

Bedfordshire Office of the
Police and Crime Commissioner

Victims' Needs Analysis

2021



Contents

1. Background and Introduction	4
2. Executive Summary	6
3. Document Purpose	10
4. Review of the 2016 VNA Recommendations	11
5. Literature Review	14
5.1 Key National Policy	14
5.1.1 Code of Practice for Victims of Crime	14
5.1.2 Summary of victims' rights	15
5.1.3 Local implication and review	16
5.1.4 Victims' Code Compliance	16
5.1.5 Victim Services Commissioning Framework	19
5.1.6 The Victims' Rights Directive (European Union)	19
5.1.7 Restorative Justice	20
5.1.8 Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law or DVDS)	22
5.1.9 Domestic Abuse Bill	23
5.1.10 Victims' Right to Review Scheme	24
5.1.11 Local implication and considerations	25
5.2 Independent Bodies	26
5.2.1 Victims' Commissioner	26
5.2.2 Points of note / Considerations	28
6. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic	30
6.1 Impact on Courts	31
6.2 Victim and Witness Attrition	31
6.3 Domestic Abuse	32
6.3.1 Points of note / Considerations	33
6.4 Fraud	34
6.4.1 Local implication and consideration	35
6.4.2 local process – supporting Fraud victims	37
6.4.3 Points of note / Considerations	38
7. Quantitative Research	39
7.1 Crime Data	39
7.1.1 Methodology	39
7.1.2 Findings	39
7.1.3 Points of note / considerations	45
7.2 Comparing crime data	45
7.2.1 Methodology	45
7.2.2 Findings	46
7.2.3 Points of note / considerations	46
7.3 Signpost Satisfaction Survey	46
7.3.1 Signpost background	46
7.3.2 Methodology	46
7.3.3 Findings	47
7.3.4 Points of note / Considerations	50
7.3.5 Signpost dip sample – first contact timescales	51
7.4 We Care Survey	51
7.4.1 Methodology / survey introduction	51
7.4.2 Findings	51
7.4.3 Points of note / Considerations	55

7.5 Bedfordshire Police Satisfaction Survey	55
7.5.1 Methodology / survey introduction	55
7.5.2 Findings	56
7.5.3 Points of note / considerations	58
7.6 Bedfordshire OPCC annual surveys	59
7.6.1 Methodology / Introduction	59
7.6.2 Findings	59
7.6.3 Points of note / Considerations	59
7.7 Complaints data	60
7.7.1 Methodology	60
7.7.2 Findings	60
7.7.3 Points of note / considerations	61
7.8 Witness care	61
7.8.1 Points of note / considerations	62
7.9 Third sector	62
7.9.1 Points of note / considerations	62
8. The OPCC 'Survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire'	63
8.1 Methodology and introduction	63
8.2 Findings	63
8.2.1 The response	63
8.2.2 Key question findings	64
8.3 Points of note / Considerations	71
9. Qualitative Research	72
9.1 Partner Focus Groups	72
9.2 Methodology	72
9.3 Victim Support Services Group Findings	72
9.3.1 VCOP	72
9.3.2 Referrals	72
9.3.3 COVID-19 impact	73
9.3.4 Communication	73
9.3.5 Engaging with victims for the VNA	74
9.3.6 Points of note / considerations	74
9.4 Criminal Justice Partners Group Findings	75
9.4.1 Additional data	75
9.4.2 COVID-19 impact	75
9.4.3 Current issue controls and additional support considerations	76
9.4.4 Points of note / Considerations	76
9.4.5 Central Bedfordshire Council - Antisocial Behaviour Victims	77
9.4.6 Points of note / Considerations	78
9.5 Early intervention / offender management group findings	78
9.5.1 Points of note / Considerations	78
9.6 IAG Focus Group Findings	79
9.6.2 VCOP	79
9.6.3 Reporting crime to the police	79
9.6.4 Communicating and providing services	79
10. Summary of findings and themes	80
11. Recommendations	81
12. Note of appreciation	86
13. Glossary	87

1. Background and Introduction

Victims are a priority for the Bedfordshire OPCC and Police service

Victims of crime are a fundamental focus point within policing and that of the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). It is a priority to put victims at the center of the way we police and prosecute and every PCC must be a champion for victims as per their statutory obligations.

PCC's responsibility for commissioning victim support services

PCC's are responsible for the statutory role of commissioning services across England to support victims to cope with the impact of crime and recover from the harm they have experienced both mentally and physically. This is in line with the policy and legislative framework of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, which was updated in 2020.

Understanding the needs and issues of victims since the 2016 Victim Needs Analysis (VNA)

It has been five years since the last VNA was published by the OPCC in 2016. Given the duty to commission victim services that provide victims with the best support, it is absolutely vital that the OPCC has a well-rounded understanding of victims needs and the issues that they face locally in comparison to the national context, and any key changes since the last VNA. This 2021 Bedfordshire OPCC Victims' Needs Analysis (VNA) set out to achieve that.

Primary goals of this Victims' Needs Analysis

- Providing an intelligence lead and evidence-based guide to further aid the commissioning of future victim services
- Providing a strategic overview of national policy and the implications for local areas.
- Reviewing national and local data to understand key themes and trends relating to crime and victims and the demand on services.
- Providing a strategic overview of local Community Safety Partnership and Police priorities.
- An overview of current service provision, identifying good practice and evident gaps.
- Raising awareness and promoting understanding of victims' issues in the county
- Providing a strong understanding of victims needs for the newly elected PCC later this year, and highlighting any areas requiring focus moving forward.

Research sources, methodology and limitations

A literature review of key national policy was carried out including existing, new, updated and coming into effect in future.

Quantitative and qualitative data was assessed and where appropriate compared against national or similar force data. This included recorded crime statistics, victim surveys, victim police complaints information.

Victim engagement was hugely important. A bespoke survey collected 296 responses to questions relating to key areas of research for the VNA.

Key partner contribution was sought from Bedfordshire Police, The Ministry of Justice and the charitable sector. Whilst great efforts were made to speak to agencies, apologies are offered to anyone who was not included. This was not intentional and further communication and feedback in relation to VNA are welcomed.

Key Policy

The Code of Practice for Victims (also known as Victims' Code or VCOP)

The MoJ update to the Victims' Code in November 2020 intended to base it around 12 clearly defined rights that are both easy for victims to understand and which clearly set out the minimum level of service they can expect from criminal justice agencies. It is the statutory code for organisations in the criminal justice system to comply with. The revised Victims' Code will come into effect in April 2021.

In results obtained from the survey of those affected by crime in Bedfordshire, 65% said they were unaware of the code, 17% were aware, but had not read it, 3% were aware but found it difficult to access and understand. Only 16% said they were aware and found it easy to access and understand.

There are some issues with recording mechanisms to monitor police compliance with certain elements of the Victims' Code on the police database Athena, such as; Victim Personal Statements and Restorative Justice and overall compliance with the Victims Code as a 'tick box' function. The VNA recognises there is limited victim understanding of these processes and of the Victims' Code in general, which requires raising awareness and compliance monitoring processes to be efficient.

VNA Points of note

- Extensive efforts have gone into the research and analysis for the VNA and engaging with partner organisations. However, any work that could not be included within the scope of the VNA or was highlighted as a result of the VNA, has been incorporated into the recommendations for future work.
- The VNA will be a live document once it is published on the OPCC website and will be developed over time if required.
- Throughout this document the term Domestic Abuse (DA) has been used. However, official titles, schemes or references from other documents using the alternative term Domestic Violence (DV) have not been altered.
- Throughout this document the terms the police and the force have sometimes been interchanged.

2. Executive Summary

This Victims' Needs Analysis has created a series of 28 recommendations in response to areas of change required, covering areas such as; process changes, cultural reviews and approach of commissioned services across partnerships. The recommendations have been designed to be delivered, monitored and completed.

It has also been found that several areas require further in-depth research and it is suggested that recommendations may come from those deep dives and should be tracked and recorded by the OPCC as an addition to this VNA, though the research may require support from partners.

It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impact upon the world of victim care and this document acknowledges that impact and changes that have been made to cope for during and after the pandemic.

In February 2021 the Victim's Minister, Dame Vera Baird QC released her report to Government to call for a new Victim Law and stated that the falling confidence in the criminal justice system could only be restored by treating victims as participants rather than outsiders in events that could have been pivotal moments in their lives. This document stands with that statement and has an ambition to be part of the solution so that the people of Bedfordshire can receive the service they both expect and deserve.

This document is there for focused on partners moving together to further improve our approaches and services.

Bedfordshire Reported Crime Patterns

Police reported data

- Recorded crime in 2020 decreased by 3.3% from the previous year
- Key contributing factors were burglary and vehicle offences. This was balanced with the increases still being seen long-term around violence without injury, stalking, harassment and public order.
- Solved crime rates ended the year at 11.3%, slightly under the previous 12 months rate of 11.7%.

Reported crime rates in Bedfordshire are similar to comparable police forces

Bedfordshire's pattern of trend for all crimes reported from June 2017 to June 2020 is very similar to other comparable police forces, peaking in September and December 2018, March 2019 and has consistently fallen throughout 2020 to fall back in line with similar areas.

High rates of recorded burglary crime

Burglary crimes had a significantly higher rate in comparison to similar forces per 1,000 population throughout December 2017 to March 2019. The rate of recorded crime for burglary noticeably decreased from June 2019 and at present is only slightly higher than similar police forces in the United Kingdom. Burglary crime also decreased in Bedfordshire from March 2020 to June 2020, throughout the first national lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Increasing rates of recorded drug related crime

Although Bedfordshire's drug related crimes per 1,000 population is shown to be comparable with similar police forces, there was a significant rise in December 2018 and has ascended from September 2019 to the highest level throughout the reporting period (June 2017 – June 2020) of 0.76 in June 2020.

Higher trends of recorded vehicle crime

Throughout June 2017 to June 2020, Bedfordshire is shown to have a significantly higher trend in police recorded vehicle crime per 1,000 population, peaking at 3.40 in December 2018 and has decreased to its lowest level within the timeframe (June 2017 – June 2020) of 1.98 in June 2020.

Victims' needs – Survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire

Engaging with 296 victims as part of the VNA through the bespoke survey, provided valuable insight into victims needs in Bedfordshire.

It is concerning that 59% were repeat victims and the overall impact to physical and mental wellbeing was significant. 84% felt some impact to their physical wellbeing and 94% felt impact to their mental wellbeing. Measuring this on a scale between 0-10 there was 73% whose mental wellbeing was at the higher end between 5-10 and the most common being 10 on the scale (31%)

Emotional and practical support from family, friends or victim support services significantly decreases the impact. After support there was a 24% increase of victims who were not impacted at all, bringing the total to 30%. There was a positive decrease of victims placing highly on the scale after they had received support. 31% of victims felt they needed or wanted support but only 17% actually accessed services. 26% did not know at the time whether they needed support.

Many victims confirmed they felt there was a lack of access to counselling support or awareness of support services. 67% said they were not informed of any victim support services that may be able to help them. 7% would have liked help from services and 9% did not know they could get help.

COVID-19 impacted 24% of victim's ability to cope and recover from the crime. Some key themes included:

- not being able to have face to face meetings
- not being able to see friends or family to help them cope
- not being able to leave the house to go to a safe place away from the ongoing offences (particularly ASB or abuse victims)
- not being able to leave the house to help take their mind away from the crime or affect
- feeling unsafe in their home or not being able to get home repairs or security installed.

The survey results showed there is a lack of awareness of support services available and the potential barriers to access. It also showed the significance of how support can assist victims with coping and recovering from the crime.

Victim satisfaction levels

The majority of victim survey respondents (76% in the Bedfordshire Police Satisfaction Survey) were generally satisfied with the overall service received from Bedfordshire Police. However, Common themes of dissatisfaction for victims which have been documented in complaints and surveys such as Bedfordshire Police Satisfaction Survey, We Care Survey, Signpost and OPCC surveys, are:

- Delayed or lack of communication, feedback and progress updates from the police following a crime being reported
- No action taken following the report of a crime or not receiving notification of an outcome
- Feeling as though the police have not taken the report of crime seriously
- No follow up on potential evidence that the victim has advised of (CCTV, witness details etc)

Key themes of helpful emotional and practical support

Feedback from victims regarding the most useful forms of emotional and practical support were:

- Having support from someone to talk to about the situation they are in
- Access to counselling for their mental wellbeing
- Council or landlord action against residents or community
- Advice on personal and home security / safety
- Installation of security measures to increase safety

Gaps identified in current provision, data / information and process utilisation

Anti-social behaviour victims

Whilst there are dedicated teams within Local Authorities relating to antisocial-behaviour, research suggests ASB victims are generally overlooked in relation to the impact that the behaviour can have and a lack of victim support services available to them. Where there is no criminal element to be recorded and investigated they do not meet the criteria of victim covered under the Victims' Code of Practice.

Witness Feedback

The VNA research and partner engagement has shown that the recording of witness views, feedback and issues is an area that still requires focus and is not currently at a good level.

Restorative Justice

Research showed a decreasing proportion of victims are being offered the opportunity to meet with the offender and partake in restorative justice process (7.8% in 2017-18 to 4.8% in 2018-19). Just under a third of victims accepted the offer of a meeting in 2018-19. Around one in four victims said they would have accepted such an offer in each of the last five years

Contradicting responses to restorative justice questions in the survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire showed a lack of understanding and awareness from victims.

The impact of COVID-19 to crime and victims

Domestic abuse (DA) has increased and enhanced case complexity

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected crime and victims in specific areas. Recorded crime data shows the number of victims who have suffered crimes of domestic abuse has increased and case complexity has been enhanced in terms of the physical and mental affect to victims. Research has shown:

In April 2020

- 67.4% of DA survivors who were experiencing abuse confirmed that it had got worse since COVID-19
- 76.1% said they were having to spend more time with their abuser

In June 2020

- 52% were feeling more afraid
- 58% were feeling that they had nobody to turn to for help during lockdown

DA support services have noted an increase in case complexity where there have been extended lengths of time before victims have made contact to the police or support services. Victims have felt they had nowhere to flee and it is not safe for them to contact police or support services. In turn, abuse has continued or they are living in a potentially dangerous and frightening environment for longer.

The Domestic Abuse Bill is due to come into effect in April 2021 and will legislate a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time. It will see the new role of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner and include a new civil preventative order regime, the Domestic Abuse Protection Notice (DAPN) to provide immediate protection following a domestic abuse incident, and a new civil Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DAPO) to provide flexible, longer-term protection for victims.

Crimes of fraud have increased and adapted during COVID-19

It is reported that online fraudulent crime has adapted and risen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is increased vulnerability of victims due to increased online activity during the lockdown and loneliness where romance fraud is concerned.

Criminal Justice Proceedings

There have been considerable delays to court hearings and trials due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These prolonged periods for victims and witnesses waiting to attend could cause them to disengage from the process.



Signpost

Signpost have supported victims since 2018 and continues to offer services of support, advice, information and referral on other victim support services that can help individuals based on their specific needs. The organisation 'Victim Support' assisted in the area of victim services prior to 2018.

Signpost satisfaction survey responses showed a hugely positive response of 97% general satisfaction of overall service. A separate 'We Care Survey' aimed mostly at police satisfaction with a much smaller sample size also covers Signpost questions, and it receives a much lower response of 55% being generally satisfied. The contrasting results and both surveys are reviewed within the VNA.

Signpost is continually growing and developing to meet the needs of as many victims as possible. There are approximately 5,000 crimes per month in Bedfordshire. An average of 3,000 (not including fraud) of those meet the criteria for Signpost to act on.

3. Document Purpose

This Victims Needs Analysis (VNA) will review information and data to understand the needs of victims of crime across Bedfordshire and the issues they face now and into the future. The primary goals of the analysis are:

- Providing an intelligence lead and evidence-based guide to further aid the commissioning of future victim services
- Providing a strategic overview of national policy and the implications for local areas.
- Reviewing national and local data to understand key themes and trends relating to crime and victims and the demand on services.
- Providing a strategic overview of local Community Safety Partnership and police priorities.
- An overview of current service provision, identifying good practice and evident gaps.
- Raising awareness and promoting understanding of victims' issues in the county

The previous VNA undertaken by Bedfordshire OPCC was researched between May and July 2015 and published in 2016. In the considerable amount of time since the last VNA there have been newly introduced or updated laws, policies and government guidance, which relate to victims or may affect them. Other changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic which have significantly affected the nation are considered regarding the impact on crime and victims.

The upcoming election of the next Bedfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner was delayed in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and is now due to take place in May 2021. For the newly elected PCC the VNA seeks to provide a strong understanding of victims needs and highlight any areas requiring focus moving forward. This will enable and evoke efforts in relation to assisting victims on their journey of coping and recovering from the impact of crime.

4. Review of the 2016 VNA Recommendations

Twelve recommendations were previously made as a result of the 2016 VNA¹. These have been reviewed alongside any actions since the recommendations to confirm whether they have been implemented and if any further action is required.

- 1. Data and evidence gathering:** Continued and improved data gathering on prevalence and profiles is required to ensure provision is based on need; a robust activity dataset should be established and used for all services funded by the OPCC.

Update: The Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit for Bedfordshire (VERU) established a data sharing agreement between Police and hospitals in 2020 that is key to understanding violent crimes. There is still a gap between data sharing of third sector partners / community safety partners to be addressed in more detail.

- 2. Commissioning:** An increased commitment to joint and 'joined up', transparent commissioning by partners is needed to ensure equitable service provision for the entire county that can also respond to specific area need. This should ensure that services are available for victims using criminal justice and non-criminal justice pathways. Improved links with health commissioning is required.

Update: A change to the commissioning process was made in 2020 to run earlier between September to December. This gives services between January to March to run recruitment processes and to find alternative funding if the OPCC has decided not to offer funding. When the funding comes in to effect on 1st April they will have a full plan of how they are going to deliver it. The OPCC also hosts a session which is open to all agencies who have entered bids. In the session the OPCC provide rationale for the awarded funds and shares bids with key partners for feedback advice.

- 3. Pan-county strategy and champions:** Pan-county strategies are clearly valued; it is recommended that a strategic model of an overall county 'champion' per crime type is appointed together with area-specific 'champions' feeding into local multi-agency partnerships to ensure a proactive and joined up response.

Update: The Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) bring together the five responsible authorities; Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Fire and Rescue Service, Police, Council (CBC) and Offender Management Services. The CSPs also work closely with partners from the Youth Offending Service (YOS), Public Health and the voluntary and community sector.

There are some pan-county crime strategies and boards collectively working together to make Bedfordshire a safe place to live, such as the Pan-Bedfordshire Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy 2015-2017², Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Safeguarding Children Boards³. A review of all pan-county strategies is required to establish any potential gaps.

¹Bedfordshire OPCC 2016 VNA <https://www.bedfordshire.pcc.police.uk/fluidcms/files/files/Bedfordshire-Needs-Assessment.pdf>

²PAN-BEDFORDSHIRE CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION STRATEGY 2015-2017 https://www.luton.gov.uk/Health_and_social_care/Lists/LutonDocuments/PDF/Pan-Bedfordshire-child-sexual-exploitation-strategy.pdf

³Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Safeguarding Children Boards <https://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.com/#>

4. Low and medium risk levels: It is recommended that provision ensures that low and medium risk victims can still access support to avoid potential escalation to greater risk.

Update: The Bedfordshire Signpost service for victims of crime introduced in 2018 by the OPCC is open to all members of the public to seek free advice and support to help them cope and recover from the impact of crime. Signpost ensures low and medium risk levels are entitled to the support required.

5. High risk repeat victimisation cases: For all types of crime, especially Domestic Abuse, a small cohort of already high risk victims frequently report repeat incidents. This cohort requires a new model of intensive partnership working developing to reduce incidence and 'pull' on agency resources.

Update: Independent Domestic Violence Advisory (IDVA) Services provide a Safe Lives accredited service offering free and confidential advice, advocacy and support to high risk victims of domestic across Bedfordshire. They support any victims over the age of 16 years old that are at risk of significant harm; regardless of their gender, sexuality, disability, culture or background. Services are provided across Bedfordshire and referrals are accepted from any agency or self-referrals.

6. Clustering: Provision must acknowledge that many individuals are victims of a cluster of different crimes – such as sexual violence, domestic abuse and honour based violence – and service delivery should be victim rather than crime-led in how they support an individual.

Update: This category is now referred to as complex cases. Multiple services commissioned by the OPCC such as 'Bedford Open Door'⁴ contribute to ensuring these victims are supported. Bedford Open Door is a charity providing FREE and confidential counselling to young people aged 13 - 25. Counselling is provided by a team of fully trained, experienced and friendly volunteer counsellors.

7. Preventative work in schools: Given that girls aged 14-16 years are at a high risk of victimisation of sexual violence and in some areas, honour based crimes, partnerships need to proactively work with schools, colleges and academies to improve the take up of preventative programmes. In addition, preventative work must tackle the 'normalisation' of peer to peer criminal behaviour. Bedfordshire's population of children and young people is higher than the national average and adequate service provision must be available for this age group.

Update: Multiple programmes have been funded by the OPCC in the past five years to ensure preventative work is being carried out in schools. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic this has now ceased and alternative methods need to be established.

8. Children witnessing Domestic Abuse: Good work is already taking place in the county, but it must reach all relevant children and young people in order to help them build healthy relationships themselves.

Update: The Early Childhood Partnership currently commissioned by the OPCC has a range of options around their locations such as domestic abuse courses and group support. These are easily accessible for everyone living in Bedfordshire and meets the needs of the diverse population. The services help victims of domestic abuse to understand how it affects them and their children, whilst also helping them to feel safer and reduce the likelihood of repeat victimisation.

⁴Bedford Open Door - <http://www.bedfordopendoor.org.uk/>

Also commissioned are Embrace, a service solely focused on supporting children, young people and families who are victims of serious crime. They help them cope with what has happened, support their recovery and provide services that enable them to put events behind them, move on and fulfil their life's potential.

- 9. Removing barriers to access:** Commissioning and delivery must strive to remove possible barriers to access. These may be due to diversity, culture, gender, sexuality, service structures or geography and need to be overcome with creative 'outside the box' thinking. This includes promoting the SARC to self-referring victims, and the Child Sexual Exploitation Panel to health professionals.

Update: The OPCC has historically incorporated the need to fill gaps such as bespoke services for those experiencing crime that was motivated because of gender or sexuality. It did not yield substantial support from the third sector. This has again been looked at with the 2021 OPCC fund for Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence where the MoJ has specifically requested it to be covered.

The MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is a multi-agency meeting where professionals share information and agree a safety plan to reduce the risk to the survivor and any children. Whilst the victim does not attend the meeting, their views are represented by an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) to ensure that the safety plan suits their individual needs and circumstances. The primary focus of the MARAC is to safeguard the adult victim. This assists the pathway to victims accessing services as the professionals share information and make recommendations for support and reducing risk which can help to overcome barriers to access.

The OPCC website incorporated the 'recite me' tool which allows visitors to customise the website in ways which work best for them. Providing tools such as, a screen reader, translation tools, reading support and the ability to make styling changes.

- 10. Post refuge re-housing:** Although difficult, strategic discussions are required to work out how to alleviate the 'bottle neck' that refugees experience regarding moving women on from their accommodation.

Update: In 2020 the OPCC reviewed the process of how individuals and families can seek shelter when experiencing domestic abuse. Although this was for a temporary measure during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic the work has been used to ensure all agencies understand the flow of available resource.

There are multiple services in Bedfordshire helping victims flee abuse, some of which have been awarded funding by the OPCC. The Local Authority (LA) also have housing duties to home those fleeing and support move on from refuge. Some additional work may be required to understand whether there is a 'bottle neck' for those moving on from their accommodation.

- 11. Victim consultation:** This needs assessment was not able to comprehensively gather victim views. It is recommended that a plan is developed for a countywide victim consultation. The information gathered then must feed directly into service provision.

Update: It was unfortunate that the 2016 VNA did not include input from victims of that timeframe. The 2021 VNA has included a bespoke assessment to ensure views are considered as a major item of research. Further to this, the 2021 VNA has also used the Bedfordshire Police satisfaction survey, Signpost survey and the Bedfordshire OPCC annual surveys. The 2021 survey was designed in collaboration with key partners to ensure encapsulation of their views before release.

12. Witness consultation: Neither was this needs assessment able to investigate witness issues. Again, it is recommended that this is undertaken through a countywide consultation.

Update: Following the 2021 VNA research and partner engagement it is noted that the recording of witness views, feedback and issues is an area that still requires focus and is not currently at a good level, thus forming part of the recommendations in this VNA.

13. Action Plan: The above recommendations cannot all be actioned immediately. The OPCC therefore needs to develop a stepped action plan that clearly states how and when recommendations will be tackled.

Update: Shortly after the 2016 VNA was published there was a change of elected Police and Crime Commissioner. The four-year Police and crime plan launched by the PCC in May 2016 has hugely contributed to the 2016 VNA recommendations. The recommendations made as part of the 2021 VNA will address any potential additional support still required.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Key National Policy

5.1.1 Code of Practice for Victims of Crime

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime⁵ (VCOP or Victims Code) was established by the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and came into effect in 2006. It is the statutory code that sets out the minimum level of service that victims should receive from organisations in the Criminal Justice system. This includes but is not exclusive to the Police, OPCCs, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and victim support services.

Since the introduction of the Victims Code there have been three updates. Firstly, in 2013 to clarify the obligations of criminal justice agencies and the entitlements of victims. Secondly, in 2015 to comply with the European Union Victims' directive which included expanding to include victims of all offence categories, ensuring that victims are entitled to receive support and information from all relevant public sector bodies and entitling all victims who report a crime to receive a written acknowledgement from the police.

The most recent update to the Victims' Code took place in November 2020. Part of the MoJ commitment was to continue working towards a vision for a Victims' Code that better meets the needs of victims and ensures that the right support is available at the right time. This revised Victims' Code will come into effect in April 2021.

It was stated that many people were still not aware of the Code, and that those who were found it difficult to understand what it means for them. For these reasons, the MoJ focused their efforts on the following key areas:

- Accessibility and raising awareness
- Providing clearer information on victims' rights to access practical and emotional support
- Strengthening communication and taking account of the victim's preferences
- Increasing the voice of the victim through providing more flexibility in the Victim Personal Statement process

⁵Ministry of Justice (Nov 2020) Code of Practice for Victims of Crime <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/victim-policy/consultation-on-improving-the-victims-code/results/victims-code-2020.pdf>

The changes endeavour to base the Victims' Code around a clearly defined set of rights that are both easy for victims to understand and which clearly set out the minimum level of service they can expect from Criminal Justice agencies. To help ensure that the experience of victims within the justice system improves and will form the basis of the MoJ's forthcoming Victims' Law, which will seek to guarantee the rights.

5.1.2 Summary of victims' rights

Rights 1, 4 and 12 apply to all victims. The remaining rights only apply where a crime has been reported to the police:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

7) 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.

8) 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.

9) 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.

10) 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.

11) 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.

12) 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.

