The Voice of the Victim in Police Service Design

Rachel Hurcombe, Research Fellow; Research Assistants Adam Sadullah, Hannah Davis, Camille Ilett, Halima Afzal and Kristina Hawkins; and Dr Debra Allnock, Head of Research form part of the VKPP Research and Review Team and have worked in collaboration to produce this report.

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About the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme

The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (**VKPP**) was formed to improve policing's collective response to the protection of vulnerable persons from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Working within the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), under the Violence and Public Protection (VPP) lead and funded by the Home Office, the VKPP undertake a wide range of activities to help improve policing's overall response to vulnerability, to reduce threat and harm, bring more offenders to justice and improve outcomes for victims.

We identify promising practice, practice gaps and share wider knowledge to shape future responses, with an emphasis on the 14 strands of public protection. We work with national police bodies, forces and partners to:

- Develop and drive the NPCC and College of Policing **National Vulnerability Action Plan** (NVAP);
- Conduct primary research to inform the overall evidence base into policing and vulnerability;
- Consolidate learning from statutory reviews into death and serious harm;
- Map, link and promote promising practice;
- Provide supportive Peer Review for forces;
- Explore ways to improve data sharing and analysis;
- Support delivery of local children's safeguarding partnerships;
- Provide support and insight for policing response to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG);
- Track the scale and nature of Domestic Abuse related deaths.

To find out more about the VKPP's work and to see our other publications and resources please visit our website – **www.vkpp.org.uk**. Police colleagues can also access our content on the **Knowledge Hub**.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Within public policy in England and Wales, there is an increasing emphasis on the needs of victim-survivors (for definition, please see Terminology page 15 and Glossary page 90) and efforts to sustain and increase their engagement with the criminal justice system (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Previous literature illustrates that there are many benefits to a collaborative approach to policing (O'Neill & McCarthy, 2012), and that victim-survivors appreciate being able to express their views and contribute to change (Campbell et al., 2009). There is also a growing body of knowledge around participation and how to involve people in decision-making. For example, the 'INVOLVE' organisation has worked with governments, parliaments, civil society organisations, academics and the public to create and deliver new forms of public participation (INVOLVE, 2018a).

While many police and partner agencies collect feedback from victim-survivors, mostly in the form of surveys, there are only infrequent examples of creative engagement methods and some emerging attempts to involve victim-survivors in co-production of services (Victims' Commissioner, 2017; 2018). While there is some research that explores how to engage those with lived experience in co-production in policing and the criminal justice system (Burns, 2018; Clinks, 2016; Kotecha et al., 2017), research has found that attempts to capture victims' voices often exclude victim-survivors of vulnerability-related crime due to fear of retraumatising them or jeopardising their safety (Victims' Commissioner 2017; 2018). However, research has shown that high-risk participatory practices can be carried out successfully if personnel work in trauma-informed ways and possess high-level expertise in group work facilitation (Factor & Ackerley, 2019).

Little is known about how engaging with victim-survivor voices leads to change in police service design (Loeffler & Bovaird, 2019a). If engagement does not lead to action but is tokenistic, this can damage rather than increase trust and perceptions of legitimacy (Bovarnick et al, 2018; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Furthermore, recent high-profile failings within policing have damaged public trust and confidence, and effective engagement with victim-survivors and communities is seen as key to rebuilding that trust.

This research explores how the voices of vulnerable victim-survivors and those experiencing structural inequalities contribute to police service design. The project has four overarching research questions:

1. What **processes** enable victim-survivor voices to influence and shape service design in policing, i.e. how are victim-survivor voices sought, collected, recorded and reported?
2. What **changes** are made to service design as a result of victim-survivor voices?
3. What **impact** do these processes and changes have on victim-survivors and on policing?
4. What needs to be in place for this type of work to be **effective**?

Methodology and limitations

The research project entailed mapping 'voice of the victim' practices in differing police forces. Practice mapping is a structured process that allows the systematic identification and collection of information about interventions (Barnes et al., 2006; Sellars et al., 2021, Duncan et al., 2020). It is a useful tool to identify best practices and areas for improvement (Duncan et al., 2020). The project consisted of three main activities:

1. A documentary review – analysis of Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) resources and public documents to identify existing 'voice of the victim' practices and policies employed by individual forces.
2. Local practice mapping – semi-structured interviews (n=91) with police personnel and partner agencies within five forces in England and Wales to enable in-depth analysis of the ways in which victims' voices (see Terminology page 15 and Glossary page 90) are incorporated in local service design.
3. National practice mapping – semi-structured interviews (n=18) with individuals from national working groups that sit within the National Police Chief Council's (NPCC) Violence and Public Protection portfolio (n=8); national organisations that represent victim-survivors (n=5); and people with lived experience (n=5), to explore how victims' voices shapes police strategy at the national level.

In terms of limitations, this research primarily interviewed police personnel and partner agency representatives, focusing on the policing perspective. Thus, the language and terminology used within the findings is reflective of the individuals who took part and does not necessarily reflect victims' perspectives and experiences of practices. Practices are subject to change and this report reflects the practices that were identified during the fieldwork period March to December 2022. Local mapping was conducted in five forces (of 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales) and the findings are not generalisable to all forces.

Research summary

This project considered all stages of designing and implementing 'voice of the victim' practices, from planning a practice through activities and engagement to outputs and impact.

Planning 'voice of the victim' practices

Among participants, there was a strong consensus supporting the need for and value of 'voice of the victim' practices. However, there was some confusion around what constitutes a 'voice of the victim' practice. A few participants spoke about practices that were focused on improving services or outcomes for victim-survivors but did not entail gathering the voice of victim-survivors, directly or indirectly. Some settings were not deemed suitable for victim-survivor participation, and little consideration was given to how to make these settings suitable or how to adapt the way in which

forces operate to increase participation. For the purposes of this report, we do not include details of work that did not gather the 'voice of the victim'.

While most practices were intended to improve victim-survivors' experiences of police services, the underlying rationale for the initiation of specific practices varied. Police personnel often highlighted that the purpose of 'voice of the victim' practices was to improve services and therefore create better outcomes for victims. However, some participants, particularly staff involved in youth engagement practices and those from third sector organisations, emphasised how practices should also benefit victim-survivors on a personal level.

At the local level, forces were carrying out a wide range of practices that sought the 'voice of the victim'. The most common type of practice undertaken by forces was online surveys but there were also a wide range of other types of practices which gathered verbal and written feedback. At the national level, working groups within the NPCC's Violence and Public Protection portfolio often had quarterly or twice-yearly meetings with key stakeholders on issues of national interest in their area. Victim-survivors did not tend to be present within these groups but were often represented by third sector organisations. Some of the working groups had very close relationships with these organisations and used them as a means of accessing victim-survivors' voices.

Research participants came from a range of roles and backgrounds, but included project managers, commissioners, policy leads, researchers, analysts, and police officers specialising in crimes impacting vulnerable people, such as rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) and hate crime. Although many participants had responsibility for individual practices, there did not appear to be any roles within forces that focused on participation more generally. Furthermore, the development, focus, and continuation of some practices can be dependent on the personal interests of police personnel and can therefore be vulnerable to change or discontinuation when new personnel come into post. 'Voice of the victim' practices were also dependent upon a range of external factors, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the commissioning landscape.

Engaging with victim-survivors

Although this research was primarily concerned with how forces capture the voices of vulnerable victim-survivors and victims experiencing structural inequalities, there were few practices that focused on seeking feedback from these groups specifically. However, some practices, such as Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) and research projects, were targeted at groups that may face structural inequalities, including people from minoritised ethnic groups, LGBTQ+, women and young people. Other practices were targeted at people who had experienced crimes that may increase the risk of vulnerability, such as sexual violence or hate crime.

Forces understood the importance of representation and engaging with people facing structural inequalities and vulnerability, but did not always know how to effectively engage with these groups. While all five forces had the Volunteer Police Cadets and many also had other youth engagement practices including the Youth Commission, many of the wider 'voice of the victim' practices often excluded people under-18. A few participants equated feedback from parents or guardians with the voice of the child or young person.

Forces often worked with third sector organisations and other agencies to recruit and engage vulnerable victim-survivors, such as those who have experienced domestic abuse or Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO). However, engagement with vulnerable victim-survivors was often prevented or restricted by concerns about the high risk of re-traumatisation, particularly for serious crimes. While many participants expressed concerns regarding the potential for harm, less consideration was given to how practices can actively benefit victim-survivors.

'Voice of the victim' practices showed considerable variation in terms of how participatory they were. Some methods enabled greater participation by entailing a greater degree of collaboration, offering victim-survivors more control and choice over their participation, and enabling more decision-making powers and influence. This project grouped the different methods broadly into three categories:

- Customer service approaches: practices that entailed a one-way flow of information, whereby police learn about victims' experiences, directly or through a third party. This was common in surveys, some qualitative approaches, complaints and presentations from victim-survivors.
- Transactional approaches: practices that entailed an exchange of information, often with victims receiving some information and being asked to respond. This was common in scrutiny panels, IAGs and various forums, panels and groups that were used as sounding boards for the police and for sense checking policy or practice.
- Collaborative approaches: practices that entailed police and those with lived experience working together to lead to improvement and change. This was common in youth engagement groups, experts by experience panels, peer research, training delivery and lived experience advisors.

All three approaches could be beneficial depending on the purpose of the 'voice of the victim' practice and the needs of victims. However, collaborative approaches had the most potential for rebuilding trust and confidence, particularly between young people and the police. Yet there was little evidence of co-production in policing-led initiatives. This was more often observed in partner agencies and third sector organisations.

Listening to feedback

Recording feedback is important for ensuring that detailed and accurate accounts of victim-survivors' voices are captured during engagement practices. However, methods for how feedback was recorded varied depending on how it was obtained. Survey feedback was generally recorded digitally, while verbal feedback from groups often comprised meeting notes or minutes. Some 'voice of the victim' practices had formal policies in place for data storage, particularly surveys and complaints. Other practices, particularly those collecting qualitative data, had more informal policies but still adhered to ethical approaches such as encrypted systems and password protected folders.

Retraction of data was not common but happened most frequently with complaints. Options to retract feedback were often deemed unnecessary across practices where data was anonymised, such as in surveys, and in some cases, there were no measures to allow for feedback to be retracted.

'Voice of the victim' practices that were conducted independently from forces typically had their own teams or contracted agencies responsible for analysing data. Some practices analysed data in-house, notwithstanding whether raw data was collected internally or externally. In some cases, data analysis was conducted non-independently by police personnel with limited analytical capability.

Resourcing and staff capacity was a common barrier to data analysis when conducted in-force.

Quantitative data was often analysed in Excel or SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Forces were not often able to use quantitative data to explore the experiences of specific groups, such as those with protected characteristics, due to this information not being collected or sample sizes being too small to allow meaningful analysis. For qualitative data, forces sometimes used NVivo or looked at themes and issues without using software. However, while participants regarded qualitative data as the most important component of data collection, as it allowed analysts to fully understand the underlying issues, its use was especially limited across forces. This could be due to limitations in analytical capability, or not having capacity to perform such analyses due to competing demands in-force.

All five forces had a similar range of intricately connected governance structures in place to enable victim-survivor feedback to be disseminated to the relevant internal departments. Participants spoke of findings from 'voice of the victim' practices being presented at various performance, tactical, strategic, and executive management meetings. Findings from practices were sometimes not discussed in detail at meetings due to time constraints and disseminating findings to frontline officers was a recurrent challenge. Victim-survivors and individuals with lived experience were rarely invited to attend these meetings, though a few participants in the study expressed aspirations to be able to invite them in future.

Creating change

The aim of 'voice of the victim' practices was to improve police services and bring about change. However, participants were not often able to identify specific actions that had been taken in response to feedback or evidence the impact of these actions. One issue was that it was not always clear who had ownership of outputs or responsibility for implementing actions in response to specific feedback. This poses the risk of important actions required in response to feedback being poorly coordinated or left unaddressed.

Another issue was that participants had not always thought ahead to what actions they may take or what impact may follow from 'voice of the victim' practices. In fact, some practices were not designed or expected to lead to systemic changes. This included some surveys and complaints procedures, which were primarily designed to monitor service and action "**quick hit**" solutions for service recovery when necessary.

Sometimes feedback could not be actioned because suggestions for change were considered inappropriate or unachievable, an issue regularly faced by complaints departments. Limitations in wider police resources also meant that some recommendations from practices were unrealistic and participants reported that "**managing expectations**" for victims was important. Frequently changing priorities in policing also made it difficult for forces to implement actions. In some cases, changes could not be actioned because they were not considered a key area of consideration by decision makers.

Many participants recognised the importance of a feedback loop to inform victim-survivors of any actions taken, but this was often lacking in practice. However, some of the five forces were developing ways to communicate actions, for example emailing electronic leaflets to respondents

highlighting any changes made or creating a network where two-way interactions between victim-survivors and police could take place.

Across most practices, participants did not report collecting high quality data to show the impact of the 'voice of the victim'. In several cases participants described processes for reviewing the effectiveness of practices, but formal or independent measures of impact were either not in place or reported to be considerably difficult to establish. Many participants were able to describe the changes they hoped to see or made attempts to correlate actions taken with subsequent service improvements or increased victim satisfaction. However, establishing that any actions had caused a positive outcome or impact was much harder to achieve.

Key research findings

Six key research findings are outlined below. Please see the Conclusions for more detail.

- Victim-survivor engagement is a key component of rebuilding trust and confidence in policing.
- Appropriate governance structures are needed to support 'voice of the victim' practices and protect them from change and flux within services.
- Some 'voice of the victim' practices have demonstrated a shift in focus from how practices can benefit services to how practices can also benefit those with lived experience.
- Proactive approaches to developing 'voice of the victim' practices and to service development are more effective than working reactively.
- Flexibility within and across practices is needed to meet the diverse needs of victim-survivors.
- Input from partner agencies and collaborators is essential for supporting forces to engage safely with victim-survivors and achieve impact.

Chapter One: Introduction

In 2021, the VKPP received enhanced funding from the Home Office to undertake primary research to address 'perennial issues' in policing, with a prioritisation exercise identifying the 'voice of the victim' (for definition please see Terminology page 15 and Glossary page 90) as a key priority area for research. Consultation and critical input from policing, the Home Office, and academic and partner agency members of the VKPP Research Expert Reference Group further endorsed a focus on the 'voice of the victim' as a research priority.

This research project examines the ways in which forces seek feedback from victims, with a focus on vulnerable victim-survivors (see Terminology page 15 and Glossary page 90), and use the 'voice of the victim' to shape and plan service design. This project is separate, but complementary, to a second research project 'Victims' Voices and Experiences in Response and Investigation' (VKPP, 2023), which explores how police engage with the 'voice of the victim' in relation to investigations and safeguarding. Together, the two projects offer insights into the ways in which 'voice of the victim' is situated, hindered, and enabled at operational and strategic levels. These two strands of research aim to provide key insights into practice at individual, force and national levels, producing a national picture of some of the ways in which victims' voices and experiences are contributing to improved investigations and responsive service design.

Background to the research

Within public policy in England and Wales, there is increasing emphasis on the needs of victim-survivors and efforts to sustain and increase their engagement with the criminal justice system (Ministry of Justice, 2021). **The National Vulnerability Action Plan** (NVAP) identifies cross-cutting themes of vulnerability and provides an evidence-based anchor for force priority work. Under Action 2.4.1 it states that forces should "develop clear process to ensure that 'the voices of vulnerable victims and witnesses' are heard" by police. Other relevant work within the policing landscape includes the draft Victims and Prisoners Bill (2022) and the Violence against women and girls (VAWG) framework (College of Policing, 2021a), two current agendas that are rooted in restoring and establishing victim trust and confidence within policing.

Previous literature illustrates that there are many benefits to a collaborative approach to policing (O'Neill & McCarthy, 2012), and that victim-survivors appreciate being able to express their views and contribute to change (Campbell et al., 2009). This is supported by research in other sectors. The inclusion of 'experts by experience' in the co-production of services and strategies is increasingly valued in the public sector (Loeffler & Bovaird, 2019a). Studies have also shown a strongly established tradition of coproduction and service user involvement within the health sector (Whaley et al., 2018) and within social care (Drinkwater, 2016). There is a growing body of knowledge around participation and how to involve people in decision-making. For example, the 'INVOLVE' organisation has worked with governments, parliaments, civil society organisations, academics and the public to create and deliver new forms of public participation (INVOLVE, 2018a).

Many police and partner agencies collect feedback from victim-survivors to support understanding of their experiences and gather their suggestions for the improvement of service delivery. The Victims' Commissioner (2017; 2018), exploring how victim satisfaction is measured and monitored through research, found that feedback from victim-survivors was mostly sought through surveys. There have also been a number of studies commissioned to gain feedback on people's experiences of police services (Awan et al., 2018; Grace et al., 2016; Scottish Police Authority, 2016).

There is limited evidence on whether police are engaging victims in participatory practices such as co-production. Studies have identified some infrequent examples of creative methods and some emerging attempts to involve victim-survivors in co-production of services (Victims' Commissioner, 2017; 2018). There is also some research that explores how to engage those with lived experience; for example, how to involve service-users (primarily offenders and ex-offenders) in the criminal justice system (Clinks, 2016), and how to involve young people as co-producers in policing (Burns, 2018). Research commissioned by HMICFRS explored different qualitative methodologies to collect victims' voices (Kotecha et al., 2017) and another study investigated how victim-survivors could be involved in co-producing support services (McCarry et al., 2017).

The challenges of engaging victim-survivors in feedback and service improvement have been highlighted by researchers. Research from the Victims' Commissioner (2017; 2018) found that attempts to capture victims' voices often excluded victim-survivors of vulnerability-related crime. These groups were excluded either intentionally for fear of retraumatising them or jeopardising their safety, or unintentionally as some vulnerable victim-survivors were unable or reluctant to engage with the chosen methods of involvement, for example because of literacy barriers, IT poverty or power dynamics (Victims' Commissioner, 2017; 2018). However, research has shown that high-risk participatory practices with young people can be carried out successfully if personnel work in trauma-informed ways and possess high-level expertise in group work facilitation (Factor & Ackerley, 2019).

Little is known about how engaging with victim-survivor voices leads to change in police service design (Loeffler & Bovaird, 2019b). Yet studies have shown that it is important to ensure that participation leads to action rather than being tokenistic, which can damage rather than increase trust and perceptions of legitimacy (Bovarnick et al., 2018; Brady, 2017; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Furthermore, recent high-profile failings within policing have damaged public trust and confidence (Mann, 2021) and effective engagement with victim-survivors and communities is seen as key to rebuilding that trust.

Overall, many police and partner agencies collect feedback from victims to understand victims' experiences and their suggestions for service improvement. However, there is currently little understanding of the extent to which victims' perspectives are being incorporated into service design and what impact this is having within policing, particularly with respect to vulnerable victim-survivors (Victims' Commissioner, 2017; 2018). In order to map the extent to which the perspectives of vulnerable victim-survivors are included, it is important to understand current approaches to incorporating victim-survivor voices in service design across England and Wales. It is especially key to understand what, if any, changes may result from these processes and the impact that these have.

Project aims

The purpose of this research is to generate a systematic overview of the ways in which the voices and perspectives of victims who are vulnerable or from groups affected by structural inequalities, are being used to shape service design in policing in England and Wales. There are four main research questions guiding the project:

1. What **processes** enable victim-survivor voices to influence and shape service design in policing, i.e. how are victim-survivor voices sought, collected, recorded and reported?
2. What **changes** are made to service design as a result of victim-survivor voices?
3. What **impact** do these processes and changes have on victims and on policing?
4. What needs to be in place for this type of work to be **effective**?

Terminology

Within this report, we use the following terminology (Table 1):

Table 1: Terminology

Victim	Those who have been subject to, or have witnessed, a crime.
Victim-survivor	Those who have been subject to, or have witnessed, a vulnerability related crime. The term represents a continuum (Women Against Abuse, 2019) upon which people may find themselves, in recognition of the fact that people with lived experience of victimisation may prefer one term or the other, and each journey from 'victim' to 'survivor' is unique.
Voice	The term 'voice' covers both the verbal articulation of wishes, experiences, and needs, alongside non-verbal indicators and features of the individuals' context, environment, and relationships. Voice not only means capturing and recording wishes, experiences, and needs, but also listening to and considering voices to influence and inform decision making.
Voice of the victim	Victims' perspectives and experience, primarily in relation to their experiences of crime and crime-related service provision. In the absence of a nationally agreed definition, the VKPP developed, in consultation with external stakeholders, the following definition: 'the perspective of individuals subjected to, or witnesses of, crime. In order to deliver authentic policing (and other agency) services, it is important that all individuals are listened to, and their description of experiences taken seriously. By listening to, considering, and recording the 'voice of the victim', police can develop a better understanding of individual's lived experiences. In turn, this can be used to help shape improvements of services delivered, criminal justice outcomes and their experiences of criminal justice processes, for those at their most vulnerable.' 'Voice of the victim' and victims' voices may be used interchangeably within this report.
Vulnerable	The College of Policing (2021b) states that: "A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation." We also recognise the wider structural issues that result in inequalities and can lead to vulnerability.
Structural inequality	A condition where one category of people are attributed an unequal status in relation to other categories of people. This relationship is perpetuated and reinforced by a confluence of unequal relations in roles, functions, decisions, rights, and opportunities (UNESCWA, 2015). Victims affected by structural inequalities can face greater barriers to having their voices listened to and taken into account, and these effects can be compounded when individuals belong to multiple, intersecting marginalised groups.

Service design	The creation or enhancement of the ways the police provide a service to the public. This can include changing operational tools, practices, policies, strategies and commissioning.
'Voice of the victim' practice	Any practice that draws on "the perspective of individuals subjected to, or witnesses of, crime" to improve police services.
Participant(s)	Within the context of this report, 'participant(s)' refers to any individual(s) interviewed by the research team.

Please see the Glossary in Appendix One for further definition of terms used throughout this report.

Report structure

Following a discussion of the methodology used for the research, this report is structured according to the different stages of planning and implementing 'voice of the victim' practices, from early stages through to impact (Figure 1). It adopts a Theory of Change approach to outline the key steps along the way. This is a framework that explains how activities undertaken by an intervention (such as a project, programme or policy) contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended or observed impacts.

Chapter Two briefly outlines the methodology of the research, including the selection and recruitment of participants, ethical considerations, the approach taken to data collection and analysis, the final sample, and the strengths and limitations of the research.

Chapter Three provides an overview of 'voice of the victim' practices, including the methods used to listen to and record victims' voices; who is responsible for such practices and the kinds of information forces are seeking when they engage with victim-survivors.

Chapter Four explores how forces engage with victim-survivors during recruitment and data collection for research or consultation activities. It discusses the key features of engagement, including whose voices are being sought, the degree to which 'voice of the victim' practices are participatory and how engagement is done safely.

Chapter Five considers how information gathered from victim-survivors is 'heard' by forces by exploring how data is analysed and then communicated to key stakeholders.

Chapter Six explores the impact of victim-survivor voices within policing service development by considering what actions are taken as a consequence of victim-survivor engagement and whether these changes lead to improvements in services.

Chapter Seven concludes the report by discussing the key research findings.

Figure 1: Structure of the report

Chapter Two: Methodology

The following provides a brief overview of the methodology for this research project. For more detail, please see the full methodology within Appendix Two.

The research project entailed mapping 'voice of the victim' practices in differing police forces. Practice mapping is a structured process that allows the systematic identification and collection of information about interventions (Barnes et al., 2006; Sellars et al., 2021, Duncan et al., 2020). It is a useful tool to identify best practices and areas for improvement (Duncan et al., 2020). The project consisted of three main activities:

1. A documentary review
2. Local practice mapping
3. National practice mapping

Documentary review

The documentary review analysed resources available to the VKPP and other online public documentation to identify existing 'voice of the victim' practices and policies employed by individual forces relating to their use of victim-survivor voices in service design. This was undertaken via an online search strategy of relevant websites that included search strings and search paths to capture ways that victim-survivor voices inform service provision, and additional systematic searches. Customised search strings were also created for Google's search engine to look for relevant practices on other websites.

