

Dorset Criminal Justice Board

Victims & Witnesses Sub-Group

Terms of Reference, January 2020

The **vision** of the Dorset Criminal Justice Board (DCJB) is to deliver, in partnership, the best possible criminal justice service to the Dorset community.

The Board **aims** to provide an effective Criminal Justice System, focusing on offering a high standard of service to victims and witnesses, protecting the public, promoting the rehabilitation of offenders and reducing crime.

Our **purpose** is to challenge, collaborate and inform to ensure the overall system in Dorset is working effectively and efficiently.

Role of DCJB Victims & Witnesses Sub-Group

1. Working in partnership to deliver the objectives set out under the priority in the DCJB Plan – “Provide support to victims and witnesses throughout the Criminal Justice System” (*more detail in Appendix 1, pages 5-9*)
2. To coordinate activity and provide governance to the agreed work programmes that focus on improving services for victims & witnesses (V&W)
3. Encourage and develop a whole system approach, fostering shared responsibility to improving the services provided to V&W with shared outcomes, working collaboratively with relevant stakeholders in the local CJS
4. Ensure group members are of the appropriate level to enable decision making, action taking and the ability to commit resource to a task

5. Work to create a forum for open and honest discussions about risks and issues between those involved in the delivery of V&W services, enabling a safe place for relationships to develop
6. Learn best practice from other areas and share planning so that opportunities for collaborative working can be identified.
7. Responsible for delivering national policies at a local level as directed by the DCJB
8. Cascade decisions and implement changes agreed by DCJB within group members' organisations and share with partner agencies where required
9. To jointly improve the gathering and sharing of data between all agencies and parties
10. V&W sub-group chair is responsible for highlighting to the DCJB, areas of risk within their programme of work and challenges that may need escalating for support. Also to provide regular updates to the DCJB on the progress of group's activity
11. Expectation that the agency that chairs the DCJB sub-group will provide the secretarial support

Task and Finish Working-Groups

V&W members will appoint an appropriate representative from their organisation to attend appropriate working groups as tasked by the V&W Group

Decision making

To make decisions within the remit of the Group

Recording of Decisions

1. Minutes will be taken at each meeting recording details of decisions made and actions assigned to group members. These will be circulated to all members and actions progressed at meetings
2. Administration of Group meetings shall be the responsibility of the Chair

Membership

- Police and Crime Commissioner (Current Chair)
- Dorset Police
- Dorset Police – Witness Care Unit
- HM Courts & Tribunals Service
- Wessex Crown Prosecution Service
- HM Prison and Probation Service – Prison and NPS
- Community Rehabilitation Company
- Youth Offending Service
- Restorative Justice lead
- Victim Support
- Witness Service

Chair

Reviewed, as directed by the DCJB

Frequency

Board meetings are quarterly

Confidentiality

Protecting confidential information is important and V&W Group members and attendees may be present when confidential information is disclosed or discussed, or given in written form. This can take the form of offender or victim & witness details, embargoed information, or unpublished performance data, which is necessary to share or monitor as part of performance management.

V&W Group members will observe the rules of confidentiality and permission should be sought from the DCJB members and the 'owner' of the confidential information before it is shared more widely or publicised.

APPENDIX 1

Extracted from the DCJB Plan - Victims & Witness Priority

Oversee Criminal Justice partners' compliance with Victims Code of Practice (VCoP)	Co-ordinating victim feedback	Promote and monitor use of Restorative Justice	Identify gaps in service provision for vulnerable or hard to reach victims	Improve court experience for Victims & Witnesses (V&W)	Effective management of Domestic Abuse (DA) cases
Support national development of VCoP compliance	Understand current victim surveys / feedback requests	Review performance and consider how to increase referrals	Focus on knife crime victims declining to support prosecution	Understand and address the decline in V&W attendance	Monitor DA performance to identify areas for improvement
Identify areas for improvement and implement changes	Identify improvements and escalate nationally	Analyse performance to establish growth and expansion of partners	Wider link with the SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) partnership board	Consider V&W when moving Crown Court trials	Review compliance with national DA Best Practice Framework
					Deep dive to improve Evidence led prosecutions

Priority - Provide support to victims and witnesses throughout the Criminal Justice System:

1. Overseeing Criminal Justice partners' compliance with the Victims Code of Practice by:

The Victim Code of Practice sets out a minimum standard for the services that must be provided to victims of crime. It is important that victims of crime know what information and support is available to them from reporting a crime onwards and who to request help from if they are not getting it.

