

# NCVPP

National Centre for  
Violence Against  
Women & Girls and  
Public Protection

## Using the Experience of Victim/Survivors to Improve Police Practice

Stage 1 - Planning

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# Executive Summary

- Initial planning should involve defining a clear, strategic purpose for the engagement practice, with a focus on gathering victim/survivor perspectives in order to improve police services.
- Ensure trauma-informed values are embedded throughout the process, including safety, trust, empower, choice and collaboration.
- Voice of the victim/survivor practices should be inclusive, purposeful and collaborative - from the start, communicate why their voices are being sought, how they will be used, and how they'll hear back.
- Effective governance, including securing executive leadership support, building expertise through dedicated roles, development of partnerships, and embedding a victim/survivor focused culture, is crucial for successful implementation.



# 1.1 Definition and Purpose

This initial planning phase focuses on defining a voice of the victim/survivor (VoV/S) practice and establishing its purpose in a clear, strategic manner.

## 1.1.1 Defining a VoV/S practice

A VoV/S practice in policing refers to an approach used to gather victim/survivors' perspectives and experiences, primarily in relation to their experiences of crime and crime-related service provision, to improve police services (e.g. by informing service design, policy development, and decision-making). Types of VoV/S practices and methods of gathering perspective, experience and feedback can be found in Stage 3.

## 1.1.2 Why develop a VoV/S practice

Rationales for developing VoV/S practices can vary but often focus on improving services. By acknowledging victim/survivors as experts through their experiences, forces should listen to, learn from, and collaborate with to drive meaningful change based on survivor insights and professional expertise. This can lead to:

- Better outcomes for victims
- Increased trust and confidence, particularly with minoritised communities
- Ease of service and contact with police
- DEI focus – ensuring services are purposeful, inclusive and collaborative
- Improved wellbeing and job satisfaction for officers/staff
- Increased legitimacy
- Victim-centred culture

## 1.1.3 Considerations for planning

When planning a VoV/S practice, whether police are leading on it, working with others or have commissioned others, those responsible must ensure that approaches are inclusive, purposeful and collaborative.

### Inclusive

Victim/survivors must be provided with safe and suitable opportunities to participate and contribute, whilst recognising the diversity of experiences.

### Challenges:

- A challenge is the assumption that certain settings are unsuitable for victim/survivor participation rather than considering how to make settings more suitable.

### Considerations for Practice:

- Recognise and review existing assumptions about victim/survivor engagement settings. Consider how settings can be adapted to make them more suitable or accessible for different groups of victim/survivors, for example by providing alternative or flexible methods for engagement (see Stage 3.7). This is particularly important for those with protected characteristics, young people or minoritised communities (see Stage 2.1.1).

Ensure trauma-involved values are embedded throughout the process, including safety, trust, empower, choice and collaboration.



## Purposeful

VoV/S practices must be developed with a clear rationale in mind, considering the outcomes or impact that the practice might have. This may vary depending on whether practices are proactive, responsive or reactive or comprise of all three elements.

### Challenges:

- Victim-survivors' voices are not always strategically planned into service design or policy making processes. Delayed involvement or hurried engagement with victim/survivors risks impacting the value of the work or appear tokenistic.

### Considerations for Practice:

- Ensuring strategic leaders prioritise victim/survivor engagement, ensuring that their voices are proactively considered at the key stages of the planning process.

From the start, communicate with victim/survivors about why their voices are being sought, how they will be used, and how they'll hear back.



## Collaborative

Police should consider the benefits of engaging with third-party organisations, such as specialist organisations and charities, including those that focus on assisting those with diverse needs. This can be a means of indirectly gathering victim/survivors' voices, as they often have established trusted relationships with victim/survivors where voices could be captured.

### Challenges:

- While police utilise rely on third-sector organisations to engage with victim/survivors who distrust the police, some victims prefer direct communication with the police.

### Considerations for Practice:

- Work closely with partner agencies to better understand the nature of third-party feedback, aiming to ensure it accurately represents victim/survivor experiences. Allow victim/survivors to choose how they engage with services, whether this is through the police or a third-sector organisation.

