

Forgotten victims: Barriers to justice following a road traffic collision

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Glossary

Adjournment - a court trial or hearing being postponed to another date.

Coroner – A coroner is a type of specialist judge who investigates and explains certain kinds of deaths.

Criminal collisions – A road traffic collision caused by a crime, for example, causing death or serious injury by dangerous driving or by careless or inconsiderate driving.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) – an agency of the Ministry of Justice which pays compensation to victims of violent crime.

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) - prosecutes criminal cases that have been investigated by the police and other investigative organisations in England and Wales.

Defendant – an individual being prosecuted for a criminal offence.

Family Liaison Officer (FLO) – A Family Liaison Officer is a trained police officer assigned to families following a fatality, including fatal road traffic collisions. The role of the FLO is to gather evidence and information from the family to contribute to the investigation whilst building trust with families, signposting them to support and providing timely information.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) – An independent body that assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces in England and Wales and fire and rescue services in England.

Probation Service – a criminal justice service that supervises offenders serving community sentences or those released from into the community from prison.

Road traffic collision – an event where a vehicle collides with another vehicle, pedestrian or obstruction, often resulting in injury, death or property damage.

Suspect – an individual who police believe may have committed a criminal offence.

Victims' Code¹ – The Victims' Code sets out the minimum standards of service (victims' rights) that agencies in the criminal justice system must meet when dealing with victims of crime.

Victim Impact Statement² - A statement which gives victims an opportunity to explain to the court how the crime has impacted them, physically, emotionally, psychologically, financially or in any other way. The statement is considered when sentencing an offender.

¹ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

² This was previously referred to as the Victim Personal Statement

Foreword by Victims' Commissioner



For most of us, getting into a car, crossing a road or cycling to work is an ordinary part of daily life. Yet every year, thousands of people are killed or seriously injured on our roads, leaving families, friends and communities facing consequences that can last a lifetime. For those directly affected, the aftermath often involves not only coping with profound grief, trauma and loss, but also engaging with criminal justice processes that can be unfamiliar, complex and overwhelming. This report shines a light on those experiences and the support that victims and bereaved families need and deserve.

Behind every road traffic collision is a human story. A life changed in an instant. A family trying to make sense of the unimaginable. A victim forced to navigate trauma, grief and loss while also finding their way through a complex and often overwhelming criminal justice system.

Victims left without answers

The research presented in this report shows that one of the most difficult aspects of that journey is uncertainty. Many victims and bereaved families spend months, and sometimes longer, waiting to learn whether the incident that has transformed their lives will be investigated as a crime. During this period of uncertainty, victims often feel left in limbo, without answers, without clarity about what happens next, and in some cases without access to support services. This uncertainty emerged as one of the strongest themes in our research and highlights the need for a more victim-centred approach from the earliest stages of an investigation.

This report is especially important because it was commissioned by my predecessor, Baroness Helen Newlove, and was the last research project she initiated before she so sadly died in November 2025. Helen dedicated much of her life to ensuring victims were listened to, believed and treated with compassion. She understood the importance of shining a light on groups of victims whose experiences can too often be overlooked. It is fitting that this report gives voice to road traffic collision victims and bereaved families, many of whom feel that their needs and experiences have not been fully recognised. I hope that the findings and recommendations in this report honour



Helen's commitment to improving the lives of victims and driving meaningful change across the justice system.

Forgotten victims

Victims have repeatedly told me that they feel forgotten by the system that is meant to support them. This research suggests that victims of criminal road traffic collisions experience this particularly acutely. Many felt they were not treated with the seriousness, recognition or compassion afforded to victims of other crimes despite the profound and lasting consequences that they continue to live with every day.

What struck me most in this research was the resilience of those who shared their experiences. Despite enduring unimaginable loss and trauma, they spoke with honesty and determination about what needs to change so that others do not have to face the same difficulties and challenges in future.

System failures

Their experiences reveal a system that too often places additional burdens on victims at a time when they are least able to bear them. Victims told us about lengthy police investigations, poor communication, repeated delays and having to fight for information, support and recognition. Many felt they were expected to navigate complex processes alone whilst coping with grief, trauma and significant life changes.

What victims need

One of the clearest messages from this research is that victims need greater consistency. They need road traffic collision investigations that are timely, thorough and subject to robust oversight. They need police officers and staff who understand the impact of trauma and are equipped to communicate with victims and bereaved families with compassion and professionalism. As Victims' Commissioner, I believe trauma-informed practice should become a defining feature of how all victim-facing agencies operate. Victims should be able to expect a response that recognises the impact of trauma regardless of where they live or which agency they encounter.

Specialist support

This research also highlights the vital role played by specialist road traffic collision victim support services. Time and again, victims described these organisations as life-changing and, in some cases, lifesaving. They provided practical advice, emotional support and were a trusted source of guidance when victims felt they had nowhere else to turn. Yet despite the crucial role they play, there remains no dedicated national funding stream for specialist road traffic collision victim services. Instead, support provision remains fragmented and dependent on local commissioning decisions, creating significant variation in what victims can access depending on where they live.

The fragility of this system was brought into sharp focus during the course of this research. RoadPeace, one of the UK's leading specialist organisations supporting road crash victims and bereaved families, and an organisation that contributed to this work, closed in January 2026 after more than thirty years of service. Its closure is a significant loss for victims and serves as a stark reminder that specialist support cannot continue to rely on uncertain and

unsustainable funding arrangements. If victims are to receive the support they need, government must take a more strategic approach to commissioning and funding specialist road traffic collision services, ensuring that support is available consistently across England and Wales.

This is why the recommendations in this report call not only for improvements to policing, including stronger national standards, better oversight and trauma-informed training, but also for sustainable funding for specialist support services, direct referral pathways into those services, and clearer information for victims about compensation and civil claims processes. Together, these reforms would help ensure that victims receive the support, information and treatment they deserve.

Trauma informed practice

While this report focuses specifically on the experiences of road traffic collision victims, many of the issues it identifies extend beyond roads policing and reflect challenges experienced by victims across the criminal justice system. Throughout my work as Victims' Commissioner, victims consistently describe the impact that trauma has on their ability to engage with criminal justice processes, absorb information and exercise their rights. Yet too often our systems, processes and communications fail to recognise this reality. That is why I remain committed to driving a more trauma-informed approach across the criminal justice system. The experiences set out in this report reinforce the importance of ensuring that victim-facing agencies understand trauma and embed this understanding within their policies, guidance, training and day-to-day practice. I would like to see the introduction of a national statutory framework, similar to the one used in Scotland, where all criminal justice agencies adopt trauma informed approaches supported by standards, guidance and training. Whilst this is broader than the scope of this RTC specific report, it is something I plan to take up with government and criminal justice agencies moving forward.

Victims' Code

More broadly, this report echoes findings from other work undertaken by my office regarding victims' awareness of, and access to, their rights under the Victims' Code. While there remains limited national data on victim code compliance and whether victims consistently receive their Code entitlements, the evidence we receive directly from victims paints a very concerning picture. Time and again, victims tell us that they are not receiving the information, communication and support to which they are entitled. Improving compliance with the Victims' Code remains a key priority for my office, and I will continue to press all criminal justice agencies to strengthen accountability, improve transparency and demonstrate how victims' rights are being delivered in practice.

Courts

The findings also contribute to wider conversations about victims' experiences of the courts, access to information and meaningful participation throughout criminal justice proceedings. This includes reforms to the use of Victim Impact Statements, which is an issue identified clearly in this report and something that my office continues to press for changes to.