5.1.3 Local implication and review

There is a nationwide obligation to uphold the statutory Code of Practice for Victims'. It is important that members of the public are aware of the code to understand what constitutes a victim and what their rights are.

As part of this VNA focus groups were held to engage with partners within Bedfordshire Criminal Justice, third sector and Local Authority. Common feedback within the groups was that the code is not currently utilised by victims to its full potential and that there could be increased efforts to raise awareness and understanding across Bedfordshire. Full focus group details can be read in section 8.1 of this report.

A survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire was also launched to gain the views of victims in key areas being researched as part of the VNA and included questions relating to the Victims' Code. 65% of the respondents said they were unaware of the code, 17% were aware but had not read it, 3% were aware but found it difficult to access and understand. Only 16% said they were aware and found it easy to access and understand. Full survey review and findings in section of this report.

5.1.4 Victims' Code Compliance

It is Bedfordshire Police procedure is that the Victims' Code is covered by all officers in attendance with victims and logged within the IT system 'Athena' operated by Bedfordshire Police. A dip sample of 30 cases is reviewed for VCOP compliance by the Victims and Witness Board. It was noted that this is a result of a tick box on each case for VCOP compliance and a lack of detail recorded behind this.

An independent review of Bedfordshire Police compliance with the Victims Code was

undertaken by RSM Risk Assurance Services LLP as part of the approved Internal Audit Plan for 2019/20. The objective of the review was to provide assurance over the processes in place to support compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victims Code). This included review of procedural and guidance documentation and testing of a total of 30 crimes from the 2018/19 year to assess compliance with key elements of the Victims Code.

A number of recommendations were identified as a result of the review which were considered by the Police and the OPCC and adopted into the Bedfordshire Police Compliance with the Victims Code 2020 Action Plan. The plan intended to enable the police to effectively progress the recommendations and subsequent ability to track and monitor progress.

Victims' Code 2020 Action Plan - Key actions

Initial Victim Needs Assessments (IVNAs)

The police and Signpost use two separate systems through the life cycle of criminal proceedings. The police use Athena to record need assessments completed for victims of criminal cases. During the completion of needs assessments, officers are required to answer a set of questions to evaluate the needs of the victim. Upon completion of the assessment, victim referral is selected on Athena which transfers the case to Case Tracker used by the Signpost Team.

The police will ensure that Initial Victim Needs Assessments are completed as per the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime, the results of which will be clearly recorded in Athena.

The importance of both capturing Initial Needs Assessment Information in Athena and compliance with the Crime Investigation Management Procedure will be reiterated by the Signpost service for victims.

Updates

- Signpost began attending all new student officer training sessions to reiterate the importance of providing information re IVNAs. They also attended training sessions for the Community Policing Teams North & South in order to remind and instruct officers to provide the information.
- A new control measure was implemented within Signpost whereby Internal referrals are not accepted by the hub unless an IVNA has been completed. If no IVNA is present it will be referred back to the OIC for completion.
- A police Intranet article was circulated in relation to IVNA requirements
- A spreadsheet is now compiled of all officers that are not completing the IVNAs, this spreadsheet is then sent to supervisors on a monthly basis to be raised with officers during 1-2-1's. This process means that victims are not waiting to be contacted whilst the IVNA is chased as Signpost are contacting the victim in the first instance.

Referrals – Signpost

Upon the completion of Needs Assessments, support is provided to victims through the Signpost function. Referrals are recorded within the Case Tracker system. Where victims do not need support, 'No Need' letters are issued to the victims by the Signpost Team to inform them of the services available should they wish support at later dates. Before sending 'No Needs' letters to any DA victims, they are assessed for appropriates and any risk before sending. The Signpost team may contact victims via phone calls or letters to provide support to victims. Letters are not to be sent where it could lead to escalation of risk such as DA victims.

Procedure

The Force and Signpost have in place procedures to support both staff and management with recording victim cases on Athena and Case Tracker. The procedures detail key information including trigger points of when to contact victims involved in criminal cases. The procedures are available to staff through the force's intranet facility.

The Force will ensure all relevant Policies and Procedures have in place next review dates which are clearly stated to ensure documents are reviewed and updated frequently.

All process maps and SOPs within Signpost were updated to include a review date. These reviews are annual and to be undertaken by the managers within the hub.

Notifications: standard vs enhanced cases

Notifications on the progress of investigations is provided to victims based upon two case types, standard or enhanced. Where victim cases are considered to be standard, updates are provided to victims within 28 days of the initial report made to the Force and further updates are provided within 28 days. Where victim cases are enhanced, updates are provided within 10 days of the initial report, however, further updates are provided within 28 days.

The Force will ensure that all reported crimes are allocated a case service type. Furthermore, victims will be updated on the progress of cases.

Notification on trial outcomes

It is the responsibility of the investigating officer to ensure the victim has been updated and made aware of the outcome claimed in this finalisation process. The Victim Contact Log must be updated on ATHENA and VCOP complied with. In the event of significant incidents occurring within cases, victims are to be updated within 24 hours of occurrence.

The Force will ensure that all victim updates are recorded within the individual case contact logs within Athena. The Force will also ensure that victims will be notified on trial dates and outcomes in line with the Victims Code of Compliance.

The Witness Care Officers within Administration of Justice (AOJ) use the CPS Witness Management System (WMS) to record contact with victims and witnesses. This includes notifying the outcome of first hearing, conducting a needs assessment for witnesses required for trial, sending out witness warning notifications, updating on all significant events throughout the life of the cases including final outcome of the case.

The purpose of the Action Plan was to offer assurance to the Strategic Board that mitigations have been designed and in place in relation to each of the five recommendations.

5.1.4.1 Points of note / Considerations

Bedfordshire Police action plan for compliance with the Victims Code of Practice was created January 2020. This was ahead of the revised Victims' code update in November 2020. A new action plan may be required to accommodate any changes.

It is clear from survey responses and other research that lack of case updates on progress and outcomes is one of the key areas of dissatisfaction for victims where they feel the Victims' Code is not complied with. Whilst efforts are being made to update victims within the standard and enhanced notification periods, the capacity of the Officer in the Case can only stretch so far. To accommodate the issue for victims and reduce impact to OIC capacity, alternative methods of updating victims more efficiently should be reviewed. For example, an online service where

victims are able to access case updates via an account with security questions and their crime reference number would be hugely beneficial. The logistics and implementation of a system such as this may be complex and large scale, however it is seen as a serious issue area for victims which needs to be addressed.

5.1.5 Victim Services Commissioning Framework⁶

The Commissioning Framework provided by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), whilst not mandatory, suggests services are designed to enable victims to 'cope and recover' and as part of this take a holistic approach to victims' needs by supporting them in eight key areas:

- Mental and physical health
- Shelter and accommodation
- Family friends and children
- Education, skills and employment
- Drugs and alcohol
- Finance and benefits
- Outlook and attitude
- Social interactions

While these overarching themes and broad requirements for services have been set out, the emphasis has been placed on PCCs to respond to their local areas in the way that they commission services, which means an understanding of the local context is key to commissioning the right services.

5.1.6 The Victims' Rights Directive (European Union)

The European Commission states the Victims' Rights Directive 2012⁷ lays down a set of rights for victims of crime and corresponding obligations on Member States. The Victims' Rights Directive is the major EU level instrument applicable to all victims of crime. It is the cornerstone of EU victims' rights policy

In May 2020 a report from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council⁸ was released. The report outlines that it assesses the extent to which Member States have taken the necessary measures in order to comply with the Directive. It focuses on the core provisions of the Directive that are grouped in the following clusters: (1) scope and definitions; (2) access to information; (3) procedural rights; (4) access to support services; (5) restorative justice; and (6) right to protection.

Whilst there is no mention of the specific Member States which were seen to have complied or not complied with the directive, the report states it includes the UK, as it covers a period during which it was an EU Member State and part of the transition period during which the Directive continued to apply.

The conclusion of the report states the assessment shows the full potential of the Directive has not been reached yet. The implementation of the Directive is not satisfactory. This is particularly due to incomplete and/or incorrect transposition.

The report also raises numerous concerns on the practical implementation of the Directive. Shortcomings in implementation of some key provisions of the Directive, such as access to

⁶Ministry of Justice (2013) Victims' Services Commissioning Framework https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/203979/victims-services-commissioning-framework.pdf

⁷European Parliament and Council Victims' Rights Directive <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1421925131614&uri=CELEX:32012L0029>

⁸European Commission report on Victims' Rights Directive <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2020:188:FIN>

information, support services and protection in accordance with victims' individual needs, were found in most Member States. It seems that the provisions related to procedural rights and to restorative justice are less problematic.

The Commission is working closely with Member States to overcome the identified difficulties. Moreover, the Commission promotes correct implementation of the Directive through financial support. For example, the European Network on Victims' Rights, set up under an EU grant, provides a forum of national experts who exchange best practices and discuss correct implementation of the Directive.

Following the report an EU Victims' Rights Strategy⁹ was released in June 2020 based on five priorities.

1. Effective communication with victims and providing for safe environment for victims to report crime
2. Improving protection and support of the most vulnerable victims
3. Facilitating victims' access to compensation
4. Strengthening cooperation and coordination among all relevant actors/representatives
5. Strengthening the international dimension of victims' rights

5.1.7 Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is a diversionary process available to all victims under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (Victim's Code), Victims are able to communicate with the offender in a controlled environment. This can take place at any stage of the Criminal Justice process including after conviction. It is commonly used as part of the conditional caution outcome¹⁰.

The Crown Prosecution Service note the aims of Restorative Justice are commonly stated to be:

- Victim satisfaction: to reduce the fear of the victim and ensure they feel 'paid back' for the harm that has been done to them.
- Engagement with the perpetrator: to ensure that they are aware of the consequences of their actions, have the opportunity to make reparation, and agree a plan for their restoration in the community.
- Creation of community capital: to increase public confidence in the Criminal Justice system and other agencies with a responsibility for delivering a response to anti-social behaviour

The Restorative Justice Council give the following summary of the use of Restorative Justice within the criminal justice arena¹¹:

Restorative justice gives victims the chance to meet or communicate with their offenders to explain the real impact of the crime – it empowers victims by giving them a voice.

⁹EU Victims' Rights Strategy https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/knowledge_publications_tools_and_data/documents/0_victimscrimen_factsheet_v4_web.pdf

¹⁰Restorative Justice <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/restorative-justice>

¹¹Restorative Justice Council – Criminal Justice <https://restorativejustice.org.uk/criminal-justice>

It also holds offenders to account for what they have done and helps them to take responsibility and make amends. Government research demonstrates that restorative justice provides an 85% victim satisfaction rate, and a 14% reduction in the frequency of reoffending.

Restorative justice can be used for any type of crime and at any stage of the criminal justice system, including alongside a prison sentence. The advocates use of safe, high quality restorative justice wherever and whenever it is needed.

The Ministry of Justice supported restorative justice providers to raise awareness of their services in their local areas in 2014 and 2015. A range of promotional communication materials to support local providers was developed.

In the Victims statistics, 2014-15 to 2018-19: victims' services, restorative justice and information, advice and support¹², the Victims' Commissioner said:

"Unfortunately, some four years after my predecessor's review, A Question of Quality: A Review of Restorative Justice, we continue to see an unmet need for restorative justice. This report found few victims recall receiving an offer of a meeting with the offender to ask why they committed the offence (5% in 2018/19). For those who did not receive an offer, one in four victims said they would have accepted – a figure which has remained consistent in each of the last five years.

There is good evidence restorative justice can be beneficial for both victims and offenders, increasing victim satisfaction with the Criminal Justice system, and helping to reduce reoffending. Also, if there is to be increased use of out-of-court-disposals for offenders, restorative justice is a key tool in managing offending and supporting victims."

Summary statistics in the same report read:

A decreasing proportion of victims are being offered the opportunity to meet with the offender to ask why they committed the offence (7.8% in 2017-18 to 4.8% in 2018/19). Just under a third of victims accepted the offer of a meeting in 2018-19. Around one in four victims said they would have accepted such an offer in each of the last five years.

5.1.7.1 Local implication and review

Signpost manage a restorative justice caseload and have supported 126 people through the process. Referrals are received from Probation Service and also the Youth Offending Service (YOS). The process is carried out in conjunction with these services.

Signpost also take a proactive approach to their RJ caseload by working through the Court closure lists and contacting appropriate victims to discuss the RJ process and establish whether they would like to take part in it. This offers victims further potential closure beyond the outcome of the Court hearing.

In addition to this, Signpost have provided awareness training to internal teams and partners. They have also delivered training approaches to eleven local schools to raise awareness of the process and it's benefits. Three of these Signpost delivered alongside the Anne Frank Trust.

¹²Victims commissioner Victims statistics, 2014-15 to 2018-19: victims' services, restorative justice and information, advice and support https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/victcomm2-prod-storage-119w3o4kq2z48/uploads/2020/06/2020-06-05_OVC-Victims-Statistics-part-2-1.pdf

Many victims might not initially see the benefits of coming into contact with the offender and will not see the value it could bring them. It is important to teach this to the local community starting at a young age.

Restorative justice questions were included in the survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire to obtain feedback on the effectiveness and utilisation. Many respondents confirmed a lack of knowledge of the process. Conflicting answers to separate questions relating to RJ also showed there may also be a lack of understanding of the process.

5.1.8 Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (Clare's Law or DVDS)

Clare's Law was brought into effect across England and Wales in 2014¹³ however was unfortunately not covered in the 2016 VNA. It enables the police to disclose information to a victim or potential victim of domestic abuse about their partner's or ex-partner's previous abusive or violent offending. The scheme is based on two elements, the "right to ask" and the "right to know". The "right to ask" request can be made by the individual at risk or by a third party such as a family member. Every request is checked by a panel made up of police, probation services and other agencies to ensure information is only passed on where it is lawful, proportionate and necessary. The "right to know" enables the police to make a disclosure on their own initiative if they receive information about the violent or abusive behaviour of a person that may impact on the safety of that person's current or ex-partner. Trained police officers and advisers are then on hand to support victims through the difficult and sometimes dangerous transitional period.

DVDS Guidance will be put into statute alongside the Domestic Abuse Bill (April 2021). This will place a duty on the police to have regard to the guidance and will strengthen the visibility and consistent operation of the scheme.

Key facts listed in the government information of DVDS factsheet - Updated 17 August 2020¹⁴:

- In the year ending March 2019, 55% of the 7,252 "right to know" applications made resulted in a disclosure (4,008) (data from 36 forces).
- In the year ending March 2019, 40% of the 6,496 "right to ask" applications made resulted in a disclosure (2,575) (data from 39 forces).

5.1.8.1 Local implication and review

Attempts were made to obtain Bedfordshire DVDS statistics. In the last quarter of 2020 the service provider for DVDS moved from the Public Protection Unit to the in-house Emerald team within Bedfordshire Police. Unfortunately, previous data capture was inconsistent however moving forward there will be a more robust system to collate data and review the findings. Within the Force locally there is a focus on improving data management and data quality beyond DVDS.

¹³Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (2016) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575361/DVDS_guidance_FINAL_v3.pdf

¹⁴Policy Paper Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme factsheet - Updated 17 August 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-violence-disclosure-scheme-factsheet>

Within Bedfordshire the police promote the scheme with a leaflet that gives full detail of the process and how to access it¹⁵. There is also an online request process accessible through the Bedfordshire Police website¹⁶.

5.1.9 Domestic Abuse Bill

The Domestic Abuse Bill is due to come into effect in April 2021 and will Legislate a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time. It will see the new role of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner who will drive better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas and agencies.

It will also include a new civil preventative order regime, the Domestic Abuse Protection Notice (DAPN) to provide immediate protection following a domestic abuse incident, and a new civil Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DAPO) to provide flexible, longer-term protection for victims¹⁷.

Where there was no obligation for Local Authorities previously, they will be required to support domestic abuse victims and their children in safe accommodation, and give priority to homeless victims. In October 2020 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government announced £6m funding to support Local Authorities domestic abuse services, giving them time to prepare ahead of the Bill coming into effect.

Other key elements noted by parliament include¹⁸:

- prohibit perpetrators of certain offences from cross-examining their victims in court (and vice versa) and give courts the power to appoint a legal representative to conduct the cross-examination on their behalf
- clarify terms of consent for infliction of harm for sexual gratification and extend jurisdiction in criminal courts to further violent and sexual offences
- enable offenders to be subject to polygraph testing as a condition of their licence following release from custody
- places the guidance supporting the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme on a statutory footing.

The bill is currently in draft form at committee stage with the House of Lords (11/02/2021)¹⁹.

¹⁵Bedfordshire Police – Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme Leaflet <https://www.bedfordshire.police.uk/assets/PDFs/Domestic-abuse/Clares-Law-leaflet-disclosure-scheme.pdf>

¹⁶Bedfordshire Police – Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme – Online request <https://www.bedfordshire.police.uk/apply/Clares-Law#ee8c7123>

¹⁷Domestic Abuse Protection Notices / Orders factsheet <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/domestic-abuse-bill-2020-factsheets/domestic-abuse-protection-notices-orders-factsheet>

¹⁸Domestic Abuse Bill – Parliament <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2021/january/lords-debates-domestic-abuse-bill2/>

¹⁹ DA Bill current draft (05/02/2021) <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/58-01/124/5801124.pdf>

5.1.10 Victims' Right to Review Scheme

The Victims' Right to Review Scheme (VRR)²⁰ provides a victim with a specifically designed process to exercise the right to review certain CPS decisions not to start a prosecution or to stop a prosecution. If a new decision is required, it may be appropriate to institute or reinstitute criminal proceedings.

The VRR scheme can include two stages of review:

- firstly, a local resolution stage where reviews are conducted by a new prosecutor at the appropriate local CPS office or Crown Prosecution Service Direct (CPSD) where the original decision was made;
- secondly, (if the original decision not to prosecute is upheld), if eligible, a review independent from the local CPS office where the original decision was made, conducted by the Appeals and Review Unit (ARU).

In the eligibility section of the CPS VRR guidance the term victim extends to those affected by the crime and can include:

- close relatives of a person whose death was directly caused by criminal conduct;
- parents or guardians where the main victim is a child or youth under 18
- Police officers who are victims of crime
- family spokespersons of victims with a disability or who are so badly injured they cannot communicate; and
- businesses, providing they give a named point of contact.

It also states a request for a review should ordinarily be made within 10 working days of the date of the decision letter. Requests may be submitted after 10 working days, although a delay may impact negatively on the outcome of the decision-making process. Furthermore, requests made more than three months after the qualifying decision was communicated are unlikely to be accepted unless there are exceptional circumstances. While not an exhaustive list, exceptional circumstances may include when a victim has not been notified of their right to review, or has been given incorrect information about the timeframes.

There is no requirement for a victim to seek legal advice or representation or to provide reasons for requesting a review. The only action a victim need take is to notify the CPS of their request for review, within the agreed time frame. Any representations which are made are considered but should be submitted within 14 days of the request for review. Victims will be provided with contact details of the relevant CPS office in order that they can make contact by their preferred means.

Bedfordshire Police also have a Victims' Right to Review process²¹ which allows victims to request a review where a suspect has been identified, formally interviewed under caution and either:

- The police decide not to bring proceedings in cases where the police have authority to charge; or
- The police decide that the case does not meet the Threshold Test for referral to the CPS for a charging decision

²⁰Victims' Right to Review Scheme
<https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/victims-right-review-scheme>

²¹Bedfordshire Police Victim' Right to Review <https://www.bedfordshire.police.uk/information-and-services/Victim-care/Victims-right-to-review#ee8c7123>

There are 6 potential outcomes of the review;

- The original decision to take No Further Action is upheld;
- The original decision is overturned and proceedings are commenced against the suspect, i.e. they are charged/summonsed;
- The original decision is overturned and the suspect is dealt with by way of an out of court disposal;
- The original decision is overturned and the case is referred to the CPS for a charging decision;
- It is determined that further enquires need to be completed before the reviewing officer can make their decision;
- The original decision is overturned but the case is statute barred and proceedings cannot be instigated.

Between 18th Feb 2020 and 17th Feb 2021 51 Victims Right to Review requests were allocated to the appropriate Inspector to conduct a review. This figure does not include the number of requests made which did not meet the VRR guidance criteria.

Outcomes of the 51 reviews:

- 47 – original decision upheld
- 1 – offender received a caution
- 2 – additional work carried out qualifying the case to meet the threshold to go to CPS for a decision. CPS then advised the cases were not in the public interest.
- 1 – ongoing review

The majority of these cases were equally split between the Emerald Team and Crime Team, followed by the response team. One of the cases related to the roads policing unit and was passed to Joint Protective Services (JPS) for allocation.

5.1.11 Local implication and considerations

The impact to victims as a result of CPS decision to discontinue proceedings or not start them, could be significant to their ability to cope and recover from the crime. They may be left without a feeling of closure or justice. It may also wrongly result in loss of faith or dissatisfaction with the Police for a decision made by the CPS.

A review of Bedfordshire VRR data is required to understand the volume of cases being requested for review and the outcomes of the reviews. It could also assist with determining the extent of awareness of the VRR scheme and whether work needs to be done to raise awareness. A request for the data has been made.

Ahead of understanding whether increased efforts are needed to raise awareness it would seem Signpost could be a useful resource to highlight the process to victims. This could be addressed and implemented without waiting for the VRR data,

The CPS guidance states there is no requirement for a victim to seek legal advice or representation or to provide reasons for requesting a review and that any representations which are made will be considered. Although this is the case victims may wish to seek assistance with the process whether it be simply how to raise the request with CPS or, how to make additional representations for consideration during the review. Further Research is needed to establish whether there is a gap in support for victims in this area. Citizens Advice Bureau can provide advice in this area.

5.2 Independent Bodies

5.2.1 Victims' Commissioner

The current Victims' Commissioner (VC) is a champion for the interests of victims of crime and witnesses, with experience of the criminal justice system as Queens Counsel (QC), as a Government Minister in the MoJ, as a Solicitor General and as a Police and Crime Commissioner.

The VC outlines entitlements, guidance and advice²² to victims' through their journey which is broken down into 9 sections:

1. Reporting a crime
2. Charging and bail
3. Before the trial
4. The trial
5. After the trial
6. Parole
7. Claiming compensation
8. Restorative justice
9. Making a complaint

In September 2019 during the consultation period of the Victims' Code update, the VC responded to the 15 questions asked by the MoJ. It is important to note that this was prior to the update to the code. Some key VC comments included:

There is poor compliance on the part of Criminal Justice agencies in respect of delivering entitlements within the Victims Code of Practice. For example, my report, published on 7 August, on the requirement to offer all victims the chance to make a victim personal statement showed just 14% of victims recall such an offer being made in 2018/19. This is consistent with data collated over the past four years.

My recent research, published on 7 August, showed only one in seven victims are offered the opportunity to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS). Just 46% of victims who did make a VPS felt it was taken into account compared to 68% a year ago. These are worrying statistics and clearly show that this key victim entitlement is not being delivered effectively.

This is despite a VPS being one of the key entitlements available to victims under the Victims' Code. The statement offers victims the opportunity to express how the crime affected their lives physically, emotionally, financially or in any other way. Importantly, the account is articulated in the victim's own words.

It is clear to me the Police need to do more to raise awareness among victims of crime of their right to make a personal statement. This will ensure the voices and experiences of those most affected by crimes are heard by the courts.

We also need to explore why there was a sharp drop in the proportion of victims who felt their statement had been taken into account by the Criminal Justice system. With just 46% of those who did make a statement believing it was taken into account, this is the lowest recorded score in the past five years.

²²Victims' Commissioner – Victims' Journey Guidance - <https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/victims-journey/?accordion-section=Reporting+a+crime#Reporting+a+crime>

Compliance monitoring in the past has been almost non-existent, and recent research shows 80% of victims have no understanding of what their entitlements are. This means we are unable to hold agencies to account.

I welcome proposals to have separate guidance on the Code, one for victims and one for practitioners. However, the success of this initiative will depend on how the latter is drafted and in what forms it will be made available. As well as traditional means of providing public information, such as leaflets and on-line pdf documents, we ought to explore the use of videos, infographics and apps.

We also need to look at how victims can seek redress when entitlements are not delivered. At present, the victim has to find out which agency is responsible and pursue a complaint through their internal complaints process.

If this is unsatisfactory, they have to write to their MP in the hope they might refer the matter to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. Only a handful of cases are referred to the Ombudsman every year.

The report published by my predecessor, Baroness Newlove, in August 2018 on the support given to victims of mentally disordered offenders called for this group of victims to be given equal entitlements to those available for all other victims of crime. I support this position.

Victims of unrestricted patients are at present left without the support of a Victim Liaison Officer and are required to liaise directly with hospital authorities. The evidence of those who support this group of victims is that they have been let down by hospital authorities. They have struggled to receive the information they are entitled to expect. They have not been kept informed when patients are transferred. Some hospital staff refuse to have any contact with victims on grounds of patient confidentiality. Others are reported as being unaware of their statutory responsibilities for victim liaison, and receive no training, or resources to fulfil their obligations in this role.

Where patients are transferred to other psychiatric facilities there is no continuity of information or support.

I am concerned that any proposal requiring the existing arrangement to continue will merely perpetuate this wholly inadequate situation. By default, it offers this group of victims an inferior level of support compared to other victims.

Since the report was published 12 months ago, the Victim Contact Scheme has given an undertaking to train a cadre of Victim Liaison Officers (VLOs) to become specialists in Mentally Disordered Offenders (MDO) cases. This is a welcome development and I would like to see victims on unrestricted patients having access to this special support, with the VLO being the point of contact with hospital staff.

Some people who suffer because of a crime are not currently covered by the Victims' Code. In my predecessor's review into Anti-Social Behaviour she called for recognition of the impact on victims of persistent ASB, by revising the Victims' Code of Practice, to afford them the same entitlement to support as all other crime victims, when they reach the 'three complaints' threshold needed to activate the Community Trigger.

Others who are not classed as victims under the Code are children who suffer from domestic abuse within their household. These children and young people are a victim of circumstance, living in a household of abuse. Research on the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) suggests that children in such households can experience long term effects from adverse physical and mental health impacts, poorer educational outcomes and poorer long-term employability. These children are as much victims and those whom the perpetrator targets directly within the household. Including such children as victims in the Victims' Code should mean they too are entitled to victim support services and the other key entitlements under the Victims' Code.

I consistently hear from victims about the re-traumatisation involved in continually having to repeat details of what happened to them to numerous contacts within the Criminal Justice system. Victims become further traumatised, but also confused. To many victims the job titles of all the different professionals assessing their needs is confusing. They are all the face of the authorities and victims often don't quite understand why they are having to repeat their story to yet another official. My predecessor, Baroness Newlove, in her review into what works in supporting victims of crime, recommended that an independent victims' advocate (IVA) would be helpful in supporting those victims most in need. I agree that an IVA could help the most vulnerable victims by coordinating support across agencies and charities, preventing victims from being re-traumatised by constantly repeating their details. I would like to see the provision of IVAs for the most vulnerable of victims within the Victims' Code.

