



SUSAN DUNGWORTH
NORTHUMBRIA
**POLICE & CRIME
COMMISSIONER**

Delivery of The Police & Crime Plan:

**Priority 6:
Victims and Justice**

August 2025

Improve awareness of the support available for victims through the Northumbria Victim and Witness Service, and ensure it is easily accessible.

Question 6

Where do you feel your priorities lie in relation to Victim Code of Practice Compliance?

The PEEL inspection identified that although the force closely monitors adherence to the Victims' Code, it needed to improve its' compliance and the recording of victims' wishes. I sought to understand what the current priorities are to ensure improvement is made.

- Northumbria Victim and Witness Service (NVWS) has made substantial progress in accessibility and victim support, notably through enhancements to the Victim Needs Assessment (VNA).
- There have been significantly improved referral rates to NVWS from 13% to a steady 25%, approaching the estimated ceiling of 30%.
- Improved awareness is a priority in relation to Victim Code of Practice compliance. This is supported by Service Manager visits across the force to ensure that the workforce is aware of what is available, and to enhance conversations with victims and witnesses. This is further supported by comprehensive online resources and guidance on the Force's intranet.
- Monitoring and automation are a priority and are being enhanced through Niche integration and performance dashboards.
- Victim Code of Practice compliance is tracked monthly with trends reviewed quarterly in the multi-agency LCJB Victim & Witness subgroup. This has assisted in priority being given to the following areas:
 - Right 3 - to be provided with information when reporting the crime: Compliance (70%) needs improvement. A priority is to enable Automation to address gaps, especially in Telephone Investigation Unit (TUI) managed cases where an officer in charge is not always identified.

- Right 6 - to be provided with information about the investigation and prosecution: Sustained improvement due to focused monitoring. Transition to Niche (a police records management system) will require continued oversight and it is a priority to introduce Supervisors' Dashboards.
- Right 7 - to make a Victim Personal Statement: Discrepancies in compliance data suggest survey misinterpretation. Manual checks show high compliance (98%+), but an automated process is being prioritised to negate the requirement for resource- intensive manual checking.
- Rights 8 & 9 - to be given information about the trial, trial process and your role as a witness and to be given information about the outcome of the case and any appeals: Historically high compliance, but risks of slippage due to NVWS caseload pressures and extended trial timelines.
- Resourcing challenges and court delays are impacting long-term case management and may affect compliance. Addressing this issue is a priority and NVWS is recruiting to address staffing gaps, aiming for full establishment by year-end.

This response demonstrates that the force knows where it needs to improve and that activity is being undertaken to ensure progress is made. As Victim Code of Practice features as a KPI, I will monitor progress regularly and we are already seeing improvements in some areas. I will continue to review this to ensure this continues.



Identify repeat victims and put in place safeguarding measures to protect them.

Question 7

What work is being undertaken to identify, understand and respond to repeat victims across all types of crime and ASB?

To be the victim of a crime or experience ASB is always an awful experience however, for those that are repeat victims, this is magnified. Whilst the PEEL inspection recognised that the force usually checks for vulnerable victims, it stated that the force doesn't always identify repeat victims. I wanted to understand what additional work is carried out to support repeat victims and reduce further risk of harm.

- For the 12 months to June 2025, the repeat victim rate is 15% which is consistent with the previous 12 months. The actual volume has reduced by 510 from 11,745 to 11,235.
- Northumbria Police have clear policy and procedure in relation to the identification and treatment of repeat victims.
- The following definition is used to identify repeat victims within crime and ASB investigations and incidents:
A person who suffers:
 - more than one crime or personally targeted anti-social behaviour (ASB) incident within a rolling three-month period; or
 - more than one burglary dwelling (including attempt) in a 12-month rolling period; or
 - a hate crime and one other crime or personally targeted ASB incident within a 12-month rolling period.
- The most appropriate resource is deployed or assigned to the incident and a Harm Reduction Notification (HRN) is generated.
- The responding/attending officer is responsible for addressing any immediate safeguarding needs and offering prevention advice when obtaining crime details. Repeat victims and locations are identified across a range of offences including ASB, domestic violence and fraud.
- Where a victim or area is being targeted for a specific reason, action should be taken to address this, and a

problem-solving approach adopted.

