

Bedfordshire OPCC CJ&V Victim Needs Assessment 2022/23 Report

Victim Needs Assessment (VNA) 2021

Victims of crime and those affected by the impact of crime are a fundamental focus within policing and for the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). Every OPCC must be a champion for victims as per their statutory obligations.

In order to further fulfil this commitment a Victim Needs Analysis (VNA) was undertaken (<https://www.bedfordshire.pcc.police.uk/victim-needs-analysis-2021/>) to help understand the needs and issues for individuals and communities across the county. The Victims and Witness Engagement Workstream also has oversight of the progress made against completion of the recommendations from within the VNA.

Primary goals of this Victims' Needs Analysis was to provide:

1. An intelligence led and evidence-based guide to further aid the commissioning of future victim services.
2. A strategic overview of national policy and the implications for local areas.
3. A review of national and local data to understand key themes and trends relating to crime and victims and the relevant demand on services.
4. A strategic overview of local Community Safety Partnership and Police priorities.
5. An overview of current service provision, identifying good practice and identify gaps.
6. A strong understanding of victims needs.
7. Provide the OPCC with the information needed to commission future victim services.
8. Look at national policies and how they would affect Bedfordshire.
9. Gather national data for a local comparison to identify local similarities.
10. Look at Bedfordshire Community Safety Partnerships and Police priorities.
11. Look at the victim services which were already available to understand what was working well and to see if any other services were needed.
12. Raise awareness of the issues victims in Bedfordshire were facing.
13. Provide a clear picture of the needs of victims in Bedfordshire.

This Victims' Needs Analysis created 28 recommendations for organisations and services in Bedfordshire. The OPCC took ownership of ensuring that these recommendations were implemented. Recommendations were completed between 2021/22 – 2022/23. These could be grouped into the following five themes.

1. Court Processes:

With colleagues from the courts, the OPCC looked at the use of remote evidence centres as an option for victims' and witnesses to give evidence by video or record their statements. This led to virtual links being set up in various hubs across the County to help with victim and witness engagement with the criminal justice process and the processes for engaging with victims and witnesses awaiting Court, which is ongoing.

2. Partnership working:

The OPCC with various partners reviewed service pathways to ensure that the victim is referred to the right support in a timely way once the need has been identified.

3. Police Processes:

The work Bedfordshire Police led on included implementation of an online system where victim and witness can feedback live updates (<https://www.beds.police.uk/ro/report/ocr/af/how-to-report-a-crime/>) which can be acted on by the Force where required with the individual and also internally within the Force. The system provides guided feedback for the user relating to the Victims Code and will allow a prompt and efficient way of managing dissatisfaction, assisting compliance monitoring and raising awareness and expectations within the Force.

4. School Programmes:

The OPCC has successfully facilitated a number of cross county youth conferences for young people of high school ages, raising awareness of the impact of drugs, alcohol and knife crime and schools debate covering current affairs has become annual feature on the OPCC/schools calendar with strong participation from schools across the county.

The OPCC will continue its work with schools in 2024, to raise aware of restorative justice and as well as the impact of drugs, alcohol and knife crime.

The Board have also agreed to work with the education leads in Bedfordshire to raise awareness of the Criminal Justice System and the various agencies to include myth busting and educating children and young people in Bedfordshire about careers within the CJS. Meetings between the OPCC and the education leads in Bedfordshire have commenced. This work will be led by the OPCC with support from the BCJB partners in 2024.

5. Training/Awareness Programmes:

Bedfordshire Police provided training and awareness raising relating to;

- a) Staff training relating to the **handling of Police complaints**
- b) Across the criminal Justice system including Police, third sector and Youth Offending - Partners continue to work together to change **perpetrator messaging and prevent a victim blaming culture** where there is a focus on victims and their behaviour;

- c) A series of local '**Victims Code Of Practice awareness campaigns**, to ensure victims are aware of their rights under the revised 'Victims' Code'. Barriers to accessing and understanding the code was reviewed to ensure that campaigns catered to all demographic cohorts within the diverse population of Bedfordshire. This work continues.
 - d) **Victims Code of Practice training** for staff to enable them to refer victims to the Victim Care Service and assist with raising awareness with victims, of the service and the referral process and other relevant service provisions available to them.
6. Victim Support: The OPCC led on reviewing the support provided to victims of crime and witness, with specific focus areas relating to victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault, burglary, Fraud and anti-social behaviour. This led to the streamlining of referrals to the victim care service for these highlighted groups, enabling victims of crime to receive contact and support in a more timely manner.

In 2024/25 there will be a review of this Board's priorities and functions in view of the Victims and Prisoners Bill which is scheduled to become law in 2024 and also the Victims Code which may therefore require the board to adapt its focus.

Francoise Julian

Criminal Justice Project Manager