5.2.2 Points of note / Considerations

All Victims' must be aware of their right to make a Victim Personal Statement²³ and this should be explained by officers in line with the Victims' Code compliance. Locally there is currently no way of measuring the compliance in relation to Victim Personal Statements being offered or made, besides a manual trawl of cases on Athena. In discussion with the Force during the process of this VNA it has been noted that moving forward VPS will be recorded and monitored for compliance purposes. This could be reviewed by the Victims and Witness Board.

It would also be recommended that the 'Echo' victim and witnesses feedback system (full details in section 6.8.1 of this report) is utilised to include key elements of VCOP such as being offered the opportunity to record a VPS.

The MoJ have spoken of separate guides on the Victims' Code for victims' and for practitioners. It is unclear if and when these will be created, efforts must be made to raise awareness ahead of any guides. Awareness campaigns should consider barriers to accessing and understanding the code and cater to all demographic cohorts. As noted by the VC effective methods should be considered such as videos, infographics, apps and social media.

Further research is required to understand the local implication for victims of unrestricted patients and the re-traumatisation of victims when discussing their case with various contacts within the criminal justice system. The idea of placing independent victims' advocates (IVA) to support vulnerable victims should be explored.

²³Making a Victim Personal Statement - <https://www.bedfordshire.police.uk/assets/PDFs/Victim-care/VictimsPersonalStatement.pdf>

The impact of anti-social behaviour to victims can be just as significant as those of crime. This is seen in results of the 'OPCC 'Survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire' reviewed in section 7 of this report. Under the updated Victims' Code ASB victims are not covered. The potential gap in provision of victim services who assist ASB victims must be addressed. The processes for ASB victims being referred in to Signpost should be reviewed to ensure they are aware of the help available.

Who is a 'victim' under the Victims Code?

The Code acknowledges that the terms 'complainant' and 'survivor' are often used in the criminal justice system to describe a person who has made a criminal allegation to the Police. However, for the purpose of the Code, the definition of a 'victim' is:

- a person who has suffered harm, including physical, mental or emotional harm or economic loss which was directly caused by a criminal offence;
- a close relative (or a nominated family spokesperson) of a person whose death was directly caused by a criminal offence.

You can also receive Rights under this Code if you are:

- a parent or guardian of the victim if the victim is under 18 years of age or
- a nominated family spokesperson if the victim has a mental impairment or has been so badly injured because of a criminal offence that they are unable to communicate or lacks the capacity to do so.

All service providers must have the victim's best interests as their primary consideration and take the victim's age, maturity, views, needs and concerns fully into account.

6. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Office of National Statistics released the following key findings relating to the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on crime and people's perceptions of crime during the April and May 2020 period of national lockdown²⁴.

Initial findings from the Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW) estimated a significant 32% reduction in total crime excluding fraud and computer misuse during April and May 2020 compared with a two-month average in the pre-lockdown period.

Underlying this reduction were significant falls in theft offences, particularly domestic burglary and other theft of personal property; this reflects the increase in time people spent at home during the lockdown period, a reduction in opportunities for theft in public spaces and the closure of the night-time economy.

Similar to findings from the TCSEW, Police recorded crime levels during the lockdown period were much lower than respective months in 2019, with 25% less crime in April 2020 and 20% less crime in May 2020.

Reductions were seen across many types of crime; in particular, theft offences fell in April and May 2020 to almost half the level recorded in April and May 2019.

One exception was trends in drug offences, where levels rose by 22% in April 2020 and 44% in May 2020 compared with April and May 2019; this reflects proactive police activity in pursuing these crimes during lockdown.

Police recorded crime fell by 5% in March 2020 compared with the previous month, followed by a larger 20% decrease between March and April; in contrast, crime increased by 12% from April to May, as the easing of lockdown restrictions began.

Other findings from the TCSEW indicated that public perceptions of the police during this time were largely positive, with 91% of adults satisfied with the way local police were responding.

The Victims' Commissioner comments regarding the impact of COVID-19 and her Victims statistics, 2014-15 to 2018-19: victims' services, restorative justice and information, advice and support²⁵:

²⁴Impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on crime and people's perceptions of crime during the April and May 2020 period of national lockdown. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/coronavirusandcrimeinenglandandwales/august2020#trends-in-police-recorded-crime>

²⁵Victims commissioner Victims statistics, 2014-15 to 2018-19: victims' services, restorative justice and information, advice and support https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/victcomm2-prod-storage-119w3o4kq2z48/uploads/2020/06/2020-06-05_OVC-Victims-Statistics-part-2-1.pdf

“The impact of COVID-19 has been felt in nearly every part of our daily lives. So, it is no surprise Government guidelines on social distancing have resulted in radical changes to victims’ experience of both the Criminal Justice system and the support offered by victims’ services. In the midst of the pandemic, the need for further funding to deal with increased demands placed on domestic abuse and sexual violence support services has brought the victim experience into sharp focus.”

Unsurprisingly, this report finds victims who had face-to-face contact with victims’ services were more likely to say it was effective in helping them to cope with the impact of an incident. More than nine out of ten victims who had face to-face contact with victims’ services said it helped them to cope with the impact of the incident. On the other hand, fewer than half said that receiving a leaflet or letter helped them to cope.

While it has been necessary for victims’ services to switch to offering on-line support during the lockdown, the evidence suggests that face-to-face support is highly valued by victims. I acknowledge it is more expensive, but the findings of my report are that after the lockdown has been lifted, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and other agencies must continue to fund victims’ services that offer vital face-to-face contact.”

6.1 Impact on Courts

During the COVID-19 pandemic the Magistrates’ Courts and Crown Courts were unable to operate business as usual due to the risk of spreading the virus. This created an issue with backlogged cases awaiting hearings and trials.

Bedfordshire Magistrates’ Courts saw a significant drop in case disposals (finalised cases) around April 2020 following the first lockdown in March 2020. The number of disposals were consistently lower than receipts (cases entering the court system) until they picked up between October and December above the levels of receipts. However, disposals again fell below receipts following the latest lockdown in January 2021.

Bedfordshire Magistrates’ outstanding cases were significantly higher throughout the pandemic due to lack of disposals. They continued to rise until October 2020 and although they have since come down somewhat, they are still roughly higher than before the pandemic. Crown Court trial disposals also dropped below receipts due to the pandemic and has caused a backlog of outstanding delayed cases. Some new trials are being listed in 2022.

6.2 Victim and Witness Attrition

Where there are prolonged delays to cases reaching court, it poses a risk of victim and witnesses disengaging from the process. On top of these delays’ victims’ and witnesses’ priorities may have changed during the period due to financial or health impact to themselves or their families. In October 2020, the MoJ initiated cross-government work to explore the impact of COVID-19 on attrition in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and released an update to PCCs in February 2021. The work aimed to build on previous MoJ work on victim and witness engagement in the CJS with a specific COVID-19 focus. The work was completed in close collaboration with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC), as well as the Home Office, Police, Her Majesty’s Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) and CPS. Evidence was gathered on the impact of COVID-19 on victims and witnesses and the MoJ are now

working to develop a range of Covid rapid response actions, as well as identifying headline areas for potential long-term actions.

One of the key findings was that concurrently with the first national lockdown in 2020, there were apparent increases in both police final outcomes of evidential difficulties (victim does not support) and the proportion of cracked trials where the prosecution ended the case of due to witness absence / withdrawal.

Whilst there have been limited cases being processed in courts it is difficult to capture the full extent of victims and witness disengagement due to prolonged waiting times. It is likely that the full extent of the problem is something that will be realised and quantifiable further down the line when the volume of cases being progressed increases and victims and witnesses have been waiting for extended times. It is therefore important to try and take a proactive and preventative approach, rather than a reactive approach to the issue. Whilst it may be difficult to know how much engagement and support for victims and witnesses is needed to prevent disengagement, further research and consideration should be given to this area.

6.3 Domestic Abuse

Office of National Statistics (ONS) released the following key findings in November 2020 relating to Domestic abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020²⁶.

Police recorded crime data shows an increase in offences flagged as domestic abuse-related during the COVID-19 pandemic, however, there has been a gradual increase in police recorded domestic abuse-related offences over recent years as police have improved their recording of these offences; therefore, it cannot be determined whether this increase can be solely and directly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The number of domestic abuse remedy orders shows a mixed picture; the weekly number of non-molestation applications, and the number of orders granted from mid-April to the end of June were above the pre-lockdown baseline, while the weekly number of occupation orders granted between March and the end of June were generally below the pre-lockdown baseline.

London's Metropolitan Police service received an increased number of calls-for-service for domestic incidents following the lockdown, largely driven by third-party calls; this is likely because people were spending more time at home during this period. This area will be explored locally for Bedfordshire in the crime data chapter.

There has generally been an increase in demand for domestic abuse victim services during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly affecting helplines as lockdown measures eased; this does not necessarily indicate an increase in the number of victims, but perhaps an increase in the severity of abuse being experienced, and a lack of available coping mechanisms such as the ability to leave the home to escape the abuse, or attend counselling.

The total number of cases discussed at multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs) decreased in April to June 2020 compared with the previous quarter; this may reflect the

²⁶Domestic abuse during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, England and Wales: November 2020
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronavirusCovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020#main-points>

difficulties high-risk victims faced when attempting to safely contact the police (the main source of referral to MARACs) during the lockdown period.

6.3.1 Points of note / Considerations

A victim support services focus group was formed as part of the research for this VNA and feedback from the services relating to domestic abuse corroborates the detail seen in the ONS domestic abuse data findings. Services have seen an increase of victims and an increase in case complexity regarding the impact to physical and mental wellbeing and victim safety. These are due to a combination of factors enhanced by COVID-19 circumstances. Full details of the focus group and recommendations in section 8.3 of this report.

The OPCC awarded local providers with £60,000 funding for emergency housing for Domestic Abuse clients during the pandemic in attempt to assist those needing to flee unsafe environments.

There are multiple support services in Bedfordshire providing help to victims of domestic abuse. 'Women's Aid' being one of them, have a 'COVID-19 Resource Hub' providing support and advice for survivors and member services. They released information online regarding the local impact of COVID-19 to domestic abuse²⁷.

An initial survivor survey²⁸ carried out by Women's Aid in April 2020, confirmed that COVID-19 had quickly impacted on the experiences of women experiencing domestic abuse.

- 67.4% of survivors who are currently experiencing abuse told us that it had got worse since COVID-19
- 76.1% told us they are having to spend more time with their abuser

In June lockdown measures had started to ease, however COVID-19 continued to have an impact on women experiencing domestic abuse. Women talked about experiencing worsening abuse, trapped at home with no respite, especially for those living with the abuser and many had no space or time to leave safely/access support.

91% of women who were experiencing abuse at the time of responding said the pandemic had impacted their experiences of abuse in one or more way/s. This included:

- feeling more afraid (52.2%)
- feeling that they had no-one to turn to for help during lockdown (58.0%)

It is important to ensure both male and female victims of domestic abuse are supported and their needs are met. The Domestic Abuse Partnership (BDAP) brings together key agencies across Bedfordshire to raise awareness about domestic abuse and unhealthy relationships, to deliver services to support those affected by abuse and to work together to improve the local response. BDAP support service users of any gender and strive to bring all local agencies working together to ensure a coordinated response to domestic abuse across Bedfordshire.

BDAP recognise the increase in incidents of domestic abuse during COVID-19 and offer multiple services²⁹ to support victims.

²⁷Women's Aid Covid-19 Resource Hub <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/Covid-19-resource-hub/#1585739910691-6b8d326b-5792>

²⁸Women's Aid Covid-19 initial survivor survey <https://1q7dqy2unor827bqjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/The-impact-of-Covid-19-on-survivors-findings-from-Women's-Aid's-initial-Survivor-Survey.pdf>

²⁹Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership - <https://bedsdv.org.uk/Covid-19/>

6.4 Fraud

The vast majority of the UK population are at risk of being victim of fraudulent crime due to the various ways in which people are lured into scams. It is reported that online fraudulent crime has adapted and risen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a September 2020 press release by UK finance³⁰ they warned that criminals have been exploiting and adapting to COVID-19 with a growth in fraud and scams that target people online. Many of these scams harvest customers' personal and financial details, for example through phishing emails or sending text messages impersonating trusted organisations. There is often a delay between criminals obtaining people's details and using them to commit fraud, meaning the full losses from COVID-19 related scams in the first half of 2020 are likely to not yet have been fully realised. Customers are reminded to follow the advice of the Take Five to Stop Fraud³¹ campaign and always take a moment to stop and think before parting with their money or information in case it's a scam.

The figures also suggest criminals have been turning away from more traditional forms of fraud due to the impact of the pandemic. Contactless card fraud, which takes place using lost and stolen cards, fell by 20 per cent to £8.2 million, the first year-on-year decrease since this data started being collected in 2013. This is likely to be related to the reduced number of face-to-face transactions by consumers using contactless cards during the lockdown. Cheque fraud losses also saw a significant fall of 78 per cent to £6.4 million, which is likely to have been driven by the reduced use of cheques during the lockdown period and the increased use of advanced security features on business cheques.

Action Fraud (AF) is the national reporting centre for fraud and cybercrime for those who have been scammed, defrauded or experienced cybercrime. In February 2021 they released an article on romance scams during lockdown³² where it was stated:

New data from UK Finance reveals a 20 per cent increase in bank transfer romance fraud between January - November 2020 compared to the previous year, with the total value of these scams rising by 12 per cent to £18.5 million. The average loss per victim reported to UK Finance members was £7,850, highlighting the significant impact this type of fraud can have on victims' finances.

But criminals can trick victims into sending them money in many ways, not just via a bank transfer. Action Fraud has also seen a rise in reports made by members of the public who have fallen victim to romance fraud in 2020, with total reported losses equating to over £68 million. In these reports, victims have lost money via bank transfer, money transfer, sending fraudsters gift cards and vouchers or presents such as phones and laptops, and providing them with access to their bank account or card.

Romance scams involve people being duped into sending money to criminals who go to great lengths to gain their trust and convince them that they are in a genuine relationship.

³⁰UK Finance – Criminals exploit Covid-19 <https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/press/press-releases/criminals-exploit-Covid-19-fraud-moves-increasingly-online#summary>

³¹Take five to stop fraud – Covid-19 advice <https://takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/Covid-19/general-advice-Covid/>

³²Action Fraud – Romance scams during lockdown <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/alert/romance-scams-on-the-up-during-lockdown>

They use language to manipulate, persuade and exploit so that requests for money do not raise alarm bells. These requests might be highly emotive, such as criminals claiming they need money for emergency medical care, or to pay for transport costs to visit the victim if they are overseas.

The rise in romance scams comes as more people have turned to online dating during 2020 due to social distancing restrictions. Figures from the Online Dating Association (ODA) estimate that over 2.3 million Brits used dating apps during the first lockdown, with 64 per cent of people surveyed seeing dating apps as a lifeline for those living alone. While the internet can be a great way to meet people and form new relationships, the growth in popularity of online dating is giving criminals more opportunities to exploit and coerce people into parting with their money.

Scammers will often build a relationship with their victims over time, the ODA's data shows that half (53 per cent) of people surveyed are having longer conversations on dating services during lockdown. UK Finance is therefore calling on people to look out for their friends and family this Valentine's Day.

6.4.1 Local implication and consideration

A strategic fraud analysis was conducted in 2020 by the police as requested by the OPCC. With fraud estimated to account for nearly a third of all crime in England and Wales it is clear that policing fraud provides a complex challenge requiring a calculated response in light of resource pressures and competing demands.

In 2019 there were 3.8 million offences of fraud by September which was indicated by the Crime Survey for England & Wales (CSEW). This was an increase of 9% on the previous year. There were 743,000 fraud crimes reported to the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) which was a 19% increase on the past year. Then further still offences reported by any other avenue such as direct contact to Bedfordshire Police. Of all of these cases the amount that are allocated, investigated and eventually detected is a tiny proportion.

Although slightly dated, referring to 17/18 figures and at a national level, The Police Foundation: More than Just A Number report helps to evidence this well: "For every crime reported just one in 13 was allocated for investigation and in that same period only 8,313 cases resulted in a charge/summons, caution, or community resolution, representing just three per cent of the number reported to the police". Therefore, the national picture of fraud criminality is one of significant under reporting to authorities and substantial triaging and funnelling of those cases that are reported. This makes a totally accurate force level strategic intelligence picture challenging not least due to the incomplete and often self-reported nature of available data sets. However, the strategic fraud analysis intended to provide as complete a picture as possible to those questions tasked within the terms of reference to report back to the Police Demand Steering Group as to current and future demand from fraud within Bedfordshire.

Key findings of the strategic fraud analysis

There is heightened interest and performance measuring of fraud from the Home Office. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) highlight the need to raise awareness of Action Fraud, utilise NFIB victim data more effectively, map Organised Crime Groups principally involved in fraud as well as increasing the use of ancillary orders and prevent tactics against fraud offenders. The National Fraud Policing Strategy from the

National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) advocates including fraud in wider force performance, demand, and vulnerability modelling, adhering to the Fraud Investigation Model for complex cases, and ensuring maximal disruption and prevention tactics against fraudsters. The Office of Police and Crime Commissioner and Signpost Hub support the triage of high-volume fraud reports to ensure support is provided to the most vulnerable victims. The Cyber Hub provide good victim service despite having very limited resources committed to fraud.

- Total victim losses for victims of fraud in Bedfordshire as revealed in Action Fraud reports amount to £23.5 million with an average loss of £8,500.
- Recorded fraud crime reports in Bedfordshire have increased for the past 4 years displaying a notable rise in 2019 with no clear seasonality across the 4 years.
- The most common fraud categories recorded within Action Fraud data in Bedfordshire are 'Other Fraud' largely consisting of phone calls to victims and many purporting to be from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs HMRC and Online Shopping and Auction Frauds.
- The peak ages for victims of fraud in Bedfordshire based on Action Fraud reports is between 30 and 40 with under 20s featuring minimally.
- The greatest average victim losses affect fraud victims in their mid-50s to early 70s the most, with age groups between 53 -62 losing an average of £45,000, and 63 -72 losing an average of £18,000.
- Total losses of victims over 65 over the past year amounted to £3.7 million with an average loss of £11,000 –for those aged 65 and where the total loss exceeded £5,000as per the current Bedfordshire triage process, the average loss was £62,000.
- The highest victim vulnerability assessed from the past year's Action Fraud reports is 'unaware' meaning those being deemed to have low protection from fraud and being at a high-risk level suggesting a prime opportunity for pro-active prevention.
- The highest victim vulnerability recorded in the past year's Athena recorded fraud crime data is by far that of 'elderly' with 'mental disorder', 'physical disability or disorder', 'domestic abuse', 'ill health' and 'repeat victim' also featuring.
- Geographic analysis across all data sets reveals Luton as the standout hotspot with 40% of fraud scene of crime addresses (the next highest is Bedford at 19%) with the North South and South Town, Dallow, and Bury Park areas of the town specifically impacted.
- A significant proportion of proactive fraud investigation capability within the Regional Economic Crime Unit is currently taken up by Operation ARDENT meaning the capacity to take on any new fraud investigations from any force within the Eastern Region is severely restricted.
- Bedfordshire currently has 3 mapped Organised Crime Groups involved in fraud and economic crime however there are likely to be many more but our understanding of these networks remains very limited.

- There were 730 assigned fraud crimes in Athena over the past year with slight peaks in allocation in July and September and the highest number of cases being assigned to Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) South Teams followed by what were formerly known as the South Community Crime Teams.
- The most common outcome in Athena allocated fraud Crimes over the past year was Outcome 18 (Investigation Complete) with a solved rate of 7% and charges accounting for 5%.
- Based on the past 4 years' reported crime growth, reported increases in fraud within the CSEW, recommendations from the National Fraud Policing Strategy and the Mackey Review, and the increased digitalisation of society presenting greater technological opportunities for new frauds Demand from fraud in Bedfordshire is projected to increase.
- There is an emerging national trend of fraud in email, social media and apps, online shopping, doorstep, telephone and investment scams linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The future of fraud will likely see a continued rise in Authorised Payment fraud with other possible trends such as SMS spoofing and SIM swapping to circumvent 2 factor authentication, deep fake videos countering facial security, and AI mimicking voice and language biometrics, all emerging alongside and in response to the increasing number of connected devices across the "internet of things".

6.4.2 local process – supporting Fraud victims

Action Fraud (AF) is the national reporting centre for fraud and cybercrime for those who have been scammed, defrauded or experienced cybercrime. The National Fraud Bureau (NFIB) sits alongside AF on Fraud within the City of London Police which is the National policing lead for economic crime.

Bedfordshire Police work in conjunction with AF and NFIB to support victims and tackle fraudulent crime locally. Signpost have also worked alongside to support victims of fraud however there has been recent request from the police for Signpost to cease any action to avoid duplication.

There are three routes that fraud cases are received by the Police:

1. A victim reports the crime to AF, AF triage cases for investigation based on evidential and crime solvability factors. These are recorded and shared with NFIB who refer directly to the police via Athena with a request for investigation and victim vulnerability information.
2. A victim reports the crime to AF and the case does not meet the triage threshold for investigation and is input into a 'victim lead spreadsheet' which is shared with the Police for victim support purposes.
3. A victim reports directly to the police. The police assess the victim's vulnerability by reason of age and or their circumstances, mental or physical disabilities, illness, or other such special feature which renders them either permanently or temporarily unable to care or protect themselves against harm or exploitation. The need for interception of perpetrators (crime in action) is also assessed. If the person reporting is vulnerable, meets the 'call for service' criteria, or the property stolen during the fraud is something that requires circulation on the Police National Computer (PNC) a Police officer is allocated to deal with the report. If not, then they will be appropriately referred to AF, the bank or

financial institution. The victim's details are also passed to the Cyberprotect team within the Force, to allow contact to be made for cyber protect advice.

Cases logged on Athena by NFIB with a request for investigation (Route one) are triaged by the Police with four potential outcomes:

1. Deemed suitable for investigation
2. Deemed not suitable for investigation
3. Referred back to uniform Police response for further information or evidence
4. Deemed suitable for bespoke protection / prevention advice

On average 65 cases per month are logged on Athena by NFIB for investigation and approximately 25% are triaged for investigation.

February 2021 triage results	
Suitable for investigation	14
Not suitable for investigation	19
Referred back to uniform Police response for evidence	2
Suitable for protection advice	22
Total	57

Cases logged on the victim lead spreadsheet (Route 2) are dealt with by Cyberprotect to provide bespoke advice and support for each victim. The three response types are:

1. Low or nil loss and low vulnerability victims – An email is sent with protection information and advice to help prevent repeat victimisation. The content of the email will have detail appropriate to the type of fraud offence.
2. £500-£10,000 loss, vulnerable victim or investment, romance or courier fraud – A phone call is made to the victim to provide advice and support
3. Highly vulnerable and or large-scale loss – A home visit is carried out to provide detailed protection advice and go through electronic devices with the victim. Often in the company of family to extend the advice to them and ways of supporting the victim

On average there are 100 victims per week added to the spreadsheet. Cyberprotect have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to contact all of these victims. Although the aim is for advice and support, a very small number of victims on the spreadsheet (approximately 5 per year) end up having their cases triaged into police investigation. This is mostly where the victim highlights evidential information to the Cyberprotect team that was previously unknown.

6.4.3 Points of note / Considerations

Many victims of fraud simply want a reimbursement of the loss of funds, however there are also victims who will be impacted emotionally through a traumatic experience. Victims of romance scams could suffer significant impact to their mental wellbeing, where there was a manipulation of their trust and emotion to trick them into believing that they were in a relationship with the offender. These victims may greatly benefit from support from victim services to help them cope and recover from the crime.

It is noted that support for fraud victims is a generally under resourced area within the Force (Cyberprotect). There are two people covering the roles within the team and in March 2021

this will reduce to one. Whilst two team members have been able to manage the workload, fraud cases are on the rise and resource is not. The idea of additional support to triage and manage the email responses for low or nil loss / low vulnerability victims on the Action Fraud spreadsheet was welcomed during discussion with Cyberprotect.

Beyond the three response types delivered by the Cyberprotect team, it is without doubt that some victims will be emotionally impacted by the crime and may benefit from victim support services. They give direct contact details to victims in case they need support and state they receive on average 4-5 calls per day. Whilst detailed technical protection advice is the focus point for Cyberprotect, consideration should be given to the emotional support for victims. Partner working with Signpost could help this cohort of victims with coping and recovering from the crime. It was noted that this would need to be done in a collaborative and appropriate way to avoid victims feeling as though they are being passed around and having to re-live and explain to multiple parties.

There is also a practical support element which victims could be assisted with. On occasion there is a requirement for the victim to work with a bank and the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to enable the money to be returned to the victim. Where victims are particularly vulnerable and do not have someone to assist them with that process, Signpost or the police may be able to assist. If that is not deemed a suitable approach then there may be an opportunity for Citizens Advice Bureau or Signpost to check in on the most vulnerable that are then suffering other impacts because of this crime type. Either way managing the expectation of the reportee of this crime type is essential. It is not enough for Bedfordshire Police to state there are no leads in a case when the real issue is capacity.

7. Quantitative Research

7.1 Crime Data

7.1.1 Methodology

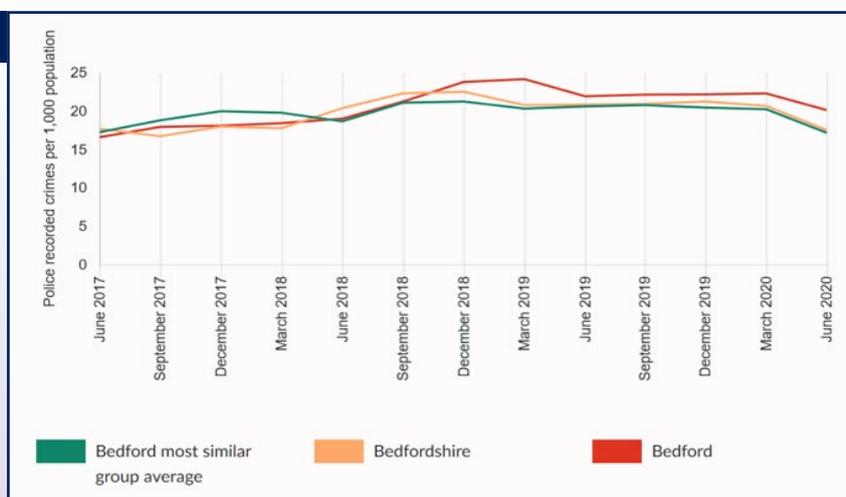
Comparing data sets from crime recording sources was an important aspect to reviewing trends and cross reference the impact on victims.

