims' Code that victims and witnesses must be kept informed of the Criminal Justice process and therefore, through the associated compliance process, we will seek to ensure this happens consistently. We will work with our partners in order to achieve the appropriate outcome and ensure offenders are held to account when securing justice for victims. Furthermore, we will work with our partners to provide access to quality, consistent support for victims when coming into contact with South Wales Police, irrespective of whether they wish to report a crime or not.

As an organisation we will seek to deliver this by:

- Ensuring that incidents are responded to and resources are deployed in a timely manner.
- Ensuring officers and staff treat victims and witnesses with respect, dignity and fairness at all times.
- Developing and maintaining an effective efficient police service, whereby specially trained officers and staff, focus on the impact of the crime rather than the type.

- Working with partners to minimise points of contact for victims, so their journey through the Criminal Justice system is seamless and support is timely and appropriate.
- Ensuring that all victims and witnesses are kept informed about the progress of their crime or incident.
- All victims and witnesses are afforded a needs assessment and those identified as vulnerable, intimidated, or persistently targeted will be identified at an early stage, and given an enhanced service and support from the outset as defined in the Victims Code of Practice.
- Raising the awareness of Remote Evidence Centres which support witnesses in providing evidence via live video links at locations away from a court building.
- Seeking feedback from victims and witnesses through engaging and discussing their experiences, listening to their feedback and making improvements to our service.
- Continuing to provide access to support services using various methods of communication ensuring provision for all victims and witnesses during any unprecedented or extraordinary circumstances.
- Recognising when officers and staff have provided an excellent service and use opportunities to capture and share this across the force as best practice.
- Identifying areas for improvement by reviewing victim’s right to review cases, to ensure the best possible service is provided to victims and witnesses and they receive all the support they need at what can be a traumatic time.

3 Ensuring that Victim’s Entitlements are provided and never compromised.

As this Victims & Witness Strategy sets out, victims need timely and accurate information, fair treatment at all times during the investigative and court process, effective multi-agency working and professional, targeted services. However, the victim’s experience of the Criminal Justice System is often subject to long delays before a case is brought to trial, with little explanation as to the progress of the case.

Delivering the Victim’s entitlements is key to ensuring the confidence and trust of South Wales Police by:

- Developing an effective referral process to statutory and non-statutory support services for victims.
- Streamlining and simplifying witness care to minimise contact points for victims, this will be undertaken in conjunction with other Criminal Justice partners.
- Increasing officer’s awareness about the importance of the Victims Code of Practice and victim’s entitlements under the code.
- Ensuring that vulnerable, or intimidated victims and witnesses, are supported with the consideration of Special Measures taken in appropriate circumstances.
- Offering the opportunity for victims to make a Victim Personal Statement, which will allow victims to have a voice.

4 Supporting the needs of individuals, including vulnerable victims and witnesses through commissioning and signposting.

Crime is constantly evolving, particularly with the rise in technology bringing new threats and challenges to policing services. The Commissioner and the police work closely with Community Safety and Criminal Justice partners to prevent and reduce crime and disorder. Our policing services, in this context, have evolved to create co-commissioning activities which seeks to respond to various forms of crime and disorder faced by our communities.

Improving service provision through the following:

- The Commissioner and Chief Constable will look to work with partners to establish and identify further shared priorities for commissioning.
- Enhancing and developing existing service provision.
- Providing specialist support services that meet the demand of people with additional vulnerabilities and complex needs, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, income, offending history or gender identity, that hinders the barriers to coping and recovering and often result in repeat occurrences.
- Putting victims at the heart of service delivery.
- Working with South Wales Police and victims services colleagues to undertake thematic reviews aimed at improving identification and responses for victims of various forms of crime.

5 Enabling staff to assist victims and witnesses to gain access to support services through multi agency partners whether they choose to report a crime or not.