- Repeat victims are referred to the Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) to manage and implement harm reduction plans. A problem-solving approach is developed and appropriate activity undertaken.
- Multi-agency Safer Estates meetings are undertaken across each neighbourhood with decisions taken regarding which agency is the appropriate lead for each case or circumstance.
- Operation Aegis specifically identifies repeat domestic abuse victims who are allocated a neighbourhood single point of contact for continuity and consistency.
- The force has an Economic Crime Protect Officer who works closely with the National Economic Crime Victim Care Unit (NECVU) ensuring a focused, consistent, and targeted service is provided to victims of Fraud and Cybercrime. Victims receive bespoke care and advice based on their level of risk of loss or repeat victimisation.
- The Protect Officer engages with all victims who have suffered high harm frauds; namely Romance Fraud, Courier Fraud or those identified as part of the banking protocol. Fraud victims are also supported by NVWS. The force is planning to train PCSO's to become Fraud Ambassadors, allowing them to provide bespoke protect advice to victims of fraud.

It is clear from this response that the force has differing and appropriate responses to victims to reflect the nature of the crime, or ASB, to which they are victim. The current force system is unable to produce data relating to repeat victims of ASB. Once Niche is implemented within force in 2026, I would like to review the opportunities to include a KPI in relation to repeat victims to ensure I receive ongoing updates.



Understand and respond appropriately to vulnerable victims of crime and missing people while being aware of neurodivergent or mental health needs.

Question 8

What are the support pathways for children and young people who are victims of crime and are you confident that they are clear and used effectively and consistently?

The number of child victims referred to NVWS is very low. We have been informed that there are other referral pathways to ensure children are supported and I have sought to understand what these are and reassurance around their use.

- Child victims are assessed by investigators and where appropriate, are supported by registered intermediaries who aid children to provide evidential accounts. Trained Interview Advisors assist investigators in ensuring that evidence is captured in a means by which the victim is fully supported and safeguarded, and the capturing of their evidential account withstands scrutiny throughout a trial process.
- NVWS can also highlight support needs to the CPS if this becomes apparent during any conversations with the child or appropriate adult.
- All children who are victims of abuse or neglect are referred into a multi-agency safeguarding hub where Children's Social Care, Health and Education are co-located. Children who do not meet the threshold for social care support will be referred into Early Help services who can provide direct support or submit referrals to other relevant services.
- Detectives within child abuse teams make referrals to Child & Young People's Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (CHISVA), who support children aged 4-17 years who have been the victim of sexual violence.
- The 'Safe Return, Sunderland' scheme identifies children who are at the start of their 'missing' journey and intervention is given as early as possible, with a view to diverting them from harm. This initiative is funded by the VRU and resourced jointly by WayThrough, Together For Children and Northumbria Police. The scheme was launched in November 2024 and, at the time of writing, only 10% of the children have had further missing reports after this intervention was given.
- The force has a PREM (Partnership Reduction of Exploitation and Missing) process for child victims of exploitation. The PREM process, chaired by police, brings together a multi-agency framework aimed at safeguarding the child beyond traditional strategy or care plan meetings. PREM also identifies hotspots for crime prevention and identifies individuals who may exploit other children within our force area.
- A specialist Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) within custody can provide assessments for children who are open to PREM who may have additional neurodiverse needs and who are at risk of being criminalised due to their exploitation.
- Where required, Special Measures are requested as part of the court process. This can include a pre-trial visual recorded cross examination, re-examination where there is an ABE Interview, reporting restrictions and pre-trial visits for court familiarisation.
- The Under 10 Protocol is a cross-agency protocol involving witnesses under 10 years old (prosecution & defence) where they have provided a statement. The principle being the interests of the child are paramount.