Local practice mapping

Five forces were selected for in-depth analysis of the ways in which victims' voices are incorporated in local service design. The forces chosen were not representative of the entire police service but were selected to ensure some diversity of key characteristics in relation to the following (present at the time of selection in January 2022):

- Urban and rural areas
- Geographic regions of England and Wales
- Crime rates
- PEEL scores
- Ethnic and gender characteristics of police personnel
- Range of 'voice of the victim' practices that include vulnerable and marginalised victims, according to the documentary review findings.

Individuals were identified with knowledge about relevant practices within these police forces, their related Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) offices, and other partner agencies involved with these forces. Online semi-structured interviews were then conducted with those who agreed to be interviewed to provide an understanding of the different 'voice of the victim' practices that are used, how they work, and how they relate to one another.

National practice mapping

To understand how victim-survivors' voices shape police strategy at the national level, individuals were recruited from national working groups that sit within the National Police Chief Council's (NPCC) Violence and Public Protection portfolio, and from third sector organisations that represent victim-survivors. A similar approach of snowball sampling and online semi-structured interviews was used to explore how victims' voices feed into these working groups and organisations. This stage of the project also recruited a small number of victim-survivors who agreed to take part voluntarily, via contacts from the national working groups or third sector organisations, who had worked with these groups to try and influence national policing strategy. Although the focus of the work was on how policing incorporates victims' voices into service design, these voices helped us to understand victim-survivors' experiences of providing feedback.

Analysis

All interviews were carried out online on MS Teams between March and December 2022. They were recorded with consent and the automated transcript produced by MS Teams. Transcripts were then manually cleaned by the research team and other professionals within the VKPP.

Analysis was carried out in NVivo, a software used for analysing qualitative data. A coding schedule was developed based on the research questions and themes arising from the early interviews. The team undertook thematic analysis using these codes, before developing secondary codes based on what was emerging from the data.

Sample

The final sample comprised 107 interviews with 109 participants (Table 2). Some people were interviewed more than once if more detail was required, and some interviews had more than one participant.

Table 2: Final sample for 'voice of the victim' in Police Service Design

		Number of interviews	Number of participants
Local practice mapping	Force One	21	18
	Force Two	16	18
	Force Three	17	18
	Force Four	22	23
	Force Five	14	14
National practice mapping	Police personnel	8	8
	National working groups / relevant organisations	5	5
	Individuals with lived experience	4	5
	Total	**107**	**109**

For the local practice mapping in the five forces, participants came from a range of roles, including personnel working in strategy, commissioning, analysis and communications. For the national mapping, participants came primarily from national working groups and staff working in policy and research roles within organisations representing victim-survivors. Five participants with lived experience were recruited, including two persons under the age of 25 years. Young people were recruited in order to provide their perspective on feeding back to the police, as this is a group police reportedly find difficult to engage. Many youth working groups and practices involving young people tend to run to the age of 25.

Ethics

The project adopted a mapping approach in terms of identifying 'voice of the victim' practices within police services and national working groups. A decision was made that ethical approval was not required for this aspect of the work, although we still followed ethical approaches in line with good practice within research (UK Research Integrity Office, 2023). However, as the project also entailed interviewing victim-survivors, ethical approval was gained for this element from the Research Institute Ethics Panel within the Institute for Applied Social Research at the University of Bedfordshire. Throughout the report, the data has been fully anonymised to protect the identity of the individuals, forces and organisations who took part.

Strengths and limitations

The project has particular strengths and limitations:

Strengths:

- This research addresses a gap in the literature. It is amongst the first to conduct an in-depth study from the perspective of those working within policing on the 'voice of the victim' within service design.

Limitations:

- This research primarily interviewed police personnel and partner agencies, focusing on the policing perspective. Thus, the language and terminology used within the findings is reflective of these individuals and does not necessarily reflect victims' perspectives and experiences of practices.
- 'Voice of the victim' practices are subject to change or can be discontinued and new practices emerge. This report reflects the practices that were identified during the fieldwork period March to December 2022.
- Local mapping was conducted in five forces (of 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales) and the findings may not be generalisable to all forces. The project focused on gaining an in-depth picture of practices within these five forces that varied according to a range of criteria (see Appendix 2).

Further information on project strengths and limitations can be found in Appendix 2.

Chapter Three: Planning 'voice of the victim' practices

This chapter provides an overview of the different types of 'voice of the victim' practices described by forces and partner agencies. It explores what participants understood by a 'voice of the victim' practice and then describes the methods forces were using to gather feedback and the types of feedback they were collecting. The chapter also discusses who had responsibility for 'voice of the victim' practices and the rationale provided for setting up these initiatives.

Summary

- There was a strong consensus regarding the need and value for 'voice of the victim' practices.
- Participants had different understandings regarding what constitutes a 'voice of the victim' practice; a few participants spoke about practices that were focused on improving services or outcomes for victim-survivors but did not entail gathering the voice of victim-survivors, directly or indirectly.
- Some settings were not deemed suitable for victim-survivor participation and little consideration was given to how to make these settings suitable or how to adapt the way in which forces operate in order to increase participation.
- While most practices were intended to improve victim-survivors' experiences of police services, staff involved in youth engagement practices and those from third sector organisations frequently emphasised how practices should also benefit victim-survivors on a personal level.
- The most common type of 'voice of the victim' practice undertaken by forces was a survey. However, there were also a wide range of other types of practices which gathered verbal and written feedback.
- Some 'voice of the victim' practices were aimed at those who may be more vulnerable because of the crime they experienced or people from specific socio-demographic backgrounds, though this was less common than practices aimed at all victims.
- The development, focus, and continuation of some 'voice of the victim' practices can be dependent on the personal interests of police personnel and can therefore be vulnerable to change or discontinuation when new personnel come into post.
- 'Voice of the victim' practices were also dependent upon a range of external factors, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the commissioning landscape.
- The victim-survivor voice was not always incorporated into strategic planning, and this can result in policy and practice that reflects police needs rather than the needs of victim-survivors.

What is a 'voice of the victim' practice?

In line with the VKPP's definition of the 'voice of the victim' (see page 15), this project considers 'voice of the victim' practices to be those that draw on "the perspective of individuals subjected to, or witnesses of, crime" to improve police services. All participants recruited through this research agreed that listening to victim-survivors is an important aspect of improving police services. However, there was some confusion around what constitutes a 'voice of the victim' practice.

Police sometimes equated an internal focus on improving outcomes for victim-survivors with service improvement that was informed by the 'voice of the victim'. Some forums or groups, such as multi-disciplinary meetings, were not considered suitable for victim-survivors to attend, due to concerns about the language used in some settings sounding **"clinical"** and whether victim-survivors have the **"required confidence"** to operate in a multi-agency partnership setting. These views appeared to be based on assumptions rather than experience, and in these cases, consideration was not given to how to make these settings more suitable for victim-survivors. For the purposes of this report, we do not include details of work that did not gather the 'voice of the victim'.

Not all 'voice of the victim' practices entailed engaging with victims directly. A few participants described their engagement with third parties, such as third sector organisations, as 'voice of the victim' practices. While these routes can provide a means of indirectly gathering victims' voices, it was not always clear whether third parties were gathering specific feedback from victims or whether feedback was based on the perspectives of professionals from their day-to-day work. Although this can be a valuable source of feedback, this is not the same as hearing from victims directly and it is important to work with partner agencies to understand how feedback has been obtained to help ascertain its validity.

Why develop a 'voice of the victim' practice?

While most 'voice of the victim' practices were intended to improve victim-survivors' experiences of police services, the underlying rationale for the initiation of specific practices varied. Police personnel often highlighted that the purpose of practices was to improve services and therefore create better outcomes for victims. However, other participants, particularly staff involved in youth engagement practices and those from third sector organisations, emphasised how practices should also benefit victim-survivors on a personal level. For example, the Volunteer Police Cadets (the Cadets) had reportedly shifted from being a recruitment tool for policing to a practice focused on engaging young people, enabling the Cadets to prioritise recruiting young people who would benefit most from participation. These perspectives reflect a shift in focus from how 'voice of the victim' practices can benefit police services and victim-survivors more widely, to how individual victim-survivors may benefit from engagement.

> "I sometimes think it can be empowering for people to talk about their experiences, but also if they're asked many times constantly, then actually that's not empowering. And also, if they don't want to talk about it, then it's not empowering either. So, what else? What is in it for that person? What are the benefits for them and just keep that in the forefront of your mind."
> Staff from third sector organisation [participant 1]

Forces could be proactive, responsive, or reactive when developing 'voice of the victim' practices. Some practices comprised all three elements (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Rationale for forces developing a 'voice of the victim' practice

Proactive 'voice of the victim' practices tended to be initiated by forces and were aimed at continuing improvement. They were sometimes developed with consideration of the outcomes or impact that the practice may have, although these considerations were often not built into the planning of practices (see Chapter Six). Proactive practices sometimes reflected the interests of senior personnel and staffing changes could be a catalyst for the introduction of new practices. They were also sometimes formed in response to analysis that had identified needs or gaps in knowledge:

> "When we've got our research team up to full capacity and we are raring to go, we also try to do surveys that are seen as of relevance to the force really. So, they could be things like fraud surveys, violent crime, we've done particular surveys on particular areas within the force as well."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 2]

Responsive 'voice of the victim' practices were often developed in collaboration or consultation with others but were not initiated by forces. They might be developed with partners, or forces might be approached by agencies such as the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) or the Victims' Commissioner to carry out a piece of work. For example, Leaders Unlocked originated the concept of the Youth Commission for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs).

Reactive 'voice of the victim' practices were often developed because of external or internal pressures. For example, some practices were being developed in response to new thematic areas, such as VAWG. A few local forces had developed practices in response to external criticism or poor performance reports. These forces had received negative feedback through surveys or complaints or had had high-profile service failings that prompted engagement with victims to establish how and why mistakes had been made and what needs to be improved. Similarly, at the national level, participants reported that the College of Policing carry out consultations and focus groups with victims following super complaints.

Findings from the national mapping suggested that victims' voices were not always strategically planned into the policy making process. One participant argued that police do not tend to initiate consultation or engagement with those with lived experience, meaning that it can be done in a hurry or once a project is already underway, impacting on the value of the work. It was also stated that, for national work, police tend to depend on third sector organisations for carrying out victim engagement work, as they have the necessary contacts and relationships of trust with victim-survivors. Where victims' voices are not sought, one participant from a third sector organisation said that this can result in policy and practice that reflects police needs rather than the needs of victim-survivors. The police response to work the organisation carried out was reportedly very positive, but they did not tend to initiate the work:

> "Actually, it's very rare that from the beginning we go on a sort of evidence-based process. And I think that's a real shame, because I think there will have been processes and policy developed without any input from people with lived experience and that probably does mean there's quite significant gaps. [...] I think we are really pleased with the level of engagement when we do consultation or publish a research report, but I don't think it's actively funded or organised by the police. Really ever."
> Staff from third sector organisation [participant 3]

Certain 'voice of the victim' practices, such as forums, often had both a responsive and reactive element, whereby the purpose was partly to reflect on what had gone well or where mistakes had been made and partly to respond to information being fed in by members and partners to adapt to the changing landscape. A few participants acknowledged that their force tended to be mostly reactive in relation to practices but were now trying to take a more proactive approach. One participant described how their force was in the process of developing a new communications survey to assess whether their communications activity was having the intended impact. The Covid-19 pandemic had been a trigger for this, as they had wanted to know if the information that they were giving people about the virus was influencing their behaviour, and they were now considering the impact of comms activities for policing more generally.

> "And because we are so in the moment, we're so reactive and we're very good at doing things. We're just not very good at then analysing it and thinking about whether it had that impact or not. [...] So we've never done it with any part of our team up until now. But this is what we kind of want to do with the local communication officers. It's kind of evidence that they are having that impact that we think they should be having."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 4]

What methods are used to gather the 'voice of the victim'?

At the local level, forces were carrying out a wide range of 'voice of the victim' practices. Figure 3 shows the types of practices that participants spoke about. Some of these have been grouped into categories to avoid compromising anonymity by identifying practices specific to individual forces. The practices are colour coded according to how 'participatory' they were; green indicates collaborative approaches, brown transactional approaches, and grey customer service approaches (see Chapter Four for a detailed discussion of these approaches).

Figure 3: Methods used to gather the 'voice of the victim'

Please note: the tiles represent the different types of 'voice of the victim' practices and do not represent the number of these practices

Surveys were the most common single type of 'voice of the victim' practice discussed by participants and were used to generate primarily quantitative data. Other forms of quantitative data were collected from victim data on records management systems for example, to carry out needs assessments. Within this context, needs assessments are commissioned assessments of need and demand for victim services to establish an independent assessment of current levels of delivery to victims, and understanding local need to inform subsequent plans for service delivery. Although this type of analysis did not tend to draw on the 'voice of the victim', it was sometimes followed by victim engagement to explore the issues raised.

Other 'voice of the victim' practices focused on verbal or written feedback and engagement and generated qualitative data. There were a broad range of practices under this umbrella, including forums, scrutiny panels, advisory groups, complaints processes, networks, and events. Some practices, particularly research projects and needs assessments, could generate both quantitative and qualitative data (see Table 3).

Table 3: Methods for gathering the 'voice of the victim'

Method	Key features
Victims' voices through third parties	• Indirect feedback through external organisations, such as service providers and third sector organisations that work closely with victim-survivors. • Information could be gathered through research or projects carried out with victim-survivors or more informally through interactions with service-users.
Surveys	• Respondents answer a set of predefined questions in a survey or questionnaire • Frequently carried out online or by telephone but can also be paper-based or face to face. • Often used for measuring attitudes and satisfaction levels and monitoring changes over time. • Sometimes ongoing, with some running as frequently as monthly. • Often kept short as long surveys can lead to low response rates. • May not be representative of the population being studied.
Interviews and focus groups	• More in-depth feedback through semi-structured or open-ended questions. • Often a feature of externally commissioned research projects. • Interviews sometimes conducted as part of larger pieces of work such as needs assessments. • Can be labour intensive and take longer to analyse than surveys.
Mixed methods	• Combines both quantitative and qualitative information, such as surveys and interviews, within a single practice. • Common in research. • Entails gathering numerical data from a larger sample with in-depth insight from a smaller number of people that can help explicate the survey findings.
Complaints	• Can be made in person, in writing, by phone or online. • Mostly tend to be received online. • Criteria tends to be any information relating to policing standards, the service received or how police are using resources. • Many complaints practices focus on criticisms, complaints or personal feedback.
Training and conference presentations	• Victim-survivors invited to provide feedback to forces or national working groups at conferences and training events. • Often takes the form of presentations or a speech. • Sometimes done in person and sometimes pre-recorded, where the victim would not be present on the day.

Method	Key features
Ad hoc and introductory meetings	• Police personnel are invited to attend informal or ad hoc events with victim-survivors or members of the community. • No fixed agenda but open conversation. • Way of meeting with groups police sometimes have little contact with.
Scrutiny panels and oversight	• Used to scrutinise police conduct in specific areas and identify poor practice and areas for improvement. • Panels can run for about two hours. • Members are presented with information, such as footage from body worn cameras and be asked to provide feedback. • Feedback may include a report and recommendations.
Independent Advisory Groups (ACPO, 2011) and boards and other advisory boards	• Victim-survivors or members of the public review and sense check police practice or policy and provide feedback. • May also be consulted on communication materials, research project design and tools. • Groups may comprise vulnerable people, for example victim-survivors of specific crimes, or people with protected characteristics. • May be ad hoc, to consult people on a specific issue or meet regularly, such as every few months.
Engagement forums, networks and events	• Enable people and the police to come together, share concerns and experiences, and look at how to improve. • Other agencies may attend. • May be open to all members of the community, or victim-survivors only, sometimes those who have experienced certain crimes. • Approach can be quite open, with victims sharing their experiences and being able to set the agenda.
Training delivery	• Victim-survivors and those with lived experience deliver training to the police, often alongside professionals. • Some victim-survivors working within third sector organisations may do this as part of their role. • Some victim-survivors undertake training packages such as 'train the trainer' to help them develop the requisite skills.
Peer research	• Members of groups and forums carry out research with peers or members of the community. • Uses a small group of people to tap into wider issues and concerns. • Used in several youth engagement groups. • Information can be used to improve engagement.

At the national level, the NPCC has a range of working groups that sit under the Violence and Public Protection portfolio and cover different thematic areas. These working groups vary in terms of how they are run, but often had quarterly or twice-yearly meetings with key stakeholders on issues of national interest in their area. The attendees of these groups included personnel from policing,

Home Office, third sector organisations and academics. The 'voice of the victim' did not tend to be directly included within these groups but was often represented by third sector organisations that work closely with victim-survivors of crime and represent their views. Staff in these organisations are sometimes victim-survivors themselves and can bring their personal and professional experience to the role. Some of the working groups had very close relationships with these organisations and used them as a means of accessing the 'voice of the victim'.

What information is being sought?

Table 4 summarises some of the topic areas that forces, and partner agencies explored when gathering the 'voice of the victim' and gives some brief examples of the foci of the topics.

Table 4: The focus of 'voice of the victim' practices

Topic area	Examples of the focus of practices
Personal experiences of police services	• Victim satisfaction • The victim journey - from initial contact through to follow up • Attrition rates
Perceptions of the police and police conduct	• Officer use of stop and search powers • Use of Tasers and police force • Examination of Body Worn Video (BWV)
Victims' needs	• Domestic violence • Sexual violence • Mental health • Robbery • Arson and criminal damage
Experiences of victimisation	• Number and types of crimes people had experienced • Experiences related to specific crime types • How people had been impacted by crime
Personal characteristics or structural inequalities	• Women and girls • Ethnic minorities • LGBTQ+ • Young people • Autism and learning disabilities
Concerns in relation to crime and community safety	• Safety in the local area • Online safety • Safeguarding • Views on the introduction of safety measures
Experiences of related services	• Domestic violence services • Criminal justice services • Sexual violence services
Feedback on the 'voice of the victim' practice	• Exit surveys from engagement practices • Feedback on engagement events and conferences

Determining the focus of 'voice of the victim' practices could sometimes be a corporate effort, comprising liaison between several teams or agencies, for example, OPCCs, performance, insight, or analysis teams. The focus of practices could also shift according to changing priorities. Part of the challenge was finding a practice that could meet the needs of several teams while avoiding duplication of effort, highlighting the need for effective governance structures to help ensure this.

> "I think I've floated the [survey] idea to my bosses sort of April, May time and it's taken sort of a lot of kind of negotiations and talking to various people just because there's a lot of people trying to do similar sort of things in different arenas and to try and sort of find the right path to do it."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 5]

How are 'voice of the victim' practices set up?

Planning and set-up varied widely depending on the type of 'voice of the victim' practice. Several practices were in the early stages, sometimes still awaiting funding or in the planning phases. Some participants were therefore unable to say much about the practice design or what the process would entail as this appeared to be something that was given more consideration once funding had been secured, rather than planned prior to obtaining funding. For projects in the early stages, participants talked about starting small and then building up.

> "At this point in time, we're just going to do a small cohort, almost a bit like a pilot [for the survey]. So rather than go gung-ho and say we're going to interview a thousand people we're just going to do 20 individuals [victims] because we want to see if our questions work."
> Staff from partner agency [participant 6]

Several participants described replicating or building upon work that had been done elsewhere, such as adapting surveys, needs assessments or complaints processes, while amending 'voice of the victim' practices to their own priorities and the local context. Some participants or partners would consult with victims, sometimes by tapping into existing groups such as IAGs or youth groups, around the kind of information that they should be asking and if they had missed anything. Conversely, other participants said that the process was more of a collaboration between the police force and partner agencies rather than **"involving the victim at that stage"**, and that asking victims their views in the early stages was not part of the process.

> "The OPCC officer is of a similar opinion that that they've got an aim, they want to get to and it's important to find out what the experience is, but it isn't necessarily about finding out what people think they should be asked."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 5]

Practice development could take longer than initially thought and piloting or trialling new 'voice of the victim' practices could take many months. In several cases participants described dealing with unexpected hurdles, particularly ethical or safety challenges around developing surveys for vulnerable victim-survivors, such as those who had experienced domestic abuse. For example, one

participant discussed the challenge of identifying a safe contact number for some victim-survivors, as there may be different numbers on the system, victims may change their contact number and they did not want the survey going to their ex-partner.

Some 'voice of the victim' practices in the planning stages focused on what the activities were going to be and what information would be gathered, with less consideration given to what would be done with the information (see Chapter Six for further discussion on how information is utilised). In some cases, forces said they would decide the next steps once they had gathered the information:

> "We've agreed [the survey's] what we're going to do. So it's just then bringing that all together. So bringing the key service providers together and gathering in that information and then we'll decide what we're going to do with that information."
> Staff from partner agency [participant 7]

In terms of good practice, one participant highlighted the importance of achieving buy-in from other agencies at an early stage to help disseminate findings and drive change.

Who is responsible for 'voice of the victim' practices?

Although all participants recognised the importance of the 'voice of the victim', this consensus may reflect the job roles of the personnel recruited for the study, as their work tended to be focused on improving the victim experience. Participants came from a range of roles and backgrounds, but included project managers, commissioners, policy leads, researchers, analysts, and police officers specialising in crimes impacting vulnerable people, such as rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) and hate crime. Some participants were responsible for planning 'voice of the victim' practices, others for delivering and carrying out practices or for analysing and reporting findings. Other participants were responsible for commissioning practices that were then delivered by external agencies. Although some personnel had responsibility for individual practices, such as analysts who oversaw surveys, there did not appear to be any roles within forces that focused on participation more generally and participants did not discuss specific training or guidance that could support them to develop skills in this area. This indicated a lack of expertise in co-production or participation within forces. Due to the range of personnel involved, findings often emphasised the need for staff within and across teams, departments, and agencies to work collaboratively together to deliver practices.

Findings showed that 'voice of the victim' practices could be dependent upon, and vulnerable to, changes in personnel. Some practices had been initiated, or amended, to reflect the interests of senior personnel, such as a new commissioner. Other practices had ceased to run or were abandoned in the early stages because the lead person moved roles. One participant described how they were planning a survey to help monitor compliance with the Victims' Code (compliance will be mandated once the Victims Bill is passed) but the person leading had left and this had led to delays and a lack of certainty as to whether it would run:

> "But since [name of colleague] left, that's taken a bit of a backseat, really. So, I don't know whether we'll ever end up doing that."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 2]

To ensure 'voice of the victim' practices are not vulnerable to staffing changes, participants frequently highlighted the need to have "**buy-in"** from a range of personnel, particularly senior colleagues. Yet, there was evidence that this can be lacking, with some practices being discontinued due to a lack of interest. One participant described how a youth engagement practice had been decommissioned and said that this was due to the new commissioner not seeing the value of community engagement. Another participant who had been involved in an engagement practice that was decommissioned suggested that some personnel place the value of engagement with organisations higher than engagement with those with lived experience:

> "One of the things I emphasised to our commissioner is that there is a relationship that's necessary beyond agencies, there are individuals [feeding back] that it's worth nurturing relationships with."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 8]

It was not always clear why a 'voice of the victim' practice had been discontinued; a few participants referred to practices that had **"disappeared into nothing"** or **"slipped away"**. This highlights the need for integrating practices within existing processes and ensuring that someone has oversight of the project.

'Voice of the victim' practices were also dependent on the funding landscape. Some practices were commissioned within the force, others by partners such as the OPCC or local authority, and some practices were jointly commissioned by a range of partners. Although some practices were part of the commissioning cycle, funding for many was short-term and dependent on available funding for this type of work.

Considerations for practice

- When developing 'voice of the victim' practices relating to vulnerability, forces need to consider a range of sensitivities, including the safety of vulnerable victim-survivors.
- Adaption of some settings, such as multi-agency meetings, making them safe and appropriate for victim-survivors to attend, could help increase participation levels.
- Governance is key in ensuring that the purpose of practices is clear and communicated to relevant staff, they are embedded within existing processes, and they respond to priorities, making them less vulnerable to staffing changes and interests.
- Forces could consider developing roles specifically focused on participation or training to help staff develop the requisite skills to engage with victim-survivors.
- Having procedures in place to deal with staff turnover, such as appropriate handovers, can mitigate against practices being impacted by staffing changes.
- Achieving 'buy-in' from other agencies at an early stage can help to ensure that practices meet the needs of stakeholders, and help disseminate findings and drive change.