Analysis of recorded crime 2017 – 2020

7.1.2 Findings

All Crimes

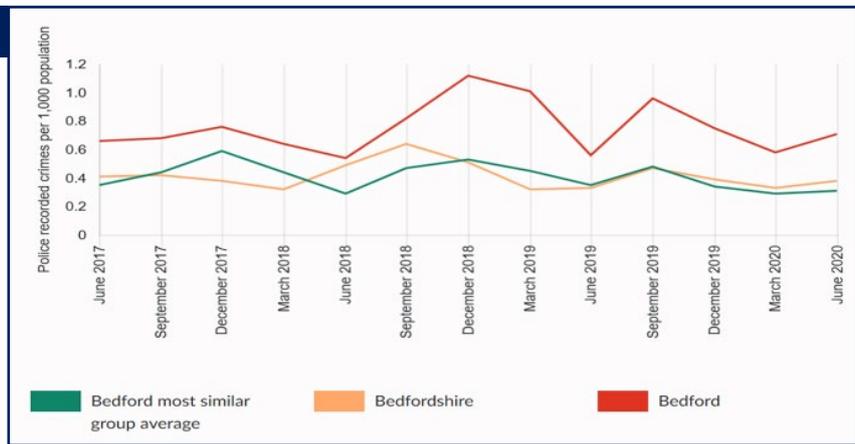
Bedfordshire’s pattern of trend for all crimes reported from June 2017 to June 2020 is very similar to other comparable police forces, peaking in September and December 2018, March 2019 and has consistently fallen throughout 2020 to fall back in line with similar areas.



Bicycle Theft

Bedfordshire appears to be within a consistent level to similar police forces in relation to bicycle theft crime. Reports of bicycle crime peaked within December 2017, December 2018, December 2019 for Bedfordshire and noticeably declined

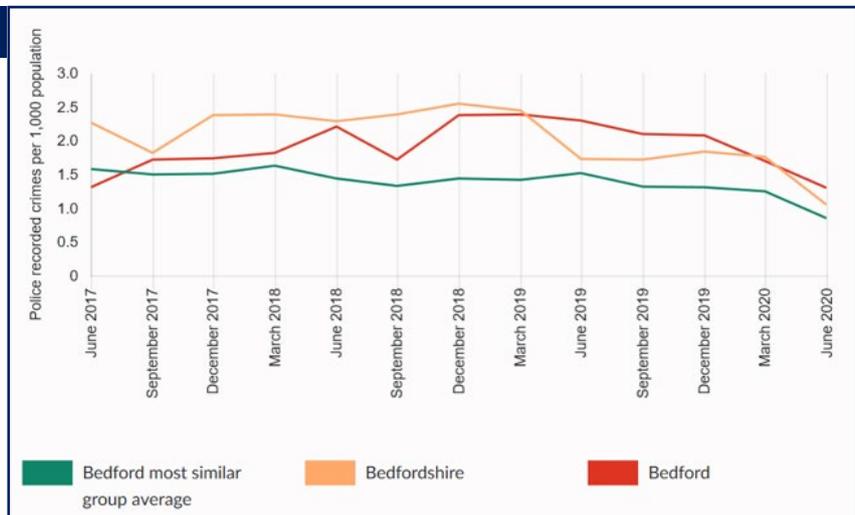
in trend from March to June of between 2017 and 2020, although remained stable and consistent at 0.3 – 0.4 per 1,000 of Bedfordshire's population from March 2020 to June 2020.



Burglary

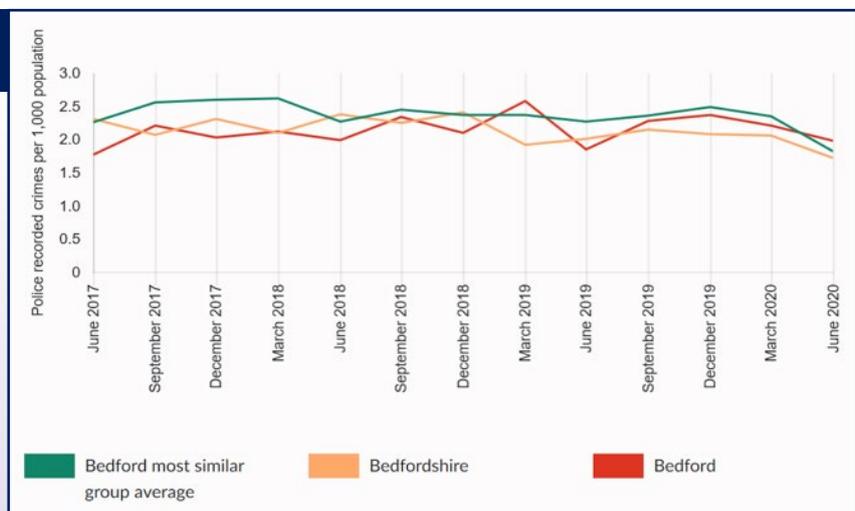
Bedfordshire's pattern of trend for reported burglary crimes is shown to have a significantly higher rate in comparison to similar forces per 1,000 population throughout December 2017 to March 2019. However, the rate of recorded crime for burglary has noticeably decreased from June 2019 and at present is

only slightly higher than similar police forces in the United Kingdom. It is also portrayed that reported crime of burglary has decreased in Bedfordshire from March 2020 to June 2020, throughout the first national lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic.



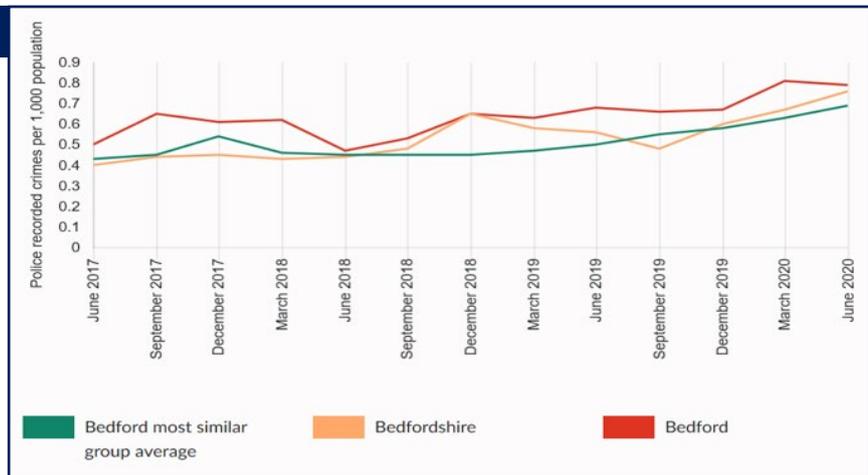
Criminal damage and Arson

Bedfordshire's pattern of trend for recorded crime of criminal damage and arson is shown to be of a consistently lower trend than similar forces from June 2017 up to June 2020. Within June 2020, both Bedfordshire and similar forces are comparable with rates of recorded criminal damage and arson averaging between 1.7 and 1.8 per 1,000 population.



Drugs

Bedfordshire's pattern of trend for drug related police recorded crimes per 1,000 population is shown to be comparable with similar police forces, although rose significantly in December 2018 and increased from September 2019 to the highest level throughout the reporting period (June 2017 – June 2020) of 0.76 in June 2020.



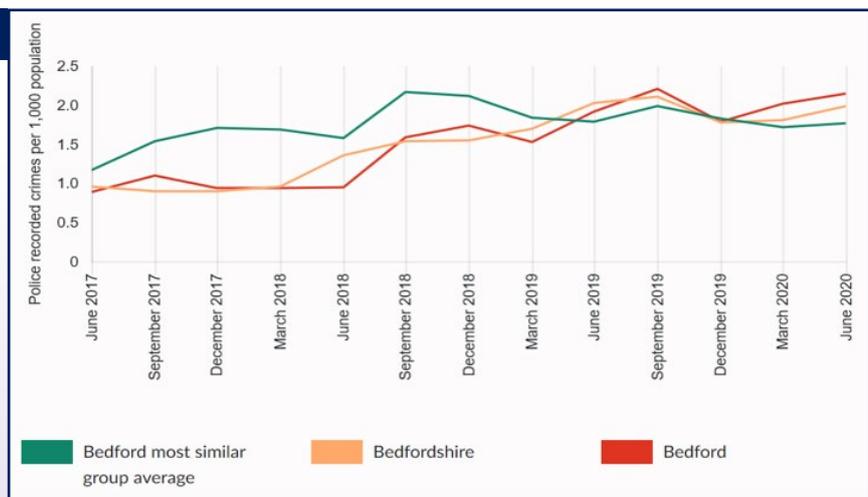
Possession of Weapons

Bedfordshire's pattern of trend on recorded crime of possession of weapons has declined from 0.18 in June 2017 to 0.11 in June 2020, proving to be significantly lower than similar forces to Bedfordshire at 0.18 of recorded crimes per 1,000 population in June 2020. Possession of weapons peaked in June 2019 for Bedfordshire.



Public Order

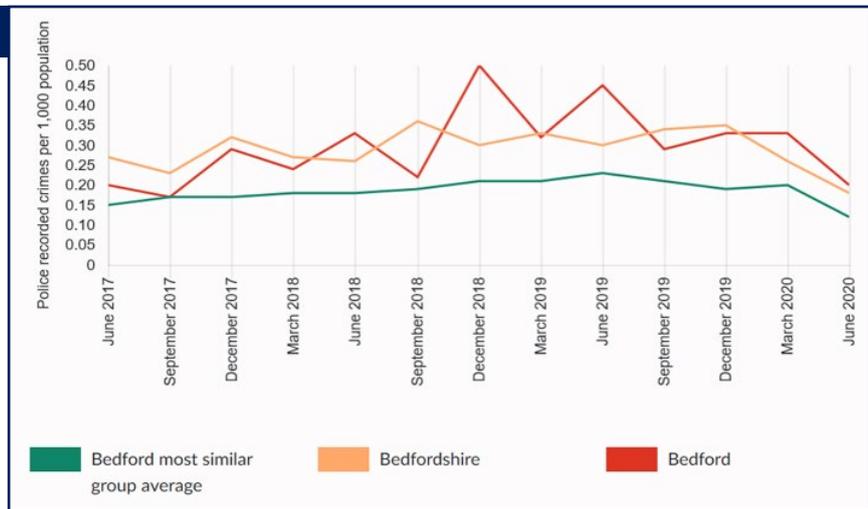
From June 2017 to June 2020, police recorded crimes of public order in Bedfordshire has increased from 0.96 to 1.99 per 1,000 of the population. Police recorded crime of public order decreased slightly in December 2019 and has slowly increased from December 2019 to June 2020 in Bedfordshire.



From June 2017 to March 2019, police forces' similar to Bedfordshire had a significantly higher rate of police recorded crime per 1,000 population. In June 2020, Bedfordshire is shown to have a higher level of recorded public order crime than similar police forces.

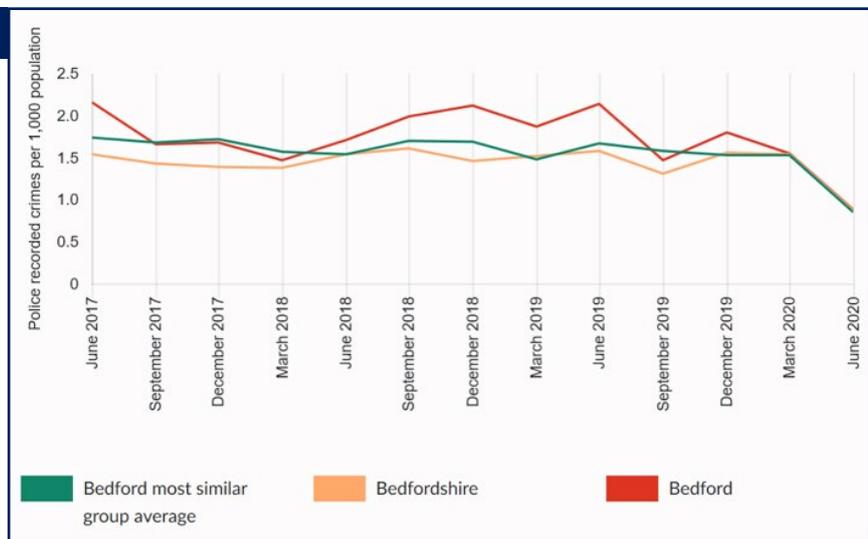
Robbery

Bedfordshire's pattern of trend on police recorded crime of robbery is shown to be at a significantly higher level than similar police forces throughout June 2017 to June 2020. However, the pattern of trend for Bedfordshire has dramatically declined from December 2019 to June 2020.



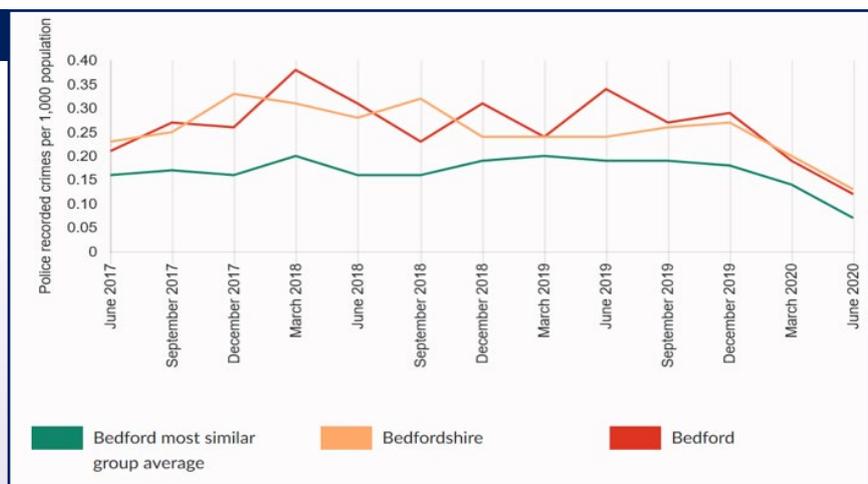
Shoplifting

Bedfordshire's pattern of trend on police recorded crimes of shoplifting per 1,000 population is shown to be at a lower level than similar police forces to Bedfordshire consistently throughout June 2017 to June 2020. Shoplifting within Bedfordshire as with similar forces decreased dramatically from March 2020 to June 2020, coinciding with the first national lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic.



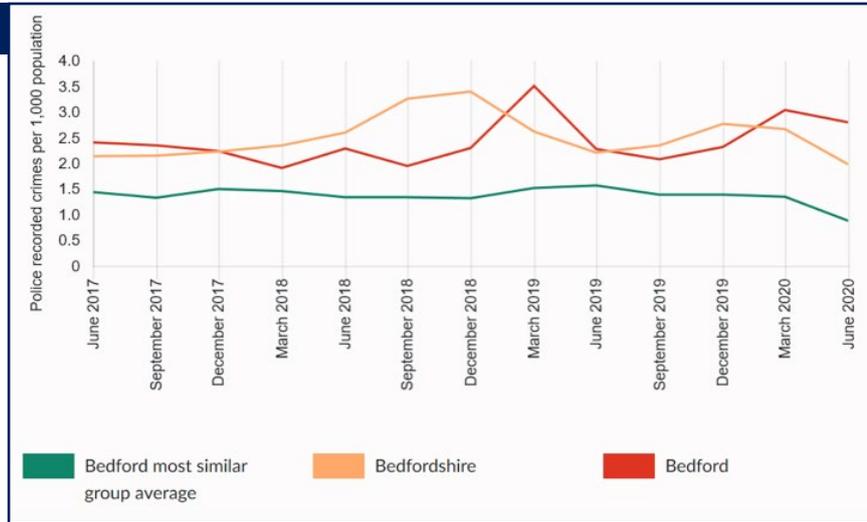
Theft from the person

Bedfordshire's pattern of trend on police recorded crimes of theft from the person per 1,000 of the population is remarkably higher than similar police forces throughout June 2017 to June 2020, peaking at 0.33 in December 2017 and has notably decreased from December 2019 to June 2020.



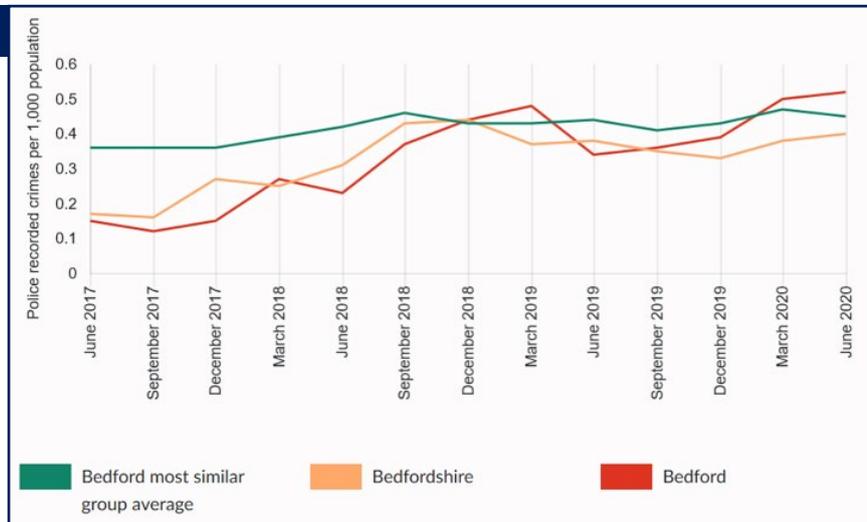
Vehicle Crime

Throughout June 2017 to June 2020, Bedfordshire is shown to have a significantly higher trend in police recorded vehicle crime per 1,000 population, peaking at 3.40 in December 2018 and has decreased to its lowest level within the timeframe (June 2017 – June 2020) of 1.98 in June 2020.



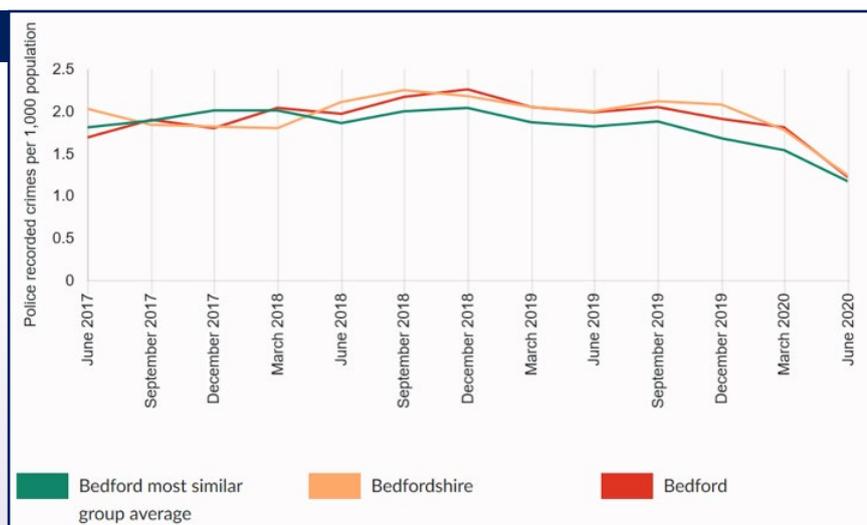
Other Crime

The category of police recorded crimes per 1,000 population for 'other crime' within Bedfordshire, has increased from 0.17 in June 2017 to 0.40 in June 2020 and appears to be consistently lower than similar police forces.



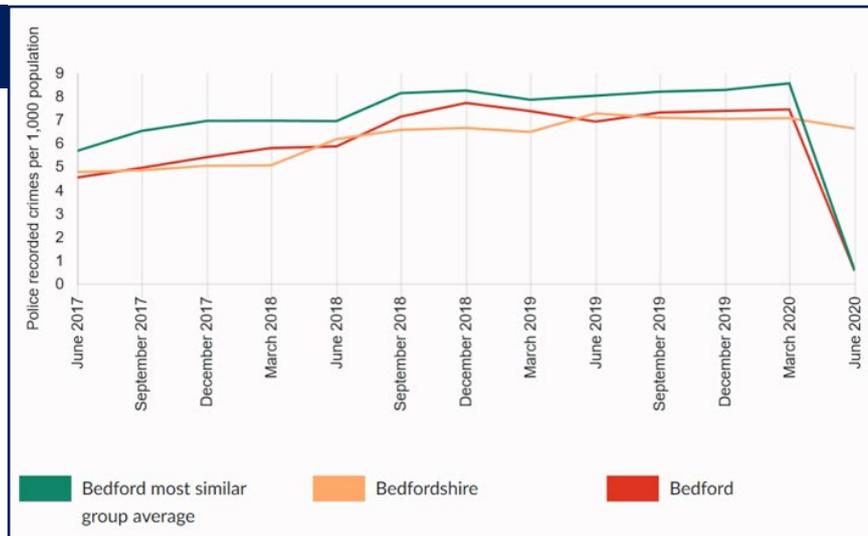
Other Theft

The category of police recorded crimes per 1,000 population for 'other theft' within Bedfordshire peaked in September 2018 and between the period of June 2017 – June 2020 it was at its lowest recorded level in June 2020. The level of 'other theft' recorded crimes rose in June 2018 and has remained at a higher level than similar police forces up until June 2020, where the level of recorded 'other theft' crime declined in trend.



Violence and sexual offences

Police recorded crime of violence and sexual offences per 1,000 of the population has steadily increased throughout the period of June 2017 to June 2020, although there has been a significantly lower level of recorded violence and sexual offences in Bedfordshire when compared to similar police forces. In June



2017, the level of recorded violence and sexual offences per 1,000 of the population was 4.77 which has risen to 6.63 in June 2020.

Police reported data

Year to date Crime and Detections

Crime Type	Recorded Crime			Solved Crime Rate		
	01/04/2018	01/04/2019	Change	01/04/2018	01/04/2019	Change
	to	to		to	to	
	31/03/2019	31/03/2020		31/03/2019	31/03/2020	
Homicide	6	5	-1	116.7%	60.0%	-56.7%
Death/Injury by Unlawful Driving	17	19	2	35.3%	94.7%	59.4%
Violence with Injury	4861	4541	-320	16.9%	15.2%	-1.7%
Violence without Injury	6637	7950	1313	12.6%	9.5%	-3.1%
Stalking and Harassment	4013	4801	788	8.8%	5.8%	-3.0%
Rape	741	592	-149	3.6%	3.9%	0.2%
Other Sexual Offences	1056	1013	-43	6.4%	9.2%	2.7%
Robbery	834	836	2	11.9%	11.0%	-0.9%
Burglary - Residential	4395	3298	-1097	8.0%	5.5%	-2.6%
Burglary - Other	2110	1417	-693	7.9%	15.9%	8.0%
Vehicle Offences	7995	6690	-1305	2.0%	2.0%	0.0%
Theft from the Person	730	651	-79	2.9%	2.5%	-0.4%
Bicycle Theft	1331	1015	-316	1.3%	1.4%	0.1%
Shoplifting	4113	4019	-94	26.0%	19.8%	-6.2%
Other Theft	5787	5358	-429	3.5%	2.8%	-0.7%
Arson	259	246	-13	6.6%	6.9%	0.3%
Criminal Damage	5779	5324	-455	8.3%	8.5%	0.2%
Trafficking of Drugs	337	255	-82	51.0%	70.2%	19.2%
Possession of Drugs	1105	1223	118	78.3%	96.9%	18.6%
Possession of Weapons	445	412	-33	60.2%	59.0%	-1.2%
Public Order	4123	5180	1057	12.9%	10.4%	-2.4%
Miscellaneous Crimes Against Society	1029	941	-88	19.8%	25.6%	5.8%
Total	57703	55786	-1917	11.7%	11.3%	-0.4%

- Recorded crime compared to the previous 12 months has decreased by 3.3% (57703 in 2019 to 55786 in 2020)
- Key volume areas contributing to that reduction are burglary and vehicle offences although this is balanced with the increases still being seen long-term around violence without injury, stalking and harassment and public order.
- Solved rates ended the Year at 11.3% slightly under the previous 12 months rate of 11.7%.

7.1.3 Points of note / considerations

This paper recognises that where trends in Bedfordshire match those in similar force areas, there will be national research and practices available from the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) on best practice.

No crime type should be left out of consideration when designing victim care. All crime can be impactful and APCC and NPCC best practice models should be followed and utilised where appropriate with the local model.

Drug crime is a significant concern for Bedfordshire. Much work has gone on in recent years to understand the profile type and this work should be utilised to build supportive plans for users of drugs and the victims impacted. The OPCC, Local Authorities and CCGs (when commissioning services) need to be cognisant of the Strategic Drug Assessment Profile of 2019 conducted by Bedfordshire Police.

Robbery is statistically high for Bedfordshire. It is believed the Force currently supply care for this crime, however Signpost are receiving a very low number of robbery referrals per month (between 2-7). The victim care process for this requires a full review with Bedfordshire Police and Signpost as it may be that Signpost are able to add support due to the volume, any confusion regarding who provides the support must be identified in case victims support is being missed.

Vehicle crime can be perceived as a lower impact crime type, however the sheer volume in this area and the fact that it appears frequently when researching on social media or in public surveys based in Bedfordshire, may well be adding to the narrative of a fear of crime in Bedfordshire. This will be impacting in a much wider way and needs to be considered for messaging and engagement from Bedfordshire Police. We are aware the Force would not prioritise vehicle crime in their control strategy, and understand the reason why, but the messaging and understanding of the impact of this crime needs to be considered.

Demographic information did not form part of the recorded crime data obtained from data.police.uk. Demographics are recorded by the police and further work is required to obtain and analyse this information with regard to understanding by demographic cohorts, the issues that victims face, hidden victims, barriers to accessing services and gaps in service provision.

7.2 Comparing crime data

7.2.1 Methodology

Looking at other data sources for crime type areas that are historically known as under reported areas to police, is key when looking at victim data. By looking at reported incidents to the third sector we can compare volume against reports to police. For this, we have looked at Domestic Abuse (DA) and Sexual Violence (SV). It should be noted the third sector log here is only built of three organisations that log data with the MoJ. There are many more organisations that would take reports.

7.2.2 Findings

Reported to Third Sector	Reported to Police
2019/2020 under MoJ reporting full year	
DA - 2294 CASES	8206
SV - 190	592
September 2020	
DA - 352	692
SV - 37	36

September was chosen as a month to review in detail as it was after a significant lockdown period, and communication practices were in place over the summer to support reporting.

Although police reports of DA in September are double that of the third sector this should actually be looked at in the reverse; 50% of reports come via the third sector. What we have not been able to establish is how many of the reports to the third sector turn into police reports.

Looking specifically at the data on sexual violence for September the reports to third sector vs police are closely matched, which may suggest that reporting practices and links with the third sector are well established. Looking at the full years' worth of data there is disparity however with numbers to third agency being significantly lower. Reviewing the data where the numbers were lower it can be tracked that a proportion of these cases end up in DA referrals and not solely SV referrals. It would be interesting to ensure that the connections between the third sector groups for SV and DA are fully understood and utilised.

7.2.3 Points of note / considerations

It would be useful to understand how many police reports of DA turn into specific plans with the third sector for recovery strategies. If there is a gap, a review of this pathway should be conducted.

DA and SV third sector agencies should be engaged to ensure they are all satisfied with reporting mechanisms and specialist support is not being lost.

7.3 Signpost Satisfaction Survey

7.3.1 Signpost background

Signpost was originally managed by Bedfordshire Police. Since 1st July 2020 the service has been managed and delivered in-house by Bedfordshire's OPCC. The Signpost Hub hosts victim care coordinators supported by volunteers from specialist support agencies. Experienced staff are trained to deliver emotional support and liaise with partner organisations where practical support is needed.