I am confident that the force has a range of support pathways for child victims. This response demonstrates that there are specialist services for child victims of serious offences that ensure they receive the most appropriate care and that risk is managed through a multi-agency response. The 'Safe Return, Sunderland' scheme is able to demonstrate how joint working can harness real success. I will be seeking to understand if this can be expanded into other areas.



Provide the opportunity for victims to explore Restorative Justice options that might help gain closure and lead to offenders understanding the impact of their actions.

Question 9

As NVWS are the specialist Restorative Justice (RJ) provider across our region, what are the forces intentions to ensure that suitable cases for RJ are appropriately identified across all areas of policing and are referred to NVWS to ensure they can be taken forward as a key cope and recovery step?

Restorative Justice is a voluntary process that allows the voice of the victim to be heard and can provide perpetrators with an improved understanding of the impact their actions have had. It can be an important step in victims being able to recover from their experience.

- NVWS are committed to identifying restorative opportunities and offering and facilitating restorative interventions to victims.
- There is a dedicated team of Care Coordinators who are trained to basic Restorative Justice Facilitator level. This enables identification of suitable cases, holding of informative restorative discussions and delivery of interventions at the initial point of contact.
- A further proportion of the team are trained in serious and complex Restorative Justice ensuring the service is equipped to provide specialist support and deliver interventions within sensitive cases such as sexual violence.
- Restorative Justice remains firmly embedded within the volunteer training to ensure they are able to identify and hold restorative discussions with victims, should the opportunity arise.
- NVWS provide an input to all Police Constable Entry Routes, which includes a section on Restorative Justice, to ensure they are equipped to identify suitable cases and to hold initial discussions with victims with the view to make referrals to the team. The team also provide inputs across the force to maximise awareness and referral opportunities.
- NVWS proactively contact victims who have been through the Criminal Justice process and meet the criteria to have an RJ discussion. Leaflets are available within most station front offices as well as being displayed on the NVWS website and NIK.

This response reassures me that NVWS have suitably trained staff to deliver across all levels of offending. I am pleased that Restorative Justice continues to be an option available to victims and that NVWS proactively reach out to those who have been through the Criminal Justice process. This is quite often the stage at which victims can begin to consider moving forward and Restorative Justice is a process that can support them to do this.



Explore opportunities to increase the use of out of court resolutions to divert offenders away from the criminal justice system and prevent re-offending.

Question 10

How does the force assess and ensure the quality of the interventions delivered through the current Out of Court Resolution (OoCR) pathways?

There is an growing range of OoCR options available along with an increase in their use for positive outcomes. These interventions need to be effective and of a high quality to ensure that lower-level offenders are dealt with proportionately and are diverted from reoffending and the formal Criminal Justice route in the longer term. I sought to understand how these standards are maintained.

- The force continually assesses the quality and effectiveness of its OoCR interventions, to ensure they are fit for purpose and continue to deliver the outcomes of prevention, education and reduction of reoffending.
- The force's centralised TREAD (Transformation, Resolution, Education, Adult Diversion) team, gather and analyse the re-offending rates of those who complete the intervention and compares this with those who are offered the intervention and don't attend or don't complete it. This provides provenance as to the effectiveness of the intervention.
- A more detailed evaluation of the force's Project CARA (Domestic Abuse pathway) is planned for later this year to mark the 12-month point since the project's inception.
- The TREAD team conducts regular engagement with external intervention providers. This ensures consistency, accuracy and relevance of the product. At these meetings they suggest amendments and potential new content when it becomes available. An example of this is the recent inclusion of the One Punch UK video.
- For interventions delivered by the force, feedback has been sought in the form of an online survey from attendees, which provides a meaningful and usable data spread to analyse. This survey data, along with the observations of the parties delivering the intervention provides the material for discussion at the review process.
- Our partners who run interventions also conduct their own independent evaluation process.
- When designing and planning new interventions, we ensure that partners and relevant parties are consulted, and the product is demonstrated prior to it being used as a formal intervention. An example of this is the imminent Assault Emergency Worker (AEW) intervention where relevant services and their staff associations have been involved in the content of the intervention.
- An OPCC External Advisory Panel (EAP) meets quarterly and scrutinises the quality and effectiveness of OoCR pathways in Northumbria. The panel provides independent oversight of decisions and samples a number of cases to assess appropriateness of the disposal method, consideration of the victim's voice and transparency and fairness in decision-making. The panel is represented by Police, CPS, Magistrates, Youth Justice and Victim, Witness Service partners and the OPCC.
- This ongoing review process ensures all the pathways continue to evolve and remain relevant, up to date, and effective.