Anyone that suffers harm or loss as a result of crime in South Wales should be entitled to access support services that can assist them. This should be regardless of whether they choose to report the crime to the police, or have received early intervention support through a third sector organisation. It is important, at this point, to empower staff to assist victims and witnesses, and encourage the communities across South Wales to report crime and build on their confidence to do so; as well as giving victims the freedom to access support services that are relevant to their individual needs.

The Commissioner and the Chief Constable will commit to and ensure:

- Access to information about organisations that can provide support, information and advice to victims & witnesses following the event of a crime, which will include online provision.
- That training delivered to officers and staff is continuously updated and designed to empower staff to refer victims of crime to the appropriate support services which will meet the need of the victim.
- That effective support is available to victims and witnesses of any crime.
- Victims of Anti-social behaviour, where a criminal offence may not have been committed, have access to appropriate support services.

6 Establishing better outcomes for those that are victims of crime working with the support of our Criminal Justice Partners supporting both equality and diversity.

There needs to be a greater understanding by officers and staff that a successful outcome for a victim does not necessarily mean a successful prosecution. Encouraging and supporting our staff to develop their understanding of victim need and expectation with regard to outcome, will help to build trust and confidence in the communities that we serve.

Our communities are diverse and as a force we need to ensure that we are inclusive and adopt a person-centred approach:

- Ensuring victim and witness focus is at the forefront of any outcome.
- Ensuring that victims and witnesses feel that they are at the heart of the process throughout their journey.
- Working towards meaningful, workable and understandable outcomes for the victim in an improved victim and witness experience.
- Utilising restorative approaches in all possible circumstances
- Increasing awareness of alternative justice and considering all options in order to resolve crime and prevent further victimisation including out-of-court disposals and outcomes where Criminal Justice is not possible, protection notices and other civil remedies.
- Working collaboratively with Witness Care Units, Witness Support services, the CPS and HMCTS to improve attendance at court by both victims and witnesses and to make it easier for them to do so.

- Improving the quality of investigations and placing emphasis on officers to collect high quality and legally sound evidence.
- Increasing awareness of staff to understand that a better outcome for a victim does not always have to follow the criminal justice pathway.
- We pride ourselves on being accessible to all those affected by crime and are particularly mindful of those who come from under represented parts of society and those who are more likely to be victims of crime but may be less likely to engage with mainstream services. We are committed to continuously learn and improve the support mechanisms to those from hard to reach and diverse/minority communities developing innovative and relevant services that meet service users' diverse needs.
- Increasing the confidence victims have in the Criminal Justice System and empower them to take up the different options available to them through it.



Governance and Delivery

The South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner, the Chief Constable and our partners have a joint responsibility for ensuring that this strategy is delivered.

It is the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner to be the voice of the people and hold the police accountable in their approach to delivering an effective and efficient police service to tackle crime within our force area. The Commissioner also has a duty to hold the local criminal justice system to account for its efficiency and effectiveness and we will do that directly in South Wales and through Criminal Justice in Wales.



Next Steps – what do we intend to do next?

- Continue to develop and provide services that meet the needs of the most vulnerable victims of crime within South Wales
- Work closely with Restorative Justice partners to further increase provision of Restorative Justice to victims of crime
- Build upon the statutory rights of victims as set out in the Victims Code of Practice by looking to provide a voice to victims as much as possible.
- Commission in line with best practice to ensure that a wider range of services are offered to victims in South Wales
- Creation of a delivery plan which features specific actions and clear timescales to bring all the commitments together.
- The South Wales Police and Crime Commissioners Team will review the strategy on an annual basis, alongside information collected about local compliance with the Victims Code of Practice, National and local policy and legislation that will impact on victims and will feed into an annual refresh of the strategy if required.

The strategy will be overseen by the Commissioner and the Chief Constable.

Supporting Victims & Witnesses

A Joint Strategy for South Wales

2021 – 2026



De Cymru
Comisiynydd yr Heddlu a Throseddu
Police and Crime Commissioner
South Wales

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Cymreag
This document is also available in Welsh