7.3.2 Methodology

Reviewing the Signpost satisfaction survey responses was an important contribution to understanding the needs of those affected by crime in Bedfordshire and the issues they face. It is these service users who have either referred themselves or agreed for the police to refer them because they would like support or advice.

The review considered overall question response volumes and percentages to measure levels of service user satisfaction or effectiveness of service. However, given that the survey has

been collating responses across three years, the review also considers the annual variance where appropriate and relevant. This helps to inform views regarding increased or decreased satisfaction, service performance or other conclusions. Where question response numbers were particularly low, the annual variance may not be deemed statistically significant.

When reviewing survey question responses, the term 'generally satisfied' has been used throughout this report. This is where question responses of 'completely satisfied', 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied' have been combined to form a group of generally satisfied. The same method applies to the term 'generally dissatisfied' for combining 'completely dissatisfied', 'very dissatisfied' and 'fairly dissatisfied' responses.

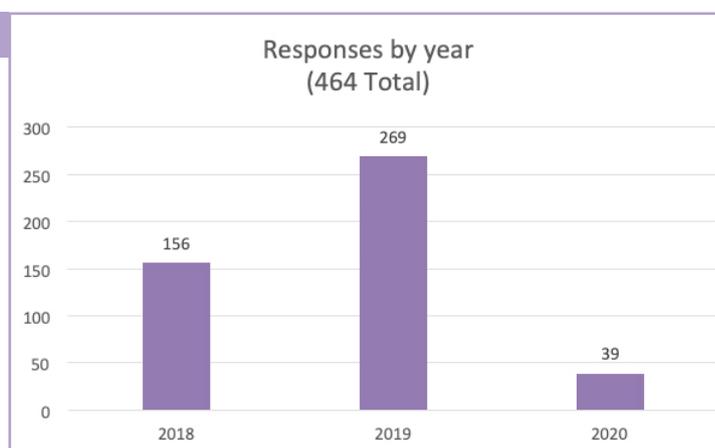
Demographic questions do not form part of the survey and could not be considered when reviewing the response.

7.3.3 Findings

464 survey responses were received between May 2018 and July 2020. Due to the COVID-19 no results were collated for the remainder of 2020, however, the survey has commenced again in January 2021.

Chart 1: responses by year

NB: Low responses in 2020 due to survey pause due to COVID-19 impacting staff capacity

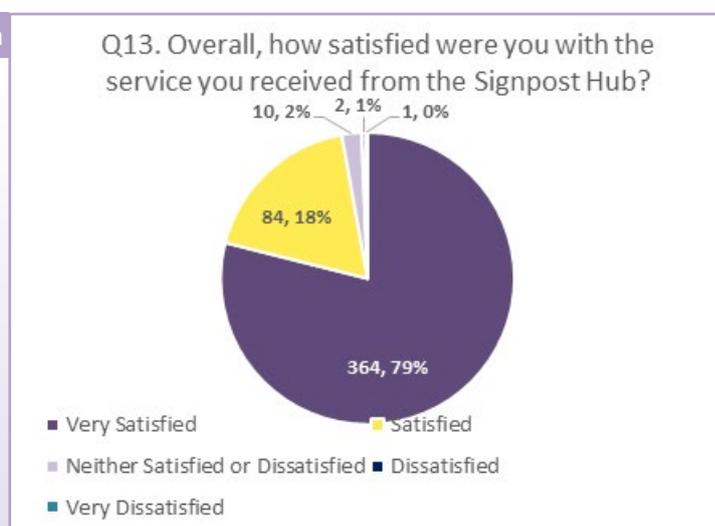


7.3.3.1 Key question reviews

All fourteen questions were reviewed to contribute to the points of note recommendation section. Three key questions are included in this section.

Chart 2: overall satisfaction

Combining the respondents who answered with 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' creating a generally satisfied group, amounts to 97%. The 'dissatisfied' and 'very dissatisfied' responses combined, amount to less than 2% and 2% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.



Of the 448 respondents, 415 who were generally satisfied gave feedback; many of whom gave thanks and praise to the specific individuals who supported them. Some other key themes were; having someone

to talk to for support, feeling understood and listened to, receiving good advice and referral for practical support, feeling comforted and reassured that there is help out there for them and being given options of other support services.

The three who were generally dissatisfied gave the following reasons.

- "The lady I spoke to was supposed to email the community sgts but nothing ever happened and it didn't get passed on"
- "I feel like we have just been left with no emotional support, I was basically told to get on with my life."
- "Client didn't sound happy with support. I explained that we are not part of the investigation. She sighed and said 'ok fine!'"

The annual variance shows that the general satisfaction (combination of very satisfied and satisfied respondents) stayed very similar but ranged between 96-98%

Table 1: Overall satisfaction with Signpost service – Annual variance

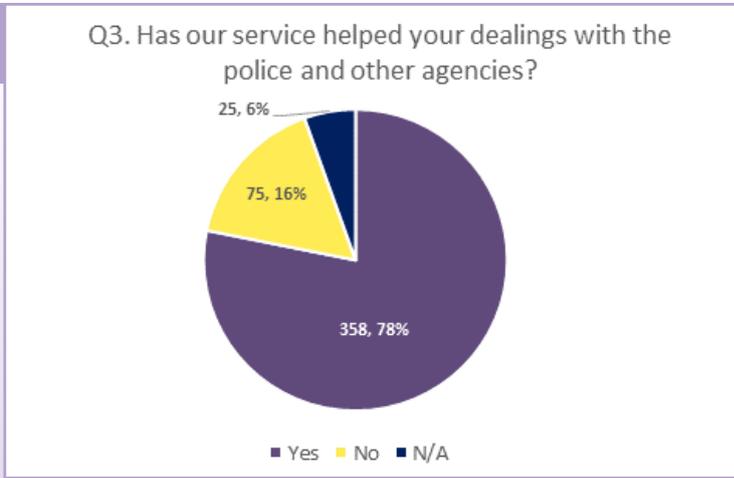
	2018			2019			2020		
	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %
Very Satisfied	79%	122	N/A	79%	211	0%	79%	31	1%
Satisfied	20%	31	N/A	17%	46	-3%	18%	7	1%
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	0%	0	N/A	3%	9	3%	3%	1	-1%
Dissatisfied	0%	0	N/A	1%	2	1%	0%	0	-1%
Very Dissatisfied	1%	1	N/A	0%	0	-1%	0%	0	0%
Answered		154			268			39	
Skipped		2			1			0	

The overall satisfaction of the Signpost service is very high from what could be considered a large sample size. The separate 'We Care Survey' (reviewed in section 6.4) mostly relates to police service satisfaction, but also covers Signpost satisfaction questions and it receives a more varied response. It has a much smaller sample size of 88 respondents, but a result of 55% being generally satisfied, 15% dissatisfied and 31% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Signpost is continually growing and developing to meet the needs of as many victims as possible. There are approximately 5,000 crimes per month in Bedfordshire. An average of 3,000 of those meet the criteria for Signpost to act on.

Chart 3: help dealing with other agencies

When asked why, the positive feedback often related to Signpost helping the respondent to understand police procedure, referring them to other support agencies or helping them to understand what other agencies can offer.



Of the 75 who answered no, 66 gave no explanation as to why, 9 provided feedback which related in the main to the

service received by the police or that the respondent did not feel the need for support from other agencies.

- "haven't used any other services and not entirely happy with the Police"
- "DIDNT REALLY SPEAK TO OTHER AGENCIES"
- "The Police refuse to help me. Saadia has been a brilliant sounding board"
- "Fay directed me to get free legal advice which is still pending"

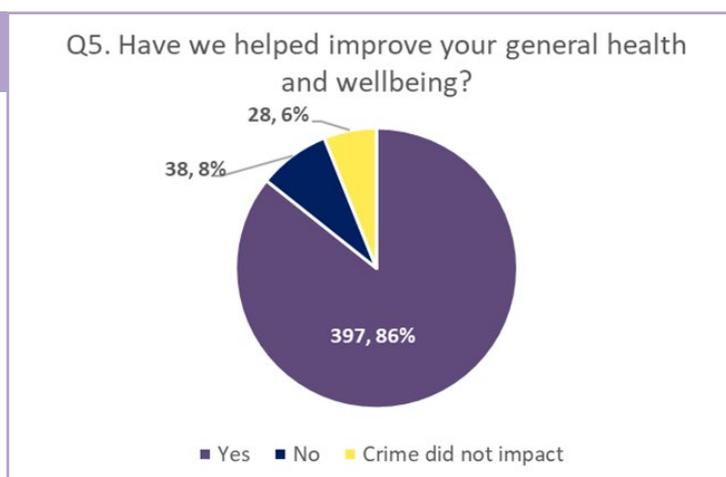
The annual variance for this question shows a decrease in both yes and no answers regarding help with other agencies and police since 2018 and a rise in those answering N/A. Those who answered N/A gave no feedback as to why.

Table 2: Help with agencies and Police – annual variance

	2018			2019			2020		
	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %
Yes	83%	124	N/A	76%	204	-7%	77%	30	1%
No	17%	26	N/A	16%	44	-1%	13%	5	-4%
N/A	0%	0	N/A	8%	21	8%	10%	4	2%
Answered		150			269			39	
Skipped		6			0			0	

Chart 4: help with general health and wellbeing

Highly positive results are seen again with the question of whether Signpost helped improve respondent's general health and wellbeing. Some key themes within the positive feedback related to; having someone to speak to who is caring, compassionate, impartial and takes them seriously, being put in touch with the right services to help them and having someone to explain processes to them.



Of the 38 respondents who gave a negative answer, only 5 gave feedback. These related to ongoing feelings of vulnerability, long standing health conditions preventing the service helping, not receiving any support or it not being useful for them to discuss at that time.

- "I didn't feel going over everything again and talking about it was beneficial for me at this point in time"
- "I am medically diagnosed with a mental health condition and whilst I know Saadia is available, the trauma has severely impacted my mental health."
- "I didn't get any counselling"
- "I have suffered from anxiety long before this incident"
- "I still feel very vulnerable"

The annual variance table below shows an increase in respondents who have felt their general health and wellbeing was improved due to Signpost.

Table 3: Improved general health and wellbeing – annual variance

	2018			2019			2020		
	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %
Yes	83%	129	N/A	87%	233	3%	90%	35	3%
No	7%	11	N/A	9%	24	2%	8%	3	-1%
No impact	10%	15	N/A	4%	12	-5%	3%	1	-2%
Answered		155			269			39	
Skipped		1			0			0	

7.3.4 Points of note / Considerations

There is a contrasting rate of satisfaction of the Signpost service from this survey to the ‘We Care Survey’ (reviewed in section 6.4). However, a recurring theme in the negative responses from both surveys, is the length of time taken to receive contact from Signpost. It is noted that all feedback of this nature in both this survey and the ‘We Care Survey’ was pre-June 2020 and there is mention of late referrals from the police. A review of the timescales from Signpost receiving referrals to making first contact was carried out to further investigate this theme, the results are documented in section 6.3.5.

Due to the very low number of negative responses and even fewer of those providing rationale, there were limited trends established regarding key issues. Whilst they are not considered statistically significant, some themes included:

- The length of time between reporting the offence to police and being contacted by Signpost. Although it is often noted that this is due to delayed police referral.
- Respondents feeling unsafe or dissatisfied due to a lack of police investigation outcome.
- Signpost helping service users to cope with the impact of crime but there still being some ongoing problems regarding their wellbeing or ability to cope.
- Some service users with long standing anxiety issues or mental health conditions not feeling an improvement to their wellbeing through Signpost contact.

Considerations / Potential resolutions:

- A review of incoming referral to first call out process and timescales to establish any potential issues. This was completed as part of this VNA and detail can be found in the next section (6.3.5)
- Regular updates from police throughout investigation to reassure the complainant that it is ongoing despite no outcome. This was also a conclusion from the results of the We Care Survey.
- A review of the follow up calls process is required to understand whether those with ongoing impact to their wellbeing, anxiety issues or mental health are coping. It could be that they are not reaching out and could benefit from additional contact. It is recommended that this would be managed through the ‘Echo’ system (details of Echo in section 6.8.1 of this report)

Results for this survey are collected over the phone by Signpost staff and populated into survey monkey on behalf of the victim or witness. A point for consideration regarding contrasting

satisfaction rates to the 'We Care' survey could be that collecting responses over the phone could influence their responses. For example, some people may be less inclined to provide negative feedback directly to a member of staff that works for the service in question. However, this consideration is theoretical and is not to discredit the positive responses. Many people who are dissatisfied would be expected to voice their opinion.

7.3.5 Signpost dip sample – first contact timescales

A randomly selected dip sample of 20 crimes was extracted from the Signpost Case Tracker. A review was carried out of the timescales between the crime and referral being logged on Athena, to the point of first contact made to the victim by Signpost staff. The results showed a combined average rate of 4.65 days.

The OPCC Head of Victim Care and Signpost manager confirmed that the staff in Signpost endeavour to make first contact with victims within 48 hours of receiving a case and that in the main it is achieved or within 48-72 hours.

A number of factors were noted in relation to potential delays:

1. Late referral of a victim on Athena
2. Incorrect referral and picked up by Investigation Management Unit (IMU) or Signpost
3. Victim not answering the phone (this is deemed the most common delay)

7.4 We Care Survey

7.4.1 Methodology / survey introduction

'We care' is an ongoing survey which commenced in 2018. It is completed by victims using an online link provided in the 'We care' leaflet given to them following the report of a crime. The survey relates to satisfaction of Bedfordshire Police and Signpost services.

The review considered overall question response volumes and percentages to measure levels of service user satisfaction or effectiveness of service. However, given that the survey has been collating responses across three years, the review also considers the annual variance where appropriate and relevant. This helps to inform views regarding increased or decreased satisfaction, service performance or other conclusions. Where question response numbers were particularly low, the annual variance may not be deemed statistically significant.

When reviewing survey question responses, the term 'generally satisfied' has been used throughout this report. This is where question responses of 'completely satisfied', 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied' have been combined to form a group of generally satisfied. The same method applies to the term 'generally dissatisfied' for combining 'completely dissatisfied' 'very dissatisfied' and 'fairly dissatisfied' responses.

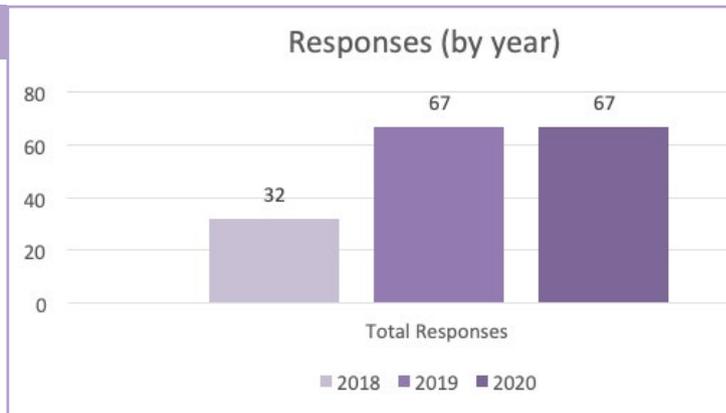
Demographic questions do not form part of the survey and could not be considered when reviewing the response.

7.4.2 Findings

'We care' is an ongoing survey which commenced in 2018. It is completed by victims using an online link provided in the 'We care' leaflet given to them following the report of a crime. The aim of the survey is to independently assess the service received by victims and witnesses and their personal experiences to identify areas where this service could be improved.

Chart 1: Responses by year

A total of 166 responses have been received between July 2018 and December 2020. There is no specific indication of any of these responses being given by witnesses of crime as opposed to victims. The results acknowledge both positive and negative experiences.



Key question reviews:

All questions were reviewed to contribute to the points of note recommendation section. Some key questions are included in this section.

Overall the majority of the respondents (67%) reported that they were generally satisfied (combination of fairly satisfied, very satisfied and completely satisfied responses) with the service they received from the police.

Chart 2: Overall satisfaction of police service received – total survey results

Consistent with trends seen in other question responses, the annual variance for this question shows a decrease in general satisfaction as the years progress; 86% in 2018, 66% in 2019 and 59% in 2020.

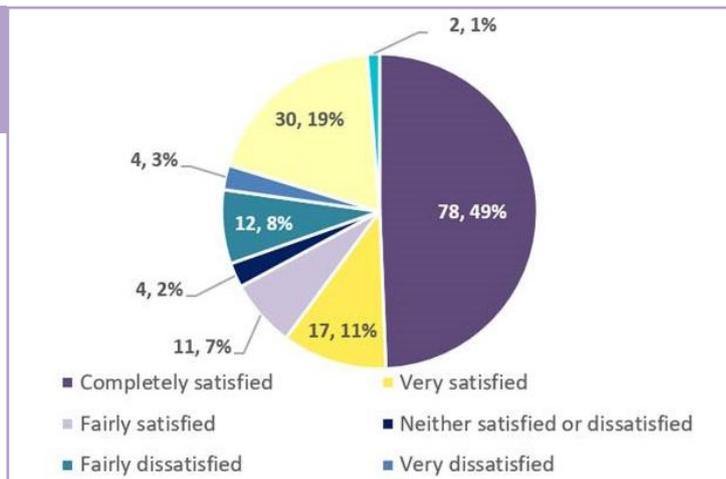
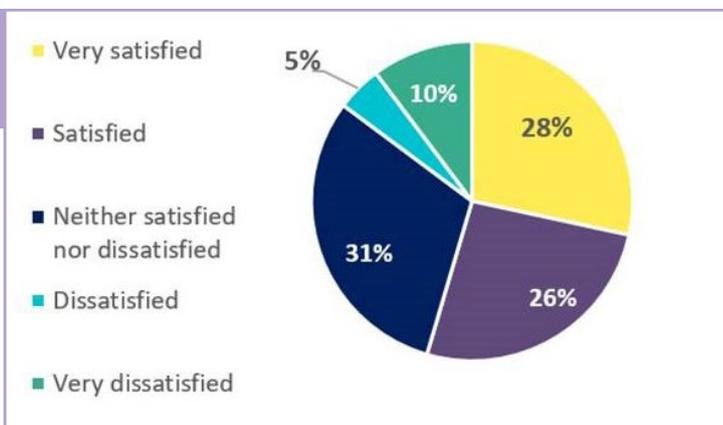


Table 1: Overall satisfaction with Police service received – annual variance

	2018			2019			2020		
	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %
Completely satisfied	59%	17	N/A	49%	32	-10%	45%	29	-4%
Very satisfied	21%	6	N/A	8%	5	-13%	9%	6	2%
Fairly satisfied	7%	2	N/A	9%	6	2%	5%	3	-5%
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	0%	0	N/A	0%	0	0%	6%	4	6%
Fairly dissatisfied	3%	1	N/A	5%	3	1%	13%	8	8%
Very dissatisfied	0%	0	N/A	5%	3	5%	2%	1	-3%
Completely dissatisfied	10%	3	N/A	23%	15	13%	19%	12	-4%
Don't know	0%	0	N/A	2%	1	2%	2%	1	0%
Total		29			65			64	
Skipped		3			2			3	

Overall the majority of respondents reported that they were satisfied with the Signpost service they received (55%). A point to note for this question is the volume of respondents who indicated they were neither satisfied or dissatisfied with the Signpost service. Many respondents selected this answer and stated it is because they had not used Signpost at all, so they were unable to comment on their satisfaction of the service. As mentioned previously in the Signpost referrals dip sample section, there are some barriers regarding referrals which are being addressed.

Chart 3: Signpost satisfaction – Total survey responses



The annual variance shows that there has been a decrease in the general satisfaction (very satisfied and satisfied combined) percentage each year from 67% in 2018 to 60% in 2019 and then 46% in 2020.

There has also been an large increase in respondents who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Table 2: Signpost satisfaction – Annual variances

	2018			2019			2020		
	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %
Very satisfied	25%	3	N/A	26%	9	1%	32%	13	6%
Satisfied	42%	5		34%	12	-7%	15%	6	-20%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	17%	2		20%	7	3%	44%	18	24%
Dissatisfied	8%	1		6%	2	-3%	2%	1	-3%
Very dissatisfied	8%	1		14%	5	6%	7%	3	-7%
Answered		12			35			41	
Skipped		20			32		Skipped	26	0%

When providing reasoning behind their answer to the question, positive feedback consisted of respondents finding it useful just to have somebody to talk to, being given clear and helpful advice and that they felt safer having someone to speak to.

The most common concerns raised by the 15% who were generally dissatisfied were; no contact from Signpost, delay in contact or only receiving written contact. Similar concerns were raised by some of the respondents forming the relatively large proportion (31%) that were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Although many giving this response said they did not want or need the Signpost service.

- "I was contacted via email by them only today. 1 month on."
- "Did not receive any service apart from letter to fill this survey in"
- "they contacted 3weeks after the event . What is the point after that period of time"
- "Poor communication from Police generally."
- "Received an email from them after 9 months of the incident."

With a lack of, or delayed follow up communication being an issue of victim satisfaction and VCOP compliance, the next two questions are significant. Respondents answered whether they had received any subsequent contact from the police and whether the police agreed how much follow up contact they would need. Almost half said they had not received any follow up communication. This is clearly a requirement for many victims and impacts their satisfaction of the support provided by the police.

Chart 4: Did you receive any subsequent contact from Police – Total survey results

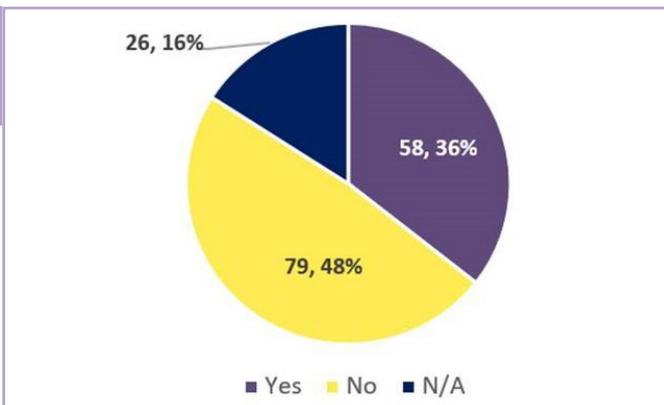
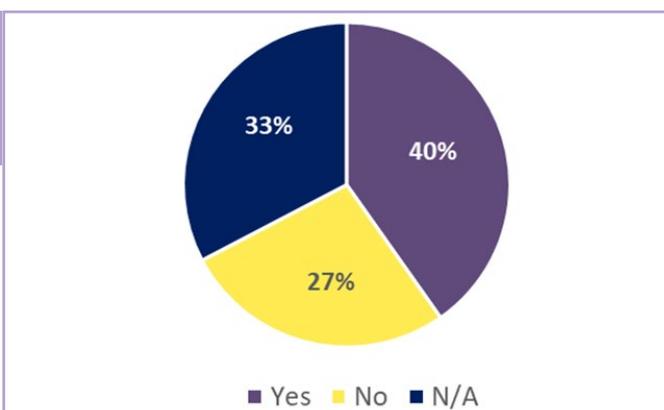


Chart 5: Police confirmation with victim the amount of follow up communication needed – total survey results



When asked what kind of follow up information was or would be helpful, respondents gave answers again relating to being kept updated during the investigation and information of an outcome or suspect being found.

- "How the enquiries are going after 5 weeks is it a waste of time? The case is still open etc."
- "Date to take a statement that was promised"
- "wether the information gathered led to an arrest"
- "I had to constantly contact to be updated with what was going on"

The annual variance of individuals receiving subsequent contact from the police it fell from 53% in 2018 to 42% in 2019 then increased slightly to 52% in 2020.

Table 3: subsequent contact received from Police – Annual variance

	2018			2019			2020		
	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %	Response %	actual amount	Annual variance %
Yes	31%	10	N/A	44%	29	13%	29%	19	-15%
No	53%	17	N/A	42%	28	-11%	52%	34	10%
N/A	16%	5	N/A	14%	9	-2%	18%	12	5%
Totals		32			66			65	
Skipped		0			1			2	

7.4.3 Points of note / Considerations

The survey includes questions relating to the Signpost service which assists victims and witnesses with coping and recovering from crimes and guides them to other victim support services available to them. Until 1st July 2020, Signpost was managed by Bedfordshire Police and therefore the survey mostly provides feedback relating to them. However, since then Signpost has been managed by Bedfordshire Office of Police and Crime Commissioner so some feedback does cross over, 5 of the 38 questions relate to Signpost.

For the multiple questions relating to competency and demeanour of the first person spoken to when reporting the crime and of the officer attending, between 79% and 87% were generally satisfied. The key issues raised relate more to levels of communication.

Although respondents were generally satisfied with the police service, 29% indicated that they were generally dissatisfied. Some of the key issues highlighted throughout the survey questions are:

- Lack of communication, feedback or updates from the police following a crime being reported.
- The time taken for police officers to attend or make contact
- A lack of follow up on information given to the police regarding potential evidence
- Dissatisfaction with case outcome or lack of outcome

There is a clear need for the impact of crime, and the amount of support required to be reviewed on an individual basis for each victim or witness. Looking at the responses, this can vary greatly dependant on the views of the individual.

The evidence shows that establishing the communication needs of the victim or witness following their report of a crime is important from an early point. Lack of communication is a key concern raised throughout the survey. Victims want to know and understand that the case is being progressed and not left dormant.

Victims identified a need to be updated of action taken by the police throughout the investigation process and this should not only be following an outcome. It is apparent that feedback relating to key stages of police investigation are highly important to victim satisfaction. Key stages such as:

- Police attending a crime scene
- Suspects being located and or interviewed
- Witnesses located and statements taken
- CCTV or other evidence obtained and under review
- Investigation outcome (regardless of it being the victims desired outcome)

There is a requirement for additional victim or witness needs to be considered at a later stage considering whether further support is needed and can be provided. This may be covered where referred to Signpost and contact is made by Signpost staff.

7.5 Bedfordshire Police Satisfaction Survey

7.5.1 Methodology / survey introduction

The review considered overall question response volumes and percentages to measure levels of service user satisfaction or effectiveness of service. However, given that the survey has been collating responses across three years, the review also considers the annual variance

where appropriate and relevant. This helps to inform views regarding increased or decreased satisfaction, service performance or other conclusions. Where question response numbers were particularly low, the annual variance may not be deemed statistically significant.

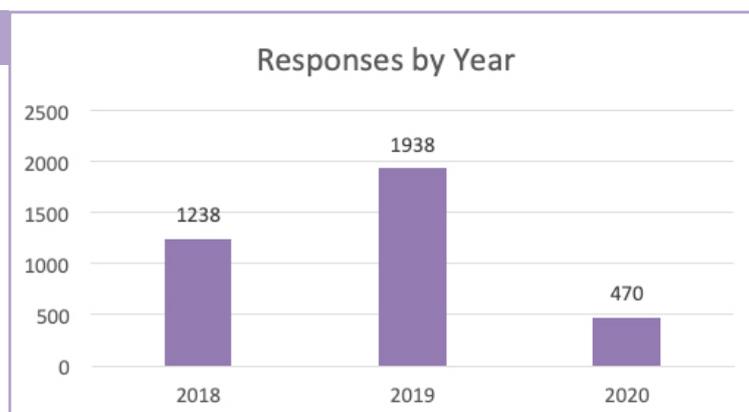
When reviewing survey question responses, the term 'generally satisfied' has been used throughout this report. This is where question responses of 'completely satisfied', 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied' have been combined to form a group of generally satisfied. The same method applies to the term 'generally dissatisfied' for combining 'completely dissatisfied', 'very dissatisfied' and 'fairly dissatisfied' responses.

