

# WEST MERCIA POLICE AND CRIME PANEL 10 SEPTEMBER 2019

## THE VICTIM ADVICE LINE (VAL)

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### Recommendation

1. Members of the Panel are invited to consider this report.

### Purpose

2. The purpose of this report is to provide the members of the Panel with an update on the Victim Advice Line (VAL).

### Background

3. The Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC) commitment to putting victims and survivors first is a key pillar within his Safer West Mercia Plan. It is a clear priority for him to ensure the best possible services are in place to enable people are able to cope and recover having fallen victim to a crime.
4. The opportunity to improve victim services was identified by the PCC as part of a comprehensive review. While services delivered previously had received positive feedback from clients, consistent feedback showed that the process involved to actually access those services was often onerous for victims. Victims felt they had to tell their stories too many times, to too many different agencies. The establishment of a new partially integrated service in VAL presented the opportunity to design out this problem and create a system that got people to the right help, but via a much faster process. VAL was therefore commissioned by the PCC and is supported by funding from the Commissioner, while operating within West Mercia Police. It replaces the service previously provided by Victim Support.
5. The Victims Advice Line (VAL) went live on the 1 April 2019. This new service, whilst independent from the police, is based in the police control room alongside call takers. It is there to provide free and confidential advice to anyone affected by crime, be it a victim, witness or family member.
6. The VAL is made up of a team of expert and fully trained Victim Care Coordinators who will help the victim when they come through to the service, be it through police, third party or self-referral. The victim may then be referred onto other specialist services, dependent on the level of support they may need.
7. When it was introduced in April 2019 VAL saw a different approach introduced around supporting victims of crime, both for West Mercia Police and the PCC.

8. The previous approach to victim care, in the shape of a direct referral to Victim Support (an inherited approach from a national contract arrangement between Victim Support and the Ministry of Justice for the previous 40 years) enabled us to support 60,000 victims per year. The main drivers for changing this from a wholly outsourced function to introducing the partly integrated VAL model were the following:
- Exploring the benefits of improved access to information and data on victims, further enhancing the support provided, tailoring support options better to individuals and providing a quicker response in a more informed way. The VAL team have access to West Mercia force systems, which provides instant access to the story and context behind the case. It also details when people have repeatedly fallen victim to offences and provides updates on a case or trial which wouldn't have been available to Victim Support directly under the previous system
  - Reducing the number of times a victim has to tell their story, to more effectively and efficiently triage their needs and support options. The support people receive is more clearly directed, and dealt with both quicker and by the most appropriate resource ( not just relying on one organisation to meet all of their needs)
  - Exploring the benefits of the force working hand in hand with the initial victim support function, aiding the force to better support and focus care around the needs of victims.
9. The model is different to its predecessor and therefore the snapshot attached is not comparable in terms of numbers and outcomes to the previous service. It does however provide an insight into the direction of travel. It shows the potential to meet the needs of victims faster, increase the number of victims being supported, and provide better support for repeat victims to hopefully reduce the likelihood of them being revictimised.
10. We have seen significant benefits of the new model. Nationally, a good service would be expected to deliver a 'hit rate' of 30%. This is the percentage of victims who actually need support from those contacted, or rather those that need support and then take up the offer. The Victim Support contract which now takes referrals after they have been triaged by the VAL had a hit rate of 85%, which is the highest in the country. The benefits of the VAL are therefore potentially creating the room for providers to focus on needs and delivery, as opposed to the administration of seeking those who need support.
11. There is a long way to go for VAL to meet its potential, and it is still in mobilisation. Referrals from the force need to improve along with the referral numbers going on to wider support providers.

### **Service update (1 April 2019 to 16 August 2019)**

#### **12. Referrals into VAL**

There are a number of pathways through which victims are brought into the service. During the reporting period, this is as follows:

- Athena data transfer = 25561
- Internal referrals (e.g. officers / harm assessment unit) = 959
- Self-referrals = 159
- Other referrals (Witness service) = 16

### 13. Contact methods

Once a victim is in the VAL the service uses a number of methods to make contact with them, These are:

- **Automated email** - the VISION system is able to auto generate emails to victims of crime where the email address is recorded on ATHENA.
- **Automated Letter** - The VISION system is able to generate a list of victims who have 'no needs'. All victims who fit this criteria will receive a letter acknowledging that a crime has been committed and offer a support service. The offer makes it clear that the victim can access support at any point and include information on victims' rights and links to the VAL Web-page.
- **Telephone** - Calls are made to all victims referred and to victims of high-harm/high impact crimes
- **Text** - Victim Care Coordinators are able to send information on the VAL via the Outlook text service

### 14. VAL Activities

The VAL has contacted 2091 victims by phone since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019, of these 1134 came directly from referrals. The remaining 957 contacted came from the ATHENA data transfer with the Victim Care coordinators (VCC'S) prioritising cohorts of high-harm/impact and/or vulnerable victims.

