

Victim Unique Identifier

The Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales, Claire Waxman OBE, is calling for the introduction of a unique victim identifier to enable victims to be tracked across the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and, in turn, allow more effective monitoring of compliance with the Victims' Code.

The CJS is made up of multiple agencies, each with distinct roles and responsibilities in a victim's journey. Although these agencies work together, in practice each operates within its own remit and uses separate systems to record and process data (see fig. 1 in appendix). The data collected typically relates to a criminal case rather than to an individual, making meaningful analysis of victims' experiences impossible. **The Victims' and Courts Bill provides a critical opportunity to address this fragmented approach by placing victims at the centre of the justice process, reducing inefficiencies, supporting the identification of risk, improving communication, and strengthening collaboration across agencies.**

The Issue

The lack of reliable information about victims shared appropriately between agencies is one of the most significant barriers to improving their experience of the CJS, and also in preventing escalation in risk.

Research conducted with victims' groups has identified that the absence of data means it is impossible to follow and effectively support an individual victim of crime through the CJS journey, and to monitor the standards of service provided by criminal justice agencies.

A report published by the Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates¹ in December 2023 confirmed these findings, stating that the police and Crown Prosecution Service often failed to meet the minimum standard in keeping both victims and each other informed, due to the absence of "joined-up digital systems"².

In addition, the HM Inspectorate of Probation has repeatedly found the quality of risk assessments to be inadequate³ It has also criticised the lack of collaboration and poor information-sharing needed to identify risks and keep people safe⁴.

This has disastrous implications for:

- **Public safety:** Opportunities to identify repeat victimisation and escalating risk are being missed, particularly for victims of serial offences such as antisocial behaviour, stalking, and violence against women and girls. As a result, harm often continues unchecked until it is too late.
- **CJS operation and efficiency:** Information silos hinder joint working and increase administrative costs. Delays in providing victims with updates as their case moves from police to CPS increase the likelihood of victims withdrawing, at significant cost to the system.
- **Policy development:** Limited accessible data on victims' demographics and reasons for withdrawing from the criminal justice process undermines the ability to design effective policies and support

¹ His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), His Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation)

² Criminal Justice Joint Inspectorates (2023) "Meeting the needs of victims in the criminal justice system: An inspection of how well the police, Crown Prosecution Service and the Probation Service support victims of crime" pp2 Available at:

<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/cjji/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/12/meeting-needs-of-victims-inspection-police-cps-and-probation-1.pdf> pp2

³ 2024 Annual Report

⁴ Chief Inspector of Probation flags concerns in first public protection inspection – HM Inspectorate of Probation

services. Moreover, the lack of insight into who is at heightened risk limits efforts to prevent harm before it occurs.

- **The Victims' Code:** Inconsistent recording practices and the absence of victim specific fields make it difficult to assess Victims' Code compliance. The Victims and Prisoners Act included a number of provisions to strengthen code compliance, and the Victims and Courts Bill aims to go further by placing a duty on the Victims' Commissioner to produce a report on code compliance to be shared with the Secretary of State and Attorney General (clause 10). However, data collection is fragmented, and, in some areas, essentially non-existent, making this task currently not feasible.

The introduction of a victim unique identifier allocated to individual victims navigating the criminal justice system would enable all agencies to work more effectively together to support victims, to improve public safety, reduce operational costs, and improve victims' overall experiences.

How will this improve victims' experiences

The victim unique identifier - which would function like an NHS number - would be allocated to all victims from the point at which they first report an incident to the police. Data on victims' demographic and protected characteristics would also be recorded, alongside any information on vulnerability or requirement for special measures.

All subsequent reports and case updates would be linked to the Victim Unique Identifier, supporting more effective policing and enabling better data sharing between agencies. By consolidating information about repeat reports, patterns of behaviour, and contact across multiple services, the Identifier would help create a clearer and more complete picture of an individual's risk profile. This would strengthen risk assessments by ensuring they are based on the full history of victimisation rather than isolated incidents, making high-risk indicators more visible. In turn this will support agencies to identify escalation earlier, reducing reliance on victims repeatedly recounting their history, and supporting early intervention.

Similarly, this consolidated information would better inform post-conviction decisions by providing a clearer picture of the risk posed to the victim and the most effective measures to mitigate that risk. The Sentencing Act increases the pressure on probation to assess risk and protect both victims and the public from harm. The Victim Unique Identifier would support probation to deliver consistent, high-quality assessments that take victims' concerns into account and help maintain public confidence in their ability to keep people safe, and in the decisions made by the justice system.

Victims consistently report feeling left in the dark throughout the justice process, unsure where to seek information. A Victim Unique Identifier would enable clearer, more consistent communication through innovative solutions such as digital platforms or apps, giving victims timely and accurate updates on their case. This would complement wider reforms to strengthen victim care, improve confidence in the justice system, and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens on agencies.

In addition, the Identifier would ensure that victims' additional needs and any required special measures are recognised and acted on at every stage of the process, without placing the responsibility on victims to continually advocate for themselves to multiple agencies.

The victim unique identifier would also provide a mechanism for collecting comprehensive data on Victims Code Compliance, supporting the Victims' Commissioner's role to monitor and report on code compliance. This would enable both professionals and policy makers to better understand the existing needs within the system, a victim's journeys through the system and support the design of effective services that meet those needs.

Overall, the Victim Unique Identifier would support victims at every stage of the justice process, from report through to post-sentence, and help prevent future harm by improving understanding of risk, vulnerability, and gaps within the system.

The Victims and Courts Bill

The Victims and Courts Bill aims to improve victims' experiences of the criminal justice system. Achieving this requires a holistic approach that tackles the current fragmentation across agencies. With the Government's plans to reform policing, strengthen the Victims' Code, and expand the powers of the Victims' Commissioner to improve code compliance, it is vital that the opportunity to introduce a systemic digital solution - a victim unique identifier - is not missed.

Claire Waxman is calling for the peers to support the following amendment, which will ensure the development of a victim unique identifier:

(1) The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 is amended as follows

(2) Section 6, page 5, at end of subsection (4) insert-

"(4A)Regulations under subsection (2) must require information about compliance with the victims' code to be linked to a consistent victim identifier that is used across the agencies of the criminal justice system."

Appendix