Demographic questions do not form part of the survey and could not be considered when reviewing the response.

7.5.2 Findings

Chart 1: Responses by year

A total of 3646 responses were received between May 2018 and March 2020. It is presumed due to the COVID-19 pandemic no survey results were collected between April and December 2020.

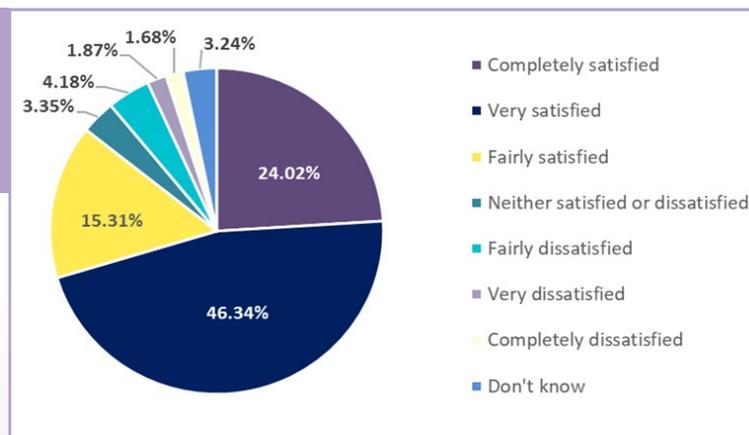


Key question reviews

All twenty-three questions were reviewed to contribute to the conclusions found in the points to note / recommendation section however some key questions included.

Chart 2: Q3. To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with how easy it was to contact someone to assist you?

Of the 3638 respondents 86% were generally satisfied and key themes in question 4 feedback were that it was quick and easy to get through on 101 or 999.



281 respondents (8%) were generally dissatisfied. Key themes in question 4 feedback were the length of time to get through on the phone or not getting through and having to leave a message, being put on hold, having to give up trying over the phone and going online to report or being passed between multiple departments;

- was passed around between departments a lot
- I ring 15 times and then eventually got through
- Dialled 101 was kept on hold for 20 minutes
- VERY HARD TO CONTACT FOR 3 HOURS
- I couldn't get through, ended up in queues and ended up going online to report the crime
- I was being assaulted at the time of reporting and I was repeatedly asked the same questions
- Because it took 15 mins to get through to the Police whilst I was being assaulted

The annual variance for Q3 shows positive improvement.
 General satisfaction 2018 – 83%, 2019 – 86%, 2020 – 94%
 General dissatisfaction 2018 – 9%, 2019 – 8%, 2020 – 4%
 Full annual variance table in appendix 1

Table 1: Q5. Were you reassured by the actions that the Police took in response to you reporting this incident? Did you feel confident in their abilities?

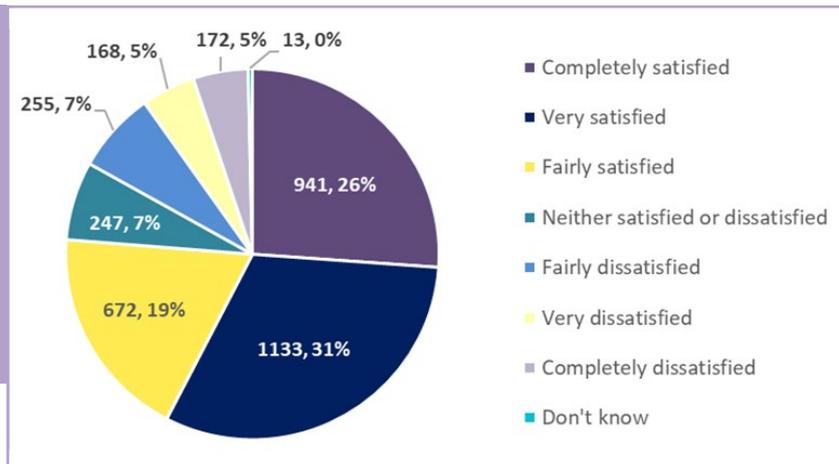
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	75.96%	2758
No	24.04%	873
Total		3631
Skipped		15

Key themes in the positive feedback for this response were that the process was explained well, the call was dealt with quickly and or the police attended quickly.

Key themes in the negative feedback for this response were lack of police attendance or action against offender, time taken for police to attend.

The annual variance for Q5 shows positive improvement.
 General satisfaction 2018 – 72%, 2019 – 77%, 2020 – 83%
 General dissatisfaction 2018 – 28%, 2019 – 23%, 2020 – 17%
 Full annual variance table in appendix 1

Chart 3: Q15. Thank you. We have almost finished now. Thinking about everything we've talked about in relation to quality of service, and taking the whole experience into account. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the service provided by the Police in this case?



2746 (76%) of the 3601 respondents to Q15 were generally satisfied.

Key themes in feedback were; being happy with officer demeanour, being reassured and explanation of processes but often would have liked a better outcome,

595 respondents (17%) were generally dissatisfied. Key themes in feedback were lack of feedback, outcome, taking the report seriously, no investigation, no protection, delay in attendance

The annual variance for Q15 shows positive improvement.

General satisfaction 2018 – 76%, 2019 – 76%, 2020 – 79%

General dissatisfaction 2018 –16%, 2019 – 18%, 2020 – 15%

7.5.3 Points of note / considerations

Overall the response to police demeanour and professionalism is of high satisfaction. When in contact with the police victims generally feel content with the service received. However, the frequency and timeliness of the contact is an issue repeatedly raised.

The evidence shows that establishing communication needs of the victim and following them up is key to their satisfaction of the police service. Feedback relating to key stages of police investigation are highly important to victims. It instils their faith that the police take their report seriously and it can assist with their feeling of safety. Key stages such as:

- Police attending a crime scene
- Suspects being arrested and or interviewed
- Witnesses located and statements taken
- CCTV or other evidence obtained and under review
- Investigation outcome (regardless of it being the victims desired outcome)

As mentioned in a previous recommendation, a self-service approach to victims gaining information on their case would be an ideal way to get these key updates. It would assist VCOP compliance whilst also reducing victims' dissatisfaction. A system that links with certain aspects of Athena and allowing manual update messages between the OIC and victim.

Further discussion with the crime management unit is required to consider what more could be done to assist with communication.

Another key issue noted is the police requesting the victim to obtain evidence such as CCTV themselves. Which in turn leaves the complainant feeling that the police are not interested

in the matter or willing to investigate. This is also the case where the victim or complainant has alerted the police to potential evidence such as witnesses or CCTV and the police not obtaining or investigating it.

In almost all sections of the survey there has been a positive annual increase in the percentage of satisfaction. This shows that service provided is consistently improving and or being better received by victims.

7.6 Bedfordshire OPCC annual surveys

7.6.1 Methodology / Introduction

A survey has been released annually since 2016 to collect the views of individuals across Bedfordshire in relation to crime, community safety, victims, Bedford Partnership Trust and other points of interest for the OPCC. 2018-2020 survey results are summarised on the OPCC website³³.

OPCC annual surveys 2016-2020

7.6.2 Findings

- Each year there is a continued lack of response from the age group 16-24yrs.
- In relation to The Police and Crime Plan eight priorities, each year the two that respondents value the most are a return to more visible community policing across the county and to ensure that the police are available when we need them most.
- Of crimes that are visible, burglary is considered the most frequent crime affecting the community, followed by drug offences pre-2019 or since then antisocial behaviour.
- In relation to feeling safe in the community respondents do feel safe. This rose by 12% from 2019 to 2020 up to 69%
- The majority of respondents are unaware of Bedfordshire Partnership Trust and the majority of these people confirm they would find the service useful.

7.6.3 Points of note / Considerations

A Bedfordshire OPCC Instagram was launched in 2020 in order to improve engagement with the age group of 16-24-year olds. A point to note however, that to date there has not been any information posted on the account relating to reporting crime or access to victim services. It is therefore a recommendation to act on this area and introduce some engagement via the OPCC Instagram.

It was a previous concern that police officers had stopped attending all burglary reports. Under the new management of Signpost by the OPCC it is now protocol to contact every victim of burglary to assess whether they have any emotional or practical support needs. This is done via a manual trawl through burglary victims on Athena. Three attempts will be made to telephone the victim and if still unable to get through a letter is sent to the victims confirming what Signpost can do to help if needed.

³³Beds OPCC annual survey results
<https://www.bedfordshire.pcc.police.uk/general.php?id=299>

7.7 Complaints data

Bedfordshire Police complaints information is available³⁴ and states those working within the police service should behave appropriately at all times and are expected to conduct themselves in the manner set out in the Code of Ethics from the college of policing³⁵.

These expectations include requirements to:

- act with honesty, integrity, fairness and impartiality
- treat members of the public and colleagues with respect
- not abuse their powers and authority
- act in a manner that does not discredit or undermine public confidence in the police service

Complaints against the police are initially handled via the Police Customer Services Team and logged on the CRT-Beds system. As part of the VNA a dip sample of cases were reviewed. It was important to consider the views of complainants as they are the cohort most dissatisfied with their experience and could highlight areas requiring focus.

7.7.1 Methodology

The data that was reviewed was taken from the CRT-Beds system by the Police Complaints Customer Services Team. Where complaints are not resolved by the team they are escalated to Professional Standards Department (PSD) for them to make a Schedule 3 Complaint recording decision. The review did not consist of PSD data or outcomes.

411 victim complaints were made between 1st February 2020 and 1st February 2021. A 10% dip sample was reviewed.

7.7.2 Findings

Within the dip sample the majority of cases related to lack of updates or contact from the police followed by a lack of action or investigation, specific police officer or police staff conduct. 71% of complaints were resolved and closed, 10% remain open and 19% were escalated to PSD. Trends seen in the complaints were:

CRT-Beds Police Complaints Dip Sample				
Complaint subject	Resolved and closed	Remains open	Escalated to PSD	Total
Lack of updates or contact from Police	11	1	2	14
Case passed between multiple officers	1	0	0	1
Specific Officer or staff conduct	7	0	4	11
Lack of action / investigation	7	1	2	10
No victim support offered	1	0	0	1
logged as concern/query not complaint	1	1	0	2
Victims charted failing	0	1	0	1
Case outcome review	2	0	0	2
Total	30	4	8	42
Percentages	71%	10%	19%	

³⁴Statutory guidance on police complaints https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/statutoryguidance/2020_statutory_guidance_english.pdf

³⁵College of Policing Code of Ethics https://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Ethics/Ethics-home/Documents/Code_of_Ethics.pdf

- Main issue lack of updates / feedback
- Officers going off sick and complainant not being kept updated and the complainant/victim having to chase for updates
- Being passed to different officers throughout the case
- Not being offered any victim support
- Complainant not happy with the lack of action taken
- Victims feel like they are not being listened to and being rushed when reporting crime or throughout investigations.
- Force not attending incidents of victims of crime
- Call Handlers not informing complainants of all information and why officers will not attend

7.7.3 Points of note / considerations

A review of the Customer Support team was undertaken by Priority Based Budgeting in 2020. A further review aimed at outcomes for victims now that we understand their motivation better through this VNA, may be beneficial. The team is large and a unified approach to recording complaints data is key to enable the results to be analysed and learned from. Training could be given to Customer Support on VCOP.

Logging VCOP failings on the CRT-Beds system is essential, at the moment this function of the system is not being utilised. It is being done in other areas such as Hertfordshire. More information and detail added to the CRT system for each complaint would enable full reports to be extracted.

Signpost Services should be briefly explained and referral offered to those that contact Customer Support and are identified as a victim.

Currently complainants are identifying themselves as victims, which is logged by the customer service team. Training on VCOP would enable the team members to assist the identification.

There is no complaint satisfaction survey. Where complaints are resolved and closed a note is often added to say that the complainant is happy with the complaint response, however this does not feedback their views.

PSD confirmed they have a local factor they can record on complaint allegations of breach of VCOP. However, this information is not necessarily captured unless identified in the complaint allegation by the complainant. Matters such as lack of updates would not necessarily be noted as a VCOP breach.

7.8 Witness care

Witnessing a crime has the potential to negatively impact an individual's physical and mental wellbeing. They might be just as much in need of support as a victim in terms of coping and recovering from the affect. It is therefore vital that their issues and needs are understood. There is currently a lack of witness care data collation across Bedfordshire. The views and feedback of witnesses are not currently collected.

7.8.1 Points of note / considerations

Hertfordshire Police currently operate a system called 'Echo' whereby a text message is sent out to victims of crime at the point a police outcome is logged. This excludes victims of crimes of sensitive nature such as domestic or sexual abuse and also victims under 18 years old, to prevent any risk or further trauma. The text invites victims to log feedback on key questions relating to satisfaction of being kept updated, their needs, overall satisfaction and more. The feedback is logged via a customer engagement software.

It is the intention to extend the Echo process to include witnesses within the next few weeks. Once witness responses are received data can be shared for consideration.

The system enables the force to monitor the live responses logged and act on it quickly. Where negative feedback is logged a call is made to the individual to discuss, provide any further information needed and appease them. If key issues arise regarding process or specific officers conduct, this can be managed internally by appropriate senior ranks. Where positive responses are logged it enables the feedback to be passed directly to the officers and increase morale within the force.

This Echo system has been hugely beneficial for Hertfordshire Police. This report recommends that the same or similar process and software is utilised across Bedfordshire. This would be a prompt and effective way of managing victims and witnesses' expectations and dissatisfaction. It would also create a wealth information to improve awareness within the Force of VCOP failings and victims' issues with officers.

Echo could also be utilised to manage feedback and satisfaction of those who have raised a complaint through the Customer Support Team. Where a complaint is closed on the CRT-Beds system a text could be sent to the complainant seeking feedback as there is currently a gap in this area.

7.9 Third sector

Focus groups were asked if they were able to provide any data in the area of crime, victims and witnesses (excluding service user personal identifiable data) that could be beneficial to review as part of the VNA. Unfortunately, no data was shared at the time of conducting the VNA.

7.9.1 Points of note / considerations

Further engagement with third sector partners is required to understand the reasoning behind the lack of engagement and to overcome any potential data sharing barriers. Data is collated by our third-party partners that may have been useful for the VNA and could be considered in future. It is important to work towards a collaborative approach and encourage data sharing processes both ways where there is potential valuable learning.

8. The OPCC 'Survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire'

8.1 Methodology and introduction

The OPCC conducted an online survey between 1st February 2021 and 15th February 2021 for people who may describe themselves as being the victim of a crime or have been subjected to criminal activity or behaviour. Responses were anonymous and open to anyone no matter what the crime was, how long ago it took place or the impact it had.

The intention was to gain feedback from victims in key areas of consideration for the VNA and to help recognise the different ways that crime can impact individuals and communities. The results also sought to offer guidance of how support services can help people to cope and recover and which processes in the criminal justice system are useful to victims or need focus.

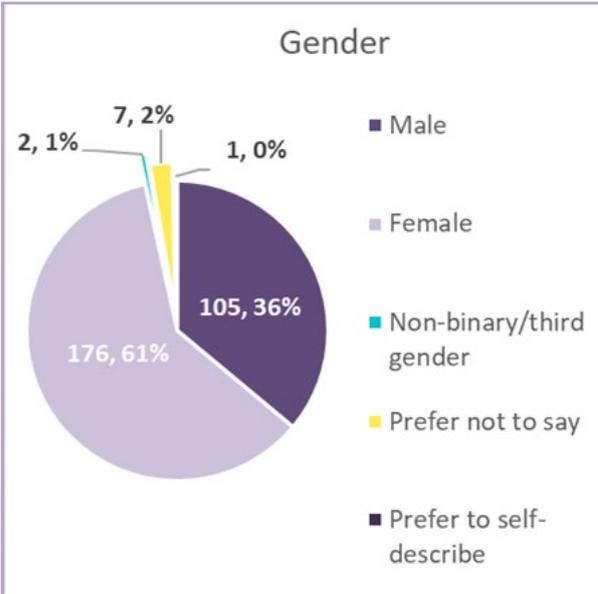
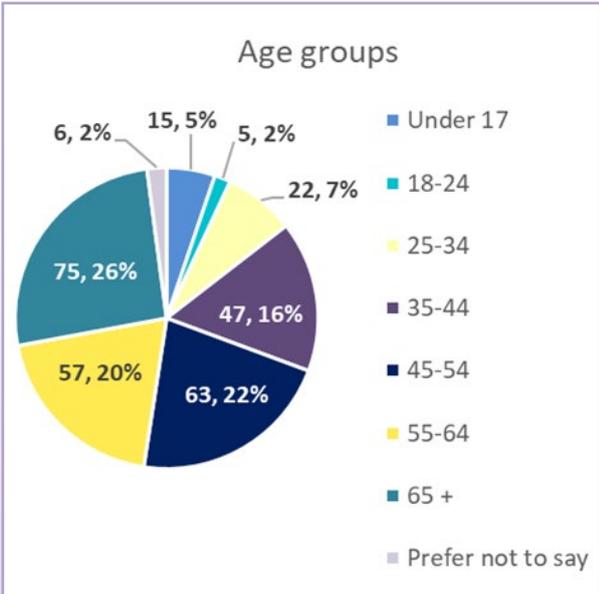
The bespoke survey and in-depth examination of the results ensured the views of victims were considered as a major element to the research. The responses contained both quantitative data and qualitative information that were fundamental to the overall goals of the VNA.

8.2 Findings

8.2.1 The response

A total of 296 responses were received between 1st February 2021 and 15th February 2021. Unfortunately, 74 respondents did not respond beyond the demographic questions, therefore 222 is a more accurate portrayal of the sample size.

The majority of respondents were above 65 years (26%) but closely followed by the two age groups below that (55-64 years and 45-54 years). Just over 2/3 of responses came from those aged 45 and above. As seen with other OPCC surveys this survey received very low responses from the age group 18-24 years (2%). It also received low responses from ethnic minority backgrounds. This resulted in a lack of trends relating to those specific cohorts.



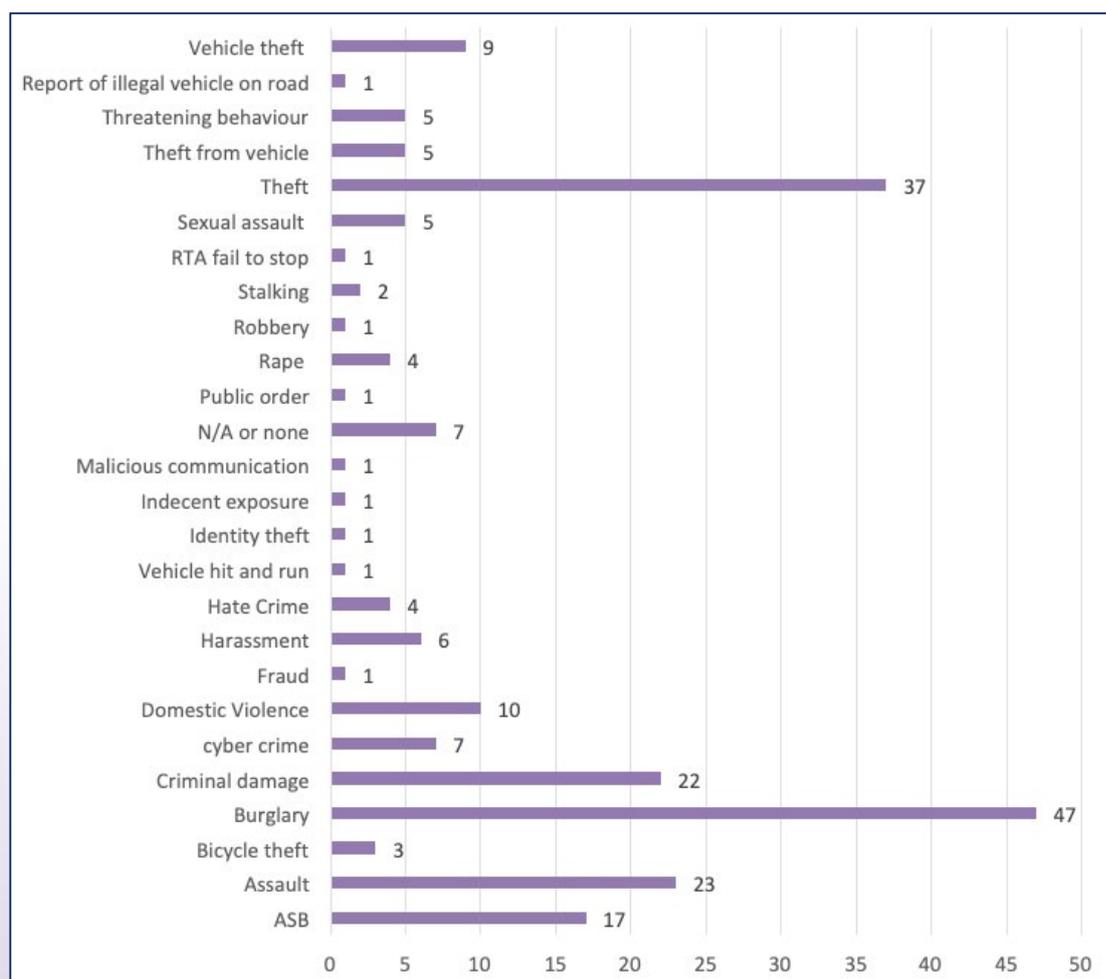
Ethnicity	Responses
Asian or Asian British- Indian	1%
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	1%
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	3%
Other Asian Background	0%
Black or Black British - Caribbean	1%
Black or Black British - African	1%
Black or Black British Other	0%
Chinese	0%
Other ethnic background	1%
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	1%
Mixed - White and Black African	0%
Mixed - White and Asian	1%
Mixed Other	0%
White British	83%
White Irish	2%
White Other	4%
Other	1%
Prefer not to say	2%

Sexual orientation	Responses
Straight / Heterosexual	88%
Bisexual	3%
Pansexual	1%
Homosexual / Gay male	0%
Lesbian / Gay woman	2%
Prefer not to say	5%
Other	0%

8.2.2 Key question findings

Crime types, police response,

The most common crime type was burglary (21%), followed by theft (17%), assault (10%) criminal damage (10%) and anti-social behaviour (8%). Full crime types below. The high level of burglary victims corresponds with the responses every year in the OPCC annual survey when asking which crime type is most visible in the community.

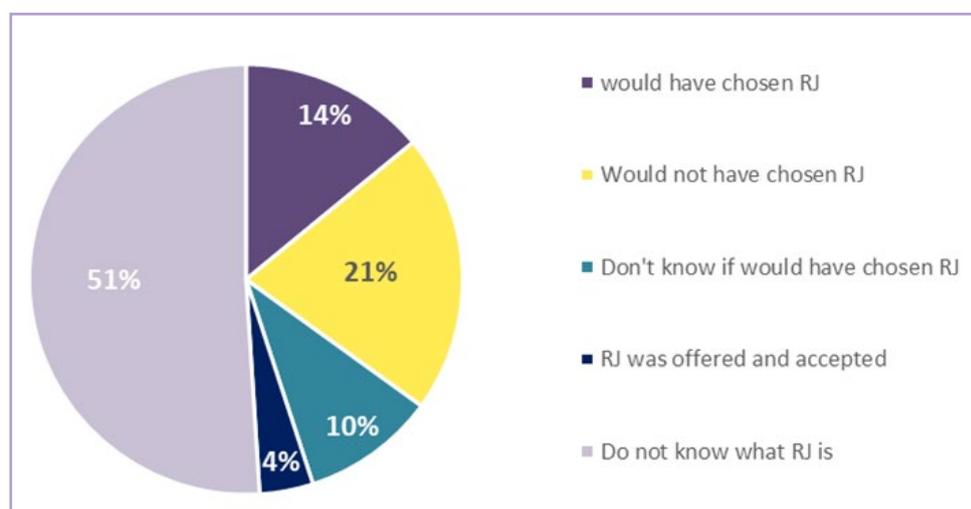


59% of respondents were repeat victims and despite a total of 89% either reporting the crime to police themselves or somebody else reporting it, 43% resulted in no investigation and 26% no further action outcome. The survey saw high levels of dissatisfaction regarding lack of police response and or being kept updated after the report of crime. It also showed high levels of impact to physical and mental health due to the crime. In relation to repeat victims this could cause loss of faith in the police or criminal justice system, deterrence from reporting future crimes and increased impact of crime to victims mental and physical wellbeing.

Restorative Justice

There appears to be a lack of utilisation and understanding of the Restorative Justice process. 90% stated that it was not explained or offered to them at any stage. Contradicting information was then received in a subsequent question which asked those who had, what stage of proceedings it was explained and offered. More respondents gave an answer of the stage it was offered than previously said it was offered at all.

The survey then asked respondents if they would have chosen to use the RJ process if it had been offered; 50% did not know what it was and 14% said they would have chosen the option.



The reliability of the RJ questions statistics was decreased due to the contradictions. However, the responses suggest there is a misunderstanding and or lack of knowledge of the process with victims.

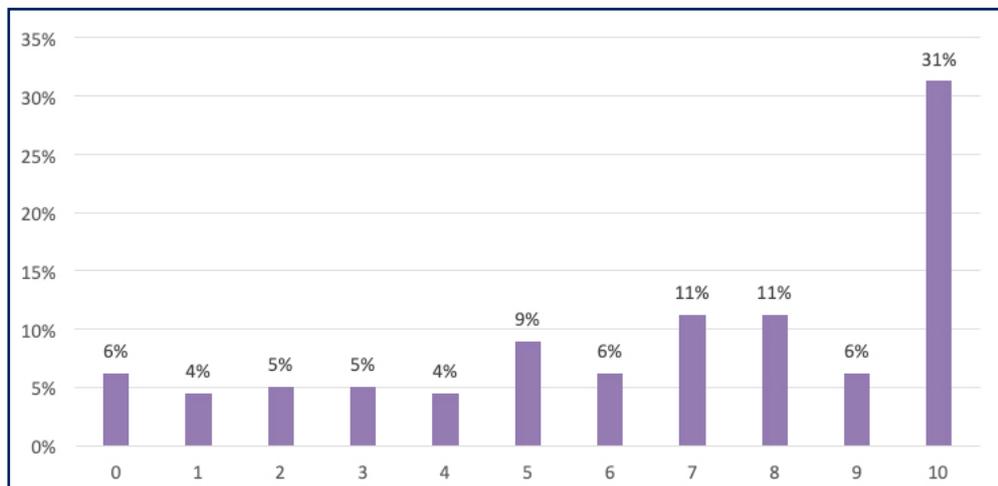
Crime impact to victims

Survey responses showed significant benefit to providing victims with emotional and practical support. Feedback was obtained regarding what victims felt helped them the most with coping and recovering from the crime. The two most common themes were having someone to talk to about their situation whether that was family, friends or support services and advice on personal safety or home security measures. Many said only time helped or that nothing helped them. Other less common themes included prescribed medication and moving home.