It may be useful to agree on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which is a formal contract between two or more agencies or organisations that outlines the terms, responsibilities, and expectations for cooperation on a specific project or initiative. It is not legally binding but serves as a framework for collaboration, ensuring clear communication and shared objectives. It can ensure that, even when the police depend on partner agencies, they still play an active role in defining the desired outcomes and have a voice in the commissioning process.

# 1.2 How to Set Up VoV/S Practices Effectively

## 1.2.1 Determining the focus

Determining the focus of VoV/S practices is a key component of the planning stage as it sets the scope and direction for listening to the voice of victim/survivors. This process often involves liaising between several teams or agencies, for example, OPCCs, performance, insight, or analysis teams.

Topic areas may include: personal experiences of police services, perceptions of police and police conduct, victim/survivors' needs, experiences of victimisation, personal characteristics, those affected by structural inequalities and that have intersectional needs, concerns in relation to crime and community safety, experiences of related services, feedback on the VoV/S practice.

For further examples, see Appendix A.

### Challenges:

- It can be challenging to find a practice that meets the needs of several business areas. For example, managing shifting priorities across internal and external stakeholders, whilst avoiding duplication of effort.

### Considerations for Practice:

- Consistently review and adjust focus as needed to ensure practices reflect shifting force priorities. Implement robust governance structures (see Stage 1.3) which foster effective communication and collaboration across teams and agencies to ensure all stakeholders' needs are met without duplication of efforts.

## Example questions to consider:

What is the purpose and scope of the practice?

Have you established clear governance?

What support is required?

What resources are needed?

Will you collaborate with partners?

Are there any commissioning or contractual considerations?

What is the planned timeframe?

What are initial plans for monitoring?



## 1.2.2 Planning and set-up

Planning and set-up processes may vary depending on the type of practice. It is key to approach this phase with flexibility and adaptability in line with funding arrangements, available resources and level of stakeholder involvement. Techniques when approaching this stage include:

- **Starting small:** For projects in the preliminary stages, you may choose to begin with a small cohort/pilot project. This allows for any necessary adjustments based on initial outcomes and can provide feedback about the effectiveness of the selected practices (e.g. whether survey/interview questions are appropriate).
- **Replicating or building upon existing models:** It may be appropriate to adapt or replicate work that has been done elsewhere. This could include modifying surveys, needs assessments, or complaints processes to fit local contexts and priorities. Part of this process can involve consulting with victim/survivors around the type of information police should be collecting.
- **Partnership development:** This provides an opportunity to identify or collaborate further with partner agencies, such as those with knowledge of diverse needs, rather than involving victims and survivors at these early stages. Whilst partnership engagement is crucial, it is important that the voice of the victim/survivor does not get lost at this early stage and is balanced with organisational priorities.
- **Evaluation:** It is useful to consider how you may measure the effectiveness of an engagement practice. Planning this from the beginning helps ensure mechanisms are in place to allow effective evaluation (see Stage 7).

## 1.2.3 Ethical and safety challenges

Potential ethical and safety challenges should be considered when planning practice. For example, practice development can take longer than expected and involve delays or unforeseen challenges.

### Challenges:

- Ethical and safety challenges can arise, especially when VoV/S practices involve vulnerable victim/survivors. For example, designing surveys for those who have experienced domestic abuse may present significant challenges in ensuring their safety and well-being (e.g. identifying a safe contact number for them).

### Considerations for Practice:

- Build extra time into the project timeline to account for potential delays or unexpected hurdles. Incorporate a trauma-informed approach from the outset to address ethical and safety challenges and protect vulnerable victim/survivors from the early planning stages – see Stage 2 for more information. Consider force guidance and seeking support from specialist organisations.





# 1.3 Governance

Effective internal governance structures ensure that VoV/S practices are successfully designed, implemented, and maintained over time. It is important to establish processes which ensure clear accountability and oversight whilst coping with challenges such as changes in personnel and the funding landscape (see the [National Vulnerability and Public Protection Strategy Governance Toolkit](#)).