Chapter Four: Engaging with victim-survivors

This chapter explores how forces and partner agencies were engaging with victim-survivors for the purpose of service improvement. Specifically, it looks at who forces recruited for engagement and feedback, and their processes for doing so. It also examines how data and information was collected from victim-survivors, how 'participatory' the practices were, and the perceived benefits for those involved in this process.

Summary

- Engagement with vulnerable victim-survivors was often prevented or restricted by concerns about the high risk of re-traumatisation, particularly for serious crimes.
- Forces understood the importance of representation and including people with protected characteristics and known vulnerabilities but did not always know how to effectively engage with these groups.
- A few participants equated feedback from parents or guardians with the voice of the child.
- Forces often work with third sector organisations and other agencies to recruit and engage some vulnerable victim-survivors, such as those who have experienced domestic abuse and RASSO.
- The context within which victims' voices are heard is crucial for ensuring effective engagement. Although the most appropriate context may vary by the type and aims of the practice, getting the context right was key.
- Many participants expressed concerns regarding the potential harm that could be caused by engaging vulnerable victim-survivors. Less consideration was given to how practices can actively benefit victim-survivors.
- Practices showed considerable variation in terms of how participatory they were. Although different approaches are required for different victims and different needs, collaborative practices can help build trust and confidence, particularly with young people.
- There was little evidence of co-production in policing-led initiatives. This was more often observed in partner agencies and third sector organisations.

How are victim-survivors recruited?

Forces and partner agencies considered a range of factors when deciding who and how to recruit victims for 'voice of the victim' practices. Often, decision-making centred around risk assessment, ensuring process safety for both victim-survivors and police personnel, and assessing the feasibility of conducting the practice within allocated resources. This meant that certain groups could be excluded from engagement, hence limiting the representativeness of any findings.

Whose voice is being sought?

Although this research was primarily concerned with how forces capture the voices of vulnerable victims and those experiencing structural inequalities, there were few practices that focused on seeking feedback from these groups or were able to differentiate these groups from the larger cohort of victims. However, some 'voice of the victim' practices, such as IAGs and research projects, were targeted at groups that may face structural inequalities, such as people from minoritised ethnic groups, LGBTQ+, women and young people. Other practices were targeted at people who had experienced crimes that may increase the risk of vulnerability, such as sexual violence or hate crime.

Some 'voice of the victim' practices were aiming to increase engagement with people who were vulnerable. For example, each Cadet unit now has a recruitment target of 25 percent of young people who are considered vulnerable as part of their process of becoming a youth engagement practice rather than a recruitment tool for the police. According to National VPC guidance, a young person is considered vulnerable if they are at risk of social exclusion or at risk of committing crime (Volunteer Police Cadets, n.d.a) One force had chosen to focus their victim survey on vulnerability, prioritising victims of hate crime and those who had experienced repeat victimisation. Furthermore, some participants were in the process of implementing a survey, which was recently mandated by the Home Office, to capture feedback from victim-survivors of domestic abuse and stalking (Victims' Commissioner, 2017). Needs assessments were also carried out with some vulnerable groups, for example people with mental health problems or those who had experienced domestic abuse. For these practices, victim engagement—often in the form of surveys and interviews—would form part of a wider piece of work assessing victims' needs.

Participants described several challenges when attempting to engage with particular groups, specifically those from 'seldom heard' groups, children and young people, and those with criminal convictions. In some cases, certain groups were excluded from participation as they were deemed too difficult to engage.

Recruiting people from 'seldom heard' groups

Although forces tended to be aware of the importance of increasing representativeness and inclusion, clear strategies about how best to achieve engagement with individuals from 'seldom heard' groups were not always evident. A number of participants did not know whether certain practices were representative or diverse as they did not collect information on protected characteristics, with one participant explaining that this was due to UK GDPR regulations. It should be noted that UK GDPR regulations contain provisions for processing personal data for research purposes (Information Commissioner's Office, 2022).

Participants reported that it could be challenging to recruit people from 'seldom heard' groups. A few participants described these groups as **"hard to reach"**. However, this term implies that some groups do not wish to engage whereas studies have shown that they can be engaged using inclusive methods and that they may be 'seldom heard' because they lack trust and confidence, particularly in authorities (Islam et al., 2021).

Many participants described strategies to increase diversity, including numerical targets for recruiting a certain percentage of those with protected characteristics. To try and make practices more inclusive, several approaches were being adopted, including the following:

- Outreach work with 'seldom heard' groups.
- Campaigns aimed at those with protected characteristics.
- Commissioned research into the barriers minoritised groups face.
- Working strategically with partners to access minoritised groups and/or those perceived as particularly vulnerable.
- Carrying out work to understand the diversity of the local population to inform engagement work:

> "So if we can have an understanding of what our communities look like in terms of demographic means, as per the neighbourhood policing strategy, we can be targeted in our engagement. So we use this to try and enhance our sort of understanding of our demographics and then obviously actively looking out to start new relationships and new partnerships with diverse groups within our communities."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 9]

The College of Policing's Police Race Action Plan outlines a national approach for improving engagement with Black people in policing activity and governance. The actions include testing existing arrangements such as IAGs and scrutiny panels, reviewing the evidence base for community engagement methods and evaluating practice models. There is also an emphasis on improved accountability, implementing learning and monitoring actions (College of Policing, 2022b). This approach could serve as a model for engaging a range of groups, including vulnerable victim-survivors.

Recruiting children and young people

All five forces interviewed for this research had Cadets and many also had other youth engagement practices including Youth Commissions. However, many of the wider 'voice of the victim' practices excluded people under-18. Even where practices were specifically designed for younger people, decisions were sometimes made to exclude certain topics or questions for some age groups:

> "The sexual harassment safeguarding stuff is only asked to those in school years 10 and 11."
> Staff from partner agency [participant 10]

While these decisions may be concerned with protecting children, literature on children's participation on sensitive subject matter highlights how a risk averse approach focused on protection may overlook children's agency and minimise opportunities to engage them in participatory activities (see Bovarnick et al. 2018). This could lead to a gap in police understanding of children's experiences of services.

A few participants equated feedback from parents or guardians with the voice of the child or young person. While capturing children and young people's perspectives through parents and guardians can be a legitimate approach, particularly for very young children or those with communication difficulties, relying solely on this approach risks removing agency from the child and increases the possibility of gaining partial or inaccurate feedback. Parents or guardians may misinterpret, intentionally or unintentionally, the young person's experience of the police service.

> "One of the things that we'd tried to do [...] was get the views of some children and young people who've been victims of crime [...] with parents talking about their experiences on their child's behalf."
> Staff from partner agency [participant 11]

Recruiting people who have criminal convictions

Several 'voice of the victim' practices recruited and engaged with both victims and perpetrators. Some practices automatically excluded all individuals with a criminal record from working with victims, others evaluated cases on an individual basis following risk assessments. Some engagement practices that involved children and young people required Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks or vetting to flag criminal histories. Again, this did not automatically exclude children and young people with a criminal record from being involved in engagement but flagged them for further assessment. If exclusion did occur, good practice involved facilitating other options, such as referral to alternative engagement practices.

Whose voice is being excluded from 'voice of the victim' practices?

Many participants described actively excluding victim-survivors of vulnerability-related crimes from 'voice of the victim' practices including victim satisfaction surveys. A number of participants described a triage process where forces, in managing perceived risks (see below), assessed vulnerability prior to recruitment and automatically excluded victim-survivors of highly violent or serious crimes from participation. A few participants acknowledged that victim-survivors of crimes like exploitation or modern slavery might still be included in survey samples under crime categories such as **"other violence"**. However, the proposed solution from one participant was to exclude these individuals from the survey cohort if identified, due to the perceived vulnerability associated with the crimes perpetrated against them.

The main reason given for exclusion was the perceived risk of re-traumatisation. Participants expressed concerns around distressing victim-survivors by asking them to recall painful experiences, particularly if the experience of crime was recent. The need to be able to provide appropriate support in case this occurred was often cited and these concerns related to surveys as well as 'voice of the victim' practices involving verbal feedback. Another pertinent barrier, particularly for victim-survivors of domestic abuse, was the potential presence of the perpetrator. In protecting victims-survivors from further risk of harm, some 'voice of the victim' practices did not engage with victims if they were still in an abusive environment.

“It would not be appropriate, or safe, to engage victims who were still being supported/still in an abusive relationship on the forum.”
Staff from external agency [participant 12]

Furthermore, there could be additional barriers when engaging with individuals with intersecting vulnerabilities. For example, one force excluded co-residing non-English speaking domestic abuse victims as it was felt that risk could not be effectively managed through translation services. This highlights how the experiences of some of the most vulnerable victim-survivors may potentially be hidden or excluded, further compounding vulnerability.

Other reasons for exclusion included the resources that would be required to engage those with additional vulnerabilities such as some disabled victim-survivors. Safe and effective engagement with victim-survivors with additional vulnerabilities could require more preparation, research, and organisation and may subsequently take longer. As such, forces described considering whether the feedback that would be collected justified the resources taken. One participant adopted this approach when conducting telephone surveys owing to notable restrictions in staffing for data collection.

“Say, I’ve got a lot of complex cases and they’re more involved obviously to research and everything. If I’ve [got] a representative sample of [one group] I’m going to park that one. Let’s see if we can get a quicker win here.”
Police personnel from local force [participant 13]

While the reasons given for excluding certain victim-survivors often centred on protecting them from further harm, their exclusion from engagement activities means that police services are less likely to understand, and therefore meet the needs of, vulnerable victim-survivors and those with complex needs. A few participants did recognise that their force was **“risk averse”** in relation to this issue and acknowledged that other forces or organisations were able to carry out engagement work with these groups. (Strategies employed to engage safely with victim-survivors are discussed further in this chapter on page 49).

When do forces engage victim-survivors?

Timeframes for recruiting victim-survivors varied according to the type of ‘voice of the victim’ practice and could be dependent on when the victim-survivor had experienced the crime. Some practices would recruit victims for surveys within a certain time-period, for example within two years of initial contact with the police. For surveys repeated at regular intervals, some practices excluded those who had already been surveyed to avoid duplication of feedback. However, some victims may have multiple and separate experiences with the police service within that time-period. In these cases, victims would either collate different experiences into one piece of feedback (despite different situations and circumstances) or they would only provide feedback on one of their experiences, thus providing partial information.

Eligibility criteria for engagement with some 'voice of the victim' practices was dependent on where the victim-survivor was in their criminal justice system journey, due to concerns about jeopardising any ongoing court cases. To address this barrier, some practices only contacted victim-survivors after a specific timeframe, to ensure the victim-survivor was nearing the end of the case. However, due to the complexity of some crimes, there was a chance that the investigation might not have reached its conclusion, as court cases can sometimes go on for many months. Statistics have revealed that the average time is 196 days between the offence to the completion of case (Sturge, 2023). As a result, victim-survivors of violent or serious crimes would be excluded, to avoid influencing the case or due to the risk of re-traumatisation.

How do forces recruit victim-survivors?

Some 'voice of the victim' practices entailed directly contacting victims and inviting them to participate in feedback or engagement. This was common for victim satisfaction surveys, where forces would contact victims using details held on their reporting systems. Other practices had more open recruitment methods, where all those who were eligible were invited to apply or people may be referred to the practice by others (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Methods of recruitment

Direct Recruitment	Indirect Recruitment
• Victim-survivor recruitment following direct engagement with a force • Victim-survivors approached due to previous experience/s • Personnel may know victim-survivors through previous work • Information may be passed onto third parties who conduct the practice/s including contact details	• Open to all who meet the inclusion criteria • Recruitment may be through external organisations • Referrals for certain practices such as schools referring children and young people to a Cadets programme

A challenge of indirect recruitment, including referrals, was that the 'voice of the victim' practice may not be suitable for all individuals. For example, practices that exclude those with criminal records were not appropriate for individuals with a criminal history. If this occurred, signposting to other organisations that may be more suitable and could offer engagement opportunities was good practice. Some practices had a combination of both direct and indirect recruitment, such as the Cadets. In the Cadets some young people were referred, whereas others wished to join due to their specific passion or interest and applied directly. Therefore, in some cases it could be valuable to have a combination of both referrals and expressions of interest.

Gatekeepers were often used in indirect recruitment, particularly if 'voice of the victim' practices were targeting 'seldom heard' groups or those with protected characteristics. Gatekeepers might be somebody within an organisation who can grant access to people or locations, for example, personnel within schools can enable access to young people. Use of gatekeepers was cited to be particularly useful for recruiting certain vulnerable groups, including those who need support to provide informed consent, such as young people, those with learning disabilities, or individuals with mental health problems (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016). However, it is important to recognise that gatekeepers may make decisions regarding eligibility or inclusion that could introduce biases and minimise full representation.

Social media, particularly Facebook, was described as advantageous when targeting young people given their high levels of engagement in these spaces. One police participant said that young people told them that if they want to build trust and confidence, they need to be in young people's spaces, which includes online, school and colleges. However, a few participants said they did not have processes, such as communication strategies, in place to undertake engagement activities on social media.

A few participants described how they were looking at new or innovative ways of engaging with victims. In one force, participants discussed using existing apps for the community, such as neighbourhood alert systems, as a platform for disseminating surveys and information and communicating with the public. This was seen as an opportunity for centralising and standardising processes given the potential to be used by multiple forces while still being able to disaggregate the results.

How many victim-survivors engage with 'voice of the victim' practices?

The number of victim-survivors forces engaged with varied depending on the type of practice involved and the capacity of police personnel and third parties. For example, surveys enable access to a large cohort of people and are less time consuming and resource-intensive than some qualitative practices—though are less likely to enable more in-depth understanding of perceptions. Telephone surveys were reported to have better response rates than other survey methods, although online surveys could have extensive reach; one online survey received 12,000 responses. Where online surveys were open access, it was not possible to know the response rate as it was not possible to know how many people had seen the survey, or sometimes even to determine where respondents were located. Some 'voice of the victim' practices offered both online and telephone options to increase the response rate by offering people a choice.

Group-based 'voice of the victim' practices, such as panels or focus groups, had sample sizes ranging from eight to thirty members. One participant argued that having smaller sample sizes for advisory boards was beneficial because it ensured that those involved are dedicated and can then cascade the message out to others. However, many participants recognised that this may limit representation, and in some forums and groups it was considered important that membership changed over time to enable new voices to be heard. Additionally, one police personnel participant reflected that sometimes within certain forums there were individuals who might dominate conversations. Such dynamics were noted to sometimes result in individuals within the forum who **"wouldn't want to speak out"**, limiting the number of voices that were being heard. This could require careful facilitation; to overcome this challenge, this force described allowing individuals within the forum to provide written answers if they did not feel comfortable talking during the session. Additionally, the participant who raised this issue noted placing emphasis on the importance of conversations after the event.

> "I'd always offer at the outset if people didn't want to speak out, I'd stay behind and have conversations [...]. I always got more out of that than I did through the individual sessions because you'd have strong characters who would take over and then actually the people who would stay behind, they had an awful lot of really good things to tell you"
> Police personnel from local force [participant 14]

In relation to force complaint systems, the number of people submitting complaints could vary depending on numerous factors. For example, a pattern identified by participants was that complaints dipped in December and one force reported a 'summer spike' in complaints attributed to officers being on leave and not providing updates. Additionally, one participant reflected that when the Queen died, the force saw a dip in the number of complaints and a huge rise in thanks. Furthermore, some participants reflected that when there were high-profile cases in the media, there was often an increase in complaints.

> "The ones that make the media, it's like a plane crash. They don't happen very often but when they do, they make the press and they make everybody frightened to get on an airplane."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 15]

How do forces gain informed consent for participation in 'voice of the victim' practices?

Informed consent means ensuring that victim-survivors know what participation in 'voice of the victim' practices will entail to help them make an informed choice about taking part. This includes (but is not limited to) what will happen to any information that they share, how it will be recorded and stored, confidentiality and anonymity, and how they can withdraw their involvement if they change their mind. Processes for obtaining and recording informed consent varied by practice. Formal methods were more frequently seen within research-based practices, such as surveys, and were the responsibility of forces, or third parties where practice was outsourced. Informed consent in other types of practices, such as panels, was less formal with varying amounts and types of information provided to participants. In some cases, it simply involved a conversation.

Participants discussed how offering confidentiality and anonymity in how findings were reported could reduce the potential for participant withdrawal. However, some police participants acknowledged that if safeguarding concerns arose during engagement, they may be required to breach prior commitments to confidentiality. Overall however, it was not common for victim-survivors to withdraw their information.

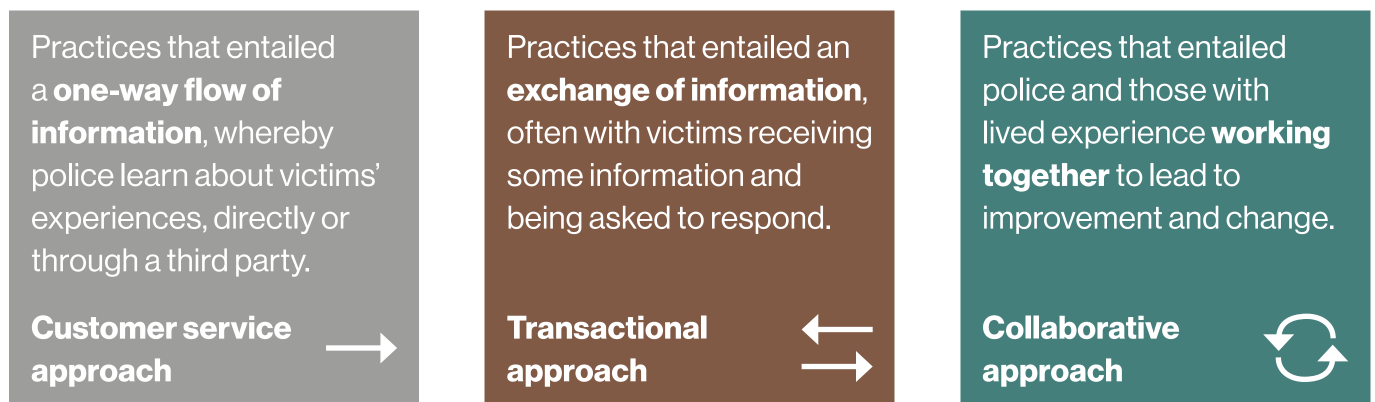
How is data collected from victim-survivors?

As described in Chapter Three, forces were using a range of methods to collect information from victim-survivors (see page 25). The context within which feedback took place helped to determine the perceived benefits of different approaches. This context included the levels of participation, incentives for taking part, accessibility and who was collecting the data.

How participatory are the methods?

Some data collection methods were more participatory than others by entailing a greater degree of collaboration, offering victim-survivors more control and choice over how they participated, and enabling more decision-making powers and influence. For this report, the different ways in which forces collected the 'voice of the victim' according to levels of participation have been grouped broadly into three categories: customer service approaches, transactional approaches, and collaborative approaches (Figure 5). The methods associated with these different approaches, and the benefits and challenges associated with them, are discussed below.

Figure 5: Approaches to victim-survivor data collection



Customer service approaches

Many 'voice of the victim' practices reflected a one-way process of information exchange, primarily where forces or partners would collect information from victim-survivors. This tended to reflect what we have categorised as a 'customer service' approach to victim-survivor engagement. Feedback from surveys, some qualitative approaches (such as interviews and focus groups), complaints, and presentations from victim-survivors all tended to involve this one-way flow of information. Information gained through third parties also tended to entail a one-way flow of information.

A key feature of some customer service approaches, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups and complaints, is that engagement tended to take place within specified parameters set by the police force. These practices enabled forces and their partners to be prescriptive in terms of who they engage, when, how, and the types of information that they collected. Different forms of customer service approaches were noted to have different benefits and limitations. In the case of surveys, respondents are limited to answering predefined questions with predefined categories. However, an advantage of surveys is that they offer opportunities for feedback from people who may not feel comfortable or able to provide verbal feedback in a public forum; providing opportunities to share their experience, often in their own time and in a safe space. Interviews and focus groups tend to be more open and could allow respondents to give fuller responses and more opportunities to direct the discussion. Surveys and interviews were among the few feedback mechanisms where participants could remain anonymous. Complaints processes were less prescriptive than surveys, as people can provide feedback in their own words and in relation to their own priorities though forces tend to specify the kind of information people can complain about and the eligibility criteria for doing so.

At the other end of the spectrum were customer service approaches where victim-survivors had greater control over the content or format of feedback. Ad hoc or informal meetings tended to be the least prescriptive as participants described the purpose of the meeting as police simply listening to what people had to say, without a fixed agenda or set of aims. For example, one participant was invited to an initial community engagement meeting with members of the LGBTQ+ community by an Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) she had met through another panel to discuss low reporting levels among the group. These introductory meetings appeared to be an important component of initiating engagement with groups who were seldom heard, particularly groups who have a distrust of the police. A participant described how they could then lead to other forms of engagement.

> "And just to have that discussion is really about what is happening, why maybe there's a lack of reporting ... things that can we do better, what is it you would like to see from this sort of meeting and forum that we can sort of work together and take forward." Police personnel from local force [participant 16]

Verbal feedback through victim-survivor presentations at conferences and training events also tended to be less prescriptive in terms of the type of information being collected. Police participants frequently emphasised how victim-survivor's feedback in these presentations was not edited or filtered in any way. Many participants felt this could be **"empowering"** and "**therapeutic"** for victim-survivors as it provided an opportunity for them to share their experience, including examples of how they had been failed by police and partner agencies. Participants also suggested that these methods provided victim-survivors with opportunities for personal development, including experiences of public speaking.

Conversely, other participants said that it can be challenging to find people willing to share difficult experiences. A few described situations where they felt victim-survivor feedback in public forums had not been constructive as the victim-survivor had wanted to **“rant”** or **“vent”**. They described how in these scenarios feedback had therefore not been well-received, suggesting that the lack of police control over content could sometimes be challenging for forces.

Feedback through third parties entailed the least amount of direct contact between police and victim-survivors—and could minimise police/victim-survivor collaboration as these approaches give third parties greater control over the process. However, police recognised that some victim-survivors, particularly those who may be marginalised or have vulnerabilities, may not be comfortable engaging directly with them. In these scenarios third parties could provide an alternative safe and trusted route through which the voices of such individuals could be gathered and heard. Furthermore, national working groups often did not have the links with victim-survivors to approach them directly. Many participants felt that utilising third parties could provide **“really rich information”** and valuable insight into the ‘voice of the victim’ because of the close and trusted relationships such organisations have with victims.

One perceived limitation of customer service approaches was that they provide fewer opportunities for victim-survivors to know what has happened to the information that they share. For example, presentations at conferences and events were regarded by some as tokenistic as victim-survivors were excluded from conversations about what happens next:

> “And it’s sometimes it can feel like they’re being used, like, come in and share your story. Everyone claps and you go away. Now we’re going to get on with the work. And it can feel quite difficult for people if they’re sort of used in that way. It’s like you’re good enough to be a case study, but you’re not good enough to actually deliver the training.
> Staff from third sector organisation [participant 17]

Overall, one of the limitations of ‘voice of the victim’ practices with a one-way flow of information is that while the police may learn more about victim-survivors, victim-survivors do not tend to learn more about the police, and so there is less opportunity to improve relations between the two groups.

Transactional approaches

Many participants spoke about ‘voice of the victim’ practices that involved a two-way exchange of information; an approach that appeared to be largely transactional in nature. Practices that could be categorised in this way included scrutiny panels, IAGs and various forums, panels and groups that were used as ‘sounding boards’ and for sense checking. It is important to note that some of these practices were open to all members of the community, not just victims.