I have long advocated for reforms that improve openness, transparency and understanding of the justice process for victims and bereaved families. Recent legislative progress has

created important opportunities to strengthen these areas, including measures to ensure that sentencing transcripts are free of charge and easily accessible. I welcome recent government commitments to address accessibility through further investment in video and audio technology in court rooms,³ as well as a roll out of a new national court listings model⁴ which will prioritise cases based on the human impact of delays. I am committed to working closely with government and justice agencies on effective implementation, ensuring that the needs and experiences of victims and bereaved families remain at the centre of these reforms.

In conclusion

Finally, I intend to share the findings of this report widely across policing, government, victim support organisations and criminal justice partners. The experiences and insights provided by victims and bereaved families should inform ongoing improvements to services, including the development of new support provision and initiatives designed to improve victims' and witnesses' experiences. The voices captured in this report deserve to be heard by all those responsible for supporting victims and delivering justice.

I am deeply grateful to every victim and bereaved family member who shared their experiences with my office. Reliving these events is never easy, and I recognise the emotional toll that participation will have involved. Their willingness to speak openly about their experiences has provided invaluable insight into an under-researched group of victims whose voices have too often gone unheard.

Victims of road traffic collisions should be treated with dignity, compassion and respect. They deserve timely investigations, clear communication, access to specialist support and a justice system that understands the profound impact these crimes have on their lives. The recommendations in this report provide a clear and practical route towards achieving that goal, and I urge government, policing and criminal justice agencies to act on them.



Claire Waxman OBE

Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

³ [Court Modernisation - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

⁴ [National Listing Framework - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

Executive summary

In reported road collisions in England and Wales in the year ending June 2025, there were an estimated 29,896 killed or seriously injured⁵ casualties.⁶ Many of these road traffic collisions will be crimes, for example, causing death or serious injury by dangerous driving or by careless or inconsiderate driving. Road traffic collisions can result in both the victim involved in the collision and their close relatives experiencing acute trauma. This group of victims have a unique and challenging journey through the criminal justice system due to the complex and multi-agency nature of investigations, combined with a lack of statutory support.

This report explores the experiences of injured victims' and bereaved victims'⁷ of road traffic collisions in England and Wales. The findings are based on interviews conducted by the Office of the Victims' Commissioner in 2025. Based on these findings, the Victims' Commissioner makes key, actionable recommendations for justice agencies and policy makers to consider.

About the research

This report aims to:

- Understand the experiences of victims of criminal road traffic collisions⁸ as they navigate the criminal justice system in England and Wales, including experiences of the police and post-charge.
- Understand victims' experiences of support and communication following a criminal road traffic collision.
- Understand victims' experiences of compensation following a criminal road traffic collision.
- Make policy recommendations in response to the research findings to improve the experiences of victims of criminal road traffic collisions.

Key findings

Whilst some victims did report positive experiences with police following a road traffic collision, the majority did not. This variation in victims' experiences was often caused by their interactions with individual police staff.

- Victims told us about their experience of slow and poorly handled police investigations which caused additional stress after an already traumatic road traffic

⁵ Injuries classed as serious include fractures, concussion, internal injuries, crushings, burns (excluding friction burns), severe cuts, severe general shock requiring medical treatment and injuries causing death 30 or more days after the collision.

⁶ [Reported road casualties in Great Britain, provisional estimates: year ending June 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ Bereaved victims of road traffic collisions refer to close relatives of victims killed in a road traffic collision. This includes parents, spouses/partners, children and siblings.

⁸ This research focuses on victims of criminal road traffic collisions due to the [remit of the Victims' Commissioner's role](#).

collision. The latest official statistics show it took an average of 372 days for police to record an outcome for investigations into causing death by driving offences.⁹

- Our research highlighted the poor communication victims received from the police, with many having to chase for updates. In one case, a bereaved relative was not told for months that the fatal collision was not caused by his wife.
- We did hear about examples of police providing great support for victims. However, we also heard examples of victims being disrespected and dismissed by police, which left them feeling de-centred from the process and as though the investigation was not a priority.
- Family Liaison Officers are key police staff that engage with bereaved relatives following a fatal road traffic collision. We found that excellent Family Liaison Officers can positively transform bereaved victims' experiences, but when Family Liaison Officers communicate poorly or the assigned Family Liaison Officer keeps changing, this is less likely to be the case.

Victims' experiences at court varied greatly, with mixed experiences of court scheduling, Victim Impact Statements and sentencing outcomes.

- We found that whilst some victims praised their availability being considered when deciding court dates, others felt let down by the adjournments they faced.
- Our findings also highlighted issues with court rooms, most notably, the poor audio within court rooms that meant victims were unable to hear proceedings and in one case had to purchase the court transcript to know what was said.
- One of the most positive parts of victims' court experiences was reading out their Victim Impact Statements which made them feel heard and empowered. However, again responses were varied with some victims telling us they were not given enough time or support to write their Victim Impact Statement. This is concerning when it is a key Victims' Code right and a rare opportunity for victims to have a voice in the process.
- Sentencing was often the most negative part of victims' court experiences. We found that several victims were disappointed with the sentence given to the defendant, particularly when a custodial sentence was not given for causing death by dangerous driving.
- Victims also told us how they were dissatisfied with the handling of driving bans, with several expressing concern they are too short. Some victims also felt that a driving ban should be implemented before sentencing¹⁰ because otherwise the defendant can continue driving for several years after they have killed someone whilst driving.

Road collision support organisations provide invaluable support to victims, but access to services and counselling provision could be improved.

⁹ This includes causing death by dangerous driving (average 402 days), causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs (average 361 days), causing death by careless or inconsiderate driving (390 days), causing death by driving unlicensed or uninsured (average 110 days), causing death by driving without due care/consideration while over the prescribed limit for a specified controlled drug (average 444 days) and causing death by driving whilst disqualified (average 524 days). Home Office (2026), Freedom of Information response on road traffic investigation timeliness, FOI ref FOI2026/04582, 17/4/26.

¹⁰ [Bail | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

- Our findings highlighted the excellent support road collision support organisations provide to victims. Victims described the lifesaving support they received from these organisations.
- We also found that too few road traffic collision victims are referred to these services by police directly and instead only found out about these specialist support organisations through family, friends or their own internet search.
- In addition, victims described the limited number of counselling sessions available, with several needing to fund their own private counselling to cope following a fatal road traffic collision.

Too many victims are not informed about compensation following a road traffic collision resulting in serious injury or death. Those that do pursue compensation often face a long, stressful and expensive process.

- Our research highlighted that whilst some victims were informed about their ability to claim compensation by their Family Liaison Officer, others were unaware this was a possibility.
- We found that those victims who did pursue a compensation claim often faced additional stress from the process whilst trying to already navigate the trauma and grief of the collision. This was due to the burdensome, lengthy and expensive nature of the civil claims process as well as the need to continue revisiting the past.

Key recommendations

This report contains six recommendations that are grouped into five overarching aims.

Please turn to page 73 for a full, detailed list of our six recommendations.

Strengthen national standards, oversight and accountability in road traffic collision investigations.

- By reviewing and revising standards and guidance for police responses to fatal and serious RTCs, to better address the needs of victims.
- By undertaking a thematic inspection of roads policing focusing on fatal and serious RTC investigations, including the victim experience, quality of Family Liaison Officers and the use 'not to drive' bail conditions.

Implement consistent, trauma informed RTC training for police officers and staff.

- By ensuring that all police staff working in roads policing have appropriate and trauma-informed training with improved consistency of practice across geographical areas.

Secure sustainable funding for RTC-specific victim support services.