Respondents were asked how the crime impacted their mental wellbeing on a scale of 0-10. The majority of responses (73%) were in the upper half of the scale (5-10). The most common response was 10 on the scale (31%).

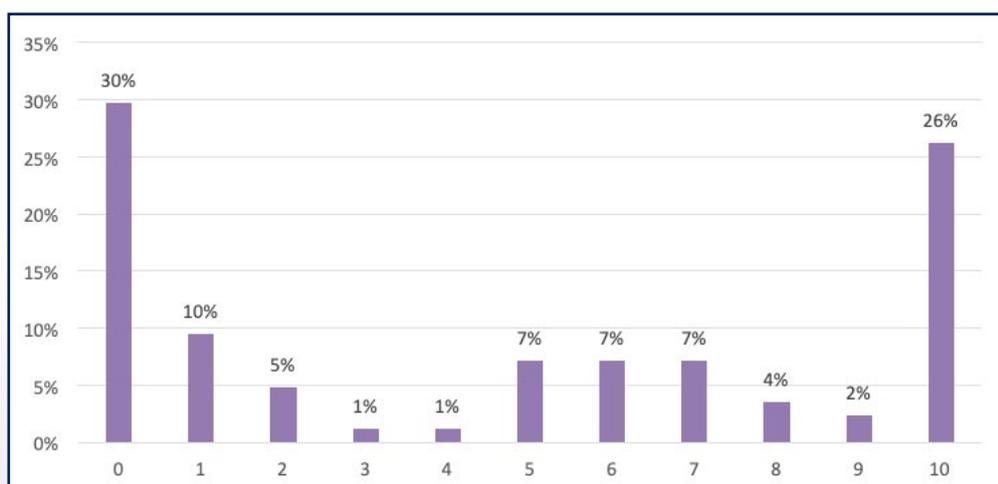
The most common crime types that were affected between 8-10 on the scale were burglary (21%), assault (14%), antisocial behaviour (9%), domestic abuse (8%), rape (5%), harassment (3%), sexual assault (3%). It is important to note that this is not a conclusion of which crime types impact victim's mental wellbeing the most. The number of victims of each crime type within the sample are not equal. For example, there are 47 burglary victims and 18 of them ranged between 8-10 on the scale resulting in the highest percentage, however, there are only 4 rape victims and all of them answered at 10 on the scale.

Impact of crime to mental wellbeing: scale 0-10



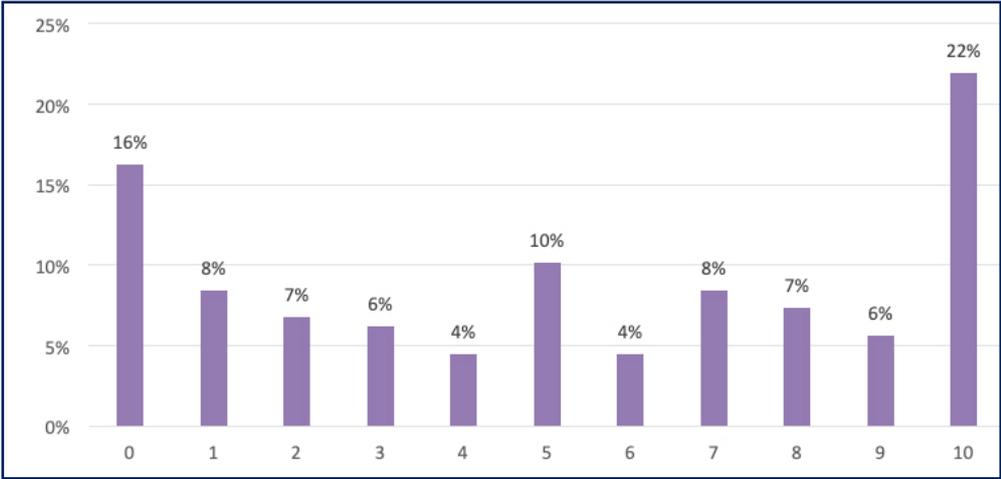
Respondents were asked where they placed on the scale after they had received support; the variance was hugely positive. Those who felt no impact at all rose to 30% which is a 24% increase, those at the highest end of the scale dropped by 5% to 26%. At each number on the scale between 5-10 with the exception of 6 there was a positive decrease. This shows the extent that emotional and practical support can help to reduce the impact to victim's mental wellbeing.

Impact of crime to mental wellbeing after support: scale 0-10



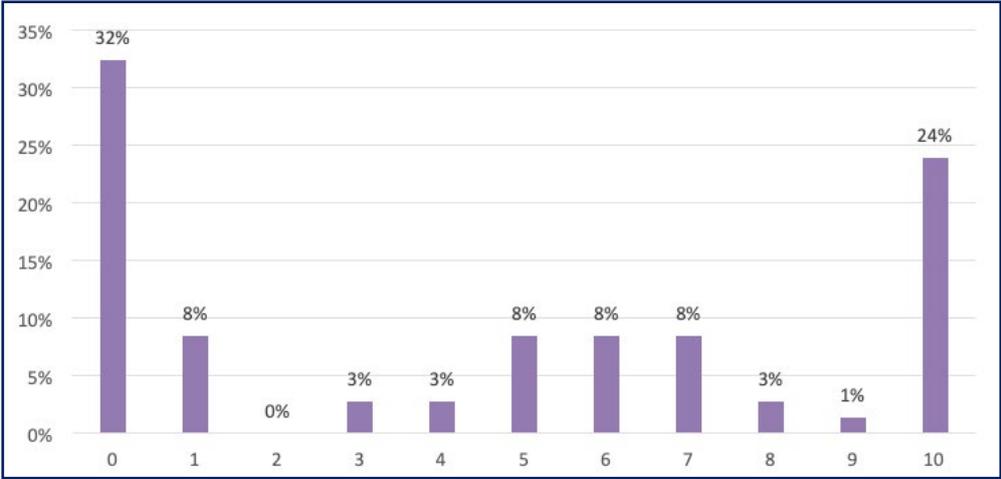
The same scale question was asked regarding the impact to physical wellbeing. The most common response (22%) was that respondents physical wellbeing was severely impacted at 10 on the scale. Within the group answering 10, the most common crime type was assault (31%) including domestic abuse, followed by rape (8%) and then a range of other offences including non-violent or physical crimes, for example theft. Respondents did not outline how their physical wellbeing was impacted.

Impact of crime to physical wellbeing: scale 0-10



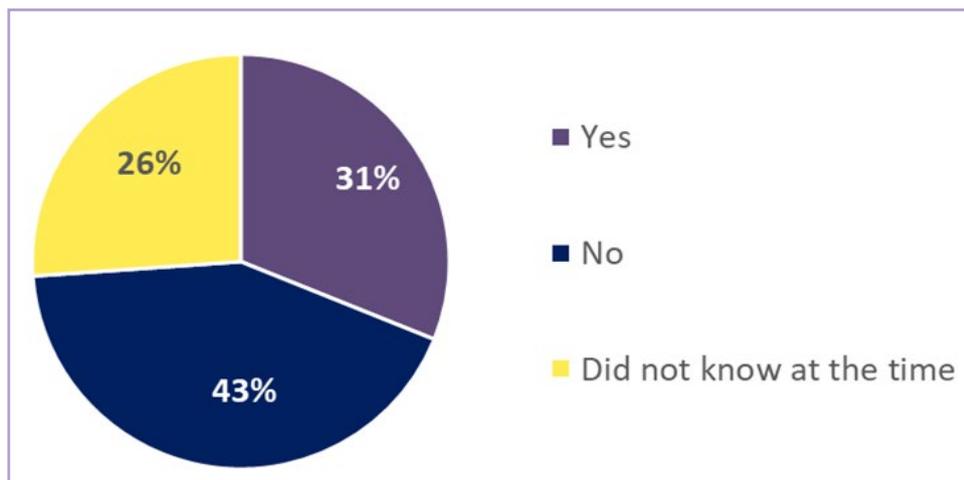
A review of the impact to physical wellbeing after respondents had received support showed a positive increase in the lower end of the scale meaning that the support had helped. 32% were at 0 on the scale and no longer affected, this is a 16% increase from the responses prior to receiving support. The percentage of those who were at 10 on the scale remained almost the same which suggests it is more difficult for the support to improve those whose physical wellbeing was severely impacted.

Impact of crime to physical wellbeing after support: scale 0-10



31% of respondents confirmed they felt they needed or wanted support to help them cope after the crime took place.

Respondents who needed or wanted support to help them cope



The results showed the age group 35-44 years wanted or needed support the most, 32% of all respondents in that age group answered yes to the question. This was the highest percentage within an age group. Interestingly those below 17 years and those above 65 years had a low percentage wanting support.

Percentage needing support by age group:

- 35-44 years – 32%
- 18-24 years – 20%
- 55-64 years – 14%
- Under 17 years – 13%
- 65+ years – 11%
- 25-34 years – 9%

Regardless of whether victims feel they need support, they should at least be aware that it is available, 67% said they were not informed of any victim support services that may be able to help them.

Despite 31% having said they felt they needed support, only 17% of all respondents confirmed that they accessed support services, 7% would have liked help from services and 9% did not know they could get help. It's clear there are some barriers to victims accessing services that could be help them.

Respondents were asked if there was any additional support that could have helped, most of the responses related to the police with themes of investigating the reported crime, giving the feedback on progress or the outcome, officers attending to see the victim, or being taken seriously / not ignored by police.

Other themes included information and advice on home security, having support from someone to talk to about the situation they are in, access to counselling, council or landlord action against residents or community.

Impact of COVID-19 / communication barriers and preferences

A set of questions was designed to help understand the impact of COVID-19 to victims in terms of coping and recovering from crime, this then helped identify any barriers and solutions to communication issues.

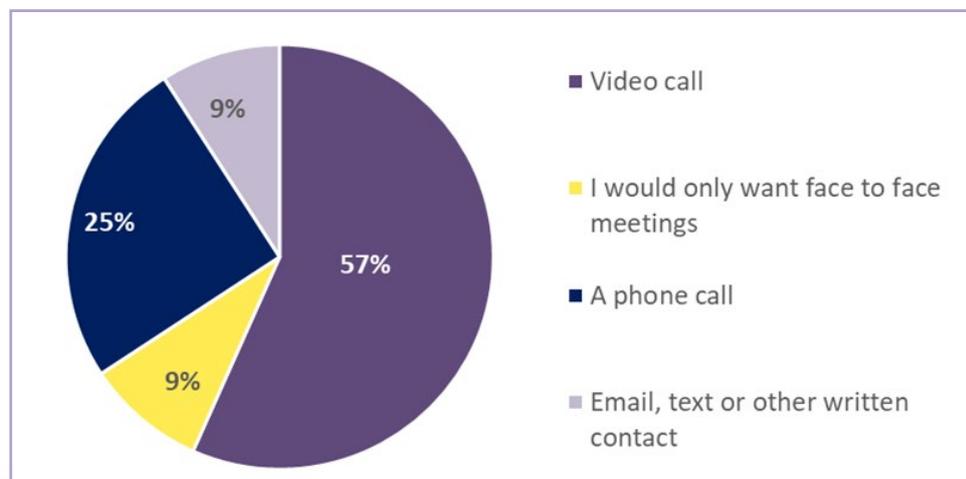
A total of 24% confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic / lockdown affected their ability to cope and recover from the crime, 38% were affected prior to the pandemic and 38% said it did not affect them.

Some key themes in feedback of how it affected them included:

- not being able to have face to face meetings
- not being able to see friends or family to help them cope
- not being able to leave the house to go to a safe place away from the ongoing offences (particularly ASB or abuse victims)
- not being able to leave the house to help take their mind away from the crime or affect
- feeling unsafe in their home or not being able to get home repairs or security installed.

Answer Choices	Responses
Yes, it made it harder to cope/recover and more support was needed	17%
Yes, it made it harder to cope/recover but no extra support was needed	7%
It did not affect my ability to cope/recover	38%
My coping and recovering was before the COVID-19 pandemic	38%

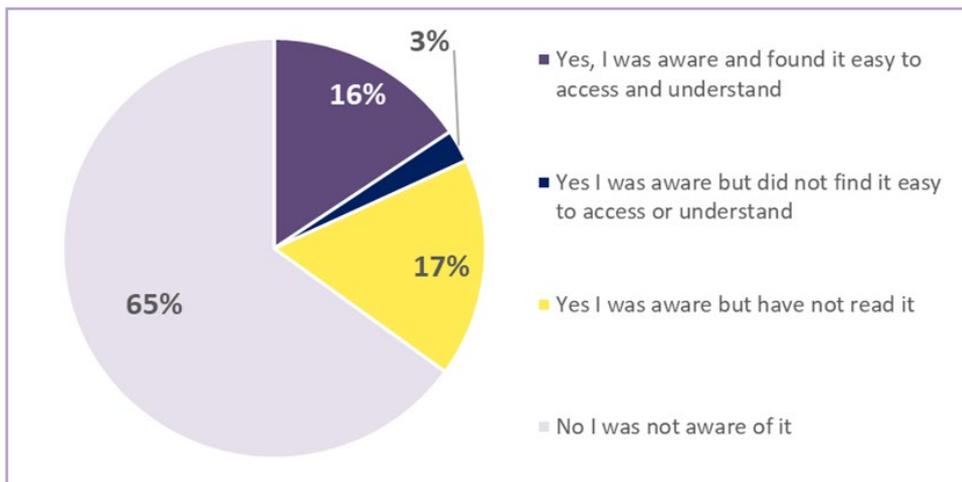
The majority of respondents (62%) felt face to face meetings with support services was the most helpful form of contact. Due to the current pandemic and difficulty in some cases to provide face to face meetings, respondents were asked what would be the next best form of contact, 57% said that video call would be the next best option, 25% telephone, 9% written and 9% said they would only want face to face meetings.



The utilisation of video calls during the pandemic is clearly valuable, however there are likely to be situations where it is not appropriate, particularly in relation to domestic abuse victims; 75% confirmed they would have somewhere private to safely and comfortably talk to support services via video call, 17% were unsure and 8% said they would not have somewhere private and safe, 83% confirmed they would have the equipment to do video calls, 9% would not and 8% did not know.

The Victims' Code

It was important to understand awareness of the Victims' Code and whether it is accessed and understood by victims. Most respondents were not aware of it (65%), only 16% were aware and found it easy to access and understand.



Respondents were asked for their comments regarding the Victims' Code (A link to the code was provided), many did not answer, however, the majority of feedback was in relation to the fact they had not been aware of it before and or it needing to be highlighted to victims more. There were some comments about the document being long.

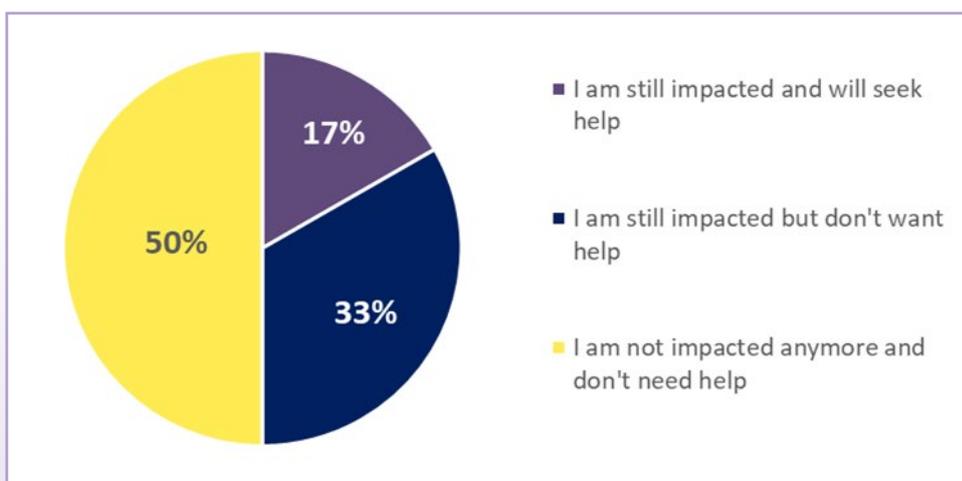
Impact of Court Proceedings

Respondents were asked if there were court proceedings and how this affected them. The majority of respondents said there were no proceedings, 12 people said they had no idea if the matter was taken to court as they never received any update following the report of the crime.

Of the 10 people who said there was a prosecution, several mentioned being unhappy with the outcome or not being required to attend court. Only one gave feedback that they felt scared to see the offender which in the end did not have to happen.

Those still affected by the crime

Details of Signpost were provided at the beginning and end of the survey, 17% of respondents confirmed they still felt affected by the impact of the crime and that they would seek further help as a result of this survey, 33% were still affected but did not want any help.



8.3 Points of note / Considerations

- The impact of crime on respondent's wellbeing is significant, 84% felt some impact to their physical wellbeing and 94% felt impact to their mental wellbeing. Emotional and practical support can significantly decrease this impact.
- 31% of overall respondents wanted or needed support to cope with the crime. A further 26% said they did not know at the time that they needed it, only 17% actually accessed victim support services. The data showing on average 31% of people would want support should provide a goal for Signpost. On average there are 5,000 crimes recorded per month, 3,000 of which (not including fraud) would align to the criteria of cases that Signpost can currently act on. Therefore, the average monthly goal would be 930 victims supported through Signpost.
- Counselling support for recovering victims of crime should be a focus point for commissioning.
- 24% confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic / lockdown affected their ability to cope and recover from the crime for various reasons. The safety and welfare of those who feel vulnerable and unable to flee from dangerous environments is paramount. There was an attempt to make it nationally known that leaving the house to escape domestic abuse was permitted during government lockdown, however there should be a consideration of where victims of various crime types can seek safe environments.
- The majority of respondents (65%) were not aware of the victim's code. Only 16% were aware and found it easy to access and understand, 3% did not find it easy to access or understand and 17% were aware but had not read it. Increasing awareness both within the Force and for the public is required. An action plan is required to address this and any barriers to reaching all demographic cohorts.
- The results show that face to face meetings with support services are generally the preferred option (62%) and should be facilitated as much as possible. However, it is clear from the response, that video call technology is beneficial to some victims particularly during the pandemic and that it should be utilised to provide victims the best possible service where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- There is a lack of victim understanding of the Restorative Justice process where some would have found it beneficial. Awareness and understanding of the process needs raising within the county.
- As seen in other survey results one of the key areas of dissatisfaction is; lack of action, updates on progress, or outcomes following the crime being reported. Further consideration of innovative methods of keeping victims informed is needed.

9. Qualitative Research

9.1 Partner Focus Groups

9.2 Methodology

It was crucial to engage with relevant partners to obtain their views and feedback on key themes being considered for the VNA. To seek their contribution of information, data and ideas to enhance the robustness of the analysis and help understand the needs of victims across Bedfordshire.

Four separate focus groups were formed with the intention of bringing organisations and individuals from similar backgrounds together:

1. Victim support services

It is these victim support services who deal directly with those affected by crime on a daily basis and see first-hand the impact it can have and issues they face.

2. Criminal Justice partners

Partners involved at various stages of the criminal justice system hold valuable insight into its processes and the impact to victims.

3. Independent Advisory Group (IAG)³⁶

Bedford and Luton IAGs provide essential independent input to improving the quality of policing services to all communities. As champions for improving the accountability of policing through a transparent approach they hold victims in the highest regard.

4. Early intervention and offender management services

Early intervention and offender management services do fantastic crime prevention work in Bedfordshire. They have a wealth of knowledge which can link to an understanding of victims needs and offenders who may have been victimised themselves.

9.3 Victim Support Services Group Findings

9.3.1 VCOP

It was noted that services are not always aware whether victims access the Victims' Code or not. It is more likely for an individual to seek guidance on their specific rights if they are unhappy with the service received throughout the criminal justice system.

It was also noted that even though the updated code intends to be more accessible and easier for victims to understand, it may still be too lengthy and 'wordy' for them to want to read it. This could particularly be the case at a time of distress or upset caused from the impact of crime.

9.3.2 Referrals

It was raised that there is likely to be a cohort of individuals who do not access support services as they do not know they are entitled to help. Those who perhaps do not know or see themselves as a victim but are still affected by crime, those who reported the crime to the police but did not get the desired outcome following investigation, or those who did not

³⁶ Independent Advisory Group <https://www.bedfordshire.police.uk/information-and-services/Get-involved/Bedford-Independent-Advisory-Group-IAG/Independent-Advisory-Group-IAG#ee8c7123>

report the crime at all. It was made clear that referrals are still received for cases where police took no further action and that they will continue to ask victims if they wish to be referred to support services. However, this does not cater to those who do not report crime or do not know or believe they are a victim.

9.3.3 COVID-19 impact

Whilst overall crime rates have generally fallen during the pandemic, victim services have seen a rise in domestic abuse. In relation to victim support in this area, case complexity has increased. Services are seeing a higher degree of harm to mental wellbeing and increased levels of fear. It is believed in some cases this is due to extended lengths of time before victims have made contact to the police or support services. During a time of government restrictions on leaving the house, victims may be feeling they have nowhere to flee or it is not safe for them to contact police or support services. In turn, they are living in a potentially dangerous and frightening environment for longer.

It is noted that case complexity has also risen in other crime areas simply because victims are not able to carry out their normal daily routines and are restricted to staying at home where there may be little distraction. This can impact the ability to cope or recover from the impact of crime, leading to increased damage to mental wellbeing.

Concerns are amplified regarding victims without access to funds during the pandemic or lack of essentials such as food. Unemployment rates have significantly increased due to the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and left many uncertain of their future. Through the OPCC charity, food boxes were delivered to elderly victims from March 2021, this has now been taken over by Bedfordshire Fire Service and is ongoing.

Heightened alcohol and or drug use or dependency is a risk and concern for victims during the pandemic. Where individuals are feeling trapped at home and without daily routine, alcohol or drugs may be used as coping mechanisms. Again, this can lead to case complexity in relation to mental and or physical health, it is also an increase of illegal drug offences where individuals are choosing to use this option. In April 2021 the OPCC began a pilot for conditional cautions being given for drug and alcohol dependents.

There has not been a reduction of road traffic crime victim referrals despite the government restrictions urging people to stay at home. It was noted that individuals who are impacted by road traffic offences are often overlooked as victims.

It was discussed that there is a rise in vulnerability of victims due to the pandemic. Particularly in relation to victims of fraudulent crime from cold calls as the majority of people will be at home more or romance fraud where victims are lonely during this difficult time. Impact to fraud reviewed in section 5.3 of this report.

9.3.4 Communication

A positive response was received when discussing the utilisation of video calls to support victims where face to face meetings are not available. It is known from both victims and support services feedback, that face to face meetings are largely the most effective form of communication when assisting victims on their journey of coping and recovering from crime. In some occasions where urgent practical support is needed such as housing or funding issues, it is noted that telephone advice is often the most effective. Given that the pandemic has prevented face to face contact in many areas, it is important to seek alternative methods that are accessible and effective for both parties.

Potential issues with video calling:

- Lack of safe or private environment for service user to communicate via video (particularly in relation to domestic abuse victims)
- Service user access to equipment or technology
- Service user access to funds / data
- Victims of domestic abuse having their phones tracked by the offender

It was raised that domestic abuse victims often flee a dangerous situation without their mobile phone or have it taken by an offender. Besides the video call element for support, mobile phones are hugely important to assisting the safety and mental wellbeing of the victim. Funding for equipment is always beneficial in this area.

It was raised that the COVID-19 MoJ funded project have been hugely beneficial and that there is a concern of the impact to services and users when the funding ends.

9.3.5 Engaging with victims for the VNA

Whilst it was still in the design stage, the group reviewed the content of the OPCC survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire. It was important to obtain feedback and ideas to ensure the survey captured the themes appropriately for the audience. Useful feedback was received and updates made. Many of the services confirmed they would assist with raising awareness of the survey and introducing it to service users they felt suitable.

9.3.6 Points of note / considerations

Increased efforts are needed to ensure VCOP awareness is raised with those affected by crime. Whilst victims may be inclined to seek guidance on their rights after they have felt let down by services, it is important that they are aware of the minimum requirements from services so that expectations are clear ahead of any dissatisfaction. The Victims' Code ought to act as an aid to victims through the criminal justice process and their journey to coping and recovering. It should be preventative of victim dissatisfaction or further trauma rather than used as a responsive mechanism. The Victims Code also outlines what constitutes a victim for those who may not be aware that they are entitled to the rights.

It is clear that the rise of domestic abuse during COVID-19 government restrictions is an issue. Beds OPCC awarded local providers with funding for emergency housing for domestic abuse clients during the pandemic. This is part of MoJ funding which is not currently under review for future risk or contingency planning when the funding runs out. The impact of not receiving additional funding is a concern, however, due to the unpredictable nature of the pandemic it is not possible to quantify the timescales additional COVID-19 programmes will be needed.

There is always a need to support victims to feel safe and manage the impact of the crime to their physical and mental wellbeing. It is important to understand the need for equipment particularly domestic abuse victims with no access to communication means such as a mobile phone. Ensuring services can support people with devices is a consideration for commissioning.

The OPCC have procured complex case support however this is an area that requires review for quantity of service due to the rise during the pandemic. It is also important that awareness is raised to provide an understanding of the support available to victims throughout the pandemic as this could combat and prevent the impact to victims which has seen an increase to case complexity.

Further work is required to review the impact and needs of victims relating to road traffic offences.

A review of the drug and alcohol dependant conditional caution pilot is needed to consider effectiveness and further investment. This may also be a service required by victims.

9.4 Criminal Justice Partners Group Findings

9.4.1 Additional data

It was noted that VCOP is covered by police officers in attendance with victims and this is monitored through updates in the Athena system. Despite this being the case it is confirmed the recording on Athena for VCOP is a tick box without additional detail. A dip sample of 30 cases are reviewed at the Victims and Witness Board.

There has previously been no way of measuring victim personal statement data besides a manual trawl. This has recently been addressed and moving forward will be monitored by the Victims and Witness Board.

The Victim Right to Review Scheme VRR (reviewed previously in section 4.1.9) has a single point of entry to Bedfordshire Police. Often victims are still being supported emotionally and or practically by the officer in the case or by Signpost at the point in which they make their request. However, this does not include support for the VRR process, VRR Requests are logged and data forms part of the Victim and Witnesses Board data.

9.4.2 COVID-19 impact

Due to COVID-19 there has been a huge impact on the ability for Magistrates' Court and Crown Court trials to take place. Some trials are now being listed to take place in 2022. The true impact of victims and witnesses disengaging with proceedings due to prolonged waiting time is unlikely to be clear until further down line. Although victims and witness statements will be taken close to the time of the offence being reported, long delays to trial listings could affect the ability to recall the incidents and the quality of evidence at trial. Information on victim and witness attrition caused by COVID-19 is noted in section 5.2 of this report.

It was noted that Signpost only take referrals for certain victims and to manage the increase in demand for keeping victims and witnesses engaged through these prolonged periods of trial delays, Signpost could be adapted to assist.