One benefit of transactional ‘voice of the victim’ practices was described as enabling people to gain new knowledge into how the police work, including insight into police demand, capacity, and resourcing. One participant spoke about how public protection work tends to happen in **“the background”** (out of sight) and these events offered police the opportunity to explain what they were doing and why. Some of these practices, such as scrutiny panels and IAGs could enable members to access information that would not normally be available to them:

> “The IAG members themselves have quite a privileged position in so much as that they get access to police information and get access to the police that... police and information that ordinary other citizens wouldn’t, or other residents and stakeholders wouldn’t get.”
> Police personnel from local force [participant 18]

Another benefit of transactional practices, particularly forums, networks, and events, is that they enabled a conversation to take place between police and victim-survivors. A few participants described how the mood in these meetings could shift from initial feelings of anger towards the police to a more productive dialogue as the two groups were able to learn about each other and to constructively challenge each other, leading to a better understanding of the issues the other faces:

> “So all the way through [the women’s engagement group] we thought, ‘OK, what do the police need to know? what do the women want to say? what has been their experience?’ and how we planned it was we actually started off with asking the police to think about ‘what is a learning disability, what is autism?’ to sort of get their views and the women run it, I don’t run it, I mean I obviously facilitate it, but they run it.” Staff from external agency [participant 19]

The transactional practice described above meant that issues and considerations that the police may not have thought about could be raised and come to light. In some groups and forums people would be asked to provide suggestions and recommendations about how police could improve. These types of practices were also noted to provide developmental opportunities for members, such as enabling them to gain experience of helping to deliver events or chair forums. In some cases they were described as potentially **“empowering”** for victim-survivors:

> “From an offence that has taken every bit of power from them and every aspect of their life, there’s no power left, to have actually been able to hold an event, which was what, two and a half hours, and actually give them some power back in their life was just incredible.”
> Police personnel from local force [participant 20]

Sometimes these transactional practices could evolve into something where victims had greater involvement, participation and influence. For example, one participant described a network that began with victim-survivors of domestic abuse sharing their experiences with the police which then developed into an advocacy role for some members who would try to bring about change for themselves and others:

> “What we found was survivors would go through their journey they would almost come into an advocacy role where they would do that peer-to-peer support, but they would also then try to meet with each individual criminal justice agency to share their feedback and try and get changes and that was being done by a number of different people in a number of different ways.”
> Police personnel from local force [participant 21]

Although there were many perceived benefits for both victim-survivors and the police from these methods, they were still largely consultative practices where the agenda was determined by the police and victim-survivors were invited to feedback. Furthermore, participants pointed to the need to have the right people (personnel and victim-survivors) attending these types of 'voice of the victim' practices. Participants highlighted how police personnel need to have certain characteristics, such as being able to establish rapport and trust. They also emphasised that victim-survivor members need to have a constructive approach to feedback and be able to adopt the role of a **"critical friend"**. This could be challenging as some people were reportedly inclined to focus too much on negative feedback or have an agenda they wanted to push. Conversely, over time, there was a risk that those attending groups to scrutinise the police or hold them to account can become **"bobby-fied"** and too sympathetic, thereby losing their critical edge. Consequently, the right balance had to be established and maintained to ensure the groups ran effectively.

Collaborative approaches

Some 'voice of the victim' practices were highly collaborative using methods that entailed police or partner agencies and victim-survivors working together for service development. Participants often used the terms **"victim-led"**, **"youth-led"** or **"lived experience-led"** to emphasise that those with lived experience were the driving force behind these practices. Although these kinds of groups often had frequent interactions with the police, they were inclined to be run by partner agencies and third sector organisations, rather than police. Youth engagement groups, experts by experience panels, peer research, training delivery and lived experience advisors were all practices that demonstrated higher levels of collaboration between police and victim-survivors and greater victim-survivor influence.

A key feature of some of the youth engagement groups and experts by experience panels described was that they enabled people with lived experience to have decision making powers around the 'voice of the victim' practice itself. This could include involving people in decisions about how the practice is developed, is run, or how funds should be spent, often through collaboration between the police or partner agency and members of the group.

> "We always involve young people, especially the young people from the protected characteristics and young people with first-hand experience of criminal justice system so right from the word 'go', we involve them in the development because we believe that young people are experts by experience."
> Staff from partner agency [participant 22]

Collaborative 'voice of the victim' practices were also noted to help rebuild positive relations between the police, victim-survivors and the wider community. This included breaking down barriers between the police and those with lived experience, by developing mutual empathy and understanding and helping to humanise the police. One victim-survivor said that working with the police in this way had helped them realise that the police were **"normal people"** and they were able to see them from a different perspective, as a group that wishes to learn and change:

> “It was literally, it was very different from what I’ve ever done, and that’s what originally made me, you know, get into it properly, these people actually want to listen. Like they actually want to see how they can change their ways and pattern and literally do things the right way. And help, they actually want to help, cause a lot of times I’ve thought that people didn’t want to help. So it changed my perception of organisations and services.”
> Person with lived experience [participant 23]

Another key benefit attributed to collaborative ‘voice of the victim’ practices was that they could help to rebuild trust and confidence, particularly between the police and young people, by creating **“young ambassadors”** who then share what they have learned about the police with the wider community:

> “I think it’s very beneficial and it creates a new generation that’s engaged and informed and feels like they’ve got a voice and that they’re being listened to as they then go through life. And then, you know, if that feeds back and then they give that to the next generation.”
> Police personnel from local force [participant 24]

Collaborative ‘voice of the victim’ practices also offered people flexibility in terms of their type of engagement. In these practices people were often provided with a choice about the pieces of work that they would like to get involved with or they would be asked what issues they wished to speak about. This helped to ensure that people were participating in activities that they felt passionate about or had personal resonance for them. They could also choose how much time they dedicated to engagement and when they would like to be involved. For lived experience advisors, evident in one of the forces, staff and individuals would negotiate to find the right task for them. There were a wide range of tasks available, including attending meetings, task and finish groups, and helping to make improvements to the force website, providing engagement opportunities that go beyond verbal or written feedback.

People were also described as being able to learn new skills through collaborative approaches. For example, one young people’s group learned how to carry out peer research, by interviewing their peers around the barriers to joining the police, especially among Black and minoritised young women and girls. People with lived experience could also develop skills around how to train others and some had received ‘train the trainer’ training to help facilitate this. Group members could also develop presentation skills and may have the opportunity to present their work to senior personnel:

> “So now you’ve got a young person, you know, delivering keynote speeches in front of commissioners and [senior personnel] on what needs to be done based upon conversations that they’ve had with their peers.”
> Staff from partner agency [participant 25]

Collaborative 'voice of the victim' practices also enabled mutual learning from each other. People with lived experience of crime could bring their understanding around the causes of crime and how to make communities safer. At the same time practices such as training delivery enabled young people or those with lived experience to learn more about the area they were training the police in, and suggest their own solutions for change. For example, in one local force young people in the Cadets designed and delivered training packages to the police, and some third sector organisations used their experts by experience panels to deliver training on working in a trauma-informed way. The development of new skills among those involved with 'voice of the victim' practices could lead to improved outcomes, particularly for young people, and these are discussed further in Chapter Six.

These 'voice of the victim' practices also had the capacity to evolve over time and become more collaborative. One example of good practice came from a participant from a third sector organisation who described how they had been moving from a consultative model towards a model where lived experience was more fully integrated into the whole organisation. This had entailed recruiting trustees with lived experience and having lived experience representation on their advisory groups. The advisory group would be consulted when developing the organisational strategy and the organisation would take on board their recommendations. They also had people with lived experience on their recruitment panel and were looking at increasing the involvement of people with lived experience in their research:

> "We're probably at a coproduced stage in terms of some of our strategy and service development. We're at a consultation stage, but at all stages of research, with our policy and research work."
> Staff from third sector organisation [participant 3]

Overall, the benefits of collaborative approaches were noted to be wide-ranging, both for victim-survivors and for police. However, collaborative 'voice of the victim' practices were fewer in number than the other approaches and often more resource intensive than customer service and transactional approaches. Engagement in these kinds of practices may also not be suitable for everyone, particularly those who do not wish to have such a high level of engagement or cannot afford the time commitment. Furthermore, motivations to engage may vary amongst individuals and could also change over time. For example, some members were said to want personal development whereas others wanted to participate in fun or enjoyable activities. This meant that some group leaders had the challenge of finding the right balance in terms of activities for the group.

Do victim-survivors receive incentives?

Offering incentives or payment for engagement and feedback varied by practice. This did not tend to be offered for surveys. For 'voice of the victim' practices that entailed a greater degree of time and commitment, such as forums, meetings, and groups, it was common for expenses such as travel, accommodation, and food to be paid. In some cases, access to equipment like mobile phones, laptops, desks, and chairs was facilitated, helping to ensure that those facing digital poverty could participate. A couple of practices mentioned offering vouchers or small gifts and one practice for lived experience advisors covered childcare and offered £11 per hour renumeration. However, it was less common for financial incentives to be offered.

There were some contrasting views on whether victim-survivors should be offered financial incentives. A few participants suggested that this may not be suitable for all participants, for example those with addiction issues, people receiving benefits or those who do not have the right to work in the UK. Another concern was that payment could lead to bias, if victims feel they have to provide positive feedback. One participant felt that payment may lead to the perception of bias as it may appear as though they were paying someone to provide certain feedback.

Other participants however, felt that people should be remunerated for their work, to enable fair exchange for work done, reflect the fact that their time is valuable, support inclusion and to place them on a more equal footing with staff who get paid for their input. Indeed, some victim-survivors may struggle to participate in practices without payment. One victim-survivor, who was in full-time paid employment, said that she had taken annual leave and funded most of her engagement work on a voluntary basis. Another victim-survivor, who received payment per hour or per project for their work, described how the payment was essential to their participation by enabling them to survive. This victim-survivor described how they would have remained vulnerable without payment:

> “And being left alone to do everything yourself and not having that support or even a financial stability. That can basically push you back into, back to basically being groomed. And make you vulnerable again.”
> Person with lived experience [participant 23]

A few participants mentioned employing people with lived experience. One practice for young people paid them the living wage and treated them as members of staff. Several participants spoke about the need to ensure that victims’ voices are heard within the organisation through paid work. However, this was more common among third sector organisations interviewed for the national mapping.

How accessible are practices?

Participants discussed how they were adopting a range of measures to make engagement more accessible for victim-survivors (Table 5). A key change was the increase in the number of practices taking place online, which had been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 5: Making practices accessible for victim-survivors

Improving accessibility	Measures taken by forces
Online practices	• Suitable physical venues can be difficult to find. • More people can be hosted. • Reduces travel time and expenses. • Safer for young people as they do not need to travel. • Many young people use social media. • Screen readers can be used, which are helpful for people who have difficulty seeing and accessing digital content.
Hybrid approaches	• Online and in-person attendance offers people choice and variety.
Flexibility	• Adjusting meeting times for young people who may find it difficult to attend because of college or school. • Conducting surveys outside of work hours. • Enabling young people to attend youth practices out of borough if they feel safer doing so.
Accessible written materials	• Printing information and paper surveys in larger text for those with visual impairments. • Easy read versions for people with learning disabilities. • Plain English versions for children and for different reading levels. • Piloting language with forums beforehand. • Support for people making a complaint who have difficulty with verbal or written communication, including adjusting font size.
Interpreters	• Offering British Sign Language interpreters for online or in person practices. • Offering written materials in sign writing, for those who communicate with sign language.
Translation	• Translating materials into other languages. • Bi-lingual services, for example, for surveys.
Assistance	• Data collector assisting people to fill in surveys (may impact validity). • Having a family member assist with completing surveys (may impact validity). • Support workers attending groups with victim-survivors.

NB: These measures reflect what was shared in the interviews and will not be a comprehensive picture of all measures that forces were taking to make practices more accessible. The list also does not consider the accessibility needs of all groups.

The implementation of some of these measures could be dependent on budget, on whether there was sufficient demand (such as translating materials into other languages), and on availability, such as finding suitable interpreters. The NPCC have introduced the **Police Approved Interpreters and Translators Scheme** (PAIT) to ensure all translators and interpreters have the vetting clearance, qualifications and experience required. A few participants felt that they were more successful at making participation accessible for some groups more than for others. For example, one participant said that they had the cultural competency and language skills to access people from diverse ethnicities but needed to do more to improve accessibility for those experiencing hearing loss, impaired sight, or who were neurodiverse. Improving accessibility could require working closely with individuals; one participant with lived experience who migrated to Britain as a child, explained how they needed support to help understand not only the language but also cultural differences.

How are victim-survivors safeguarded during data collection?

There was widespread consensus that collecting data from victim-survivors, particularly those who are vulnerable, must be done safely or it can risk re-traumatisation. The key risk factors related to the following:

- Asking victim-survivors for information that they may find distressing to relay.
- Requesting feedback on multiple occasions.
- Needing to ensure that victim-survivors have a safe space for providing feedback.
- Dealing with safeguarding concerns.
- Being unable to provide appropriate support, particularly when practices take place online.

A number of participants argued against engaging vulnerable victim-survivors in some practices for these reasons, although one person from an external agency contracted to carry out a 'voice of the victim' practice argued that **"not being heard was more traumatising"** than being able to share an experience. In several cases participants only gave vague indications of how these types of concerns would be managed, for example by saying **"there are mechanisms"** in place, while others gave more concrete examples of measures they adopted to help make practices safer for victim-survivors (Figure 6):

Figure 6: Safeguarding in 'voice of the victim' practices

Safeguarding survey respondents
• Providing a phone number on surveys that victim-survivors can call if they need support. • A content warning at the start of surveys and throughout, plus a question to check if the respondent wishes to proceed. • Enabling quick exit from surveys to a generic website should the respondent be interrupted or need to exit in a hurry. • Deletion of responses if surveys are exited before completion, to avoid anyone else being able to follow the link and view the responses. • An open text question at the end of survey requesting feedback on the experience of filling out the survey and if it had been distressing. • Following completion, a link to support websites.

Safeguarding victim-survivors participating in verbal or group feedback
• Using pre-recorded feedback to avoid victim-survivors having to recount their experience multiple times. • Offering attendees at forums and events the option of feeding back via other means, such as a survey, if they are not comfortable sharing their experience publicly. • Limiting safeguarding disclosures by sending out information beforehand covering topics that should be discussed through other mechanisms, such as details about ongoing investigations or complaints. • Having specialist support or advocates present for victim-survivors to make referrals if needed and manage any risks. • Handing out leaflets for practical support, if appropriate. • Disguising support information from perpetrators, such as offering hand sanitisers with a bar code that was a number the victim-survivor could call for support.

Who collects data for 'voice of the victim' practices?

Data collection was carried out by a range of people, including police personnel, partner agencies and researchers, depending on the practice and its focus. There was consensus that feedback may be heavily influenced by who is collecting the information, although there was a notable divide in opinion about who is best placed to do this. Several participants argued that it is beneficial for someone independent to gather feedback on behalf of the police, particularly for 'voice of the victim' practices such as surveys or research. This was based on the perception that victim-survivors may feel more comfortable feeding back to a third party and feel able to be more honest, thereby reducing bias. This was corroborated by (unpublished) survey findings cited by one participant, which found that young people would be more comfortable criticising the police to someone external, rather than directly to the police. Participants from external agencies said their impartiality was key in encouraging victim-survivors to participate in feedback.

> “We get victims saying ‘oh I’m not sure if I should say this’, but we’re like ‘we are independent, you could say anything you want in this interview, there’ll be no comeback from the police, no one will be knocking on your door saying why have you said that about me or anything like that’ so and they do get that chance of anonymity as well, I think that’s a positive aspect of it.”
> Staff from external agency [participant 26]

Another advantage of independent collectors was that they may be trained in how to appropriately speak to people, particularly those from vulnerable and diverse groups, about sensitive topics. Telephone surveys were often contracted out to call centres for this reason, with participants talking about the need to put respondents at ease, get **“buy-in”** from victim-survivors early in the call and tailor the approach for each individual. External service providers were also sometimes involved in collecting feedback where they had a strong relationship with victim-survivors, could assess who can safely be involved, and could provide or signpost to appropriate support.

Partner agencies may also have expertise around cultural competence that can be lacking within police forces. The issue of cultural competence was not raised often within the interviews and not many participants reflected on the socio-demographic characteristics of people collecting data. However, one practice specified that the chair of a domestic abuse victim-survivors forum must be female, with the chairs of the same sex relationship and transgender forums to be decided in advance of the meetings taking place. Where cultural competence was considered lacking internally (within the police force), work may be commissioned out. A researcher within an OPCC explained:

> “It depends whether or not we’ve got the skills internally or the cultural competence to be able to do that. So for some of the hate crime projects that we do, we would commission that out or at least have an involvement in the setup and what we want to do. And sometimes we are actually involved in things like focus groups with them as well. But we probably wouldn’t lead it. And where there’s anything that is particularly vulnerable or particularly specialist we’ve just commissioned that out.”
> Staff from partner agency [participant 27]

For more collaborative ‘voice of the victim’ practices or exchanges, such as certain forums, meetings, and conferences, it was sometimes considered to be valuable to have senior police personnel in attendance. Their presence could help persuade people with lived experience to engage, as it can offer assurance that feedback will be heard and acted upon. One participant, discussing a presentation someone with lived experience gave at a national conference, said:

> “The audience was so engaged and was so interested, and of course a lot of these people, this is the first time they’ve ever had any interest shown in them. And all of a sudden, they’ve got like 100 senior people going ‘OK, tell us, tell us what we’re doing wrong here.’”
> Police personnel from national working group [participant 28]

As noted above, hearing feedback directly can be beneficial for police and partner agencies, with some participants saying that they want to hear what is being said first-hand. Depending on the practice, this may require gaining the requisite skills and expertise to collect the information directly. One participant, from an OPCC, said that they had asked the PCC for some money to partner with another organisation but were told that it was important for them (members of the OPCC) to carry out the work.

> "I said to the PCC 'can I have some money? I'd like to partner with a third sector organisation to help us do it'. And rightly so, she said no. She says 'We have to be doing this. We genuinely have to be listening to the voice. And so, however you want to do this, [participant's name], it has to be our staff that are listening and are working in this way'."
> Staff from partner agency [participant 29]

Several participants also disputed the claim that people with lived experience do not feel able to freely discuss negative experiences and voice criticism directly to the police. One participant said that in their previous experience running a focus group within a youth organisation young people **"definitely didn't hold back"**. However, they also acknowledged how the fact that they were not in uniform might have made a difference, highlighting how the context within which feedback is heard can affect the 'voice of the victim'. A few participants from partner agencies said that professionals within institutions sometimes do not know how to engage with young people and victim-survivors, for example by turning their camera off in online meetings, and that they need to learn these skills before trying to engage.

What is the impact of data collection on data collectors?

Collecting feedback from victim-survivors can sometimes mean hearing distressing information, which over time can lead to burn-out or vicarious trauma. A few participants felt that this was very much part of the job and that police personnel are used to dealing with difficult material, whereas others felt that this is something that is not sufficiently acknowledged and addressed within forces. Less common was the challenge of dealing with abuse or aggression from people providing feedback. A couple of participants said that while the majority of people they surveyed were friendly and respectful, callers could sometimes be subject to abuse:

> "You will get victims that, you know, will be really horrible to the interviewer, call them names, swearing, shouting at them, you know, I mean, I suppose they're they don't know who they are. We've had one girl subjected to racist abuse as well which was reported to the police so, yeah, you do get that side of it as well."
> Staff from external agency [participant 26]

Many participants discussed support available for police personnel within forces, such as occupational health, counselling, and the employee assistance programme. Checking in with line managers and risk assessments were also part of the process of undertaking 'voice of the victim' practices. Participants also discussed more informal approaches, such as checking in with colleagues to see how they are feeling, taking regular breaks, and allowing colleagues to go home if they feel upset. For some practices, working from home could make it harder to provide the informal support that is sometimes more readily available when people share an office space.

Police personnel gathering feedback may also be required to listen to harsh criticism and navigate challenging conversations, with one participant saying that **"they get some stick sometimes"**. At some events, such as meetings with groups who do not often engage with the police, some participants emphasised the need to listen to what people were saying rather than try to justify or defend the police as that could make interactions more difficult. They also highlighted the need to be receptive and willing to learn and able to let things go. As one participant described, this could require a certain amount of resilience to be able to respond constructively and not defensively to criticism:

> "Quite often the truth, a quite robust truth comes my way and you have to accept that not in a defensive manner. You have to accept it for what it is and use it to shape and tailor the service we provide."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 14]

Considerations for practice

- It is important to enable multiple ways for victim-survivors to provide feedback, both within and across practices.
- Where possible, forces should offer victim-survivors choice in terms of how they engage. More collaborative practices, with smaller cohorts, are well-placed to offer this flexibility. Choice can include the nature of engagement and also whether the victim-survivor wishes to share their own experience or adopt a role representing victim-survivors as a group.
- Practices need to be culturally competent, and consideration should be given to the diversity, skills and backgrounds of those collecting feedback.
- Police personnel should aim to utilise sensitive and inclusive terminology, such as 'seldom heard' groups rather than 'hard to reach'. The former does not imply that these groups are responsible for reduced engagement.
- The College of Policing's Race Action Plan outlines an approach for engaging with people from Black ethnicities that could serve as a model for engaging with a range of groups, including vulnerable victim-survivors.
- Practices that entail the police working collaboratively with victims and members of the community can help to rebuild trust and confidence but are more resource intensive than consultation and feedback.
- Effective skills and training are needed to work with victim-survivors. "Skilling up" police can be done in collaboration with partner agencies, particularly the third sector where this is a great deal of expertise in participation and coproduction.
- Having senior police personnel present during engagement practices can be a motivating factor for some victim-survivors to share their experiences. Conversely, for other practices, independence may be preferable for victim-survivors and can help ensure the validity of the process.
- Measures can be taken to help break down barriers. Examples provided include police not wearing uniform and ensuring cameras are turned on during online meetings. Conversations with victim-survivors about what is needed to ensure their safety and comfort can help establish what steps need to be taken.

Chapter Five: Listening to feedback

The following chapter outlines the processes that were in place to record and subsequently analyse feedback from 'voice of the victim' practices following data collection. This includes how feedback was securely stored on systems, whether victim-survivors could retract feedback and the approaches taken to analyse feedback. Some of the most common themes found across practices are also discussed. The final part of the chapter explores the processes in place across forces to communicate findings from practices to the relevant police personnel to drive systemic change.

Summary

- Methods for how feedback was recorded varied depending on how it was obtained.
- All practices followed ethical guidelines to securely store and delete data, though the formality of guidance varied.
- Options to retract feedback varied but were commonly deemed unnecessary across practices where data was anonymised.
- Data analysis was sometimes conducted non-independently by police personnel with limited analytical capability.
- Some surveys could not disaggregate data to explore differences across subgroups.
- Resourcing and staff capacity was a common barrier to data analysis when conducted in-force.
- Analysis of qualitative data was especially limited across forces.
- Feedback obtained from victims about their experiences of police services was primarily negative and tended to be repeated over time.
- Police have limited understanding of the needs of vulnerable populations and groups with structural inequalities.
- Some practices triangulated findings with internal force data, academic research and/or external influences such as media reports to further understand specific directions of feedback.
- Findings were often communicated to a variety of internal meetings with senior force representation.
- Sometimes findings from practices were not discussed in detail at meetings due to time constraints.
- Disseminating findings to frontline officers was a recurrent challenge.
- Victim-survivors and individuals with lived experience were rarely invited to attend meetings where findings from practices were discussed. Nor were there many other regular or formal feedback mechanisms to ensure they understood how their data was used to influence change.

How information from victim-survivors is recorded and analysed

How is information recorded?

Recording feedback is important for ensuring that detailed and accurate accounts of victim-survivors' perspectives are captured during engagement practices. This minimises the possibility of important data being lost, disregarded, or misinterpreted when being considered to inform service delivery (USAID Contribution, 2021). The nature of how feedback was recorded varied depending on the 'voice of the victim' practice.

Survey feedback was generally recorded digitally, though there were some survey practices that still collected responses in paper format. It was evident that survey systems were not always well designed to record feedback. For example, due to limited technological resourcing in one force, the recording of telephone survey data was completed on an **"improvised manual system"** created independently by one survey administrator that was frequently prone to **"glitches and crashes"**.