- By ensuring there is sustained and adequate funding for support services for victims of RTCs, including those where a collision has not yet been recorded as a crime.

Roll out direct police referrals into specialist RTC victim support services.

- By building on direct referral arrangements across England and Wales which are well established and operating successfully, so that seriously injured and bereaved RTC victims are automatically referred directly into specialist services.

Improve access to clear information on compensation and civil claims processes for RTC victims.

- By ensuring clear guidance developed in consultation with specialist services on compensation and civil claims processes is accessible to victims and those agencies supporting victims.

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1. Introduction

Road traffic collisions in England and Wales

In reported road collisions in England and Wales in the year ending June 2025, there were an estimated 29,896 killed or seriously injured¹¹ casualties which is a continuation of the trend seen in recent years.¹² Within this figure there are 1,579 fatalities which is more than triple the number of those killed in homicides in the same period.¹³ These figures highlight the notable proportion of people in England and Wales that are impacted by road traffic collisions each year.

Many of these road traffic collisions will be recorded as crimes¹⁴, such as:

- causing death or serious injury by dangerous driving
- causing death by careless driving under the influence of drink or drugs
- causing death or serious injury by careless or inconsiderate driving
- causing death or serious injury by driving: unlicensed, disqualified or uninsured
- causing death by aggravated vehicle taking.

A multitude of different road users can be involved in road traffic collisions, including pedestrians, cyclists, vehicle drivers and passengers. These individuals and the family of those involved will experience acute trauma. In this research we focus on the experiences of victims injured in road traffic collisions and bereaved victims¹⁵ of road traffic collisions. We also focus specifically on criminal road traffic collisions that took place in England and Wales.

The victim journey for victims of road traffic collisions

Injured victims and bereaved victims of road traffic collisions face a particularly complex and challenging journey through the criminal justice system. Consequently, these victims often feel forgotten by the system, particularly where the collision is treated or referred to as an 'accident'. This undermines the harm victims have experienced and, until criminality is established, can leave them unable to access services and support that are specifically available to victims of crime¹⁶.

Road traffic collisions can be particularly complex due to their sudden nature and the potential involvement of multiple vehicles and multiple injured people. There are also many agencies that are involved straight away at the scene, this can include standard police and

¹¹ Injuries classed as serious include fractures, concussion, internal injuries, crushings, burns (excluding friction burns), severe cuts, severe general shock requiring medical treatment and injuries causing death 30 or more days after the collision.

¹² [Reported road casualties in Great Britain, provisional estimates: year ending June 2025 - GOV.UK](#) (accessed on 11/05/26)

¹³ [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

¹⁴ [Stakeholders interviewed by the Department for Transport estimated that 25-30% of the road traffic collisions they support are criminal.](#)

¹⁵ Bereaved victims of road traffic collisions refer to close relatives of victims killed in a road traffic collision. This includes parents, spouses/partners, children and siblings.

¹⁶ Specialist providers of road victim support services can provide support from day one of the crash regardless of whether criminality has been established.

traffic police, fire and rescue services, ambulance services and air ambulance services. At the scene, the investigation will begin to determine whether the collision was criminal. This can take a long time, which results in victims experiencing delays in finding out what happened and why, often at a time of acute grief.

The police investigation will proceed and where it is established that the collision was criminal, the evidence collected will inform a police charging decision or will be put to the CPS for a charging decision.¹⁷ This further investigation can involve additional specialist experts such as forensic collision investigators and a coroner, which can take a significant amount of time. Following this, if the police or CPS make a decision to charge, the case may proceed to court. Additional delays will be faced by victims waiting for court. Unlike bereaved victims of cases of murder and manslaughter, the suspect in a road traffic collision is much less likely to be remanded into custody ahead of trial. This means that road traffic collision cases will not be expedited in comparison.

Throughout their criminal justice journey, victims may also be navigating support services and compensation claims. The majority of support services for victims affected by road traffic collisions are currently provided by charities and there is no government funding ringfenced for this. This results in a variance in the type of support available across areas, and who is eligible for it. Previous research has identified the lack of parity in funding for bereaved victims of fatal criminal collisions, compared with what is received for bereaved victims of murder and manslaughter, despite both victim groups experiencing a sudden fatal trauma.¹⁸ Compensation is also a challenging part of the process for this victim group. Unlike bereaved victims of murder and manslaughter, road traffic collision victims are unlikely to be eligible for compensation through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. Instead, victims need to instruct a solicitor to pursue compensation through civil law. This can be a stressful, timely and expensive process for victims to engage with whilst also navigating the criminal justice system.

This road traffic collision victim journey is illustrated in a flowchart in Appendix C.

Previous research

The research conducted to date has primarily focused on road traffic collision victims' support needs and experiences of support services. A Road Victims Needs Assessment found that there was a lack of consistency across police forces, in relation to the level and type of road victim support services available and also the eligibility requirements to access support.¹⁹ The Department for Transport's review of the post-road traffic collision victim support landscape in England and Wales similarly highlighted a fragmented support system, with eligibility for support, referral arrangements, service provision, geographical coverage and funding varying significantly across providers.²⁰ A recent Transport for London pilot supporting victims of the most serious road traffic collisions demonstrated that enhanced victim support is both achievable and effective. The pilot highlighted the

¹⁷ For a select few offences, the police can make a charging decision, however sentencing guidelines and anticipated plea must be considered. The CPS guidelines state that all fatal road collisions require CPS approval.

¹⁸ [Post road traffic collision support](#)

¹⁹ [Road-Victims-Report-Full-Staffordshire-University-Supporting-Justice-pdf.pdf](#)

²⁰ [Support for victims of road traffic collisions - GOV.UK](#)

significant benefits of direct police referrals into specialist services, alongside timely emotional and practical support for victims and bereaved families.²¹

Very little research has looked at the specific experiences, that victims of road traffic collisions have, with the criminal justice system. This has resulted in this group of victims' often left feeling unheard at every stage of the system. Some research has highlighted the negative impact the criminal justice system had on bereaved victims' mental health, the additional stressors they had to manage whilst navigating the system and the poor treatment they received.²² More recent research also found that the criminal justice system significantly impacts those bereaved by a road traffic collision and can leave families feeling frustrated.²³

This report builds on previous work through primary research with victims injured in road traffic collisions and bereaved relatives of those killed in road traffic collisions (referred to throughout this report as bereaved victims), where a criminal charge had been brought in connection with the collision. The overarching aim of this research is to understand the experiences of victims of criminal road traffic collisions²⁴ throughout their journey through the criminal justice system and in accessing support. It also examines victims' experiences of pursuing compensation following a road traffic collision resulting in injury or death. This research is a small-scale qualitative study based on twelve interviewees' experiences. Our full methodology is detailed in Appendix A.

Report aims

This report aims to:

- Understand the experiences of victims of criminal road traffic collisions as they navigate the criminal justice system in England and Wales
- Understand victims' experiences of support and communication following a criminal road traffic collision
- Understand victims' experiences of compensation following a criminal road traffic collision

Research questions

This report seeks to present and discuss the relevant findings from this research to answer each of the following four research questions:

1. What are road traffic collision victims' experiences of the police?
2. What are road traffic collision victims' experiences post-charge?
3. What are road traffic collision victims' experiences of support?
4. What are road traffic collision victims' experiences of compensation?

²¹ [London Road Traffic Collision Victim Support Pilot: Evaluation](#)

²² ["We are the forgotten grievers": Bereaved family members' experiences of support and mental ill-health following a road traffic collision](#)

²³ [Giving Hope to Rebuild Lives: Practical and Emotional Support for Those Bereaved by Road Traffic Collisions](#)

²⁴ Throughout this report, the term victims of road traffic collisions refers to both individuals injured in road traffic collisions and bereaved family members of those killed in road traffic collisions.