1.1 Following publication of the Victims Strategy, support the national development of a compliance framework

1.2 Using the data captured locally, identify and challenge any gaps in partners' compliance and highlight interdependencies, creating an action plan to improve the service provided to victims

2. Co-ordinating victim feedback by:

2.1 Firstly understand the current position across all agencies regarding victim surveys and requests for feedback

2.2 Establishing a clear picture of how contact is made with victims to provide feedback and frequency across all partners

2.3 Reviewing alternative methods for effectively obtaining victims feedback and escalate nationally for consideration

3. Promote and monitor use of Restorative Justice (RJ) by:

3.1 Continuing to gather RJ performance data and regularly monitor source of referrals, trends with crime types and sharing qualitative information regarding cases

3.2 Exploring alternative opportunities to promote the use of RJ through close partnership working

4. Identify gaps in service provision for vulnerable victims by:

- 4.1 Building on police research identifying problem profile of victims declining to support knife crime prosecution. Developing action plan to support this harder to reach cohort **(delivery forum for this work programme is yet to be agreed by the DCJB)**
- 4.2 Ensuring the Victims & Witness sub group has links to the SARC Partnership Board and understand the governance

5. Improve court experience for victims and witnesses by:

- 5.1 Continuing to reduce the impact on victims and witnesses due to unavoidable movement of trial location. Including, timely communication, increased information sharing as to specific vulnerabilities, in order to improve listing decision making
- 5.2 Increasing the number of effective trials in the Magistrates' court and reducing the number of witnesses called to court unnecessarily. Monitor this through trial scrutiny panels in each court area, identifying the reasons for cracked and ineffective trials and implement the actions required to avoid recurrence of the causes. Ensure a consistent approach and share best practice to identify areas necessary to improve
- 5.3 Exploring innovative ways for victims and witnesses to give evidence remotely
- 5.4 Understanding and address the reasons why there has been a decline in victim and witnesses attendance at court to give evidence and identify what improvements may be able to be put in place

6. Effective management of Domestic Abuse cases by:

- 6.1 Improving domestic abuse prosecution and victim experience by monitoring Magistrates' court performance to identify areas for development. This includes arrest rate, timeliness, trial effectiveness, conviction rate and production of pre-sentence reports on the day. Be mindful of the reduction in sitting days at Bournemouth court and to consider this when reviewing performance
- 6.2 Reviewing compliance with the national cross CJS Domestic Abuse (DA) Best Practice Framework. Ensuring the domestic abuse courts are complying with the components highlighted in the Specialist Domestic Abuse Court (SDAC) Guidance which includes multiagency approach to address risk management and safeguarding procedures, Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) support, well trained staff across all agencies and in court services
- 6.3 Undertaking a deep dive exercise to understand why there is less success in achieving successful outcomes for 'evidence led prosecution' cases (where a witness is not supportive of the prosecution). A deep dive into the prosecution picture to understand the practical challenges and see what needs to be

done to improve, this will initially be undertaken by police and CPS. This also links to understanding the key factors that impact on victims and the nature of the support and engagement they receive

6.4 Supporting the Crest research project exploring where and how the principles of swift and certain justice play the most effective role across the offender journey and throughout the victim’s experience of the criminal justice system. Where in the system do we need to be faster and more effective and when is it better spend time building relationships to foster better outcomes?

Victims & Witnesses Performance Framework
Victim Code of Practice 5 high level measures
Victim satisfaction data
Restorative Justice referrals, completions and feedback
Knife Crime and proportion of victims not supporting
Number of CC trials moved at late notice
Unsuccessful outcomes due to victim & witness reasons
Cracked and ineffective trials
DA court performance measures
DA Best Practice compliance
Successful outcomes for ‘evidence led prosecution’ cases

How we will work together

Close and effective collaborative working by criminal justice agencies across the Dorset Criminal Justice Board sub-groups is essential to deliver the shared priorities of the local partnership.