There have been referrals for enhanced victim support services relating to forthcoming trials in the next 9-12 months. Whilst there is a focus on court process, this creates a concern that there may be gap in service provision in appropriate support for witnesses, particularly whilst services are already stretched.

In relation to domestic abuse during the pandemic, there has been higher intensity of harm and risk for victims due to a lack of ability to access safe spaces (library, shops, doctors, leisure centres and schools etc).

Police have seen increased domestic abuse offences and higher levels of violence being used. There is a rise in first time DA offenders alongside a steady flow of repeat victims. There have been higher rates of child neglect and violence on children; this area is very reliant on child social care for the victim support. There is a rise of trauma inflicted children living in abusive or violent households who require both emotional and mental health regulation. There have been trauma informed processes, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD research

and knowledge developments over past couple of years resulting in child trauma becoming more recognised.

9.4.3 Current issue controls and additional support considerations

It was noted that funding provision for temporary engagement officers would be beneficial to combat increased demand for witness care due to extended court delays.

Section 28 provides the option to pre-record evidence in advance of a trial for vulnerable complainants of a crime, as well as witnesses, including children. This is now also being utilised by Crown Courts during the pandemic to assist trials.

It was noted that Hertfordshire OPCC are producing a pilot for remote evidence centres through funding from the PCC. Citizens advice bureau are utilising space to turn into remote evidence centres for victims and witnesses. This supports victim and witness care and enables trials to take place during the pandemic with remote evidence in a controlled environment, eliminating the potential element of duress issues.

Housing funding during the first lockdown was hugely effective, however, there is a concern that due to Brexit, those who previously would have had access to public funds may no longer have that access.

9.4.4 Points of note / Considerations

VCOP compliance recording could be enhanced to record more detail pre-charge. It is known from survey feedback and complaints data that one of the fundamental areas of dissatisfaction for those reporting crimes is a lack of communication and updates from the police.

A review of the victim right to review data is required to understand the volume of victims unhappy with the decision to discontinue a prosecution or take no further action following a police investigation.

Efforts must be made to address the potential issue of victims and witnesses disengaging with the criminal justice process. Utilisation of s28 evidence recordings and controlled environments for giving remote evidence are required. Similar to the pilot of remote evidence locations in Hertfordshire, the Bedfordshire SARC could be developed for this purpose.

It is clear that supporting victims of domestic abuse and trauma inflicted children through preventative measures such as emergency housing or access to safe areas is vital during the pandemic.

An understanding of social care resourcing is required to establish whether there are any gaps in service provision for higher rates of child neglect, violence and or abuse that could be assisted through funding or joint commissioning.

In order to understand any demand for additional provision for temporary engagement officers, to combat increased witness care during the pandemic, the data needs to be collected and reviewed. Signpost could be adapted to provide additional resource and service within this area.

Further understanding of the engagement of victims and witnesses during lengthy delays for court is required. It is important that the communication is tailored to help them understand the situation and offer support to their needs, in attempt to keep them well informed and prevent disengagement.

9.4.5 Central Bedfordshire Council - Antisocial Behaviour Victims

Antisocial Behaviour Officers and the Safer Neighbourhood manager provided valuable insight to victims of antisocial behaviour (ASB) and processes and issues for victims.

The team manage prosecutions in relation to breaches of ASB orders. It was noted that even under ordinary circumstances prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, their cases were allocated limited court time. With the impact of the pandemic and pressures on courts this has become worse. Where preventative action is needed to tackle ASB, some cases are now taking up to a year to reach court.

It was stated the extent of their engagement with victims gives them the resilience and confidence to keep going and in turn this results in successful prosecutions. However, the longer the process goes on, the harder it is to keep the victims engaged. The team have good relationships with victims and witnesses but it is hard to keep them on side when no updates are being received for the team to keep them informed. Often where cases have prolonged wait for court there are also further incidents of ASB which affect the victim and create a need for multiple additional statements to be taken. This impacts ASB Officers capacity and can also lead to disengagement from victims.

It is believed that there is a misunderstanding of the extent of the damage and affect caused by ASB to its victims and local communities. The team are seeing a rise of clients reporting mental health issues as a result of ASB even to the extent of considering suicide.

There is a huge emphasis on supporting victims of crime which is not to be discredited, however it is felt there is not so much support for ASB victims. The affect to mental and physical wellbeing can be just as devastating and life changing. There may be a gap in provision of support service for victims of ASB where there is a lack of criminal element or report to Police.

Anti-social Behaviour Risk Assessments (ASBRAC) are held monthly for individual cases. Agencies come together to assess the risk and vulnerability of a particular victim, to establish whether additional support is required. This often results in multi-agency sign posting.

There is also a Problem-solving Group (PSG) which is a multi-agency meeting designed to find solutions to ASB problems by way of an action plan. It was noted that some collaborative working from Signpost could be beneficial in this area. As the team can deal with the enforcement side and support victims as much as possible but there is only so much that can be done and Independent support would be hugely helpful.

Where reporting to the Police is concerned many victims of ASB are informed there is nothing the Police can do to help. This results in victims feeling as though their issues are not important and they just have to put up with it. It can create a loss of faith in the Police and also prevent ASB victims from reporting to Police when further incidents occur. Victims often then turn to Housing Officers or the Safer Neighbourhood Team for help. However, some victims may feel they have nobody to turn to.

Where required some work is carried out alongside the Police and their investigations for certain offences such as harassment. In relation to the Victim's Code the team follow the same principles and haven't seen a dissatisfaction with victims but have seen lack of updates from the Police. There have been occasions where an ASB investigator is classed as witness for a case and have not received an update until two months after an outcome.

9.4.6 Points of note / Considerations

The recent results of the OPCC 'Survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire' corroborate the opinion that there is a potential lack of support for ASB victims, a lack of satisfaction with Police response and a high impact of ASB to victims' mental wellbeing.

Although a small sample size of 16 ASB victims completed the survey some key findings were:

- 94% reported the issue to the Police (15 of 16)
- 0% confirmed that there was a Police investigation, 69% confirmed the Police did not investigate or took no further action (11 of 16), 19% said other outcome (3 of 16) and two did not answer
- 56% were dissatisfied with Police response (9 of 16), 38% neither satisfied or dissatisfied (6 of 16) and 1 person (16%) confirmed they were satisfied with Police response.
- 44% confirmed they felt they wanted or needed support to cope with the impact (7 of 16)
- Only 19% were advised of support services and accessed them (3 of 16)
- On a scale of 0-10 of impact to mental health 63% ranged between 8-10 on the scale.

Work is required to understand whether there is a gap in support services for victims of ASB particularly where there was no report to the Police, no action taken or it does not amount to a crime specifically.

Signpost could be assisting in this area of victims and as previously recommended, Signpost details should be offered by call handlers receiving reports of crime, regardless of the Police undertaking an investigation.

Following discussion of the potential benefit of independent support from Signpost working with ASB Officers for PSG and or ASBRAC meetings, this option should be explored. If not to attend meetings, some collaborative working and support where appropriate outside of the meetings could assist.

9.5 Early intervention / offender management group findings

After the first couple of months of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a rise in online child sexual exploitation crimes and it is likely to be a similar of other online criminal activity. It is noted this is believed to be due to increased level of online activity of vulnerable children.

The violence and exploitation reduction unit are conducting a Child Exploitation Needs Assessment is being undertaken and has multiple agencies involved.

9.5.1 Points of note / Considerations

As previously noted some further communication with third sector partners is required to understand the reasoning behind the lack of engagement and overcome any potential data or information sharing barriers. It is important work towards a collaborative approach and encourage data sharing processes both ways where there is potential valuable learning.

The intention was to gather an understanding of the links between victims and early intervention and preventative work with offenders. Matters such as offenders who may have been subjected to crime or witnessed crime themselves, young or vulnerable victimised individuals and the link to gangs, knife crime and county lines. These are themes that would have been useful to review as part of the VNA.

'You turn' provide a mirror image service of signpost for offenders and vulnerable individuals. engaging with 'You turn' could be a starting point for further understanding these areas.

There will be some cross learning to be considered between this VNA and the findings and recommendations of the Child Exploitation Needs Assessment. The dates for completion of the assessments do not align, however once complete the findings will be shared and reviewed.

9.6 IAG Focus Group Findings

The chairs of Bedfordshire IAG were invited to feedback on the survey for those affected by crime whilst it was in design stage. Following this a separate meeting took place with two members.

9.6.2 VCOP

A key factor is that victims want to know how the Victims' Code can help them and what it relates to. It is believed that often the purpose of the code is sometimes misunderstood and it is thought of as relating to victims going to court and what that means for them. It needs to be clear to victims that it outlines what they can expect from services.

It is important for victims to understand that they do not have to report a crime to the Police to be entitled to rights under the Victims' Code. The Code outlines this and people should be aware.

9.6.3 Reporting crime to the police

It was noted that during the pandemic Bedfordshire Police requested for crime to be reported online; there are pros and cons to this. It can be beneficial to domestic or sexual abuse victims due to it being more discreet and, in some occasions, safer. There can also be a nervousness for victims reporting over the phone. However, requesting detailed information of a crime in an online form could potentially be difficult for victims to do and may cause increased trauma. There may be occasions where this information needs to be obtained in a more tactful and supportive way for victims. Perhaps an option of online completion less detailed with an option to request a call back.

9.6.4 Communicating and providing services

There cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach to communication. Where victims are concerned this should be tailored to suit their needs, however, alternative communication methods for supporting victims could be beneficial while face to face meetings might be limited. Video services or WhatsApp encrypted messaging could be useful besides issues of access to equipment or software.

In relation to communication it is imperative that all demographic cohorts are reached, particularly where there are cultural and language barriers for victims in reporting crime or seeking support for the impact. Honour based crime is a particular consideration for these types of challenges.

Every victim has a right to review and it was raised that this is currently not well explained or supported.

10. Summary of findings and themes

- a. The most common themes of dissatisfaction for victims which have been documented in surveys and Police complaints are:
 - Lack of communication, feedback or updates from the police following a crime being reported
 - No action taken following the report of a crime or no outcome information provided
- b. The Victims' Code of Practice was updated by the MoJ in October 2020 in order to make it more accessible and easier to understand for victims and is due to come into effect in April 2021. There is a lack of awareness and understanding of the Victims' Code of Practice with victims. The OPCC survey for those affected by crime saw 65% were not aware of the Code at all, 16% were aware and found it easy to access and understand, 3% were aware but did not find it easy to access or understand and 17% were aware but had not read it.

There are issues with recording mechanisms in place to monitor compliance with certain elements of the Victims' code such as Victim Personal Statements and Restorative Justice. This report recognizes there is a lack of victim understanding of these processes which requires compliance monitoring processes to be efficient.

- c. The impact of crime to victim's wellbeing is significant, 84% felt some impact to their physical wellbeing and 94% felt impact to their mental wellbeing. Emotional and practical support from victim support services has been seen to significantly decrease this impact.

Some victims who need or want support from services in relation to coping and recovering from the impact of crime are not accessing services. On average 31% of victims engaged with as part of this VNA felt they needed or wanted support and only 17% had accessed services. Many victims confirmed that they felt a lack of access to counselling support or awareness of support services.

- d. On average COVID-19 has impacted 24% of victim's ability to cope and recover from the crime. Some key themes included:
 - not being able to have face to face meetings
 - not being able to see friends or family to help them cope
 - not being able to leave the house to go to a safe place away from the ongoing offences (particularly ASB or abuse victims)
 - not being able to leave the house to help take their mind away from the crime or affect
 - feeling unsafe in their home or not being able to get home repairs or security installed.
- e. Whilst there are dedicated teams within Local Authorities relating to antisocial-behaviour, research suggests ASB victims are generally overlooked in relation to the impact that the behaviour can have and a lack of victim support services available to them. Where there is no criminal element to be recorded and investigated they do not meet the criteria of victim covered under the Victims' Code of Practice.
- f. There has been an increase of domestic abuse victims since the COVID-19 pandemic and a rise in their case complexity regarding the impact to the victims physical and mental wellbeing and safety. The Domestic Abuse Bill is due to come into effect in April 2021

and will legislate a statutory definition of domestic abuse for the first time. It will see the new role of a Domestic abuse Commissioner who will drive better performance in the response to domestic abuse across all local areas and agencies. It will also include a new civil preventative order regime, the Domestic Abuse Protection Notice (DAPN) to provide immediate protection following a domestic abuse incident, and a new civil Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DAPO) to provide flexible, longer-term protection for victims.

- g. The VNA research and partner engagement has shown that the recording of witness views, feedback and issues is an area that still requires focus and is not currently at a good level.
- h. There has been an increase of online fraudulent crimes and scams as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Figures also suggest criminals have been turning away from more traditional forms of fraud due to the impact of the pandemic. Whilst many victims of fraud simply want a reimbursement of the loss of funds, there are also victims who will be impacted emotionally through a traumatic experience, particularly in relation to romance fraud. It is noted that fraud is under resourced within the police and further partner working could be beneficial.
- i. Demographic information was included in the survey for those affected by crime designed for this VNA, however it was not included in many of the other surveys reviewed or the recorded crime data obtained from data.police.uk. Demographics are recorded by the police and further work is required to obtain and analyse this information with regard to understanding by demographic cohorts the issues that victims face; hidden victims, barriers to accessing services and gaps in service provision

11. Recommendations

This VNA recognises that there is a wealth of beneficial work being done to support the needs of victims throughout Bedfordshire. The 28 far reaching and collaborative recommendations below could provide valuable additions and improvements.

It is advised that each of the recommendations are allocated to the specified board or OPCC meeting, to review and action suitably. The progress and impact should then be monitored and recorded. A timescale for each recommendation should be allocated at the next available meeting.

Breakdown of recommendations by area				
Bedfordshire Police	OPCC	Police & OPCC collaboration	Signpost	Partners
4 (1, 2, 3, 7)	13 (4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28)	5 (5, 14, 15, 16, 25)	3 (6, 12, 20)	3 (13, 17, 18)

Police processes:

- 1. Bedfordshire Police VNA consideration** - whilst the Force is carrying out an analysis and re branding Bedfordshire Police, the VNA should be considered in relation to culture and in establishing how we manage the expectations of our service users and their needs. This is an action advised for the Chief Constable at the Force Culture Board.
- 2. Victim engagement and case updates** - increased engagement with victims is required to provide case updates following reports of crime, in order to improve victim satisfaction, victim's confidence of the criminal justice system and ensure police compliance with the Code of Practice for Victims. The implementation of an online self-service crime update platform for victims should be considered and researched. This option could also alleviate workload and increase capacity for officers. If online provision is researched and not deemed appropriate, resource is required for this area as well as ensuring education to officers and staff about the importance of timely and appropriate updates. This should be managed in line with the Business Change and Continuous Improvement Board (BCCIB).
- 3. The 'Echo' programme** - an online engagement programme such as 'Echo' should be implemented to obtain victim and witness feedback. This live update system can be monitored and acted on where required with the individual and also internally within the Force. Guided feedback questions for the user relating to VCOP will allow a prompt and efficient way of managing dissatisfaction, assisting compliance monitoring and raising awareness and expectations within the force. Echo should also be utilised for victims who have been through the complaints process. This system would be an opportunity to bridge a gap in relation to witness feedback and the complaints process feedback where there is currently no data being collected for either. A full gap analysis around Echo should be managed in line with the Business Change and Continuous Improvement Board (BCCIB).
- 4. Drug and alcohol Conditional Caution** - A review of the drug and alcohol dependant conditional caution pilot is needed to consider effectiveness and further investment. This may also be a service required by victims but requires review. This is an action for the OPCC to be reviewed through the Business Review Meeting (BRM).

Victims Code of Practice (VCOP)

- 5. Awareness campaigns** - Local VCOP awareness campaigns should be launched to ensure victims are aware of their rights under the revised Victims' Code. Barriers to accessing and understanding the code should reviewed to ensure campaigns cater to all demographic cohorts within the diverse population of Bedfordshire. Current and accessible methods should be considered such as videos, infographics, apps and social media. If MoJ separate VCOP guidance for practitioners and victims are published, these should be reviewed and incorporated. This recommendation should be managed collaboratively through the Victims and Witnesses Board (VWB).

Training / awareness programmes

- 6. Signpost** - VCOP training for staff to enable them to assist with raising awareness with victims, highlighting key points to victims where appropriate and identifying breaches. This is an action for the OPCC to be reviewed through the Business Review Meeting (BRM).
- 7. Customer Support (Police Complaints)** - VCOP training to enable breaches to be identified during complaints and logged appropriately on the CRT system. A unified approach should be adopted to recording complaints with more information and detail. To be monitored through the Business Change and Continuous Improvement Board (BCCIB).

- 8. Perpetrator messaging** - Although there are one to one programmes with perpetrators, the OPCC should work with Bedfordshire Offender Management Teams to ensure that wider reaching programmes are considered. Perpetrator messaging programmes will work towards preventing a victim blaming culture where there is a focus on victims and their behaviour. This is an action for the OPCC to be reviewed through the Business Review Meeting (BRM).

Victim Support

- 9. Counselling** - Counselling support for recovering victims of crime should be an area of focus for commissioning. Particularly in relation to domestic abuse victims and the rise in case complexity during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to increased severity of abuse, lack of available coping mechanisms and or escape from abusive environments. This is corroborated by the recent OPCC open commissioning session where the majority of victim services providers bid for counselling services and still felt that the need was greater than the current resource. This is an action for the OPCC to be reviewed through the Business Review Meeting (BRM).
- 10. Antisocial Behaviour Victims** - There should be emphasis on commissioning victim support services for ASB victims to ensure emotional, and practical support is available for this cohort. These victims are not covered under the rights of the updated Victims' Code where there is no criminal element, however research shows they are hugely impacted by the incidents. This will be further implemented via recommendation 15 and should be monitored by the Victims and Witnesses Board (VWB).
- 11. Raising awareness with 16-24-year olds** - Efforts should be made via the OPCC Instagram account to engage with the age group 16-24 years to raise awareness of victim support and reporting crime. This is an action for the OPCC to be reviewed through the Business Review Meeting (BRM).
- 12. Signpost victim support targets** - The data from the 'OPCC survey for those affected by crime in Bedfordshire' showing on average 31% of victims feel they want or need support to help them cope and recover from crime, should provide a goal for Signpost. On average there are 5,000 crimes recorded per month, 3,000 of which (not including fraud) would align to the criteria of cases that Signpost can currently act on. This has been considered against the average 31% of victims wanting support, affordability to budget and staff resource (considering the 30% national average sickness / annual leave) to equate to a target of 812 victims per month supported by Signpost.
- 13. Drug user support plans** - The 'Bedfordshire Drug Profile' work should be utilised to build supportive plans for users of drugs and the victims impacted. The OPCC, Local Authorities and CCGs need to be cognisant of this work when commissioning services. This should be reviewed by the Pan-Bedfordshire Commissioning Group.
- 14. Fraud victims** - Victims are currently being failed in this area. Further research and discussion is required between the Force and the OPCC to review where further partner working could benefit this cohort of victims with coping and recovering from the crime. In particular, the practical element of assisting vulnerable victims in communication with banks and FCA for money recovery. There may also be an opportunity for Citizens Advice Bureau or Signpost to support the vulnerable victims that are suffering other impacts because of this crime type. This should be monitored via the Strategic Board.
- 15. Robbery victims** - Robbery is statistically high for Bedfordshire. It is believed the Force currently supply the majority of the victim care for this crime type, however Signpost are receiving between 2-7 robbery referrals per month. The victim care process for this requires

a full review with Bedfordshire Police and Signpost, as it may be that additional support can be provided through Signpost due to high crime volume. Any confusion regarding who currently provides the support must be identified in case victim support is being missed. It is advised this action is allocated to the victims and witness board (VWB).

Data Analysis

16. Understanding barriers to accessing services by demographic cohorts - A gap analysis can be carried out using data of demographics for those who report crime to Bedfordshire Police compared to those who have accessed Signpost. Evidence led conclusions should be formed collaboratively with partners. It is advised this action is allocated to the victims and witness board (VWB).

Partnership Working

17. Communication Strategy - A wider communication strategy is required for Beds Police, OPCC and CJ partners to work towards a shared approach to perpetrator messaging. This will be managed through and with the bespoke teams across Bedfordshire Police such as Emerald and Modern-Day Slavery Coordinators. This should be allocated to the Partnership Comms Board.

18. Commissioning partners review of barriers to accessing services, gaps in provision and data sharing - It is advised that commissioning partners such as OPCC, NHS, Local Authority work together to review:

- Demographic cohort issues, barriers and needs around accessing support services and gaps in provision
- Data sharing requirements and agreements to assist shared learning and unified approach
- Criminal Justice system disengagement from victims and witnesses after the process. What aftercare support is available and is the pathway known and accessible to victims.

19. Victim Services Map - A clear map is needed of all services for victims including the links between specialist police departments (e.g. Emerald, Modern Slavery Coordinators, Victim Engagement Officers) and third sector victim support services. This is an OPCC action to be reviewed through the Business Review Meeting (BRM) however the work will require collaboration of multiple partners.

20. Antisocial Behaviour Victims - There should be partnership working between Signpost and Local Authority (LA) Safer Neighbourhood Teams / ASB Officers in relation to the Problem-Solving Group (PSG), Anti-Social Behaviour Risk Assessment (ASBRAC) and any other areas that LA may benefit from independent support. To be monitored through Business Change and Continuous Improvement Board (BCCIB)

21. OPCC support for victim services - Clear pathway support is needed not only for victims but also professionals. Collaborative work with local authorities, social workers and early help teams should be considered. This is an OPCC action to be reviewed through the Business Review Meeting (BRM) but will require contribution from partners.

Court processes

22. Remote evidence centres - In an attempt to aid the backlog of cases awaiting court trials, remote evidence centres should be considered to allow victims and witnesses the ability to record and or give live evidence securely and safely without having to attend court.

The Bedfordshire SARC should be reviewed for its suitability to accommodate this and criminal justice partners should be consulted regarding other potential remote evidence sites. Liaison with courts is required to understand the logistics of scope for live remote evidence. This should be reviewed by the Local Criminal Justice board (LCJB).

23. Engaging with victims / witnesses awaiting Court - feedback from victims and witnesses awaiting court must be collated to understand the impact of prolonged waits for hearings and trials during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Echo programme could be utilised to collect this data. However, a proactive and preventative approach should also be taken in attempt to prevent the issue of victims and witnesses disengaging due to long waiting times. Further research is needed to understand whether there is a demand for additional resource to engage with those awaiting court and whether this could be met through Signpost. This should be reviewed by the Local Criminal Justice board (LCJB) and the Business Change and Continuous Improvement Board (BCCIB).

School Programmes

24. COVID-19 adaptations - All victim related school programmes should be reviewed to consider the logistics and effectiveness of alternative or adapted delivery methods. This should include any safety measures required within schools when they reopen but also consider measures if schools are required to close again due to government restrictions. Options could include online video programmes or the use of appropriate training locations where COVID-19 safety measures are feasible. This is an action for the OPCC to be reviewed through the Business Review Meeting (BRM).

Victim support process reviews

25. Anti-social behaviour victim referrals to Signpost - The processes for ASB victims being referred in to Signpost by the Force should be reviewed to ensure that referrals are being made where appropriate. Particularly where there is no criminal element and victims are informed the police cannot assist. This should be reviewed by Business Change and Continuous Improvement Board (BCCIB).

26. Domestic abuse third sector recovery strategies - The amount of DA cases reported to the police should be reviewed to establish how many are progressed to specific plans with the third sector for recovery strategies. If there is a gap a review of this pathway needs to be conducted. This should be reviewed by the Bedfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership (BDAP)

27. Reporting mechanisms - The amount of sexual violence cases reported to the police should be reviewed to establish how many are progressed to specific plans with the third sector for recovery strategies. If there is a gap a review of this pathway needs to be conducted. This should be reviewed by the Serious Sexual Abuse Board (SSAB)

28. Video Call Technology - A gap analysis should be carried out in relation to the logistics and barriers of Victim Services in Bedfordshire using video call technology to support victims where appropriate. It is acknowledged that this function could be costly and not always effective for all services. It is advised this action is allocated to the victims and witness board (VWB).

12. Note of appreciation

It was important that I took this opportunity to offer my appreciation to the people of Bedfordshire who have contributed to this work in so many ways. To have experienced crime at all is an impact on an individual, a family and a community but to re live that crime in order to share views, experiences and advice is one I acknowledge as a selfless act to aid the recovery for others. So, to everyone who has taken part in a direct or indirect survey or focus group for this work I offer my thank you to you, and on behalf of the future individuals where the results will impact directly upon for the better.

To our many partners, across the sectors that all play a significant and important part in a victims' journey, thank you for your contributions to the data and focus groups as well as the joint review of the recommendations it has yielded.

Volunteers who have given their time completely freely to this research have brought a depth of perspective and professionalism in relation to their bespoke areas that has enriched the quality of both the direction of the Victims' Needs Analysis and its recommendations, so again I offer my sincere thanks for the energy, time and commitment you have given.

It would be remis of me not to appropriately thank the main author and researcher Eliot Johashen who has brought together all the imperative research in order to form the basis of a set of findings and recommendations to ultimately achieve our goal of understanding and responding appropriately to victim care for 2021 and beyond.

I truly believe this document will be a well-used tool not only for my Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner but for all professionals wishing to understand the current needs we have in front of us and wanting to respond positively for the people we serve. I also offer full commitment to the monitoring and delivery of the recommendations of the 2021 Victim Needs Analysis, we have asked questions of our service users, we have listened to their responses now is the time to act to meet those needs fully.



Clare Kelly

Chief Executive

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire



13. Glossary

AF	Action Fraud
AOJ	Administration of Justice
APCC	Association of Police and Crime Commissioners
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
ASBRAC	Anti-social Behaviour Risk Assessments
ARU	Appeals and Review Unit
BDAP	The Domestic Abuse Partnership
BCCIB	Business Change and Continuous Improvement Board
CCG	Clinical Commissioning Group
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CSEW	Crime Survey for England and Wales
CSP	Community Safety Partnership
DA	Domestic Abuse
DABPN	Domestic Abuse Protection Notice
DAPO	Domestic Abuse Protection Order
DV	Domestic Violence
EU	European Union
HMCTS	Her Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
IAG	Independent Advisory Group
IDVA	Independent Domestic Violence Advisory
IVA	Independent Victims' Advocate
IVNA	Initial Victim Needs Assessment
LA	Local Authority
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
NFIB	National Fraud Intelligence Bureau
NPCC	National Police Chiefs Council
OIC	Officer in the Case
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PSD	Professional Standards Department
QC	Queens Counsel
RJ	Restorative Justice
VC	Victims Commissioner
VCOP	Victims' Code of Practice
VERU	The Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit
VNA	Victims' Needs Analysis
VPS	Victim Personal Statement
VRR	Victims' Right to Review Scheme
VWB	Victims and Witnesses Board
(O)PCC	(Office of the) Police and Crime Commissioner
SARC	Sexual Assault Referral Centre or The Emerald Centre
SV	Sexual Violence
WMS	Witness Management System
YOS	Youth Offending Service

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