Currently the VAL is proactively contacting victims of:

- Burglary – including un-resourced burglary's
- Hate Crime – All victims of hate crimes are contacted by telephone
- Sexual Violence – there is a twice weekly cross check of cases with WMRASAC and AXIS (the two specialist service providers for victims of sexual crimes) to ensure there are no gaps in service offers.
- Vulnerable and repeat victims – domestic abuse referrals are cross checked with West Mercia Women's Aid to ensure there are no gaps in service
- Children and Young People (CYP) – Triage all CYP victims to ensure appropriate support is put into place.

15. Of the 2091 victims directly contacted by phone, the Victim Care Coordinators (VCC) have been able to directly support 1838 (88%) of victims. The VAL has completed 1208 detailed needs assessments with victims of crime. The process for this is as follows:

- Referral to the VAL.
- VCC makes an initial call to victim (up to 3 phone call attempts)
- VCC undertakes detailed needs assessment and agree tasks to address the victims needs including ongoing support and reassurance calls
- Complete an outcomes assessment
- Close case as needs met/resolved

16. When additional needs are identified VAL has created 630 specialised support plans for those victims of crime and made 634 referrals (some victims have been referred to

more than 1 specialist agency). The process for a specialist support plan includes the same as for a detailed needs assessment, plus the VCC will also :

- Undertake an additional assessment
- Develop a support plan including referral to other agencies if required
- Oversee the agreed support package
- Provide regular check-ins and reassurance calls
- Complete an outcomes assessment and plan an exit strategy
- Close the case as needs met/ resolved

17. There are currently a further 173 victims receiving on-going support.

18. The VAL has been successful in referring victims onto other agencies for additional support, help and advice. The table below provides an indication of the wide range of agencies contacted since 1 April

Examples of agencies referred to:	
WMRASAC	CAB Witness Service
AXIS	Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority
Women’s Aid West Mercia	Community Health Services
Victim Support	Community Trigger (Community Safety)
NCDV	Home Start
We don’t buy crime – SMARTWATER	West Mercia Community Fund
SDAS	Police Deployment
The Truth Project (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse ( IICSA )	Ambulance deployment
Design Out Crime	Social Housing – Various
Relate	GP Service
Daughters of Eve	Restorative Justice
Samaritans	The Sleep Council

**19. Outcomes**

Using the Ministry of Justice outcomes assessment criteria, the following outcomes have been reported by the victims receiving support through the VAL.

- 154 - Victims reported they had improved health and wellbeing
- 254 - Victims reported they are better able to cope with aspects of everyday life
- 242 – Victims reported they had increased feelings of safety
- 1530 – Victims felt better informed and empowered to act

20. To provide members of the Panel with an insight into the outcomes achieved two case studies have been included as examples. These are set out below along with some examples of feedback received from victims.

**21. Case Study 1.**

VAL received an incoming call from Mr H. His daughter died a few years ago and was found at the bottom of a cliff face. Mr H’s daughter went to the top of the cliff, wrote a note and tragically she killed herself when she impacted with the ground below her.

Mr H would like to know where she was found so he can take his wife. He explained that PC Ziola was dealing with the case and that he was very good, but is now on leave until the 23rd August. The VCC contacted PC Ziola's Sgt to see if he could assist the family.

Email from the Sgt of PC Ziola - I've made contact and arrangements are in hand for the family to visit the scene on Sunday 18th August.

## 22. Case Study 2.

Upon first glance, this looked like a 'simple' case where a woman has had her bag stolen. When the VCC called her, she didn't really focus on the impact of the recent offence, instead talked about suffering CSA and sexual abuse as an adult. She had been victimised throughout her life. Although she has engaged with lots of services previously (she knows about Axis, as she has had counselling and ISVA support from them, plus mental health support), she hasn't really had any 'justice' or recognition of the CSA that she suffered. The VCC did offer VS support in relation to the recent robbery, but she declined this at this time, stating she has had similar support previously. However, the VCC did tell her about the Truth Project, which she was not aware of, she was really interested in this and is going to contact them, (participants self-refer). This will enable her to let the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) know about the abuse that she suffered, helping to make changes for those affected by CSA in the future. The VCC has agreed to call her back next week, at her request.

## 23. Feedback from victims supported

24. *"I am aware of the help and support offered by the victim support team and the role you play in our justice system, it is a fantastic service, often overlooked, but nonetheless of great importance to vulnerable people".*

25. *"I've just been on live chat with your selves someone's phoning me today at 4 thank you"*

26. *"I had lost faith but it has been restored now with the support that is available"*

## Supporting Information

None

## Contact Points

### Specific Contact Points for this report

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