Considerations for Practice:

- **Building expertise and dedicated roles:** Consider developing roles focused on participation and engagement, providing officers/staff with the skills to work effectively with victim/survivors, particularly those with intersectional needs. These roles could be supported by specialised training and formal guidance to strengthen internal capability for embedding victim/survivor voice into policing services.
- **Securing executive leadership ‘buy-in’:** It is important that executive leaders are supportive or actively involved from the outset. Their endorsement can be key for securing long-term commitment, resources, and organisational focus on VoV/S practices. To prevent initiatives from losing focus or being deprioritised, integrate them into existing processes and ensure project oversight.
- **Coping with staff turnover:** Establishing dedicated roles or teams responsible for VoV/S practices can also ensure continuity despite personnel changes. Putting procedures in place to deal with staff turnover, such as appropriate handovers, can mitigate against practices being impacted by staffing changes.
- **Embedding a victim/survivor focused workforce culture:** Effective internal governance should help shift the workforce culture to one which fosters a victim/survivor focused and trauma-informed approach embedded within officer/staff norms.





# Glossary

Term	Description
<b>Good Practice</b>	Practice referred to as 'good practice' reflects positive processes, approaches and useful resources. This is intended to provide examples that could be considered by forces but may not have been evaluated.
<b>Intersectional / Intersectionality</b>	Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (for example, gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance, height and so on) combine to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. ( <a href="#">College of Policing, n.d.</a> )
<b>Memorandum of understanding (MoU)</b>	A MoU describes a formal agreement between two or more parties outlining commitments, shared goals and intended collaboration.
<b>Minoritised communities / groups</b>	The term minoritised communities usually refers to racial and ethnic groups that are in a minority within the population. It emphasises that these communities are minoritised by societal structures and systems, rather than inherently being minorities. ( <a href="#">Durham University, n.d.</a> )
<b>Needs Assessments</b>	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.
<b>Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC)</b>	The OPCC supports the Police and Crime Commissioner by helping deliver the Police and Crime Plan, ensuring effective use of resources, meeting legal duties, and upholding high standards in line with the Nolan principles.
<b>Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC)</b>	PCCs are publicly elected to represent local policing priorities, enhance community safety, and hold the police accountable, working with agencies to prevent and reduce crime.
<b>Public Protection</b>	Public Protection is a core policing function to prevent and reduce harm through safeguarding, investigation, tackling perpetrators and working in partnership. ( <a href="#">VKPP, 2025</a> )
<b>Stakeholders</b>	An individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organisation.

Term	Description
<b>Trauma-informed</b>	Trauma-informed practice is an approach which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological and social development. The approach aims to increase awareness of how trauma can negatively impact on individuals and communities. It also aims to improve the accessibility and quality of services by creating culturally sensitive, safe services that people trust and want to use. It seeks to prepare professionals to work in collaboration and partnership with those people. ( <a href="#">GOV.UK, 2022</a> )
<b>Victim/survivor</b>	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.
<b>Voice</b>	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.
<b>Voice of the Victim/ Survivor (VoV/S)</b>	'Voice of the victim/survivor' refers to the perspective of individuals (adults and children) who have been impacted by crime or harm: either through lived experience, as a witness, family member, friend or colleague. The perspectives, opinions, rights and non-verbal cues of victim/survivors and their advocates must be heard, respected, prioritised and actively sought during investigations, enquiries and interactions. They must also be embedded within policy, practice, and support provision. In turn, this will aid in strengthening investigations, shaping and developing current and future policy, practice, response and support of policing and wider agencies to victim/survivors, for those who need support.
<b>VoV/S Practice</b>	A Voice of the Victim/survivor Practice refers to any engagement process through which agencies collect feedback from or collaborate with victim/survivors to gain insights into their perspectives, experiences, and rights. The information gathered should be used to inform future discussions, enhance responses, and strengthen practices moving forward.
<b>Vulnerability</b>	A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation. ( <a href="#">VKPP, 2025</a> )

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## About the National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection

We're a collaboration between the  
College of Policing and the National  
Police Chiefs' Council.

We work across law enforcement,  
the third sector and government to  
professionalise public protection and  
strive for a whole systems approach to  
prevent harm, give confidence to victims,  
survivors and witnesses to come forward  
and bring more offenders to justice.

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**Vulnerability Knowledge  
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