I am confident that the force has improved its' monitoring of community tensions over the last 12 months and that it is in a better position to predict, and keep track of, future incidents. The Chief Constable has appropriate engagement in place and is planning ahead for the upcoming elections, should any issues arise from this.



I am pleased to introduce a new area of my scrutiny framework, questions from the public. I wanted to ensure that we enabled the public to actively participate in the scrutiny of Northumbria Police and have therefore provided them with the opportunity to submit questions relating to the Police and Crime Plan Priorities. The following was submitted to the Chief Constable in the same manner as all other questions in this report.

Context: Digital abuse is increasing and is a method used within domestic abuse affecting adults and young people. We have supported victims where despite police involvement the perpetrator has continued the abuse. The police have been hampered by a lack of technological know-how and tools to enable them to access and gather evidence which then means a conviction is highly unlikely.

Question 11

How does the Chief Constable plan to improve responses to victims of digital abuse and ensure effective responses that support convictions?

- The force is committed to tackling digital, online and tech-enabled digital abuse of adults and young people, and we seek to continuously improve. The force has made some significant improvements in 2024 and 2025, in its' response to digital online and tech enabled VAWG.
- Subject matter experts from specialist units are utilised to deliver training to Student officers, those on investigation courses, Detective courses and during protected learning time.
- Operation Modify is a learning package provided by the College of Policing which will be rolled out in force this year and raises digital thinking and awareness of investigators. The workforce has access to bite size training videos which provide quick and easy access to a library of short videos on key topics. This learning package includes a focus on digital abuse, deep fakes, managing digital intelligence and case file digital evidence.
- Digital Evidence Suites (DES) within force are undergoing improvement to increase access to frontline resources. Digital Forensics kiosks have been relocated across the force to match demand. 133 officers and staff from across the force are now trained in the use of these kiosks, including exhibit handling and relevant legislation. These officers and staff can conduct some digital device downloads and examinations which support investigation of digital abuse, subsequently providing evidence which supports positive outcomes.
- The force is delivering improved capability within the Digital Forensic Unit with a 33% uplift in Digital Forensic Investigators. This provides enhanced capacity and capability in the examination of digital devices and CCTV, reducing the time taken to conduct examinations and returning them to investigating officers.
- Following a national benchmarking project, Northumbria Police have reviewed and implemented a revised structure to our specialised branch of digital investigations. We have appointed more digital media investigators who support in identifying new and emerging digital trends and threats when investigating digital abuse, stalking

and harassment. This includes the early capturing of evidence and the simplifying of its presentation at court.

- This is accompanied by investment in digital software and hardware which will support the new neighbourhood policing pledge in managing offenders specifically around digital devices used by perpetrators of digital abuse, minimising the opportunities for repeat offending.
- It is not unusual for perpetrators of digital abuse who predominantly use digital tools to use software based outside of the UK. This has caused UK based agencies issues with obtaining evidence in a timely manner.
- Northumbria Police is confident that this investment will increase the skills of our workforce in investigating digital abuse, assist convictions and in doing so, will improve public confidence in our ability to tackle cyber offending.

In addition to the response from the force, there were several comments within the PEEL inspection that relate to this area of work. Inspectors noted that delays in processing submissions within the digital forensic unit are improving. The PEEL Inspection also highlighted an area of innovative practice in that the force effectively uses digital triage officers and equipment to reduce the number of devices requiring seizure and examination by the digital forensic unit. I am satisfied that there is evidence of real progress and further investment will ensure force capabilities continue to develop.



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