For group-based practices with verbal feedback, such as forums and IAGs, practice leads were usually responsible for recording feedback through notes or minutes. In some cases, recording feedback was not a formal mechanism and instead relied on attending personnel making notes of their own accord. Where appropriate, digital recording was used to capture discussions with the consent of the victim-survivor(s) in practices including telephone surveys, focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

In one 'voice of the victim' practice that involved police personnel speaking directly to bereaved family members of domestic homicide victims, feedback was not recorded in any physical format during consultation. This decision was made to enable a more naturalistic listening environment, while remaining sensitive to the possibility that recorded feedback may have legal implications for those in attendance. Feedback was instead recorded by a representative from the agency that co-facilitated the event, capturing specific actions and suggestions while removing details about individual cases. This was then collated on a secured document alongside reflections from the police personnel who attended.

> "We ended up deciding not to take any notes of the event, not only so that we could listen, but also because we were sort of advised that if we wrote anything down, potentially it could be kind of used in any future court case as a piece of evidence, that kind of thing. So essentially all of that was laid out to them and to us at the time."
> Police personnel from national working group [participant 30]

How is data stored?

Data storage policies ensure that data collected from 'voice of the victim' practices is not only utilised effectively but securely retained on systems in line with GDPR requirements (Information Commissioner's Office, 2022). This is especially important within the context of collecting victim-survivor feedback, owing to the personal and sensitive nature of the information obtained. Some practices had formal policies in place that required data to be stored and shared according to official legal guidelines, such as force surveys and complaints. External agencies that were commissioned by forces to obtain victim feedback had formal contracts in place to ensure all data was securely stored, shared and only accessible to personnel with clearance.

> "We have an individual contract with each particular force as well that stipulates how we'll transfer data. We use the criminal justice secure mail to receive data and things like that. So, we've got a lot of safeguarding in place."
> Staff from external agency [participant 26]

Other 'voice of the victim' practices set their own criteria for how data would be stored and shared, which sometimes varied in the level of formality. Participants described a range of measures in place to ensure that all victim feedback data was transferred and stored securely, such as encrypted systems, secure emails, and password-protected folders. It was common practice for personally identifiable data to be fully anonymised when used for analysis purposes. All force complaints data was stored on **Centurion** (Force Information Systems, 2017), a secure force information system with multiple functionalities to allow for local and national analyses of complaints.

How long do forces keep data?

Data retention periods varied depending on both the nature of the data and the agency who had ownership of it. For identifiable data stored in-force, some participants spoke of data retention periods complying with Management of Police Information guidelines (College of Policing, 2022b), whereby the severity of the crime the data applied to, determined how long it was stored on police systems.

External agencies commissioned by forces to collect (but not analyse) survey data tended to only have access to personally identifiable data supplied by forces. There were notable differences in how long data was retained on their systems before being securely deleted. Some agencies were granted a three-month window before deleting identifiable contact details to ensure that any complaints or general enquires made by individuals could be addressed. Others kept personal details considerably longer to avoid re-surveying people.

> "[The] market research company keep the personal details for 13 months [...] The reason they do this is because in any 12-month period we don't want to interview the same person twice. We don't want to overload people [...] So at the end of every year we look at on a rolling basis, look at the sample we've got - 'Has that person taken part in the last 12 months?' If no, fine, if yes, delete."
> Staff from external agency [participant 10]

When data was non-identifiable and used for analysis, this tended to be retained on systems for longer periods of time. A participant from an external agency commissioned to analyse survey data for one force explained that non-identifiable data was held **"fairly indefinitely"** to analyse how responses change over time. For hand-written raw data, it was sometimes the responsibility of the individual that collected data to securely dispose of it when no longer needed.

> "So, the researcher who does interview will keep those pieces of paper and then what we do is one month after the final report is finalised, the researcher will destroy their notes and the notes never get shared around the team."
> Staff from external agency [participant 31]

Can participants retract their feedback?

Individuals have the right to request that data be deleted if they withdraw their consent or change their opinion on the information they provide. Allowing for feedback to be retracted therefore ensures that data collection processes are both accurate and ethical (GDPR 2019a; GDPR 2019b). Retraction tended to happen for complaints most commonly. This could be done under Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) statutory guidance, though forces recognised that advertising this feature may give complainants the false impression that the force are **"cautioning them to withdraw a complaint"**. One participant reported that some individuals involuntarily withdrew complaints, as they no longer wanted to engage with the force due to holding negative attitudes towards the police. Similarly, another participant reflected that people may withdraw complaints because they believe the force will take no action.

> "We normally ask why as well; you know, why are they withdrawing? And sometimes it's disappointing to hear them say – 'well, nothing's going to happen, so I'll just withdraw.'"
> Police personnel from local force [participant 32]

For other types of 'voice of the victim' practices, participants stated that they rarely experienced retraction requests. Options to allow this varied, though there did not appear to be much formal guidance for how to retract submitted feedback from practices outside of complaints processes and research projects. For practices that involved group-based meetings or face-to-face engagements, such as forums or IAGs, retraction would be organically governed throughout sessions by those in attendance. Once sessions had concluded, some of these practices allowed for recorded conversations or reports to be shared back with attendees for agreement.

> "We have a second review built in before publication, so we take draft comments, then they see the comments in a final draft report and the panel and chair approve it."
> Staff from partner agency [participant 33]

Across surveys, several participants could not confidently confirm whether there were processes to allow feedback to be retracted upon submission. Several participants stated that there were no measures to allow for feedback to be retracted, whilst others expressed that they did not know how they would enable this feature. It was commonly perceived that retraction processes were not necessary to have in place when data was anonymised. Nonetheless, some survey processes collected personal data and held this for short periods which allowed victims to retract feedback within a limited timeframe. Others utilised unique personal identifier systems for data to be identified and retracted at any time.

Who analyses feedback?

Not all 'voice of the victim' practices were heavily data driven or warranted rigorous analyses of feedback, though when this was the case, analytical responsibility varied. Practices that were conducted independently from forces typically had their own teams or contracted agencies responsible for analysing data. Some analysis for practices took place in-house, notwithstanding whether raw data was collected internally or externally. There were some concerns around non-independent analysis leading to the potential for bias in the interpretation of data. In some instances, data analysis was conducted by police personnel with limited analytical capability, owing to limitations in resources.

> "At the moment it's me and going forward, I'd like to sit with an analyst, but capacity is just not there at the moment. So, it's currently still sitting with me."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 34]

Some 'voice of the victim' practices contracted external agencies to collect and analyse data. Good practice was seen in one force where data analysis for several surveys took place within the force's internal systems, though access to datasets were not permitted for police personnel. The force instead seconded a research team from a contracted partner agency, who were vetted to conduct analyses within the force's systems. This ensured that data was both independently analysed and stored in the most secure environment.

> "[The force] don't have access to data. We wanted to set it up that way on purpose."
> Staff from external agency [participant 10]

Few 'voice of the victim' practices involved victim-survivors or those with lived experience during data analysis stages, though some that involved peer-led research with young people demonstrated co-productive elements to data analysis. In practices such as young people's IAGs and Youth Commissions, young people were offered some responsibility to analyse data with support from practice coordinators as an optional developmental opportunity.

> "So some of the raw data, members, who are interested in looking at raw data and helping us to make sense. We don't give too much, we don't give them too much, but there are a couple of people that I know in every Youth Commission that like to do that."
> Staff from third sector organisation [participant 22]

How is information analysed?

Quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis of feedback primarily centred around data obtained from surveys. In most cases, this was limited to standardised Likert scale questions (see Glossary on page 90). Most participants responsible for analysing quantitative data reported using either Excel or SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). For most surveys, analysis primarily focused on descriptive statistics and trend analyses of feedback. This allowed analysts to highlight what percentage of a sample gave specific answers to Likert scale questions and understand how these responses changed over time.

One survey used correlational data modelling to understand what areas of service, if improved, would predict higher levels of overall satisfaction. This was not commonplace across other force areas, though was regarded as something that **"would be ideal"** in future. Where analytical capability was more limited, analysts sometimes reverted to making assumptions about the results that could not be explained nor confirmed by the dataset alone.

For some victim satisfaction surveys, not all data obtained from respondents was analysed. Where this information is being collected, it is important that it is used so that data is not being collected unnecessarily, in line with UK GDPR requirements (Information Commissioner's Office, 2019). Yet quantitative analysis was sometimes limited to high-level overviews of satisfaction, whereby the focus was on answers to general questions that represented a small fraction of victims' responses. A few participants made comments to suggest that looking at survey data in extensive detail was not considered a priority due to being **"quite time consuming"** to achieve:

> "I don't know what you found with other forces, but I would suspect that we, as five forces if you were to look at us all as a whole and say these are the five forces, I would suspect that the focus is probably more on getting the surveys done and the volume of the surveys, as opposed to the detail that's coming out, specifically."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 35]

Disaggregating quantitative data

Disaggregating data (breaking down information into smaller subpopulations) during analysis helps analysts understand differences in perspectives or experience across specific populations within samples (Midway et al, 2020). In some 'voice of the victim' practices, analysis looked at findings by different crime types and demographics to understand whether certain groups were less likely to be satisfied with the service they received, or with particular elements of the service. For victim surveys in one force, this depended on whether victims consented to having a unique non-identifiable number, which held additional information about their demographics and the nature of the crime retained against their survey responses. The participant reported that **"about 60%"** of victims consent to this.

Across some of the surveys, in-depth subgroup analysis of responses was not currently possible. In one survey, this was due to limited demographic options for participants to choose from, providing only binary choices. There were concerns that providing additional categories would mean that the categories were too small for meaningful analysis to be undertaken.

In another force, analysts could not disaggregate survey data to compare differences across victim groups and protected characteristics due to limited sample sizes. Nevertheless, the force had recently commissioned a third party to conduct their surveys which would allow for **"five or six times as many surveys for about a third of the cost"**. The force was waiting to obtain 12 months of data before conducting analyses to secure a larger sample size.

Conversely, another force, though having robustly larger survey datasets, were still in the developmental stages of defining what information they needed to enable more meaningful analysis of victim feedback. They had just refined their victim satisfaction survey with new questions that captured age, ethnicity and gender. However, rigorous analysis of subgroups was not possible until the new dataset was large enough to enable meaningful interpretations of the additional data.

In the same force, one participant speculated that it was possible that victim-survivors of crimes like "modern slavery" or "exploitation" may be surveyed under categories such as 'other violence' (see page 35). However, attempting to disaggregate these populations in the dataset was not a priority due to the resourcing this would require:

> "We could do that, the only problems with that is, that's quite a laborious issue and it would be quite time consuming, so yes it can be done but it does go back to the resourcing issue."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 35]

One participant explained that complaints data can be extensively disaggregated for analysis across different demographic information, such as particular crime types and protected characteristics, though this was reported to be dependent on fields within Centurion being completed correctly. This has allowed the IOPC and other national working groups (such as the VAWG task force) to conduct national analyses of complaints data. It also enables forces to conduct local analysis to identify disparities in complaints data across different thematic topics in policing. Nonetheless, the level of complaints analysis being conducted was reported to have varied across forces.

> "The data can drill down to whatever information that you want as long as you've captured it, obviously, and put it in the right format. And so with every force if they want that information and they've captured it, they can extract it out of the system to do that analysis locally."
> Staff from partner agency [participant 36]

Qualitative analysis

Many participants regarded qualitative data as the most important component of data collection. It allowed analysts to fully understand what the underlying issues were that victim-survivors were facing, which quantitative data alone could not do.

> "It's really those verbatim comments that are the key for making change, not the statistics as such."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 37]

Thematic coding appeared the most common method for analysing qualitative data. This was employed across free text survey responses, group-based practices (such as forums and IAGs), and semi-structured interviews and focus groups with victim-survivors. Across many practices that collected qualitative data thematic coding tended to be done **"manually"** with **"no analytical capability"**. Only some practices looked at full transcripts of data, whilst others relied on notes or summaries of conversations with victim-survivors.

> "We're not using any specific software or anything to code those answers. It's more general, kind of looking for a theme as to why people are becoming more dissatisfied and trying to link that back to things that might be going on in force so changes to call handling or anything that might be going on that might be driving that."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 34]

One participant reported that they had liaised with analysts across several forces who had reported using NVivo to conduct free text analysis in surveys. One participant reflected that the use of software primarily depended on the amount of the qualitative data obtained.

> "Sometimes we don't use software. We have used software, but sometimes if it's only, I mean it has been seven, eight, nine, ten interviews. It can feel a bit laborious to use software for the sake of quite small number of interviews."
> Staff from external agency [participant 31]

Robust and systematic analysis of qualitative data across some of the practices appeared considerably limited, which was regarded by one participant as **"definitely a big gap"**. In the same force, a participant who worked with qualitative data in victim surveys explained that due to the absence of a qualified analyst, they **"don't get to as much detail"** with qualitative data as desired. Others stated that there was no clear indication as to how it was being used for analysis purposes.

> "The free text... I don't know, there's no transparency. If they are doing something with it, I would like to know because it's a little bit demoralising not knowing, and I would feel more motivated if I knew they were doing something with it [...] I don't know, I don't get the impression that's happening."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 13]

It was commonly observed that where qualitative analysis was handled internally by forces, it tended to be underutilised. A few participants responsible for in-house data analysis of surveys owed this to limitations in analytical capability, or not having capacity to perform such analyses due to competing demands in-force. Consequently, this led to difficulties in interpreting findings within some survey datasets.

> "We would like to do more around the qualitative and we've done a little bit, we do ad-hoc pieces of work around that. [...] but it tends to be the regular work [...] the quantitative stuff, so what your percentages are, all that sort of stuff, because we haven't at the moment got capacity to do that [qualitative data analysis]."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 38]

What have practices found?

Some participants reported that findings across 'voice of the victim' practices tended to be repeated with victims saying the same things **"every time we talk to them"**. Victim satisfaction survey results often remained relatively stable over time, with only the occasional fluctuation. One police personnel participant stated that due to victim satisfaction scores not significantly declining overtime, it was not viewed as a **"burning need to start to dig into"**. Consequently, victim satisfaction was not currently linked to the force's performance work. As survey data was often not disaggregated, it is important to consider that some survey findings which were reported may not have reflected differences in satisfaction across different groups.

Several other forces conversely reported that satisfaction was consistently declining over time. When asking police personnel in one local force whether they could objectively determine what was leading to declines in satisfaction, they stated that the analysis team **"hadn't looked at that in any depth"**. However, initial explorations of the data revealed that more negative satisfaction **"translated into communication of keeping people informed**". This was a prevalent criticism found across multiple practices, ranging from surveys, complaints processes and engagement events with victim-survivors. The finding also supports recent research highlighting systemic challenges for police officers in keeping victims updated (VKPP, 2023). Many participants stated that they expect this to be a national finding that is likely to never change within the context of policing.

> "I think that is the basis over the whole country. I don't think it will sort of change, I don't think we're an outlier in that, and it's just, I think sometimes the expectation of the victim, how often they're going to be kept informed, and the officer's availability ... to do so, with the workload they've got on doesn't always match."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 38]

There were some concerning findings from 'voice of the victim' practices that explored experiences and perceptions of 'seldom heard' groups. In some areas, trust and confidence in the police was lower among younger populations. As described by participants across practices, some young people expressed feeling intimidated by police and disconnected from their local force. Young victim-survivors recalled having negative interactions and feeling ignored when in contact with officers, which had a longstanding impact on their perceptions of the police. One participant from a partner agency described results of a survey exploring young people's perceptions of the police related to reporting crime in one force area as **"abysmal"** whereby only half of respondents felt comfortable reporting any crime to the police. This reduced to approximately a quarter of participants when asked if they felt comfortable reporting VAWG-related crime to the force in their area.

> "Some of the stories that they told; you'd just think 'I wouldn't go anywhere near a police officer ever again'."
> Police personnel from national working group [participant 39]

In one force, one participant commented that conversely, their satisfaction survey consistently showed higher levels of satisfaction among victim-survivors aged 65 and over. The participant reflected that this may be partly due to an embedded aspect of police culture within the force, whereby frontline officers have a biased perception of the appearance of vulnerability. This may subsequently influence how they respond to different demographics of victim-survivors when attending an incident.

“Certainly when I was training, and I still hear it now [...] it’s the image of a white haired little old lady [...] and you ask our officers and they’ll proudly tell you that they’ll go above and beyond for an elderly lady [...] and it’s trying to educate officers that sometimes young and angry is what vulnerable looks like, not just white haired and offering you a cup of tea.”
Police personnel from local force [participant 40]

Similar findings in other forces have revealed that some victim-survivors of specific crime types feel that frontline officers do not recognise their level of risk. There were several distinct examples of victim-survivor feedback addressing this across some ‘voice of the victim’ practices. Though not overarching themes, such examples indicate a limited understanding around how to respond to vulnerability, which could be pertinent to the conduct of some frontline officers. In one engagement activity where force leads spoke to victim-survivors of stalking, it was raised that officers did not understand the complexity of stalking and the psychological harm it has on victim-survivors. As a result, there may be underlying tendencies for officers to be biased to explicit warning signs of vulnerability, without fully acknowledging signs that are not apparent at face value.

“Officers are still focused into that physical – ‘Can I see a physical harm? Can I see a physical damage? Can I see a bruise?’”
Police personnel from local force [participant 41]

One participant shared a story from an engagement event outlining how an officer once failed to recognise that a domestic abuse victim-survivor was blind when taking their statement, creating a communication barrier that could have negatively affected the level of safeguarding the officer was able to put in place. Victim-survivors in other practices reported similar feedback outlining a lack of understanding among officers when it came to recognising and sensitively responding to victim-survivors with complex vulnerabilities. This was sometimes reflected in the way that officers presented themselves when dealing with victims.

“A lot of it is really around officer conduct, you know, their language, their understanding of domestic abuse and sexual violence and the vulnerability, and how they sort of conduct themselves within that process that they have to follow, bring in that human element.”
Police personnel from local force [participant 21]

How are findings corroborated?

Triangulating victim-survivor feedback with various sources of information can help determine the validity and reliability of findings from practices, as well as establish a more comprehensive picture of the issues raised.

“In order to have effective problem solving, you need to understand that the problem, the data comes from multiple sources.”
Police personnel from local force [participant 9]

Many ‘voice of the victim’ practices did not triangulate findings with other information. For those that

did, triangulation was sometimes restricted to comparing different forms of data obtained within a practice. This particularly applied to mapping quantitative feedback against qualitative feedback in surveys to uncover explanations for the direction of statistical data. Some practices triangulated findings with other internal force data or were in the process of establishing ways to achieve this. For instance, victim satisfaction survey results were on occasion compared with complaints data, and in one force were compared against key themes that came out of a victim-survivor engagement event. Another force compared victim satisfaction data to staff absence data which was reported to shed light on feasible explanations for periods of low victim satisfaction.

One participant spoke about how the voices of victim-survivors had recently been considered against internal performance audits within specific thematic areas to shed light on the accuracy of such audits. The participant explained that during one auditing period, although internal auditors rated force performance as 'requires improvement', 14 out of 15 victim-survivors consulted reported being satisfied with the service they received. This discrepancy in findings highlighted how feedback from victim-survivors could be used as an additional measure to inform the efficacy of internal force performance evaluations.

> "I suppose the disparity was my organisation says 'we haven't got it right', yet the victim said 'you have got it right'. So that's something I suppose that was a key message for me as actually, is it complete systemic failings? The victim's voice is probably the key one to say – I might not have all the correct systems, I might not have everything, but actually, have we met the objective of the victim themselves? Which I think was the critical piece."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 41]

Some 'voice of the victim' practices alternatively triangulated findings with external sources of data, such as academic research, to further explore and verify problems raised. In one force survey, a participant discussed plans for their proposed IT re-development to link survey data with relevant academic research, studies, and updates. The participant expressed aspirations to capture research into a visual template for recall and reference during call-schedules and for post-survey analytics.

It was relatively common for participants to attribute the direction of feedback to external influences that had nothing to do with the force's performance, such as high-profile stories of police failings in the media. For example, one force correlated especially low victim satisfaction figures during June 2020 to the co-occurring media coverage of the murder of George Floyd (Mohdin & Swann, 2020). The participant inferred that the results reflected highly publicised international criticism of the police at the time, rather than poor performance from the force.

> "People will see 'I'm being surveyed by the police' as an opportunity to give us a kick if they are generally unsatisfied by the police."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 40]

A very small number of 'voice of the victim' practices triangulated findings with both internal and external sources of data. Good practice was seen from one participant from a partner agency responsible for evaluating victim-survivor interviews, who stated that data was never considered in isolation. The participant would consider **"local wider data, national data and research"** alongside interviews to determine the weight of consideration that an issue raised by victim-survivors should be given. Qualitative research and desk-based research was compared to case studies provided by

commissioned services to account for potential gaps that remained in the data that the analyst was reviewing. The data went through a tiered process, by which the level of consideration for immediate action depended on the number of sources of information that corroborated with the issue identified.

> “I look to see if an issue is replicated elsewhere, before I consider it a key issue to respond to.”
> Staff from external agency [participant 11]

How the ‘voice of the victim’ is communicated

How are findings presented?

Across most ‘voice of the victim’ practices, feedback was primarily collated into report documents outlining summaries of findings and key points raised, sometimes including recommendations for organisational learning and service delivery. Good practice was seen from one participant who utilised a graphic designer in-force to convert feedback and recommendations into a one-page visual article for decision makers to easily digest. Quantitative data was typically collated graphically to visually highlight key findings obtained from datasets. Key findings from practices were also prepared in PowerPoint format if they were to be presented at meetings with police personnel in collective attendance.

Who receives and hears feedback?

All five forces had a similar range of intricately connected governance structures in place to enable victim-survivor feedback to be disseminated to the relevant internal departments. Participants spoke of findings from practices being presented across various performance, tactical, strategic, and executive management meetings. These often referred to in-force meetings with senior police personnel (with ranks ranging from Chief Inspector to Assistant Chief Constable), as well as multi-agency meetings with OPCC and criminal justice representation. Whilst most practices had findings presented at local or regional level meetings, some practice findings achieved attention at national policing board meetings. Force leads in charge of the area of service that feedback applied to were usually in attendance at the meetings.

> “Those slides go to the force leads as well in the particular areas. So hate crime goes to the hate crime leads, and they then look at that in in particular detail and they assess then ‘OK, what are the next steps that need to be done based on these findings?’.”
> Police personnel from local force [participant 2]

The frequency by which groups met to communicate and discuss findings varied but generally ranged from monthly to quarterly. Several participants reported that the length of time dedicated to discussion of feedback varied depending on the data discussed and what other information was to be covered during the meeting. Consequently, sometimes only a fraction of data capturing victim feedback would be discussed with force leads.

> “When we present satisfaction data to the Exec Board, for example, there’s probably not a massive opportunity to go into great detail. You might get 20 minutes at a performance board to talk about your whole performance and not just satisfaction.”
> Police personnel from local force [participant 35]

Despite many participants describing governance structures that were in place to disseminate information to senior personnel, a recurrent challenge seen across forces was the ability to cascade findings to frontline officers, so they are informed of present issues. Some participants attempted to achieve this through hosting regular meetings with Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) across the different force areas and/or districts. One external agency published satisfaction metrics on a dashboard that was able to highlight the key issues affecting local force areas at district level. Though officers were encouraged to look at this, the participant remained sceptical that this was the case: **“I don’t think many of them are aware of it”**. One participant from another force said that they were unsure whether frontline personnel saw satisfaction data at all. Some participants brought partner agency representatives in to communicate findings to frontline officers, as this was deemed more impactful than dissemination via internal personnel.

Very few participants mentioned whether victim-survivors or individuals with lived experience were invited to attend meetings where findings were communicated to senior leads. As discussed in Chapter Three, some settings were not considered suitable for victim-survivors to attend. Yet there was also recognition that this could further humanise the findings being presented to police personnel and create a more emotional response that results presented in writing or statistics alone cannot achieve. It would also empower victim-survivors to directly act as a critical friend to force leads responsible for change and hold them accountable for actions taken. A few participants expressed aspirations to have mechanisms like this in place within their force in future.