2. Experiences with police

Following a road traffic collision, the police are the main criminal justice agency to be involved. There are multiple different roles within policing, including the Investigating Officers, the Forensic Collision Investigators and the Family Liaison Officers (FLOs).

Engagement with the police is the first stage of the criminal justice process and it sets the tone for the rest of the journey through the justice system. It is vital that victims have confidence in the police response, feel that investigations are being conducted thoroughly and promptly, and are kept informed, supported and treated with compassion and respect throughout the process.

Victims described inadequate police investigations and poor communication, often relying on the police as their sole source of information about what had happened and the progress of their case. Many felt they were not kept sufficiently informed and were left struggling to obtain answers at a time of significant trauma and uncertainty. Victims also reported a lack of compassion and respect in their interactions with the police, leaving them feeling sidelined from the process and that the offence was not being treated with the seriousness or priority it deserved.

At the same time, the research highlighted the transformative impact that positive interactions with police staff, particularly Family Liaison Officers, can have on victims' experiences. Where officers adopted a trauma-informed approach, communicated effectively and ensured victims felt listened to and supported, they were able to alleviate some of the stress and uncertainty associated with navigating the criminal justice system. However, inconsistent practice, staff turnover and concerns about training impacted the quality of support provided, undermining the effectiveness of Family Liaison Officers in meeting the needs of victims and bereaved families.

The police investigation

The police investigation is a vital part of the criminal justice process and involves police officers investigating to ascertain whether a person should be charged with an offence. This can take an extended period of time, which can be further delayed by the complexity of the case, for example, where a crash has more than one cause that can be identified.²⁵ A thematic report by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) found the arrangements for road deaths strikingly different to homicide cases. Whereas for homicide cases there are major incident teams, they found many fatal road traffic collision investigations are often carried out by one officer, rather than a team of officers, despite many forces establishing serious collision investigation teams. This meant often these officers were working at capacity.²⁶ Investigations should be thorough and effective but many of the victims we spoke to as part of this research described their experiences of slow and poorly handled police investigations following a road traffic collision.

²⁵ [Section 8: The police investigation | Brake](#)

²⁶ [Roads policing: Not optional – An inspection of roads policing in England and Wales](#)

We heard from one victim who had an excellent experience with the police, praising their communication and investigation. This experience is what victims need, particularly following a sudden and traumatic road collision resulting in death or serious injury.

The police were incredible and I would like to make that as clear as possible, through the whole thing, all the emergency services, but particularly the police, their investigation, how they kept us up to date, they were brilliant. And I can't fault them. (Bereaved family member)

Unfortunately, we found that this exceptionally positive experience with the police was unique and many other victims we spoke to had less positive experiences.

Slow police investigations and poor police case handling

Throughout the research we heard about victims' experiences of slow-moving police investigations which caused additional stress after an already incredibly traumatic time. In the year ending September 2025, it took an average of 372 days for police to record an outcome for investigations into causing death by driving offences.²⁷ The protracted nature of these investigations, coupled with high staff turnover, resulted in a lack of continuity for many victims. We also heard from victims who felt the police investigation into the road collision was handled inadequately, and in some cases where vital witnesses in the case were lost and procedural errors made by the police. This is a concern when research by the Victims' Commissioner consistently shows that having the crime fully investigated is one of the most important things to victims.²⁸

One bereaved family member was a witness to the fatal road traffic collision, and the police did not take her witness statement for ten weeks. This left her feeling as though the police were not taking the investigation into her daughter's death seriously. In addition to causing her further stress following this trauma, this slow communication made her feel like the investigation was not a priority for the police, despite it being a case of lethal harm. Feeling dismissed in this way damages victims' trust in the police and the wider justice system.

They took my statement 10 weeks after [her daughter's] death. And I was going spare. I was going like, why aren't they taking this seriously? Why don't they want to take my witness statement? I don't understand it. I wrote the whole thing out and I submitted it to them anyway. And I'm just like, can you do something? So they came around 10 weeks later. And he said that, well, we didn't have to come so early, but we felt like you needed to get this off your chest. And I said, oh, don't do me any

²⁷ This includes causing death by dangerous driving (average 402 days), causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs (average 361 days), causing death by careless or inconsiderate driving (390 days), causing death by driving unlicensed or uninsured (average 110 days), causing death by driving without due care/consideration while over the prescribed limit for a specified controlled drug (average 444 days) and causing death by driving whilst disqualified (average 524 days). Home Office (2026), Freedom of Information response on road traffic investigation timeliness, FOI ref FOI2026/04582, 17/4/26.

favours. And again, it's just the dismissiveness of it. (Bereaved family member)

Other bereaved relatives described slow police investigations and the stress this caused about witnesses' and suspects' memory recollection which is vital for the case.

It went on for quite a long time... they like didn't interview him for like quite a few months and I was thinking how is he going to remember what happened on the day? You know, I'm guessing they took an initial statement from him, but then I think he [FLO] said to me, "we've brought him in now, he's actually been in and now we've got all the evidence we can now charge him"...I just assumed they would have done all that level of detail right at the start...it did seem quite strange that his recollection, by that time, probably would not be as good as it would have been if he'd been interviewed in detail. (Bereaved family member)

The police didn't actually manage to get all the witness statements done for about six weeks, which apparently is quite common, which I think is absolutely outrageous because memory can change and it's best to do it straight away, unless of course the witness is completely distressed. (Bereaved family member)

One victim was frustrated to find out that the delay in police taking witness statements meant they were unable to locate an important witness, resulting in the loss of potentially useful evidence which could have been used in the criminal case.

[The fatal collision was in September], Beginning of December, end of November and they hadn't taken witness statements or anything. By that time, I thought it was quite appalling, not knowing the system, perhaps it isn't. But my worry was like people's memories fade, don't they? ... it seemed to me like he was just waiting for the forensic [collision] report²⁹ before he did anything and they take a year...and like you ask somebody a year ago, what they did on that certain day or so. Do you remember it? I can't even remember what I ate last week... We'd been told that she was seen taking balloons ['laughing gas'], and then we say, well, what's going on with that? Because that's a drug that you know, that causes blackouts. They said, "All right, well, we can't find the witness now", but they didn't take witness statements...So they then promised they would take statements by the end of December. I think they took most of them, but this is when they lost this lady who said she'd saw them taking balloons and they haven't found her ever since. (Bereaved family member)

Several victims reported experiencing a high turnover of staff during the police investigation. One victim highlighted how this was exacerbated by the slow police

²⁹ A forensic collision report is a document produced by forensic collision investigators that reconstructs the circumstances of a road traffic collision.

investigation into her son's death. This lack of staff continuity damages the relationship between victims and police. One victim reported feeling like the changes in staff weakened the case as they lacked knowledge on the details, leaving victims having to re-explain themselves. Previous research by the Victims' Commissioner highlighted the damaging impact this can have on victims, leaving them feeling stuck in a cycle of reliving their traumatic experiences.³⁰

Then the officer, that was my communication, he then moved forces so he was gone. Then I had this other lady that come and did a video interview at home. She was really lovely, but then she left and then in the end I was given somebody that, I'm going to be really honest with you, he wound me up and he was put in charge. (Injured victim)

We've lost one detective. The lady above him who was a Detective Sergeant. She retired... she said I'll follow this through with you... And then a month later, oh, "I'm retiring". Well, she must have known she was retiring? That's why it doesn't give you any confidence that they really care about prosecuting somebody for doing something naughty. And then...the family liaison officer rung and just said he told us something else and then he said, "oh, I don't know whether you know. But [another member of police staff] left now" I said no, we didn't...we thought we'd see him on Tuesday. With it taking that long you get no continuity and to me it makes the case feel weaker because these people haven't been with you the whole time. They don't know the ins and outs and they're not going to know all the other fine bits, are they? You know, it's just another bit of paperwork or that's another case like that, tick, tick, tick, tick. And it's not all the other interactions they've had with the family if you get all these changes, People are going to change jobs, but if the job got on with a bit quicker, you wouldn't have that changing. It makes it harder each time to us to try and explain where we are and why you want something done. (Bereaved family member)

Slow moving police investigations also delayed the return of victims' belongings to bereaved family members which caused additional distress. One bereaved victim described feeling as if their father's phone was only examined as evidence when the family began to chase for its return. These knock-on impacts of slow investigations exacerbate victims' feelings of helplessness and frustration while prolonging how long they must engage with the criminal justice system.

