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Victim Support – Public Briefing

Briefing No. 24



September 2025



Summary

This briefing outlines Police Scotland's approach to supporting victims of crime. This is one of the main strands of the Police Scotland 2030 Vision and features prominently in the Three-Year Business Plan 2024-27.

This public briefing covers the policy and legislative context for supporting victims in both Scotland and England and Wales, Police Scotland's commitments in this area, and examples of what Police Scotland are currently delivering to support victims.

Background

According to the [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2023/24](#), victims of crime are less likely to be confident in police than non-victims. A victim is a person who has had a crime committed against them. This can mean someone attacked them, abused them or stole from them.

While the majority of victims are confident in policing to respond quickly, deal with incidents as they occur and solve crimes (ranging from 51 and 57 percent, where an opinion was expressed), they are consistently less confident than non-victims (ranging from 55 and 63 percent).

When asked about confidence in the ability of police to prevent crime victims who expressed an opinion recorded a lower rate of confidence (36%) than non-victims (44%).

Regarding levels of confidence in catching criminals, victims who expressed an opinion recorded less confidence (45%) than non-victims (55%).

The survey noted positive confidence levels relating to support for victims in both groups where an opinion was expressed, with slightly higher confidence (58%) for non-victims than victims (53%).

Although a higher proportion of victims were positive about police in their local area doing a good job, there was a nine-percentage point difference between victims and non-victims. Victims were eight percentage points more likely to feel that police were doing a poor/very poor job in comparison to non-victims.

The Victim Centred Approach Project, commissioned by the Scottish Government's Victims' Taskforce, aimed to explore potential models of service delivery that could enable a victim-centred approach throughout the criminal justice system. This research found that victim-survivors have poor experiences of the wider criminal justice system that were "disappointing, distressing and at times deeply frustrating and re-traumatising". The project noted that police have a primary role in referring victims to support as they are often the first contact.

Legislation in Scotland

The care of victims of crime in Scotland is legislated under the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014 ("the Act"), supported by the Victims' Rights (Scotland) Regulations 2015 and the Vulnerable Witnesses (Criminal Evidence) (Scotland) Act 2019. The general principles of the Act are as follows:

- That a victim or witness should be able to obtain information about what is happening in the investigation or proceedings.
- That the safety of a victim or witness should be ensured during and after the investigation and proceedings.
- That a victim or witness should have access to appropriate support during and after the investigation and proceedings.
- That, in so far as it would be appropriate to do so, a victim or witness should be able to participate effectively in the investigation and proceedings.

Under the Act, Scottish Ministers are required to prepare and publish a Victims Code for Scotland. This was last updated in 2020 and sets out the rights of victims and where to access help and advice, including from Police Scotland. Additionally, the Act ensures that victims are able to complain or challenge a perceived breach of their rights under the Act. There is also a duty for all criminal justice agencies to publish and annually review Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses. Police Scotland publishes their Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses on their website.

The Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill is currently at Stage 3 of the legislative process in the Scottish Parliament. The Bill, if passed, will make changes to the law intended to improve victims and witnesses' experience of the justice system. This includes creating a Victims and Witnesses Commissioner for Scotland.

Legislation in England and Wales

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (known as the Victims' Code) was updated in January 2025. It sets out the minimum standards that must be provided to victims of crime by service providers in England and Wales. The Victims' Code sets out the rights that victims of crime are entitled to and the services that are required to deliver them. This includes all police forces in England and Wales (including British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence Police).

Within England and Wales there is a Victims' Commissioner. This role was established in the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004. The role of the Commissioner is to:

- raise awareness of the common issues faced by victims and witnesses.
- monitor how criminal justice and victim support agencies comply with the Victims' Code and Witness Charter.
- conduct detailed research and produce comprehensive reviews.
- use their independent voice to influence national policy-making and hold partner agencies to account.
- speak up about what works best for all victims and witnesses, and especially the most vulnerable.

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 expanded the Victims' Commissioner's remit to include powers to request information, issue recommendations, and require responses from public bodies. The Victims and Courts Bill introduced in May 2025 suggests further powers for the Victims' Commissioner.