> “We need to have IAG members in some of our strategic groups which will really, I was going to be over dramatic in terms of, you know, set the cat amongst the pigeons, but it will be a real dynamic issue for some of the people I work with, I think to know that… ‘Well, what’s that person doing in our meeting?’, but we need to get there.”
> Police personnel from local force [participant 8]

In some national based ‘voice of the victim’ practices involving peer-led research by young people, findings would be communicated to forces through annual conferences delivered by the young people involved. Youth Commissions are one example where conferences have been organised both locally and nationally, gaining attendance from senior OPCC and police personnel responsible for decision making. These have involved Youth Commission members with lived experience sharing personal testimonies of negative experiences with the police which motivated them to join their local Youth Commission. Members would then present findings from the peer-led research they were involved in. This would be followed by the facilitation of discussions with attending police personnel around subsequent actions. For local conferences, a report would be shared with attending police personnel prior to the conference, to prompt preparation for discussion around actions that forces were taking or planning to take in response to findings.

Considerations for practice

- It is important for personnel responsible for 'voice of the victim' practices to consider how and where feedback should be recorded to ensure important detail from victim-survivors does not get lost.
- Following GDPR requirements, forces could consider establishing internal databases for all victim-survivor feedback and shared guidelines that cover how data should be stored, accessed and retained.
- Where formal or statutory guidance is lacking, facilitators of practices may consider developing their own guidance for protocol to follow when participants request to retract their data.
- For more formal, data-driven practices, forces could consider employing partner agency personnel to analyse data. This would ensure independence, better analytical capability and more capacity for internal staff currently conducting analyses.
- Forces could make more effective use of qualitative data obtained from practices, for example by commissioning or working with partner agencies or researchers familiar with qualitative analysis to train or develop guidance for in-house analysts to enhance their expertise.
- Forces may wish to review their data collection to ensure that all data being collected is analysed and fit for purpose.
- It is important to ensure that there is transparency (both with victim-survivors and personnel facilitating practices) regarding how data is being used.
- Forces could consider how complaints data is being used to identify systemic issues in service delivery which may require action.
- Triangulating practice findings with other data can help to strengthen the evidence-base and its credibility.
- It is important for forces to consider how to include individuals with lived experience in meetings where findings from 'voice of the victim' practices are discussed.
- Forces could consider utilising more easily accessible formats for disseminating practice findings to the relevant police personnel.
- Forces may want to consider linking feedback to performance measures more robustly so that feedback can be correlated with staff performance.
- Forces could consider formulating process maps outlining which meetings and groups specific feedback will be disseminated to, and for what purpose.
- It is important for forces to have effective strategies for disseminating findings from practices to frontline personnel who can use them to help drive systemic change, and support strategic vision with operational delivery.

Chapter Six: Creating change

The following chapter outlines actions that were taken following victim-survivor feedback. The chapter explores governance and who was responsible for making decisions, actions that were taken, how actions were monitored and recorded and how they were communicated within forces and to victim-survivors. It also considers the impact of any actions taken, on police forces and victim-survivors, and how forces are attempting to demonstrate the impact of 'voice of the victim' practices.

Summary

- There was sometimes minimal transparency over who had ownership of outputs and actions in response to specific feedback.
- Some 'voice of the victim' practices were not designed or expected to lead to systemic changes. This included some surveys and complaints procedures, which were primarily designed to monitor service and action "quick hit" solutions for service recovery when necessary.
- Participants reported that "managing expectations" for victims was important regarding what actions were realistic with the available police resources.
- Participants had not always thought ahead to what actions they may take or what impact may follow from 'voice of the victim' practices.
- Actions taken were sometimes reactive to current social climates rather than proactive and in response to feedback.
- Frequently changing priorities in policing made it difficult for forces to implement actions. If actions were taken, differing priorities also lessened the impact of the changes made, as the focus was frequently shifting, and key messages became distorted.
- Many participants recognised the importance of a feedback loop to inform those who provided feedback with any actions taken. However, this was often lacking in practice.
- Some 'voice of the victim' practices had processes in place for reviewing their effectiveness, but formal or independent measures of impact were either not in place or reported to be considerably difficult to establish across most practices.

Actions taken in response to victim-survivor feedback

Who decides what actions to take?

Participants explained how personnel relaying findings from 'voice of the victim' practices would commonly generate discussions for actions at board meetings, where force leads relevant to the area of service would finalise priority actions. Good practice was seen in one force where feedback was reviewed by the Domestic Abuse Board, and plotted against the force's Domestic Abuse plan to ensure that this was informed directly by the victim-survivors' voice. Nonetheless, across other practices it was not entirely clear which teams or governance boards were responsible for specific actions in response to feedback, nor the different ways feedback was subsequently utilised across different boards to inform decision making.

Some force leads had senior leadership teams or various working groups for areas of business feedback applied to. These groups would be responsible for creating action plans to make the appropriate changes to services in accordance with feedback. Some working groups primarily consisted of staff internal to forces, while others involved external stakeholders or transformation teams that were consulted for problem solving related to the issues raised. Transformation teams refer to a team of experts operating within or commissioned by a police force to form innovative solutions to problems identified with service delivery. One participant mentioned that their transformation team invited victim-survivors from internal and external 'voice of the victim' practices to attend to contribute their views and lived experience on how changes could be implemented.

Conversely, a number of participants indicated that there was little transparency regarding which individuals or departments in-force had ownership of specific issues raised across practices. Consequently, this poses the risk of important actions required in response to feedback being poorly coordinated or left unaddressed.

> "I just think you find anything that indicates a problem, I would expect to be told exactly what you're doing to solve that problem. And who owns that problem? Who's responsible for it now? Which groups are looking at it?"
> Staff from partner agency [participant 10]

One force recently introduced a 'balanced scorecard' as part of their strategic board, whereby an area of service was rated from one (immediate action required) to four (no action required) based upon data obtained from victim satisfaction surveys and other forms of data. The lower the rating, the higher the force seniority it would be escalated to for decision making responsibility. This chain of command structure was also used when proposed actions had higher resourcing and funding implications.

What actions did participants expect to see?

Evidence from the interviews showed that practice planning did not always include consideration of how feedback from victim-survivor engagement may lead to service change. In fact, some practices were not designed or expected to create definitive or widescale systemic change. For example, feedback from some victim satisfaction surveys aimed to reassure forces about the level of service being provided to victims.

“We’re not doing it simply to identify something to change. We’re doing it for a degree of reassurance that, particularly with our more vulnerable victims, they’re getting a decent level of service, and just reminding the organisation of the things we’re not doing quite
as well.”
Police personnel from local force [participant 42]

Complaints were designed to be able to bring about systemic change—Centurion has a section to highlight areas for both individual and systemic learning for forces to consider for every complaint, conduct matter, death or serious injury. However, findings showed that changes relating to complaints tended to be tailored to individual complainants for immediate actions rather than widescale service recovery. No forces reported any expected changes that would occur on a systemic level as a result of complaints they dealt with daily.

“It’s more, I don’t want to say lower level because it dismisses them, but commonly known lower level, ‘haven’t been given an update’, ‘I’ve reported my bin being stolen and no one’s been for three days’, those kind of things, we should be looking to apologise if we need to and try and sort it out for him.”
Police personnel from local force [participant 43]

On the other hand, for serious complaints externally investigated by the IOPC (IOPC, n.d.), learning recommendations are formally produced to drive national and local systemic changes in policing. Categorised by “Section 10” and “Section 28” learning recommendations under IOPC statutory guidance (Table 6) (IOPC., 2020b), these have primarily centred around informing policy, guidance, and training for forces (IOPC, 2022).

Table 6: IOPC learning recommendations

Categorisation	Additional context provided by participant
Section 10: Recommendations that become apparent during the investigation which are “fast time” and require immediate action by the force being investigated.	**“Let’s say I identified immediately ‘this police force doesn’t have effective XYZ in place’, so I’m going to make a learning recommendation now within a week of getting it, saying before we finish our investigation, they need to sort this out.”** Staff from external agency [participant 44]
Section 28: Recommendations that are collated into a report at the end of a serious complaint investigation for forces to action.	**“If it’s at the end of the investigation, we put it through what’s called our learning recommendations tracker, internally in the IOPC it gets reviewed by our policy experts, and then it gets sent back to us and the decision maker. We sign it off again and send it to the force.”** Staff from external agency [participant 44]

For 'voice of the victim' practices that were in the early stages of development or recently launched, several participants said they would be led by the outcomes of feedback rather than anticipating actions ahead of time. Where participants reported that it was too early to predict actions, informal reflections were made around influencing policy, procedures, and training development in forces (Table 7).

Table 7: Actions participants would like to see following victim engagement

Action	Associated aspirations raised by participants
Improvements to services: **"Also some of the thinking from victims' perspective, survivors' perspective, around how we best look after our police officers in order that they can provide the best service to victims."** Police personnel from local force [participant 45]	• Departments and processes set up in-force to support both victim-survivors and police personnel. • Prioritisation of resources. • Better cooperation with partner agencies that support victim-survivors. • Improved communication from forces with victim-survivors throughout their criminal justice journey. • Improved wellbeing support for police personnel. • For the police culture to move in a more **"positive direction"** towards recognising the value of victim-survivor feedback and ensuring that its influence on service delivery becomes business as usual.
Better engagement with vulnerable groups and 'seldom heard' groups: **"The better our engagement, the better our relationships, the more intelligence we get, the more we can be proactive in tackling the issues."** Police personnel from local force [participant 9]	• Enhanced visibility and engagement with victim-survivors and groups facing structural inequalities. • Cultural changes including improved attitudes among police personnel when working with victim-survivors across all protected characteristics. • Improved knowledge bases for supporting vulnerable populations among police personnel through trauma-informed training and regular refresher programs. • Improved accessibility for victim-survivors when reporting crime or accessing support from forces.
Improvements to practices: **"A more sort of collaborative approach where we actually get to see things through, so that there's a bit more accountability"** Staff from partner agency [participant 24]	• More co-production with victim-survivors and communities to inform strategic planning and service provision. • More collaboration and accountability from forces in terms of what they do with findings. • More use of victim-survivors and individuals with lived experience in police training.

What feedback could not be actioned?

Participants expressed that it was important to remain transparent and manage expectations (both for victim-survivors providing their voice and for personnel responsible for decision making) of what were achievable actions from 'voice of the victim' practices. Some proposed actions were considered outside the scope of policing, such as changes to court processes or education curriculums. Good practice was seen when forces liaised with partner agencies upon recognising that they were not best placed to action specific recommendations. This ensured that actions deemed unsuitable for police forces to implement could instead be handed over to more appropriate agencies to action, thus minimising the risk of them being disregarded.

> "It was too big for us as a small team to lead that project. But we took it to that forum, a partner developed it, took it and it was able to grow with [force name] support as such."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 46]

For actions relevant to policing, suggestions for change were sometimes deemed either inappropriate or unachievable, an issue regularly faced by complaints departments. This also led to challenges around managing expectations, as desired outcomes were often disproportionate to the nature of the complaint, nor within the scope of the department's capabilities. When this was the case, complainants were provided with an explanation from the force, along with a final decision on the outcome of the complaint. Complainants would also be informed of their right to have their complaint reviewed or appealed if they were unhappy with the outcome (IOPC, 2020a).

> "Setting the complaint's expectation is key to what the [complaints department] has to do [...] Sometimes people will say I want someone sacked or I would like the policy changed or I'd like to change the law... we can't. So, we do get those complaints coming in all the time."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 15]

Limitations in wider police resources meant that some recommendations from 'voice of the victim' practices were unrealistic. Sometimes recommendations had to be adapted so that changes could be made within the capabilities of the force. Some examples of unrealistic actions included the following:

- A mandate for body worn camera to always be turned on. (Although this may be deemed credible, it was reported to be impractical due to the cost of storing all footage on the cloud and potential human rights issues).
- A requirement for forces to treat all suspected suicides as homicides
- Having more police patrolling the streets
- Financial compensation for being failed by forces
- Psychological debriefs for frontline officers after every emotionally demanding incident
- Highly specialised therapy services funded by forces for victim-survivors
- More rapid analysis of forensic evidence

Sometimes victim-survivors' expectations of what forces were capable of achieving were distorted by fictional depictions of police processes in popular culture:

> "Sometimes they see things on the telly and they expect us to work like one of these dramas on the telly [...] We can't do what they see. We haven't got the staff; we haven't got the technology to do it."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 38]

Feedback from different groups of victim-survivors could also be conflicting. National organisations that worked with people with lived experience spoke of challenges when taking contrasting views into account, and in developing policy to meet the needs of different groups. This applied to a variety of crime types and vulnerabilities, though it was particularly relevant to missing people. One participant explained how families of missing people may have views that contradict those held by previously missing people on what actions need to be taken when someone goes missing, such as the impact publicity has on locating someone.

In some cases, changes could not be actioned because they were not considered a key area of consideration by decision makers. One participant explained that conversations would be held with lead officers within the force but if potential changes did not fit with the current policing priorities or thematics (College of Policing, 2022a), they were largely ignored.

What actions have resulted from victim-survivor feedback?

Several participants described changes that were made to 'voice of the victim' practices following feedback. Many participants discussed developing new practices for engagement or refined existing ones, for example, adding more questions to surveys. However, few forces made changes to service design following feedback. Of those that did, one common action was to introduce additional training for frontline officers. For example, one force implemented a training programme with a specific focus on coercive and controlling behaviours. Several examples showed how actions can increase demand on frontline officers, such as an action that required all cases of residential burglary to have a police officer in attendance. Although this was met with some resistance from frontline officers, it was eventually mediated by the increase in victim satisfaction that resulted from it.

Changes to service design could be limited due to competing demands and priorities across multiple strands of vulnerability (see Critchfield et al., 2021 for discussion of the multiple strands). One participant from a local force emphasised that **"when everything is a priority, nothing is"**. Participants highlighted how forces should not need to categorise people into thematics to make changes. Due to competing demands, service changes were sometimes implemented reactively rather than proactively, in response to current issues. Often feedback highlighted areas that may need improvement, but changes were not being made. When high profile cases, such as the murder of George Floyd and Sarah Everard, were reported in the media they supported existing feedback, highlighting that implementing changes to service design was necessary.

External pressures could also limit service changes. Many participants explained that the Covid-19 pandemic restricted implementation of changes to service design. Some participants were only just beginning to start discussions around service changes, conversations which forces hoped to have had much sooner. One participant reflected that while initial conversations were promising, this does not guarantee action.

Are actions being monitored and recorded?

Forces recognised the need for effective and accurate monitoring and recording of actions to evidence how feedback is being used. This was particularly important to avoid proposed actions becoming **"lost"** or not being seen through. As discussed in Chapter Three, changes in senior personnel could lead to a change in priorities and could potentially halt conversations around initiating or implementing actions. Embedding proposed actions through recording any dialogue surrounding potential changes was one way of mitigating against this.

However, actions were often not monitored or recorded, as participants explained that the technology was often not able to support this effectively. Several participants discussed how recording systems were complex, not **"user friendly"**, or were even faulty, resulting in inaccurate data.

Good practice by one force involved piloting a 'review scheme'. This included reviewing every learning recommendation to check if the recommendations were actioned and followed up and reviewed effectively if necessary.

Keeping track of conversations between multiple stakeholders and the subsequent actions taken, also made recording changes challenging. Participants reflected how conversations often started with one person or one group, but eventually went **"beyond the scope of that board"** and escalated. While these consultations with additional groups were essential for implementing changes, it made keeping track of those changes really challenging as they could become **"a massive spiral"**.

Are actions being communicated?

Some of the 'voice of the victim' practices did not have a feedback mechanism to communicate actions based on feedback from victim-survivors, and lacked a 'you said, we did' approach. Failing to communicate changes may make people feel like they are not being heard and may affect the likelihood of them engaging in future. Participants explained that challenges with feedback mechanisms arose when there were many participants, for example in victim surveys, arguing that it's difficult to contact five or six thousand people a year to explain what they had done as a result. However, another participant stated that:

> "From an operational point of view it, it wasn't normal for me to go contacting all the victims on that list [to communicate change], because that was not the purpose of it."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 47]

Many participants acknowledged that this feedback loop was missing, and that communication needed significant improvement. One participant wondered if an improvement to the feedback loop would subsequently improve trust and confidence, and another recognised the importance of feeding back to people what had changed as a result of their input:

> “Sometimes they feel empowered if they’ve been responsible perhaps for feedback or changes within the police. And that can be sold to them positively, of course. And if I tell them, you know, thanks for your complaint and as a result of this, we’ve identified some individual learning or organisational for [police force], which we are taking forward.”
> Police personnel from local force [participant 32]

Some participants were finding ways to communicate actions; one force utilised their mailing lists to email electronic leaflets highlighting any changes made. They also ensured there were hard copies available for those who did not have internet access. Another force aimed to create a network where two-way interactions between victim-survivors and police could take place. This allowed the force to be more collaborative.

One force showed evidence of collaborative work whereby victim-survivors and associated partners had conversations surrounding findings of a domestic survey that was administered. In these conversations, partners acknowledged what actions needed to be taken and any subsequent plans for service change.

How were actions received by forces?

Forces faced challenges when implementing actions due to a negative reception from local commanders and frontline officers. One participant highlighted that when their scrutiny panel revealed poor practice, there was a pushback from the force, even though the organisation was not working against the police but highlighting opportunities for change and attempting to work towards co-production. Similarly, frontline officers were described as defensive, believing that scrutiny panels were criticising them:

> “It took us probably two and a half to three years to get [the force] to the mindset of the panels being a benefit to their operation”.
> Staff from partner agency [participant 33]

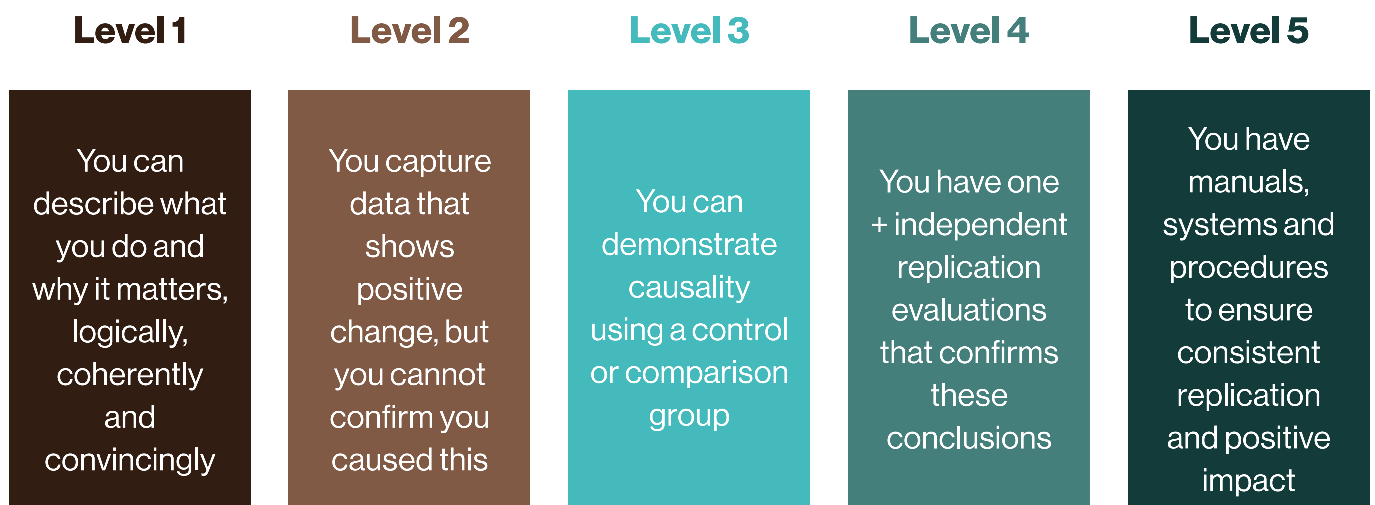
Shifting priorities meant that new initiatives were sometimes met with scepticism as participants explained frontline officers and operational personnel often believed these changes may soon be replaced by something else. Furthermore, several participants reported that differing priorities had a negative impact on the reception of actions as people would want to deal with one pressure before moving on to another. One participant reflected that there was not always an appetite for actions among frontline officers who often viewed change as change for the sake of it. To overcome these barriers, participants highlighted that actions should be communicated force wide and that explaining why an action was being introduced was important to avoid the process being seen as a tick box exercise.

> “This is a place where we see change all the time, people see another initiative – ‘right now what are they trying this month? What looks different? Why is this any different? How’s this actually going to impact what I’m trying to do in my day job?’ People get very blinkered in the police”
> Police personnel from local force [participant 15]

What is the impact of the victim-survivor voice?

Across most 'voice of the victim' practices, participants did not report collecting high quality data to show the impact of the 'voice of the victim'. Often this was mediated by the size of the force and the availability of data, with bigger forces having greater analytical capability and larger amounts of data. Participants reported that measuring impact was considerably challenging, particularly as many of the practices were lacking a way to monitor actions (see page 74 above). Yet evaluating participatory practices is important for demonstrating the impact of participation and showing that it has led to positive change. It can help to improve and develop the practice, demonstrate accountability, and ensure that participants' involvement is worthwhile (YoungMinds, 2020). This requires collecting evidence on what has changed, and linking this to the practice itself. However, some forms of evidence are more robust than others and there are various standards for assessing evidence. Guidance produced by Nesta (Puttick and Ludlow, 2013) categorises evidence according to five levels, with higher levels indicating a greater degree of confidence that an intervention is having a positive impact (Figure 7). Findings showed that the evidence being collected for many of the practices reflected Level One or Level Two, with none of the practices collecting evidence that could be categorised as Level Five. Several participants said they could not predict what the impact of practices would be until specific changes had been made and were therefore not considering what impact they were hoping to see.

Figure 7: Nesta standards of evidence for demonstrating impact



Source: Puttick and Ludlow (2013)

What is the impact on policing?

Level One standards of evidence

Participants often spoke about the value of 'voice of the victim' practices and the impact that they expected or hoped to see, though without having a plan in place for evidencing this impact. This corresponded to Level One standards of evidence (you can describe what you do and why it matters, logically, coherently, and convincingly). Several participants hoped that changes, if embedded sufficiently, would lead to systemic shifts in police culture, whereby previous failures would not be repeated.

Training and engagement activities were intended to lead to police personnel having improved emotional intelligence, professionalism and evidence-based practice when responding to the needs of victim-survivors across a variety of demographics and circumstances. Participants commented that enhanced police performance would in turn result in better interactions, improved safeguarding, and improved outcomes for victim-survivors, whilst making police procedures less prone to potentially fateful errors.

> "If you don't get the hearts and minds and don't want to do it because you don't buy into the victim's circumstance, at least buy in from a 'If I don't do something, I'm going to be answering a lot of questions' [perspective]."
> Police personnel from local force [participant 41]

Consideration was also given to the impact that engagement activity could have on improving relationships with communities. In some interviews, this simply referred to the general public as a whole within force areas. Other participants specifically referred to groups facing structural inequalities, such as younger populations, disabled groups and minoritised ethnic groups. The expectation was that issues could then be transparently tackled based upon sincere dialogue rather than presumptions made by forces on what the most appropriate actions were. Participants commented that improved service provision and more cohesive relationships with the public would in turn lead to higher levels of trust and confidence in the police. For victim-survivors, participants expected the impact of changes to be highlighted by higher rates of victim satisfaction and fewer formal complaints made, relevant to the areas where service was improved.

Level Two standards of evidence

Many participants also talked about capturing data that could be categorised as Level Two evidence (you can capture data that shows positive change, but you cannot confirm you caused this) — they provided examples of positive change that had occurred, although it was not possible to prove that this change was a result of the 'voice of the victim' practice itself. Many participants discussed receiving anecdotal evidence that the practice was working well, for example from **"gang members"** following training for police around stop and search or from police officers saying they would deal with cases in a more trauma-informed way following training.

In other cases, this type of evidence would be collected in a more systematic way by triangulating it with other data, for example changes in officer behaviour. One force had seen an increase in recorded cases of stalking and in protection orders, and another discussed improvement in officers' behaviour, such as compliance with body worn video policy. Several participants were in the process of triangulating actions taken following victim feedback with compliance rates to the Victims' Code of Practice (VCOP; Ministry of Justice, 2021). These changes were sometimes monitored through frequent audits of officer behaviour. Other data that was triangulated with practices included victim attrition rates and crime reporting levels. One participant spoke of having data **"timelines"**, where significant events or changes to service were plotted for subsequent impact to be interpreted.