We haven't had her clothes back. So, it's been two years and three months and it's still not finished. (Bereaved family member)

There was things like the returning of my dad's belongings. We had to really ask for them. When are you going to bring them? They weren't

³⁰ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

forthcoming... They kept my dad's phone for an awful long time, I think it was a period of five months. He explained that the phone is useful for part of the investigation. Fair enough... But again, once I chased it up again, all of a sudden, they said, "oh, we need the code to get into it", which suggested to me they hadn't even looked at the phone up until that point, until I started chasing again. (Bereaved family member)

We additionally heard in this research from victims who felt the police investigation into the road traffic collision was handled inadequately, including procedural errors by the police.

One victim described experiencing poor police handling of their case, where a Fixed Penalty Notice³¹ was issued by police as the case outcome. The police failed to communicate with the CPS and the victim about the Fixed Penalty Notice and the case was still passed to the CPS who charged the defendant with dangerous driving. This meant the victim was given false hope that the offender would have to go to court to take responsibility for the collision and experienced long delays waiting for a justice outcome that ultimately could not be delivered. As a result of this poor police case handling and inadequate communication, CPS and court resources were wasted, and the victim made two unnecessary trips to court. This experience caused avoidable emotional distress for the victim, compounding the trauma of an already devastating road traffic collision.

We went to court for his plea hearing, and we were told he's not entering a plea, and his solicitor was claiming abuse of process. So we were sent away again, with another court date in a few months' time... went to that hearing and basically, that's when we were told that the police had issued a Fixed Penalty Notice in the May after the crash. And from that point on, they were never going to be able to charge him with anything more serious, the police had failed to inform the CPS that they'd issued a fixed penalty notice, so the whole thing was a complete waste of time, energy, upheaval and that was the end of it, and there would be no charge. And there was nothing we could do about it. (Bereaved victim)

Police information sharing

Due to the often-complex nature of road traffic collision cases, it is necessary for the police to be able to provide clear communication to victims about what has happened and what needs to happen next in the investigation. This comes at a time when victims are faced with trauma and distress as well as navigating a system which is unfamiliar to them.

However, the main issue victims raised in relation to police communication was the lack of information given to them about the circumstances and cause of the collision. This was particularly distressing for bereaved victims who were not present at the time of the collision as they were reliant on the police for details of what had happened. Victims highlighted the

³¹ A Fixed Penalty Notice can be issued for minor offences, including motoring violations. It provides an individual the opportunity to pay a fine instead of facing prosecution, allowing a quick resolution without formal charges. If the Fixed Penalty Notice is accepted, the individual does not have to face court proceedings for the offence.

extended time periods they had to wait to find out this information. One victim described only finding out the true cause of the collision when the details became publicly available. Another bereaved victim described the pain of not knowing for months whether his wife had caused the collision in an attempt to commit suicide when in fact the collision was caused by the other driver driving dangerously. This prolonged uncertainty leaves victims distressed and anxious as they wait for extended periods to understand the circumstances of the collision that led to their relative's death. For bereaved victims, this lack of timely information sharing compounds their grief and hinders their ability to process what has happened.

We were waiting for what caused the accident. They sort of indicated what might have caused it, but we didn't know, until all of the case files could be released, and the information was open to the public essentially. (Bereaved family member)

I didn't know if she'd actually committed suicide by going to the wrong side [of the road]. I didn't. I didn't know... I was eventually told the collision was "avoidable" and I thought that was a terrible comment to make. "It was avoidable", so I said, "avoidable, by whom?" I didn't know who was at fault. And then they said, "avoidable by the perpetrator, by the accused", not my wife. So that's the first time I actually found out, months later...it'd be nice to have someone to say, well, actually, you know, our initial inquiries show that your wife is not at fault at all. And in fact, what had happened was it was a double bend with double white lines and he had come across the double white lines and went straight into her...I would have liked to have known that, actually we were not the guilty party, much, much, much sooner. (Bereaved family member)

The lack of information shared by the police with victims often left them unprepared for details that emerged during court proceedings.³² Some victims described hearing distressing information about the collision for the first time in court. This lack of communication, coupled in some cases with insensitive language, undermined victims' experiences and failed to acknowledge the profound impact of the offence on their lives.

As a result, victims experienced unnecessary anxiety and emotional distress. Many were expected to remain silent and composed while processing traumatic and upsetting information, creating a real risk of re-traumatisation. This left victims feeling marginalised and like an afterthought within the justice process, while placing the burden on them to regulate their reactions to information they should have been prepared for in advance.

When it came to the actual trial itself, I do feel that they could have sort of prepared, well given us a little bit more information what we had...I understood that they could only tell me what they were allowed to tell me. I understand that... But later down the road after the initial investigation. If I'd have known more about it, a little bit more about this

³² The information disclosed to bereaved relatives during an investigation is subject to operational considerations and is ultimately a matter for the lead investigator.

guy and what we was going to have to face and what we'd be dealing with in court I think I would have been better prepared. (Bereaved family member)

You're given snippets of information as things happen, and then it's court and you have to sit silently and you we learnt so much about what happened that night in court, having to sit there in silence and listen to it all. We knew very little before then and then we had to hear he actually went up to her and he said he was sorry before he ran away. And this is what the police came across, this is what they found. So there's a lot of emotions to go through, but the fear of reacting to it, you don't know if I react to this, am I going to throw the proceedings off? Is it going to be a problem? You're supposed to sit and I think one of the judges at one of the hearings we went to said something about our dignified silence being a good thing and I found that really difficult...you're listening to how your loved one died, finding out things you didn't know and you're expected to you know, sit back and think of England and not speak. (Bereaved family member)

One victim expressed frustration that the police would not even share the basic facts of the case with the bereaved family ahead of court, even if this was just on the morning before the court hearing began. He explained how not sharing these basic facts with bereaved victims for years is detrimental to their mental health. With the time taken for cases to progress through the criminal courts increasing³³, victims will be left without this information for even longer.