Police Scotland Strategic Context

An aim of the Scottish Government [Vision for Justice in Scotland 2022](#) is that:

“We have effective, modern, person-centred and trauma-informed approaches to justice in which everyone can have trust, including as victims, those accused of crimes and as individuals in civil disputes”

In 2024, Police Scotland outlined their [2030 Vision](#) of “safer communities, less crime, supported victims, and a thriving workforce”.

To deliver this, they developed a [Three-Year Business Plan 2024-27](#) (hereby referred to as “the Plan”). The Plan states that the criminal justice system needs reformed if “we are to ensure that victims receive the care and outcomes they deserve” and that part of achieving the 2030 Vision is to “ensure that victims are fully heard and supported, with our service more tailored to victim needs through our trauma informed approach”. Progress is reported to the Authority’s Policing Performance Committee every six months.

The Plan lists various actions that will achieve this. These include:

- Support being delivered from the outset and provision of tailored care at the earliest opportunity.
- Reflecting the voices of survivors of violence against women and girls in the actions of Police Scotland.
- Improving the response to victims of anti-social behaviour via community policing (ASB).
- Improving public contact.
- Offering improved trauma informed victim care.
- Reducing the number of times victims have to recount experiences.
- Complete review of third-party reporting in relation to hate crime.
- Roll out Summary Case Management Pilot.
- Supporting a pilot of domestic abuse courts and an established mechanism to receive feedback to improve victim care.

Supporting Victims in Practice

Your Care Card


Police Scotland recently updated the 'Your Care Card' (formerly the Victim Care Card) to be more accessible and person-centred. This was due to specific feedback during victim consultation that supported modernisation, rebranding and improved accessibility.

Police Scotland undertook a review of the language and layout of the Victim Care Card and consulted with victims' groups, which led to creation of the Your Care Card (YCC). The card contains information and contact details for support services and links to the Victim's Code for Scotland and the Standards of Service for Victims and Witnesses. It also includes a Quick Reference (QR) Code to access more information about support to victims or witnesses on the [Police Scotland](https://www.pscotland.gov.uk) website.

Police Scotland now also offer the option to email the card directly to victims. Police Scotland continues to scope opportunities for further technical advancements to support officers in delivering a high-quality service to victims and witnesses of crime.

In 2024, 44% of those who were offered the YCC accepted, whereas 50% of those who were offered declined. The remainder were unable to be issued, classed as being not suitable for issue or were not recorded.

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Your Care Card

Supporting you
Being affected by a crime can be difficult and upsetting. This is to let you know what support you can get.

You can have someone with you
Just ask a friend, someone from your family or your legal representative to come with you when you give your statement.

How to get support
Victim Support Scotland is an independent charity who are not part of the police or courts. They help anyone affected by crime, no matter who they are or what's happened. Their service is free, confidential and they won't judge you. They will listen to you and offer practical and emotional support.

To get support or more information from Victim Support Scotland, you can;

- Agree for the police to make a referral on your behalf,
- Call them on 0800 160 1985 or
- Fill in the form at www.victimsupport.scot/self-referral

If you need help getting support
Ask anyone in the police or at the courts and they will contact a provider of support services for you. You can do this in person or over the phone.

Your rights
The Victims' Code for Scotland sets out your rights. It also has contacts for our partners and support organisations. Please ask us for a copy or read about them here:
www.mygov.scot/victims-code-scotland

Our care standards
We set high standards for the way we care for people who have been affected by crime. Please ask us for a copy or read about them here:
www.scotland.police.uk/victimsandwitnesses

About Your Report
Here are the details for your report, in case you need them.