A few participants discussed using their victim satisfaction surveys to monitor whether actions led to improved satisfaction. One force described significantly higher victim satisfaction upon implementing actions to improve updates, and another found that satisfaction for victims of motor vehicle crime rose from 27 percent to 78 percent following an experiment to call back every victim. However, this type of correlation was not deemed possible in forces where analytical capability was more limited, or the data was not robust.

> "If there is a change that happens in force, for example if you see lots of officers have training in a particular area, then a couple of months later when you do the satisfaction surveys, technically you should see a spike in whatever they've had training in. But at the moment, I don't think our data is sound enough to be able to make those correlated links".
> Police personnel from local force [participant 2]

Follow-up feedback was sometimes used to measure impact particularly for practices that involved training police personnel using the 'voice of the victim' or providing them with co-produced resources. Follow-up time periods ranged from several months to a year after the completion of the practice to understand how learning had been applied. In one force, a self-report survey was sent to officers six months after completion of a bespoke training course commissioned because of victim-survivor feedback. Similarly, a participant who facilitated a practice that involved victim-survivors delivering training to one force reported that feedback forms and suggestions for change were filled in by attending officers to measure impact. However, this did not prove successful as monitoring this through the management process failed to be sufficiently embedded by the force that undertook the training.

> "With the police, we did feedback forms and [...] we did some postcards with changes that they were going to make on, and that that was meant to then be going back to their managers, and the managers were meant to be actually then having it in part of their management process, but that, I don't think, was actually embedded enough."
> Staff from external agency [participant 19]

Such follow-up can be crucial for monitoring the impact of training and new resources because while certain practices were considered effective at the time, participants questioned the lasting impact. It was explained that certain practices must be repeated to ensure new learning and education becomes embedded force-wide in everyday policing.

“It’s not to say that the training wasn’t impactful at all. I have no doubt in my mind that everyone still remembers it. I just think in terms of what it’s managed to change as a result as being significantly limited”
Staff from external agency [participant 48]

Other participants preferred verbal feedback over surveys. One participant who co-produced training with victim-survivors opposed using surveys to measure impact, implying that **“people ticking boxes”** should not be considered an authentic indicator of improved practice and understanding amongst officers. The participant explained that they would instead be conducting quarterly dip sampling with police personnel who had undertaken the training. This was aimed to be conversational rather than **“confrontational”** with formal **“questions and answers”**, in attempt to understand how personnel had applied learning from the training into practice.

“I want to know what they’ve learned from the film by not saying ‘what did you learn from the film?’ Just saying, you know, ‘Have you used this? Do you use that? Tell me about the last domestic abuse call you went to’.”
Staff from external agency [participant 49]

Level Three standards of evidence

There was little indication that forces had collected data that would meet Level Three standards of evidence (you can demonstrate causality using a control or comparison group). Several participants were fully aware of the challenges associated with establishing that ‘voice of the victim’ practices had directly caused any positive impacts:

“What you can’t do with that is say specifically it was related to that particular policy influence or change, that’s very hard to achieve.”
Police personnel from local force [participant 14]

One of the difficulties identified was that multiple changes often occur simultaneously in-force. This can make it difficult to distinguish what impact each of the changes had made.

“We seem to put many things in place, we don’t put one thing in and wait and see what happens, we’ll change six things, so then the causation of the improvement or not is difficult to determine… Because once you identify a problem, everybody tries to fix it, so sometimes you can’t measure which one it is that works best.”
Police personnel from local force [participant 38]

Other participants reflected on how external factors may influence satisfaction, such as media stories around police failings or the Queen’s funeral, however, these are difficult to account for. One participant suggested that media stories relating to high-profile police failings for the force had a greater impact on perceptions than actual service change. As such, changes to service design were overlooked with emphasis placed on poor practice:

“The legacy probably has a bigger voice than the actual reality at times, in terms of what you’ve done in change... The actual failings sell the story far better than the success. So, everything you move forward, they still want to reflect back and say, ‘well, you still failed back then’.”
Police personnel from local force [participant 41]

Level Four standards of evidence

There was limited evidence of forces or partner agencies having evaluations in place that would meet Level Four standards of evidence (you have at least one independent replication evaluations that confirms these conclusions). One participant working within an OPCC that had several victim engagement pathways reported the following:

“We do not regularly review our surveying and engagement tools.”
Staff from partner agency [participant 29]

In some cases, evaluations took the form of reviewing the ‘voice of the victim’ practice, akin to process evaluations rather than impact evaluations. These processes were primarily designed to gain insight into alterations that may be required to ensure practices were evolving in accordance with the requirements of those involved, rather than to formally evaluate the practice. Across several ongoing practices, participants mentioned that this was conducted on an annual basis with the individuals and agencies involved. In one practice, the facilitator would conduct a **“sense check”** with attending agencies to check that attendees were still benefiting from the practice and ascertain whether any improvements could be made to the way it operated. One force similarly conducted surveys with IAG members to gauge how they thought the first 12 months of their involvement had gone and whether the setup of the IAG needed to be improved to make participation easier for attendees.

One participant from a local force spoke of implementing a quality assurance branch to their complaints department to understand what it feels like for complainants going through complaints processes. This included the proposal of employing **“mystery shoppers”** to file complaints. The participant expressed interest in targeting this specifically towards ‘seldom heard’ groups where there are notable **“blockages”** to accessibility, though was waiting for funding and resourcing that had been promised to put this in motion.

Some participants stated that their ‘voice of the victim’ practices were currently under review. In one instance, the review was being conducted to explore how the facilitators could achieve their aim of further expanding their reach to recruiting across all protected characteristics in the force area. One practice was currently being reviewed to determine whether funding for it would continue. The participant, despite being the primary coordinator for this practice, disclosed that they were not kept informed in conversations surrounding this, thus could not comment on how this evaluation was being undertaken.

Good practice was seen in one force area where OPCC scrutiny panels were reviewed upon request of the area’s new PCC, to understand **“what value they were adding and what actual impact they were having in force”**. The evaluation revealed that panels were not having the desired level of widescale impact on the way the force operated. This led to the organisation developing a fully revised model of independent scrutiny panels. These were designed to ensure that the voices of local communities were being heard at a higher level within the organisation to help shape the local police force.

To really reach Level Four standards of evidence, evaluation should be independent and replicable to demonstrate that positive change has occurred as a result of the practice. While forces did not seem to be commissioning this kind of work, some third sector organisations interviewed for the study had included this in their planning and were able to demonstrate positive impact from their engagement work.

Level Five standards of evidence

There were no examples of Level Five standards of evidence, which would require evidence that the practice could be operated by someone else, somewhere else and scaled up, while continuing to have positive and direct impact on the outcome, and whilst remaining a financially viable proposition (Puttick and Ludlow, 2013). Building on the previous levels can help police services work towards this level.

Furthermore, no participants reported applying formal Theory of Change or Logic Model approaches to practices (a model or graphic illustration that represents how an intervention or practice will lead to its outcomes), which can prove highly effective for planning and evaluating the impact of 'voice of the victim' practices. Such approaches can help facilitate strategic alignment, bring clarity to goals, and identify causal relationships between actions and impact. As a result, they can help organisations articulate how a practice will lead to the desired outcomes and ultimately make a positive difference (Asmussen, Brims & McBride, 2019).

What is the impact on victim-survivors?

This project was concerned with the impact of 'voice of the victim' practices on both police services and victim-survivors. Although the interviews were primarily carried out with police personnel, they identified a range of positive outcomes for victim-survivors and those with lived experience. This was most evident in collaborative practices, particularly youth engagement practices and experts by experience panels. Some practices produced case studies, however, there was little indication that outcomes were being captured systematically and this information would largely fall under Level One and Level Two evidence. Participants described improved outcomes for young people and those with lived experience around education and employment, with people gaining new qualifications or finding paid work.

> "One of our lived experience advisors ended up getting a job as a lived experience advisor through one of our local authorities, they've got trauma informed work."
> Staff from partner agency [participant 29]

Wellbeing outcomes were also cited for victim-survivors, such as improved wellbeing, confidence, and resilience, gaining new friends and positive role models. Some 'voice of the victim' practices provided an opportunity for those with previous criminal justice experience to **"turn their lives around"** by giving them valuable experience that can help them gain employment. By working with vulnerable young people, some of the practices were noted to be able to help keep young people safe and support them to make positive choices in their lives.

“But you think whilst we keep her here with us that’s one day that we’re keeping her safe, isn’t it? We’ve got some really challenging young people with some really difficult lives that we’re supporting.”
Police personnel [participant 50]

One participant with lived experience explained that working co-productively with the police acted as a **“healing process”** to help them recover from previous traumatic experiences with the police. Working closely as a critical friend with police personnel also reversed deeply engrained negative perceptions they held, as the positive experience helped restore their long-lost trust, confidence, and respect for the police.

“I think being able to like kind of put myself next to the police and work alongside them in certain projects has kind of taken that trauma off me a little bit, and I think obviously there’s going to be people with way worse trauma than me, they’ve been beaten up by police officers and whatnot. And I think if they could go through a similar process and realise that: ‘OK, the people that were wrong with me, [...] they’re not representative of the entire force’, I think that would be very helpful.”
Person with lived experience [participant 51]

Considerations for practice

- Facilitators of ‘voice of the victim’ practices could consider employing Theory of Change or Logic Model approaches to inform decision making regarding future actions, resources, risks and intended effects (or outcomes).
- It is important for ‘voice of the victim’ practice facilitators and forces to remain consistently sensitive and transparent around what actions are feasible with the available resources, to manage expectations of those providing their voice.
- Forces should consider promoting more transparency and reporting on actions taken as a result of feedback, such as “you said, we did’ approaches for practices that inform service provision. In doing so, this can improve trust and confidence, and encourage future engagement.
- Forces could consider strategies to map changes that take place in response to feedback, and objectively measure the impact of these changes on the force, service users and perceptions from the general public.
- It is important for the relevant police personnel to understand the potential repercussions (for victim-survivors, the force, and themselves) if they do not apply learning from feedback to their day-to-day practice. Equally, it is important for police personnel to be able to objectively see the positive impact that applying learning from feedback can have.
- Personnel could consider how to improve the level of evidence that they collect around the impact of ‘voice of the victim’ practices, and look at undertaking regular evaluations of practices to ensure they are fit for purpose and do not **“fall by the wayside”**.
- To achieve long-lasting impact, some ‘voice of the victim’ practices may need to be repeated and embedded in everyday policing practice.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

This chapter concludes the report by drawing together some of the cross-cutting themes identified through the research. It also draws together the considerations for practice outlined at the end of each chapter.

Key themes

Some of the key themes from this project and the VKPP's other research project, 'Voice of the Victim in Investigations and Safeguarding', have been captured by illustrator Jenny Leonard in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Key themes from 'voice of the victim' primary research projects

Six key findings from this research are discussed in Table 8.

Table 8: 'Voice of the victim' in police service design key research findings

Victim-survivor engagement is a key component of rebuilding trust and confidence in policing.
Trust and confidence in the police has diminished in recent years, particularly among some groups. This research has identified engagement practices that have the potential to start to rebuild that trust. In particular, collaborative approaches to victim-survivor engagement, such as co-production, help to break down barriers and foster communication. These approaches enable police personnel and those with lived experience to learn more about each other and to **"humanise"** the other, challenging stereotypes and increasing understanding. Collaborative approaches were also seen as creating **"young ambassadors"** for the police, thereby improving police-community relations beyond the boundaries of the 'voice of the victim' practice itself. Crucially, collaborative approaches demonstrate engagement with victim-survivors throughout the life of the practice, including communicating findings and decision making. Where possible, victim-survivors should be engaged throughout all stages of the process to ensure that each step can meet the needs of all parties, and that work is safe and ethical. Involving victim-survivors also demonstrates that their voices can be meaningfully heard, but this needs to be done consistently.
Appropriate governance structures can help support 'voice of the victim' practices and protect them from change and flux within services.
For victim-survivor engagement to be effective, the different stages of the process need to be considered as a whole and be clearly embedded within forces. Without this consideration there is a risk that 'voice of the victim' practices may **"disappear"**, information may not be analysed, or changes may not be actioned. The findings have shown that 'voice of the victim' practices can be vulnerable to internal factors — such as changes in personnel, and external factors — such as the funding landscape, new thematic areas, Covid-19 and media accounts of police failings. These were all perceived by participants to have an impact on the success or continuation of practices. Linking 'voice of the victim' practices to key priorities and targets, embedding them within existing policies and practices, and ensuring that findings are heard by senior stakeholders, can help ensure that 'voices' do not get lost following changes within or external to forces. A key component of this is determining where such practices sit within forces, and determining the personnel and teams who will be responsible for delivery. These factors need to be considered during practice inception and are an important part of planning. Theory of Change or Logic Models can provide a framework to help forces consider the full context of engagement, including inputs, outputs and potential impact.
Effective 'voice of the victim' practices demonstrated a shift in focus from how practices can benefit services to how practices can also benefit those with lived experience.
'Voice of the victim' practices that were more collaborative with higher levels of participation were often described as **"victim-led"** or **"youth-led"**. These practices often involved some elements of co-production, such as helping to design training packages and being part of discussions for change. The practices also demonstrated a shift in thinking from how engagement can benefit services to how engagement can also benefit victim-survivors and young people. This reciprocal outlook can help to avoid the potentially exploitative or tokenistic approach to engagement that can further damage relationships between those with lived experience and those who deliver services. This shift in focus was more evident in third sector organisations and youth engagement practices. In these practices, having a 'voice' extended beyond sharing an experience to being involved in the processes that determine how voices are listened to, understood and acted upon.

Proactive approaches to developing 'voice of the victim' practices and to service development are more effective than working reactively.
Participants highlighted how better engagement with communities, victim-survivors and stakeholders can lead to better intelligence about the needs of vulnerable people. This in turn can lead to proactively developing practices and services that meet these needs, mitigating against the risk of service failure. Yet the findings highlighted how 'voice of the victim' practices were often initiated in response to external pressures and failings. Similarly, service changes were sometimes implemented reactively rather than proactively, in response to current issues. Furthermore, some practices were not designed to bring about wider systemic change but to respond to individuals with short-term immediate actions. While this can be the result of dealing with competing demands, forces could be using engagement practices to focus reactively on service recovery rather than proactively on service improvement. Where practices were proactive, forces often demonstrated the good practice highlighted above, in terms of effective planning, being embedded within governance structures and working collaboratively with victim-survivors.
Diversity within and across 'voice of the victim' practices can help to meet the diverse needs of victim-survivors.
Victim-survivors are a diverse group who will have different preferences for engagement at different times in their journey. Offering a range of methods for victim-survivors to share their perspectives (directly and indirectly, verbal and written, brief and ongoing) can help to ensure that anyone who wants to can find a way to share their experience. This enables police access to a wider range of perspectives and views, and offers victim-survivors choice and control in how they engage with police. Furthermore, findings may not represent all voices, so consistent feedback with diverse victim-survivor populations is important to continuously enhance knowledge of victim-survivors' experiences. Many participants were looking at ways to improve the accessibility of 'voice of the victim' practices and offer more flexibility, but this could sometimes be lacking in some practices. Importantly, forces were not always taking the necessary steps to ensure that some of the most vulnerable victim-survivors could contribute and were actively excluding them from practices. To work safely with victim-survivors and diverse groups, participants highlighted the importance of effective trauma-informed training that needs to be repeated regularly in order to sustain impact. Some youth engagement practices and third sector organisations offered 'train the trainer' training to young people and those with lived experience, enabling them to then train police personnel in how to work in a trauma-informed way.

Considerations for practice

One of the research questions for this project was what needs to be in place for 'voice of the victim' practices to be successful. Throughout the report each findings chapter has concluded by summarising some considerations for practice. These considerations highlight some of the key factors that participants revealed contributed to the success of practices, or the key factors that were sometimes lacking and needed to be addressed. They are not intended to be exhaustive or prescriptive for forces but offer suggestions for improving the effectiveness of 'voice of the victim' practices. Table 9 brings these considerations together.

Table 9: Summary of Considerations for practice

Planning 'voice of the victim' practices
• When developing practices relating to vulnerability, forces need to consider a range of sensitivities, including the safety of vulnerable victim-survivors. • Adaptation of some settings, such as multi-agency meetings, making them safe and appropriate for victim-survivors to attend, could help increase participation levels. • Governance is key in ensuring that the purpose of practices is clear, they are embedded within existing processes, and they respond to priorities, making them less vulnerable to staffing changes and interests. • Forces could consider developing roles specifically focused on participation or training to help staff develop the requisite skills to engage with victim-survivors. • Having procedures in place to deal with staff turnover, such as appropriate handovers, can mitigate against practices being impacted by staffing changes. • Achieving 'buy-in' from other agencies at an early stage can help to ensure that practices meet the needs of stakeholders, and help disseminate findings and drive change.

Engaging with victim-survivors

- It is important to enable multiple ways for victim-survivors to provide feedback, both within and across practices.
- Practices need to be culturally competent, and consideration should be given to the diversity and backgrounds of those collecting feedback.
- Police personnel should aim to utilise sensitive and up-to-date terminology, such as 'seldom heard' groups rather than 'hard to reach'. The former does not imply that these groups are responsible for reduced engagement.
- The College of Policing's Race Action Plan outlines an approach for engaging with people from Black ethnicities that could serve as a model for engaging with a range of groups, including vulnerable victim-survivors.
- Practices that entail the police working more collaboratively with victims and communities can help to rebuild trust and confidence, but are more resource intensive than consultation and feedback.
- Effective skills and training are needed to work with victim-survivors. "Skilling up" police can be done in collaboration with partner agencies.
- Having senior police personnel present during engagement practices can be a motivating factor for some victim-survivors to share their experiences. Conversely, for other practices, independence may be preferable for victim-survivors and can help ensure the validity of the process.
- Measures can be taken to help break down barriers. Examples provided include police not wearing uniform and ensuring cameras are turned on during online meetings. Conversations with victim-survivors about what is needed to ensure their safety and comfort can help establish what steps need to be taken.

Listening to feedback

- It is important for personnel responsible for 'voice of the victim' practices to consider how and where feedback should be recorded to ensure important detail from victim-survivors does not get lost.
- Following GDPR requirements, forces could consider establishing internal databases for all victim-survivor feedback and guidelines that cover how data should be stored, accessed and retained.
- Where formal or statutory guidance is lacking, facilitators of practices may consider developing their own guidance for protocol to follow when participants request to retract their data.
- For more formal, data-driven practices, forces could consider employing partner agency personnel to analyse data. This would ensure independence, better analytical capability, and more capacity for internal staff currently conducting analyses.
- Forces could make more effective use of qualitative data obtained from practices, for example by commissioning or working with partner agencies or researchers familiar with such analyses to train or develop guidance for in-house analysts to enhance their expertise.
- Forces may wish to review their data collection to ensure that all data being collected is analysed and fit for purpose.
- It is important to ensure that there is transparency (both with victim-survivors and personnel facilitating practices) regarding how data is being used for analytical purposes.
- Forces could consider how complaints data is being used to identify systemic issues in service delivery which may require action.
- Triangulating practice findings with other data can help to strengthen the evidence-base.
- It is important for forces to consider how to include individuals with lived experience and/or victim-survivors in meetings where findings of practices are discussed.
- Forces could consider easily accessible formats for disseminating practice findings to the relevant police personnel.
- Forces may want to consider linking feedback to performance measures more robustly.
- Forces could consider formulating process maps outlining which meetings and groups specific feedback will be disseminated to, and for what purpose.
- It is important for forces to have effective strategies for disseminating findings from practices to frontline personnel who can use them to help drive systemic change, and support strategic vision with operational delivery.

Creating change

- Facilitators of practices could consider employing Theory of Change or Logic Model approaches to inform decision making regarding future actions, resources, risks and intended effects (or outcomes).
- It is important for practice facilitators and forces to remain consistently sensitive and transparent around what actions are feasible with the available resources, to manage expectations of those providing their voice.
- Forces should consider promoting more transparency and reporting on actions taken as a result of feedback, such as "you said, we did' approaches for practices that inform service provision. In doing so, this can improve trust and confidence, and encourage future engagement.
- Forces could consider strategies to map changes that take place in response to feedback, and objectively measure the impact of these changes on the force, service users and perceptions from the general public.
- It is important for the relevant police personnel to understand the potential repercussions (for victim-survivors, the force, and themselves) if they do not apply learning from feedback to their day-to-day practice. Equally, it is important for police personnel to be able to objectively see the positive impact that applying learning from feedback can have.
- Personnel could consider how to improve the level of evidence that they collect around the impact of 'voice of the victim' practices, and look at undertaking regular evaluations of practices to ensure they are fit for purpose and do not "**fall by the wayside"**.
- To achieve long-lasting impact, it is imperative for practices to be repeated and embedded in everyday policing practice.

Appendix One: Glossary of terms

We use the following terms in this report, but we recognise that terminology is constantly evolving.

Term	Meaning
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers.
Areas of business	The specific functional or operational domains within a police organisation. These areas encompass various aspects of police work based on the functions they perform. Examples may include Community Engagement, Patrol and Response or Investigations. These may also be further broken down relative to different types of crime they apply to, such as (though not limited to) domestic abuse, child abuse or hate crime.
BWV	Body Worn Video.
Child	A person under the age of 18.
College of Policing	A professional body established in 2012 for the police in England and Wales.
Co-production	In this report we have used the Involve definition of Co-production (**Involve, 2018b**): “The term Co-production refers to a way of working where service providers and users work together to reach a collective outcome. The approach is value-driven and built on the principle that those who are affected by a service are best placed to help design it.”
Correlation	A statistical measure for exploring whether there is a relationship between two variables.
Criminal justice system	The system which investigates, prosecutes, sentences and monitors individuals who are suspected or convicted of committing a criminal offence. This also encompasses institutions responsible for imprisonment, probation and sentences served in the community.
CRIS	Crime Reporting Information System.

Term	Meaning
Critical Friend	An individual or group of individuals who are encouraging and supportive, but who also provide honest and often candid feedback that may be uncomfortable or difficult to hear. In policing contexts, a critical friend is someone who agrees to speak truthfully, but constructively, about weaknesses, problems, and emotionally charged issues relevant to policing.
Descriptive statistics	Descriptive statistics is a way of quantitatively describing or summarising the basic features of a dataset.
Disaggregating data	Disaggregating data refers to breaking down information into smaller subpopulations. For example, a victim satisfaction survey may collect extensive data on victims' demographic information. Disaggregating such data allows analysts to look at responses from specific populations in isolation from the rest of the dataset, such as (though not limited to) victims of a particular crime type, victims with a specific gender identify, or both combined.
Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)	A DBS check is used by employers to check the criminal records of potential employees. These checks can be standard or enhanced checks, depending on the role.
Domestic abuse	Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional. 'Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim (Home Office, 2013).
EDI	Equity, diversity and inclusion.
Equity	Taking differences into account to ensure a fair process and ultimately, a fair outcome. It recognises that some groups are disadvantaged, 'seldom heard', and marginalised.
Ethnicity	Refers to aspects of culture that are shared, such as language, clothing and dress, religion, and foods, and influence a way of life.

Term	Meaning
Experts by experience panels	Panels comprised of people with lived experience often utilised by third sector organisations for providing feedback and input into research, policy and practice.
Focus groups	A small group of people that are brought together to discuss a particular topic. Focus group discussions are usually facilitated.
Gatekeeper	Gatekeepers are essential mediators for accessing study settings and participants within social research. They may be persons within organisations who have the power to grant or withhold access to people or situations during research into organisations.
GDPR	The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is the toughest privacy and security law in the world. Though it was drafted and passed by the European Union (EU), it imposes obligations onto organisations anywhere, so long as they target or collect data related to people in the EU.
Good practice	Describes the activities carried out by a force that have been shown to make it work more efficiently and effectively in certain aspects of policing.
Hate crime	The Police and Criminal Prosecution Service define hate crime as: "Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice, based on a person's disability or perceived disability; race or perceived race; or religion or perceived religion; or sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation or transgender identity or perceived transgender identity" (Crown Prosecution Service, 2017).
IAGs	Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) are a network of individuals independent of the Police who meet to advise and offer ideas to police forces on a wide range of activities relating to local policing.
Information Commissioner's Officer (ICO)	An independent body that supports information rights in the United Kingdom.
Innovative practice	Describes new ways of working that may not have been formally evaluated but that have the potential to make the force work more efficiently and effectively in certain aspects of policing.
IOPC	Independent Office for Police Conduct.
ISVA	Independent Sexual Violence Adviser.