The police, although we asked lots and lots of questions, the police wouldn't tell us anything on the grounds that it would affect the case... Now, that's wrong. I mean, there's nothing we were going to say that would actually, you know, whatever you told us would be private. I mean, come on, what are we going to do? Immediately ring up the BBC? Knowing that it's going to affect the case? My opinion is this, that if it's a fact, yeah, it's a fact that she was doing a minimum of 44 miles an hour. You can't change that. So even if we did phone up the BBC and tell her she was doing a minimum of 44, it wouldn't matter, because it's a fact. And even if it went to jury, which it didn't because she pleaded guilty, it wouldn't matter if the jury knew because it's a fact. So I don't see why the CPS can't tell you things that are facts...Our sentencing hearing took 13 months, which I think is a disgrace anyway...but you know, to keep someone in the dark for that long is wrong. You know, the way it affects our mental health is a disgrace...there's no reason why we can't know what evidence is going to be presented, you could do that the day before, you know, or even say, right, the trial is going to be on in the afternoon, which it was. I'm going to meet you at 9:00 in

³³ [Criminal court statistics quarterly: January to March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

*the morning, we'll go through everything. But we had none of that.
(Bereaved family member)*

In contrast, some victims were given additional information ahead of the trial by their Family Liaison Officer³⁴ to ensure they were not hearing shocking details for the first time whilst in court. Sharing additional information about the case ahead of the trial better prepares victims for court hearings and gives them time to process potentially traumatic details in private.

*Just before the trial, the FLO went through the file with us. So then they did that because they said there'll be information that will come up in court and we don't want you to be shocked. So we, you know, we can tell you certain information upfront. Because obviously, they couldn't release everything because it was still. You know, under trial essentially.
(Bereaved family member)*

This allowed them to feel included in the process, rather than as an afterthought. This appeared to be an essential part of the process to protect against re-traumatisation.

Police treatment of victims

Some victims described the excellent support they received from police staff during their criminal justice journey, from the original police officers who notified the victims of the road traffic collision, to the officers who then investigated the collision. At a time when victims are navigating trauma and grief, this is incredibly important.

One victim described how the police officers who notified her that her husband had been in a road traffic collision and took her to the hospital helped her pack what she needed to bring, helped her contact her husband's children and checked in on how she was doing throughout the day. These considerate actions by the police helped lighten the burden on the victim and alleviated some of her stress at an exceptionally difficult time.

They were really good at sort of trying to help. Tell me what kind of things to take with me because they said we don't know how long we were going to be and they weren't able to tell me what kind of state he was in, so I didn't know whether or not he was unconscious or what I was going to be walking into... I couldn't get hold of his children and he said, "Oh well try this" or "try that" and they even offered to try and find a phone number for one of his children so you know they were really, really good... I saw the traffic officer a bit later on in the day when I was outside ringing people, he came over to check how I was doing and how my husband was doing, which was like really, really good and, you know, told me what his name was. (Bereaved family member)

Another bereaved victim described how the police officers assigned to the case, supported the family through the entire criminal justice process, even attending the appeal hearing

³⁴ Family Liaison Officers are trained police officers assigned to families following a fatality, including fatal road traffic collisions.

following sentencing. The victim described how much it meant to her that these officers went above and beyond their roles to support the family. Having consistent support from a justice professional with detailed knowledge of the case can be transformative for victims. This ongoing support can reduce victim anxiety and distress, lower the risk of re-traumatisation by the justice process and ensure victims understand what is happening and what to expect.

The original solicitor did come to the appeal hearing as well as did two of the three, I think actually of the crash investigators, the police officers, they stuck with us by that point. They didn't have to have anything to do with it anymore. But they stuck with us and like that. That's what makes me quite emotional, actually. That matters to me so much that they didn't have to do that. They don't have time for that. But no, they stuck it through with us. (Bereaved family member)

However, this experience was not universal. In this research we also heard from several victims who had been treated poorly by police during their criminal justice journey. Victims told us about police refusing to acknowledge the mistakes they made as well as being dismissive, disrespectful and lacking compassion towards victims.

One victim described the way they were treated following a communication error between the police and the CPS. Whilst the CPS apologised and acknowledged the communication issues, the police refused to accept their role in the situation. The difference in behaviour from the two agencies highlighted the impact a lack of accountability has on a victim. It is clear from this victims' experience that what was important was the police taking ownership of their mistakes and apologising and not doing this compromised her confidence in the system. In addition to this, the victim described how the police acted aggressively and displayed victim-blaming behaviours towards her which were emotionally damaging. Research has identified the harm that victim-blaming by criminal justice agencies can do to victims. This secondary victimisation can result in disengagement from the criminal justice process.³⁵

We asked for a meeting with the CPS and the police...the CPS have been brilliant throughout...we've had an amazing prosecutor work with us and they were very apologetic. During the meeting, they held their hands up and said there had been problems with communication. We'd been put through stuff we didn't need to and we were met with the police refusing to apologise, refusing they did anything wrong and it was really weird. We were sat there with the CPS almost gobsmacked. The police were being aggressive, like...she was getting really quite irate with me... The CPS were there going, "something's gone very wrong with the communication" and then I've got the senior investigating officer saying, "well, we communicated really well"...And we just couldn't get them to just say, "we made a mistake" and that's all I wanted from them,

³⁵ [Secondary Victimisation: Victim-Blaming, Retraumatization, and the Criminal Justice System | Springer Nature Link](#)

was to just hold their hands up and go, “we messed up and we're really sorry” and they just wouldn't...it's been really damaging emotionally for me because there's been a lot of blame put on me as a victim. Like,” it's your fault”, “you're wasting taxpayers' money”, “you don't deserve an FLO”, “You're wasting our time”, “You're a nuisance”. It's like, that's how they've made me feel. (Bereaved victim)

Another victim felt dismissed by the way she was treated by police. She described how the police tried to reassure her by emphasising how her daughter was not killed by a prolific criminal. However, this caused frustration rather than comfort as she felt it understated the actions of the driver which resulted in her unlawful death and failed to recognise the loss she had experienced. This can lead to victims feeling unrecognised and forgotten as despite there being lethal harm, because it was a road crime it was not treated with the same seriousness as other forms of lethal harm. This downgrading of events in comparison to what victims have experienced can lead to them feeling disempowered, as they do not feel heard or recognised. This can reduce victims' trust in the police. The charity RoadPeace has highlighted the importance of the language used throughout the criminal justice system in relation to road traffic collisions, identifying that too often language is used that undermines the severity and preventability of a road traffic collision.³⁶

A couple of things that the senior investigating officer said to me, “he's not some big criminal”, was literally a thing that he said. And, since he said that, I found out that's quite common for a police officer to say to a road victim, because in a way they're trying to comfort you but it's very, very backwards, because... they say, well, he's not a big criminal, meaning, he's not like a drug dealer or a murderer, or, hasn't got this 20 year record of killing little children on crossings. But he is a big criminal, because he killed her. I just find it so dismissive because she was killed...unlawfully. (Bereaved family member)

Similarly, another bereaved victim we spoke to in this research described how the actions of the police left her feeling dismissed, as though her son was viewed as ‘just another dead body’. She felt their approach and treatment of victims lacked compassion and this extended to their disrespectful and dehumanising handling of her son's belongings. The insensitivity shown added to her distress at a very difficult time and highlights the need for trauma-informed practice to ensure that bereaved victims receive communication and treatment sensitive to their grief.