Reference number	Crime reported	Date reported
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Police Officer's email	<input type="text"/>	@scotland.police.uk

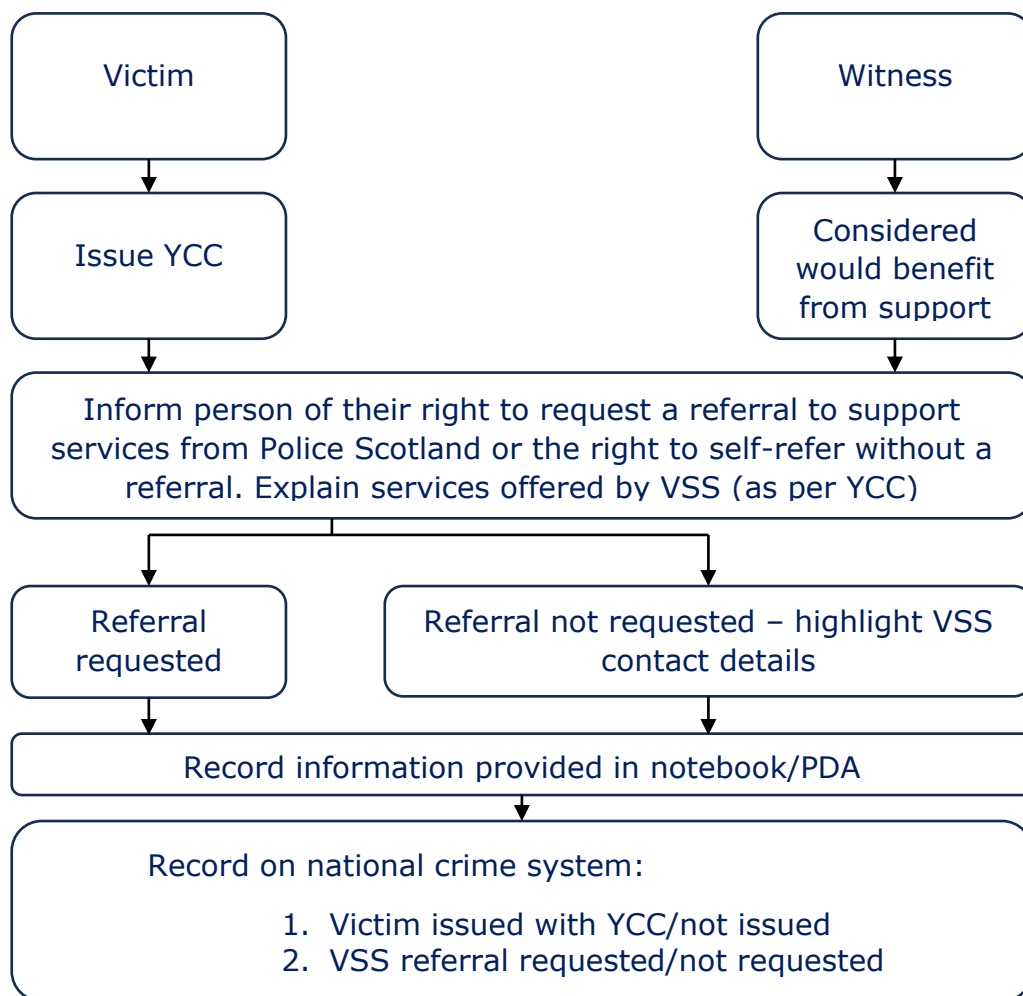
Call 101 to speak to the police Always call 999 in an emergency

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Referrals

Under the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014, Police Scotland are required to inform anyone who is or appears to be a victim that they can request a referral to victim support services from any competent authority, and that they can contact providers of this service directly without a referral. The flow chart below outlines the current process in Police Scotland. It should be noted that the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill may result in changes to this process.

In 2024, there were 9,427 referrals, with referrals for females nearly double that of males. In total, there has been an increase in referrals by 16.3% between the period January-June 2024 and 2025. While Non-sexual Crimes of Violence have the highest total number of referrals, those who experienced/witnessed Sexual Crime have the highest acceptance rate (13%). *



*Source: Police Scotland Management Information

Victim Strategy to support victims of rape

In 2025, Police Scotland embedded a victim template into their national reporting system to support victims of rape.

This method ensures that Police Scotland effectively share essential information about a victim's vulnerabilities, care plans, support networks, contact and necessary assistance in the Criminal Justice System, to reduce the risk of additional trauma from having to provide information on more than one occasion.

This provides an opportunity for investigating officers to supply the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) with information that identifies early prosecution challenges and helps develop tailored strategies for each victim ensuring a victim centred approach.

Summary Case Management

Currently the Summary Case Management Pilot is ongoing across the country. The pilot is designed to resolve cases at the earliest opportunity.