Term	Meaning
Leaders Unlocked	An initiative that enables young people and underrepresented groups to have a stronger voice on the issues that affect their lives. They help organisations across education, health, policing, and criminal justice sectors to involve the people who matter and shape decision-making for the better.
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex, queer, questioning, ace.
Likert scales	Likert scales are linear rating systems designed to measure people's attitudes, opinions, or perceptions. Commonly used in surveys and questionnaires, the respondent is asked to choose from a range of possible responses to specific questions or statements. Across victim satisfaction survey questions, responses typically included "extremely satisfied", "dissatisfied", "neither dissatisfied nor satisfied", "satisfied" or "extremely satisfied".
Lived experience	Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement of everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.
Logic Models	A model or picture that represents how an intervention or practice will lead to its outcomes (College of Policing, n.d.).
Minoritised groups	Individuals and populations, including numerical majorities, whose collective cultural, economic, political, and social power has been eroded through the targeting of identity in active processes that sustain structures of hegemony (Selvarajah et al, 2020).
Needs Assessment	Within the context of report, needs assessments are commissioned assessments of need and demand for victim services to establish an independent assessment of current levels of delivery to victims, and understanding local need to inform subsequent plans for service delivery. This includes, though is not limited to, police forces within the territorial area(s) that the needs assessment is commissioned. The resulting report may be informed by a combination of desk-based research looking at local crime data, agency data and/or scientific literature, though can also extend to obtaining feedback from victim-survivors by means of surveys or interviews.
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council.
NVAP	National Vulnerability Action Plan.
NVivo	NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package that supports qualitative researchers with the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video, and image data, including (but not limited to) interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, and journal articles. (Kent State University, 2018).

Term	Meaning
OPCC	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
Participant(s)	Within the context of this report, 'participant(s)' refers to any individual(s) interviewed by the research team.
Participatory	Participatory means allowing people to take part in or become involved in an activity (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Within this report, practices are deemed to be more participatory if they involve a greater degree of collaboration, offer victim-survivors more control and choice over their participation, and enable more decision-making powers.
Partner agencies	Staff from OPPCs, local authorities or other statutory agencies.
PCCs	Police and Crime Commissioners.
PEEL	Police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy inspections introduced in 2014 and carried out by HMICFRS.
Personal data	According to the Information Commissioner's Office, personal data is information that relates to an identified or identifiable individual.
Qualitative data/research	Qualitative research uses words and themes, rather than numbers, to answer research questions. Qualitative social research seeks to observe and understand social situations without measuring them using numbers, for example, through interviews with people involved.
Quantitative data/ research	Numerical data that can be counted or measured.
RASSO	Rape and serious sexual offences.
Raw data	Data that has been collected and stored but not processed.
Serious crimes	According to the Serious Crimes Act 2015, serious and organised crime includes drug trafficking, human trafficking, organised illegal immigration, child sexual exploitation, high value fraud and other financial crime, counterfeiting, organised acquisitive crime and cyber crime (Home Office, 2015).
Retraumatisation	When an individual relives stress reactions experienced as a result of a traumatic event, when faced with a new, similar incident, or when placed in a situation where they are required to recall the traumatic event.
Seldom heard groups	Underrepresented people who use or might potentially use police services and who are less likely to be heard by these service professionals and decision-makers.
Semi-structured interviews	Qualitative research method using a pre-determined set of open questions.

Term	Meaning
Sensitive information	Data that must be protected from unauthorized access to safeguard the privacy or security of an individual or organization.
Service design	The creation or enhancement of the ways the police provide a service to the public (e.g. changing operational tools, training, practices, policies, strategies & commissioning).
Service recovery	The process whereby complaints are dealt with there and then by way of an explanation of how the police responded and why, to the satisfaction of the complainant.
Sexual violence	Any kind of sexual activity or act that takes place that is unwanted and without consent.
Single Point of Contact (SPOCs)	A person or a department in-force serving as the coordinator or focal point of information concerning an activity or practice.
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, used to analyse quantitative data.
Stakeholders	An individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organisation.
Statutory institutions	Institutions set up by law to carry out public activities, for example the police and children's social care services.
Structural inequality	A condition where one category of people are attributed an unequal status in relation to other categories of people. This relationship is perpetuated and reinforced by a confluence of unequal relations in roles, functions, decisions, rights, and opportunities (UNESCWA, 2015). Victims affected by structural inequalities can face greater barriers to making their voices heard, and these effects can be compounded when individuals belong to multiple, intersecting marginalised groups.
Tasers	A hand-held electronic device only used by police officers who have received specialised training and in situations where they are dealing with violent or dangerous individuals. The taser uses an electrical current to temporarily incapacitate a person.
Task and finish groups	A group established to review a particular aspect of service, policy or practice.
Thematics	The various areas of focus or key themes that guide policing strategies and priorities in the UK. These often reflect the challenges and priorities identified by law enforcement agencies and the government. Examples of thematics in policing include Adults at risk, Child abuse, Domestic abuse, Modern slavery and Female genital mutilation.

Term	Meaning
Third sector organisations	Non-governmental and non-profit organisations that undertake activities for social benefit, including charities.
Theory of Change	A Theory of Change explains how the activities undertaken by an intervention (such as a project, program or policy) contribute to a chain of results that lead to the intended or observed impacts (Rogers, 2014).
Trend analyses	Using data to identify patterns over time.
Triangulation	The process of using several methods or data sources to increase the credibility or validity of findings (Noble and Heale, 2019).
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls.
Victims	Those who have been subject to, or have witnessed, a crime. The term victim is inclusive of all nine protected characteristics: age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity (Equality Act, 2010).
Victims Code/Victim Code of Practice	The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime is a statutory guidance that sets out the minimum level of service that victims should receive from the criminal justice system.
Victim-survivors	Those who have been subject to, or have witnessed, a vulnerability related crime. The term represents a continuum upon which people may find themselves, in recognition of the fact that people with lived experience of victimisation may prefer one term or the other, and each journey from 'victim' to 'survivor' is unique.
VKPP	Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme.
VKPP Research Expert Reference Group	A group of experts within the policing sector, comprised of academics and practitioners, who offer guidance and feedback to the research strand within the VKPP.
Voice	The term 'voice' covers both the verbal articulation of wishes, experiences, and needs, alongside non-verbal indicators and features of the individuals' context, environment, and relationships. Voice not only means capturing and recording wishes, experiences, and needs, but also listening to and considering voices to influence and inform decision making.

Term	Meaning
'Voice of the victim' / victims' voices	The perspective of individuals subjected to, or witnesses of, crime. In order to deliver authentic policing (and other agency) services, it is important that all individuals are listened to and their description of experiences taken seriously. By listening to, considering, and recording the 'voice of the victim', police can develop a better understanding of individual's lived experiences. In turn, this can be used to help shape improvements of services delivered, criminal justice outcomes and their experiences of criminal justice processes, for those at their most vulnerable.
'Voice of the victim' practice	Practices that draw on "the perspective of individuals subjected to, or witnesses of, crime" to improve police services.
Volunteer Police Cadets	The Volunteer Police Cadets is the nationally recognised police uniformed youth group throughout England & Wales (National Volunteer Police Cadets, n.d.).
VPP	Violence and Public Protection.
Vulnerable	The College of Policing (2021b) states that: "A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation." Within this report we also recognise the intersectionality of vulnerabilities and the wider structural issues that result in inequalities and can lead to vulnerability.
Vulnerability-related crimes	Crime types that are recognised as having barriers to reporting, require specialist support, are sensitive and complex in their nature and often have a long term psychological and emotional effect on the victims.
Youth Commission	The Youth Commission on Police and Crime provides a platform for young people to influence the future of policing and crime prevention in their local areas (Leaders Unlocked, n.d.).
Youth engagement groups	Practices aimed at engagement with young people under-25.

Appendix Two: Methodology

The research project consisted of three main activities:

1. A documentary review
2. Local practice mapping
3. National practice mapping

Documentary review

The documentary review was led by the four overarching research questions (detailed in the Project aims section of the report, page 14).

The reviewed documentation held by the VKPP included NVAP benchmarking returns; responses to calls for practice; and data supplied during peer-review:

- NVAP benchmarking returns from 2019 and 2021 included each force in England and Wales and every report relating to the NVAP action of 'voice of the victim' was analysed.
- VKPP Calls for Practice encouraged forces to submit promising/emerging practice relating to vulnerability or violent crime in 2020, and the prevention of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in 2021. Each submission during the Call for Practice during this time-period was analysed within the scope of the review.
- Peer review data is supplied by forces when they undertake a peer review with the VKKP and was analysed for any material relevant to 'voice of the victim' practices.

In addition, publicly available material including force and PCC websites (including social media accounts), and relevant HMICFRS inspection reports were analysed, and relevant data extracted. This was undertaken via a search strategy that included search strings and search paths to capture ways that victim-survivor voices inform service provision, and additional systematic searches. Customised search strings were also created for Google's search engine to look for relevant practices on other websites.

Relevant data was extracted and coded within an Excel spreadsheet. This allowed for development of a data collection tool that analysed the following: the method used to gather victim feedback; the crimes and vulnerabilities the feedback related to; challenges and barriers of methods; processes for communication of findings; resulting changes; and measures and evidence of impact. From this review, an initial picture of the range of ways forces across the country incorporate the 'voice of the victim' in service design was established.

Local and national practice mapping

Selection criteria

For the local practice mapping, five forces were selected for in-depth analysis of the ways in which victims' voices are incorporated in local service design. A decision was made to undertake a more detailed review across a small sample of forces to gather a comprehensive picture in these areas, rather than attempting to capture a less detailed overview across all forces. The forces chosen were not representative but were selected to ensure some diversity of key characteristics in relation to the following (present at the time of selection in January 2022):

- Urban and rural areas
- Geographic regions of England and Wales
- Crime rates
- PEEL scores (The PEEL inspection programme is an assessment of the effectiveness, efficiency, and legitimacy of police forces in England and Wales)
- Ethnic and gender characteristics of police personnel
- Range of 'voice of the victim' practices that include vulnerable and marginalised victims, according to the documentary review findings.

Following selection, VKPP single point of contacts (SPOCs) engaged with force SPOCs to discuss the research and gain consent from senior personnel within the force to participate in the project.

For the national practice mapping, individuals were recruited from national working groups that sit within the National Police Chief Council's (NPCC) Violence and Public Protection Portfolio, and from national organisations that represent victim-survivors. Staff within the VKPP were able to provide some initial contacts and internet searches also identified potential participants.

Data collection tools

For the local practice mapping, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to support the research team in conducting the interviews. A semi-structured approach was chosen as it was considered to provide flexibility and offered further opportunities to explore the practices in more detail. The guide included an introduction to remind participants of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw, and to confirm that they consented to the interview being audio and visually recorded. It also included a set of questions for the interviews which was derived from the data collection tool utilised for the documentary review and the research questions. The interview guide covered the following:

- How the practice was set up
- Whose voice the practice captured
- Seeking and collecting the 'voice of the victim'
- Recording and analysing the 'voice of the victim'
- How the 'voice of the victim' is communicated and to whom
- Outputs and changes made to services
- The impact of the practice

The research team shared the developed question set with senior members of the VKPP, along with members of the team who had a policing background to ensure that the question set was appropriate and easily understood. Amendments were made following feedback, and the question set finalised. Following the initial interviews, the interview schedule was further refined. The schedule was also adapted if required depending on the practice and the personnel being interviewed.

For the national practice mapping, the semi-structured interview guide was further adapted to create three separate versions: for police personnel, staff working within third sector organisations, and victim-survivors. These three guides were amended following feedback from senior staff within the VKPP and from the Research Institute Ethics Panel before being finalised. As with the local mapping the schedules were adapted if required depending on the practice and interviewee. The interviews allowed for a more detailed exploration of the varying practices pertaining to 'voice of the victim' within the national landscape. Interviews with police personnel and third sector staff explored the following:

- Background to the interviewee and the organisation
- Methods and practices of engaging with 'voice of the victim'
- Benefits and challenges of engaging with 'voice of the victim'
- Outputs
- The impact of 'voice of the victim' engagement
- Improvements that can be made

Interviews with victim-survivors explored the following:

- About the interviewee
- Involvement with working group/organisation (how that came about, what involvement entailed, etc)
- Contribution to work [within working group/organisation]
- Hopes for involvement outcomes
- Benefits of engaging with victim-survivors
- Challenges of engaging with and involving victim-survivors
- Personal assessments of being heard and listened to
- Perceptions of changes following interviewee involvement [within working group/organisation]
- Support received
- Lessons learnt

Copies of the interview schedules are available from the authors on request.

Data collection

A snowball sampling approach was adopted for both the local and national mapping. The use of snowball sampling is commonly employed in qualitative research (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). Snowball sampling allows for a diversity of perspectives to be gathered and this knowledge is particularly valuable for in-depth and contextualised exploration of a phenomenon (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). The present research examined different victim-survivor feedback practices (how they are used, work and relate to one another) within forces and, as such this sampling method was deemed fitting as it allowed for the gaining of access and knowledge of other practices [in force] that the team may not have been able to otherwise. Participation for all participants was voluntary.

For the local mapping, SPOCs for the forces put the research team in touch with relevant personnel within the force for an initial Teams meeting to discuss the aims of the project and identify relevant practices. Snowball sampling was then used to identify further relevant practices and potential contacts within the force for interviews. As potential participants were selected according to their job role, the sample will be biased towards those whose work tended to be focused on improving the victim experience.

The research team sent potential participants an email detailing the research and how it linked to their work/practice. The email included a three-page project description detailing the project background, scope and aims and research plan, including all project phases. It also included an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the process of participation, risks and benefits associated with participation, withdrawal options, key terminology utilised in the project/in the interview questions, and an example Logic Model. The content of the information sheet and an agreement to participate in response to the invitation email allowed for informed consent (Oates et al, 2021). Prior to the interview, researchers also went through the information sheet with the participant to ascertain understanding and agreement to all aspects of the interview.

For the national mapping, potential participants were sent an email detailing the research opportunity and how it linked to their work/practice, a three-page project description and the information sheet. Contacts who agreed to be interviewed were asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview, covering the purpose of the interview, how their information would be used and how to withdraw their consent. At the end of the interview, participants were provided with a debrief form, disseminated by email. The form consisted of resources they could make use of if they felt affected by the study in any way. These resources included, **Mind**, **The Samaritans** and **Victim Support**. There were two debrief forms - one for participants from organisations and one for victim-survivors. The project interviewers had access to clinical supervision and the Employee Assistance Programme if needed.

For both the local and national mapping, semi-structured interviews were conducted via **Microsoft Teams**, a business communication platform that allows for video conferencing, remote meetings, and calls, alongside one-to-one and group chats. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and were audio and visually recorded using Teams.

Sample

The final sample comprised 107 interviews with 109 participants (Table 10). Some people were interviewed more than once if more detail was required, and some interviews had more than one participant. Multiple interviews were at times conducted with one participant, to ascertain detailed understanding of a practice or understanding of multiple practices that an interviewee was knowledgeable about.

Table 10: Final sample for 'voice of the victim' in Police Service Design

		Number of interviews	Number of participants
Local practice mapping	Force One	21	18
	Force Two	16	18
	Force Three	17	18
	Force Four	22	23
	Force Five	14	14
National practice mapping	Police personnel	8	8
	National working groups / relevant organisations	5	5
	Individuals with lived experience	4	5
	Total	**107**	**109**

Although the project initially aimed to interview police personnel about all 'voice of the victim' practices within the five forces, time constraints and resourcing meant that the number of interviews had to be capped at a maximum of 25 for larger forces and 20 for smaller forces.

For the local mapping, participants came from a range of roles, including personnel working in strategy, commissioning, analysis and communications. For the national mapping, participants came primarily from national working groups and staff working in policy and research roles within organisations representing victim-survivors. Five participants with lived experience were recruited, including two persons under the age of 25 years. Young people were recruited in order to provide their perspective on feeding back to the police, as this is a group police reportedly find difficult to engage. Many youth working groups and practices involving young people tend to run to the age of 25. Some agencies use under-18 and 18-25 age groups usually in response to funding or legislation. It is also related to the age banding used within local authorities whose duty of care for children and young people is up to 25 where the young person is vulnerable.

Analysis

All interviews were automatically transcribed using Teams and were then manually cleaned. Transcription was completed by the research team and other professionals within the VKPP, with all transcribers provided with written instructions outlining the process.

Following cleaning, all transcripts were imported into NVivo 12 for analysis. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package that supports qualitative researchers with the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video, and image data, including (but not limited to) interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, and journal articles.

A coding framework was developed based on the research questions and the themes emerging from the early interviews. A total of five researchers (four research assistants, one research fellow) used Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is defined as a systematic search of the dataset to find, and report repeated patterns (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This approach is deemed as one of the most appropriate methods when seeking an understanding of experiences, thoughts, or behaviours and is considered especially useful for novel qualitative research (Braun & Clark, 2012). The thematic analytical framework took an inductive approach that followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Firstly, the coders familiarised themselves with the data and generated initial codes. The coders then met to discuss the codes and identify themes within the data; this resulted in the generation of secondary codes and, thus a theoretical and epistemological coding framework.

To ensure that coding was being carried out consistently, a coding comparison was conducted in NVivo. The coding comparison was used to compare the degree of coding agreement between the five users, using percentage agreement. Percentage agreement is the percentage of characters on which the users agreed should be coded to a specific code. Analysis showed that 94 percent of codes had agreement of 80 percent or more (Miles and Huberman suggest a standard of 80 percent agreement on 95 percent of codes as an accepted threshold, (in O'Connor and Joffe, 2020). Where agreement fell below 80 percent, the team discussed the discrepancies and amended the coding guide accordingly.

Ethics

The project adopted a mapping approach in terms of identifying 'voice of the victim' practices within police services and national working groups. A decision was made that ethical approval was not required for this aspect of the work, although we still followed ethical approaches in line with good practice within research (UK Research Integrity Office, 2023).

For the aspect of the project that entailed interviewing victim-survivors, the research team submitted a request for ethical approval to the Research Institute Ethics Panel within the Institute for Applied Social Research at the University of Bedfordshire on the 19 of July 2022. This included all materials used for the national mapping. Ethical approval with minor advice was granted on the 15 September 2022.

Strengths and Limitations

This research primarily interviewed police personnel and partner agencies, focusing on the policing perspective, although it has been informed by previous research and consultation with victims on their interactions with the police. However, to consider the findings from the perspectives of those with lived experience the project team held a consultation with young people from **Leaders Unlocked** (the young people were not necessarily victims) (see Glossary on page 90). Please see Appendix Three for the findings from the consultation.

The language and terminology used within the findings is reflective of the individuals who took part and does not reflect victim-survivors' perspectives and experiences of practices. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was completed towards the end of the project to consider the impact of the project and its outputs on those with protected characteristics and to ensure that any outputs were accessible to a diverse audience.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants, as this method allowed the researchers to identify and recruit participants who may otherwise have been difficult to locate (see Appendix Two). However, there is a likelihood that some potential participants were not identified, and the mapping outlined here is unlikely to be comprehensive. This method also led to the recruitment of a few participants who did not work on victim engagement and service design. However, this was mitigated by the early documentary review that identified existing practices and policies employed by individual forces relating to their use of the victim-survivor voices in service design (Tyrer & Heyman, 2018). Whilst the early documentary review did not always match findings determined during interviews, it was largely consistent. Participation was also dependent upon availability and willingness to take part, which may further bias the sample (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018).

It should also be noted that practices are subject to change or are discontinued and new practices emerge. For example, details on some practices identified during the documentary review did not always match findings from the interviews, which may reflect practice changes or may reflect inconsistent accounts of the practice. This report reflects the practices that were identified during the fieldwork period March to December 2022.

Local mapping was conducted in five forces (of 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales) and therefore the findings may not be generalisable nor reflective of the work being undertaken across all police forces. The project focused on gaining an-depth picture of practices within these five forces that varied according to a range of criteria. Additionally, the three phases of the research allow for triangulation of data and understanding of a local and national picture.

Impact of the context in which the research was undertaken

We recognise that this project was conducted at a time of intense scrutiny of the police, and this may have had some bearing on the present findings. While we acknowledge the many committed, dedicated, and professional police officers and staff in service, recent and disturbing high-profile cases reveal a concerning culture amongst some police personnel which are damaging to public confidence and trust (Mynenko & Ditcham, 2022). Cases include the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer; police misconduct in relation to Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman; the sentencing of a serving police officer, David Carrick, for 85 significant offences, including rape; findings from Operation Hotton by the IOPC relating to bullying, sexist, racist and discriminatory and misogynistic conduct of officers at Charing Cross (among others), (Independent Office for Police Conduct, 2022); and findings from the Casey Review relating to MET conduct (Casey, 2023). These cases are recent, extreme, and shocking, and as such are firmly embedded within the public and political consciousness. At a time when public and victim trust and confidence within policing is at an all-time low, the present research is timely given its recognition and due significance upon victims and their voices within the shaping of police service design. This work continues to be important given the need to shape victim-centred services and for proactive police efforts to hear and act with victim-centred approaches.

Appendix Three: Findings from Leaders Unlocked consultation

The research team held an online consultation with young people from **Leaders Unlocked** on the findings that were emerging from the study. This consultation helped the research team to consider the findings from the perspectives of those with lived experience and this was used to shape the considerations for practice. The young people were presented with several key interview findings. They were then asked to provide guidance on what feedback they felt should be made to policing and/or what they would like the police to know on the basis of these findings. This feedback should be utilised by forces when they consider how to improve engagement with children and young people, particularly in relation to working safely, gaining consent, gathering feedback directly, and communicating changes and actions. Table 11 outlines the questions young people were asked and the responses they provided.

Table 11: Consultation with Leaders Unlocked

Findings and questions	Response from young people
Forces worry that engaging with people who have been traumatised could trigger them. It can also be hard to gain consent for some young people. a) How can police work safely with young people? b) How can police gain young people's consent?	• The young people acknowledged that children and young people (CYP) get nervous about talking to the police. Rapport building before gaining consent was cited as effective in putting the child/young person at ease and ensuring safe engagement. This included: - use of icebreakers - non-threatening ways of starting the conversation - engaging on things of interest to the CYP - engaging on things in common with the CYP • The group spoke about the importance of developing a relationship with one key officer in aiding safe working/engagement with CYP. • The young people suggested that gaining consent for someone under-16 years old via a parent should be considered on an individualised basis. Personnel should consider gaining consent in this format depending on the seriousness of the situation (is the parent a risk factor to the CYP?). Alternative ways suggested to gain consent from the child when the parent was a risk factor were gaining consent from a secondary guardian, a family member, or a trusted member of the CYP's school (i.e. teacher). • If police do seek consent from parents/carers on behalf of the child, it is important that personnel still take the time to engage with the CYP and provide them with clear information so that they [the CYP] know what consent pertains to. This ensures that CYP have agency in decision-making and their voice is captured.

Findings and questions	Response from young people
Who is present during engagement can influence whether people want to be involved and what they say. a) Do you think it is better if young people feedback directly to police or through someone independent? b) When police engage directly with young people, how can they do this better?	• The young people cited that providing feedback directly and through someone independent should be options made available to victims/victim-survivors. Both options should be made available to CYP and CYP select which of the options is more suitable for them. • The idea of agency, being a part of decision making, and placing CYP at the forefront of every conversation was noted. In that, it was cited that personnel should speak to CYP and ask them how they want to feedback, make CYP aware of the available options, and keep them [CYP] informed throughout the feedback process.
Forces do not always feed back changes that have been made following engagement, so people don't know if they have been listened to. a) Following feedback, how should police communicate what changes are made to young people?	• Young people recommended police utilise social media platforms to communicate changes, alongside official force/police websites. • Linking in with neighbourhood teams and schools (i.e., school liaison officers, emails to all schools in a force area) to have that local impact and communication of changes made was also noted. • The importance of providing feedback regarding changes was communicated—it acts as an "incentive" for young people to continue to engage/engage as they see that changes are being made following their feedback.

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