One time after the court cases, [the Family Liaison Officer] said “all right, I've arranged a meeting in the police station”....And while we're walking over there, they're talking about whose leaving party they're going to, or are they going out drinking that night, and stuff like that, you know? And that's not a way to treat the family, is it? You know, wandering around behind them, listening to all this. I know they've got to lead their lives but ... they really do need some lessons in how to deal with people

³⁶ [Crash Not Accident - RoadPeace](#)

who've lost somebody and it isn't just another dead body on the street, you know? And that's how we felt it was, you know...I said to the Family Liaison Officer, "is there any possessions?" ... well he kept forgetting. And then he did say, "No, we haven't got anything apart from his phone" ... then a number of weeks later, he said, "oh, I found a bag of [your son's] stuff". He said he'd bring it to the next court case. He dragged it out [of] the evidence bags, and then it was this pile of stuff, we didn't think about it, we hadn't got anything to put it in. So he finds an old Tesco's bag in the bottom of his rucksack and shoves all [my son's] stuff in there, you know. Well, that really upset my sister, because she said it's the last things [my son] touched, you know. So yes, that wasn't good. They just don't stop to think of that person that they're dealing with it's not just a body, it's somebody who's loved with every bone in our body, you know. (Bereaved family member)

Family Liaison Officers

Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) are trained police officers assigned to families following a fatality, including fatal road traffic collisions.³⁷ The role of the Family Liaison Officer is to gather evidence and information from the family to contribute to the investigation whilst building trust with families and providing them with support and timely information.³⁸ In their thematic report on roads policing, HMICFRS found in most forces they visited that the number of roads policing Family Liaison Officers wasn't enough to meet demand. This meant they were responsible for far more cases than their counterparts in homicide investigation teams, sometimes dealing with as many as eight families at any one time.³⁹

This research demonstrates the impact Family Liaison Officers have on victims' experiences of the system. It is clear that the delivery of trauma-informed communication and care is crucial for centring victims in the process and helping them to navigate the unfamiliar, whereas a lack of clear and consistent implementation of this results in victims feeling invalidated. Family Liaison Officers also have an important role to play in acting as a single point of contact, signposting to support and managing victims' expectations. Where they do not fulfil this, the burden is placed on victims to seek information and seek support out for themselves.

Good practice from Family Liaison Officers

Our research found that when a Family Liaison Officer fulfils their role to a high standard, victims experiences are transformed. Victims described good practice where their Family Liaison Officer signposted them to specialist support services and explained each stage of the criminal justice process. This was in addition to building strong relationships with them

³⁷ Family Liaison Officers are assigned in RTC cases only where there is a fatality. However, they may be provided in a case where there is a serious injury if the case is complex or there is a fatality in addition to serious injury in the same collision.

³⁸ [2 Management Structure for Family Liaison.pdf](#)

³⁹ [Roads policing: Not optional – An inspection of roads policing in England and Wales](#)

and showing genuine care. This included keeping them updated with case progression and supporting them at court. One victim emphasised how her Family Liaison Officer signposted her to specialist support services which have been incredible.

We were initially given a FLO and he was great to start with. He signposted to RoadPeace who have been phenomenal throughout. So I can't fault them for that. (Bereaved victim)

Testimony from another victim highlighted how crucial it was to be communicated with and supported in a trauma-informed way by her Family Liaison Officer. She described how her Family Liaison Officer spent time talking her through each stage of the criminal justice process, including the involvement of the coroner, potential charging decisions, what it will be like at court, the different sentencing types and writing Victim Impact Statements. This can reduce distress for victims, by managing expectations and providing structure to prepare them for processes in the criminal justice system that are often complex and difficult.

They sort of start talking to you about what the bits of the processes are. So, you know a little bit about what the coroner will do. And that, you know, I'd be contacted and some of the questions that I might be asked might seem a little bit harsh and bit cold, but that's what they need. They need to ask some of the questions that they ask and sort of preparing you a little bit for what a trial might be like, whether it might go to crown, or whether it might be in the magistrates and started talking a little bit about the type of sentences that might come into play and obviously helping doing victim statements and things like that, ready for the trial...throughout the FLO had kind of steered me that that was probably the way it would go. I don't think there'd been any, there'd been no evidence that he had been drinking or taking was under the influence of drugs. He was not on his phone. He wasn't speeding, so they were able to give me some of that information as they were doing the investigation...I knew he wasn't going to get a custodial sentence and my FLO had spoken about that. (Bereaved family member)

This victim also described how her Family Liaison Officer showed genuine care for her and her family, checking in on them on significant dates, and providing advice when she returned to work. This shows how transformative empathetic communication can be when supporting victims during acute bereavement.

Because my son, his 18th birthday was five days after my husband passed, and he even remembered that and contacted us on my son's birthday to check how the day, you know, he said. Hope the day goes OK. I know it's not going to be quite what you expected, but you know it was just little things like that I was very impressed with, with the service that I got from my FLO throughout the whole proceedings that followed...even if there wasn't a lot they could say, and sometimes the FLO would just ring just to check how I was doing and how my son was

doing, you know, which was which was nice, you know, and like, when I was ready to go back to work, he sort of gave me advice on what that might be like for me and how I could maybe manage how people reacted to me going back to work. It was things I wouldn't necessarily have thought to do myself. (Bereaved family member)

Additionally, this victim told us how her Family Liaison Officer was good at keeping her updated with how the case was progressing even if they could not give her much detail. Her Family Liaison Officer also let her know when things would be slowing down and there would not be any updates for a while. Providing proactive and clear communication to victims and managing their expectations reduces their uncertainty and stress and allows them to feel supported and informed through the justice system. It is particularly important for this group of victims to feel included in the process, when they were often left feeling like road crime was not taken seriously despite it resulting in traumatic loss.

It's like, oh, "we've got this" or "we're waiting for this" so they don't give you a lot of information about what they find out, but obviously they let me know the day that he'd gone in for interview. You know, they let me know when the postmortem had been done and what the coroner's involvement was. So yeah, I didn't ever feel that I hadn't heard anything for any period of time...even if he didn't have anything to tell me, he would say, "look, we're hitting a bit of a time now where it's going to be a bit quieter. You may not hear from me for a month or two", so he was really good at managing my expectations. (Bereaved family member)

Victims also described the important support they received from their Family Liaison Officers at court. In some cases, the Family Liaison Officer arranged separate entrances for the bereaved family to use and in others the Family Liaison Officer found out the exact layout of the court room and where everyone would be in the court room at the request of the family. These actions provided victims with vital support at a very stressful and anxiety-provoking time.

The FLO was very good. You know, he met us beforehand. He took us in [to the court] ...He ensured we had a room to go in separate to everybody else, so we weren't waiting outside amongst everybody else, which was very helpful. (Bereaved family member)

I wanted to know exactly the layout of the court and the FLO said he'd never been asked that before and he went and actually did it. He went through it with me because I wanted to know where we were sitting as the family and where the police would be, where the judge was, where the accused was and where the attorneys were. And that worked very well. (Bereaved family member)

It is evident from our research that a good Family Liaison Officer can change a victims' experience of the criminal justice system for the better. It was therefore concerning that most victims we spoke to as part of this research did not have such positive experiences with their Family Liaison Officer. Victims described poor communication, a lack of training

and empathy, insufficient signposting to support services and a high turnover of staff. In their thematic report on roads policing, HMICFRS found that officers were highly supportive where one force had created a specific roads policing Family Liaison team, as it clearly separated the role of investigator from that of Family Liaison Officer. It is likely that the additional capacity this provides allows for more of the positive work detailed in our research. However, this was in comparison to examples found by HMICFRS of serious collision investigators 'double hatting', with officers reporting still being expected to carry out a certain level of enforcement activity while dealing with bereaved families.⁴⁰

Poor communication

In contrast to the exemplary experiences reported by some victims, many described inadequate communication from their Family Liaison Officer whilst navigating the criminal justice system. Victims spoke of receiving confusing or inaccurate information, prolonged periods without contact, and having to repeatedly chase for updates about their case.

Lengthy gaps in communication disrupted the continuity of care and support that victims had been led to expect. As a result, many felt abandoned, deprioritised and unheard at a time when they were coping with significant trauma and uncertainty.