It works by providing evidence such as CCTV and statements during the submission of police reports to COPFS. This allows the earlier disclosure of evidence to the defence and can help conclude cases much more quickly, reducing the number of cases having to go to court.

This means that Police Scotland may ask victims and witnesses of crime to help them by providing this evidence sooner, but has the benefit of being able to update on the outcome much earlier.

Feedback and lived experience

Every month, Police Scotland conduct a 'User Experience Survey for Local Policing' – run by an independent market research agency. This survey captures the experiences of people who have reported a crime or incident to Police Scotland. In 2024-25, 40,607 responses were received.

Within this survey, people are asked questions relating to ease of access, response, communication and other experiences. This year there have been recorded improvements across most measures as shown in the table below.

Question	April 2024-March 2025*	Previous year April 2023-March 2024
How easy or difficult was it to contact Police Scotland? (Easy & very easy)	75%	73%
During the initial contact how satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the staff member? (Satisfied & very satisfied)	86%	85%
Did you feel staff properly understood what you needed? (Yes)	88%	87%
Do you feel that the police provided the appropriate response to the incident you reported? (Yes)	66%	64%
How satisfied are you with the way you were treated by the officers who attended the incident? (Satisfied & very satisfied)	83%	82%
Were you adequately informed about the progress of the incident you reported? (Yes)	50%	50%
Based on your overall experience, how satisfied are you with Police Scotland? (Satisfied & very satisfied)	71%	69%

*Please note the figures above show a combined % of strongly agree and agree/very satisfied and satisfied responses.

In May 2023, Police Scotland launched a feedback mechanism for domestic abuse and sexual crime which invites victim survivors to provide anonymous feedback on the service they received. There have been 231 responses since the survey launched in May 2023. The 89 responses received in 2024-25 are being considered to inform any service improvement actions. While the sample dataset is small, and therefore should be considered with caution, it is important feedback when designing and delivering services.

There has also been collaboration with groups that possess “lived experience” to understand how Police Scotland can improve their approaches and services and better meets the needs of victims and witnesses. The lived experience groups have offered valuable insights by sharing their views of interactions with policing, both in terms of the positives and the areas which could be improved, enabling Police Scotland to explore more effective methods of supporting victims and witnesses with a focus on empowerment, trust-building, and sharing of the best practices.

Domestic Bail notification process

In partnership with COPFS, a new national standardised form has been introduced in relation to the Domestic Bail notification process. This will improve clarity, reduce duplication and ensure a consistent approach across Police Scotland, COPFS and the courts, enhancing service delivery and improving victim safety.

Communications

The '[People at Heart](#)' approach has been developed by The First Word Communications company in partnership with criminal justice agencies, third sector partners and people with lived experience.

The approach aims to ensure that communications are empathetic and empowering and are easy to access and understand. Alongside rewriting key justice communications, the partnership has produced a 'People at Heart' style guide and training materials to support the transformation of written communications with victims and witnesses across the criminal justice system.

Police Scotland are currently working to continue awareness raising within their own organisation. A launch webinar took place in February 2025 and further training sessions have been ongoing since March 2025. Feedback and consultations have confirmed that good communication is critical in supporting victims and witnesses. This work is an ongoing commitment to improve communication and supports the victim-centred and trauma informed workstreams of the Victim Task Force.



Purpose of these Public Briefings

The Strategic Police Plan commits to the provision of Policing for a safe, protected and resilient Scotland. This requires designing and maintaining services which meet rising and evolving demands in a constantly changing environment. To meet these demands, now and in the future, Scotland's police service must adapt and proportionately adopt the necessary technologies which will enable them to protect the safety and wellbeing of our communities (as outlined in the Policing Principles - Section 32 of Police and Fire Reform Act 2012).

This series of public focused and user-friendly public briefings has been developed to provide an overview of the benefits of emerging technology and upcoming developments within policing, the policies that will govern them, and the ethical, privacy and human rights implications.

Keeping up to date

To keep up to date with our work, please keep an eye on the Scottish Police Authority's [website](#) where you can find papers and watch livestream committee discussions, and follow us on Twitter/X:

@ScotPolAuth @policescotland

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