Breakdowns in communication were particularly distressing at key stages of the process. Several victims described learning new information about the collision through media reporting before receiving any update from the police. Others felt unprepared for significant developments in their case because important information had not been communicated to them in a timely way.

These experiences left victims feeling overlooked and undervalued, as though their needs and interests were secondary to the wider process. Such failures not only undermined victims' confidence in the police response and investigation but also compounded the emotional impact of an already traumatic experience.

We went through a period of four weeks with our FLO where we had no contact at all. We phoned, we sent messages, we sent emails. We never had anything, no out of office, nothing. We don't know what was happening at all. And whilst I understand the FLO is restricted to tell us anything, really, there was no contact. There was nothing asking how we were...I strongly believe that there should be just regular contact. I got nothing to report, but how are you? Is there anything I can do? And you can set that up on a repeat on your calendar. Yeah, so it's not difficult to do. It's not difficult to set an out of office...but no, we had nothing of that. Yeah. We had...It was like, I mean, I know that she had, we were not the only ones. And that's probably even more important to set your diary so that you don't miss people. But the feeling was she lost interest. Yeah, she moved on to the next one. So yeah, I do feel that it could have been better managed. (Bereaved family member)

⁴⁰ [Roads policing: Not optional – An inspection of roads policing in England and Wales](#)

When they came to see me, it was all like, "if you've got any questions, you know, get in touch". And I think it was that night. It was like 3:00 in the morning. One of my friends had said "there's an article in the Sun, It fits your description, your age, your car. Was it you?" And I was like, "yes, it was." I wasn't ready to even tell, I hadn't even told my mum at that point. So I was really taken aback. So I messaged my FLO. Then I didn't hear back from her for three days. Because I was up all night going, are you going to release my name? What's going to happen? So yeah, there was definite lack of communication from the start. That felt difficult. (Injured victim)

One victim described several months passing between each update they received from their Family Liaison Officer and how no improvements were made even when they complained about the lack of communication.

The first FLO...they weren't communicating properly. So we did put in a complaint that they assigned a second person. And throughout the process, we had complaints about the communication. We weren't kept regularly up to date, and according to the victims' code of practice, we're entitled to be regularly communicated to. And I did take it up with the officer in charge and he sort of explained that well, it's an ongoing process. You know there is a, there has been a crime committed. We can't give out information, which I fully understand, and I said, I don't want to know the details of the investigation as such, in terms of what you've found, and what you've discovered, I just want to know what is happening next. What are you looking to? What do we expect and when? And I did communicate that, but it never improved. So the accident happened in November, I think the next piece of information we got from them, was that they set a date to interview the defendant, which was sometime in February. And then there was a massive gap from I think February to June, where we didn't hear anything at all and we had another update of something or other than I forget exactly what it was. And then from June to September, there was a massive gap. (Bereaved family member)

Victims also described needing to chase their Family Liaison Officer for updates on the case. For some victims this did result in receiving the information they needed but for others it did not. In contrast to victims who received proactive communication, where communication from the Family Liaison Officer was only reactive, this placed the burden on the victim. Having to chase for information placed additional stress and hardship on victims who were already navigating the grief of a sudden and traumatic loss.

They were awfully sporadic in getting back to you... You know, we went through a number of weeks where we didn't really hear anything. If we'd ask the question, the family liaison officer, we'd speak to him and then

he said "I'll get back to you" and then he'd come back "Oh, I forgot to do that" or whatever. (Bereaved family member)

What I found was, it was always us, myself or my sister that was either trying to phone the FLO or e-mail them for information and to be fair, they did come back. They did reply to emails, but it was always one sided. It was always us chasing up what was happening next. Where are you up to? Do you have any update? It was never them coming to us, you know, which adds to the stress and the uncertainty and not knowing. And fair enough, they might not have any updates, but just a courtesy call or a check in would, you know, make a world of difference knowing that they are there and they're doing something. We've sort of just been left to be honest, there wasn't really support in that sense...They don't always have anything to say, but I just think that regular contact, even if you've got nothing to say, just to know that they're there and they're doing something rather than us having to constantly reach out. (Bereaved family member)

In some cases, victims also received confusing, conflicting and incorrect information in relation to their case. One victim described being told the police would not be taking a case following the fatal road traffic collision and then told they would be. Another was told they would be charging the suspect to then find out the Family Liaison Officer had mixed up their cases. Receiving this level of misinformation can cause anxiety and a sense of chaos at a time when families are highly vulnerable and are also dependent on the Family Liaison Officer to be able to provide some clarity. The mistakes are not just administrative and can be emotionally damaging for victims.

Then information would change, "Oh, no, no, I don't think it's that" and then they're thinking, "oh, no, perhaps we're not taking a case", "Oh, yes, perhaps we are". And it was a bit. Oh, my God. What's going on? (Bereaved family member)

We were told about a month before that it was going to be causing death by dangerous driving, but the FLO made a mistake, it was the wrong case. (Bereaved family member)

Lack of training and empathy

Many victims felt that their Family Liaison Officer lacked the appropriate training to fulfil the role to the standard needed. Whilst several victims described their Family Liaison Officer as nice in nature, they highlighted that they had insufficient training to effectively support families bereaved following road traffic collisions. This is a concern when it is evident from this research and other literature how much a trauma-informed approach can improve victims' experiences and help them to feel supported.⁴¹

⁴¹ [Full article: Trauma-informed policing: a scoping review](#)

Everything's a last minute job, you know. Especially with [the Family Liaison Officer], he's a bit of a 'last minuter', bless him. Nice, nice guy, but not trained enough. (Bereaved family member)

The Family Liaison Officer, he's a perfectly nice guy. I think he...often didn't know what to say to us, but, he didn't say anything terrible himself. He just, sort of, would say, "yeah, it's rubbish, isn't it?" (Bereaved family member)

The ramifications of a lack of trauma-informed training were that victims experienced a lack of emotional awareness and empathy in their interactions with their Family Liaison Officer. One victim described the insensitivity of the communication they received, with their Family Liaison Officer showing inadequate consideration for the timing in which they provided their updates to the family. This unfortunately can exacerbate rather than minimise trauma and adds to the feeling victims have about the lethal harm they have experienced not being treated with the gravity it would be if it was another crime.

About an hour before the ventilator was going to be turned off. That's when the FLO came to talk us through what was happening justice wise. So it was a very, very strange time. And so what he was saying, I didn't really, I couldn't really care about it in that moment. But he was talking about some very...obviously serious things and he was trying to bring up a post-mortem. I mean, obviously that seemed quite far away because we hadn't done the organ donation. And then he talked about a secondary post-mortem and I just like, it was just words to me at that point. He did say that one of the witnesses had captured the whole incident on dash cam and that they were confident that the killer was going to be, he was going to have to take the full responsibility and that we were not to blame. And that was helpful to hear, at that point, that we did nothing wrong. I mean, I knew that we did nothing wrong, but it was weird. The whole thing was weird. (Bereaved family member)

The Family Liaison Officer, he's so young. He just needs training up to be a little bit more empathetic. (Bereaved family member)

Insufficient signposting of support and lack of continuity of care

One of the key parts of the Family Liaison Officer role is to make sure families know what support is available to help them deal with the trauma they are facing.⁴² In this research we heard from several bereaved relatives who felt their Family Liaison Officer should have done much more to facilitate them to access support. They described their Family Liaison Officers handing them a booklet of relevant information in the aftermath of the collision, but this was left to victims to navigate themselves. Victims voiced how placing this responsibility with them only added to the burden of things they needed to organise at a time of acute grief. They also expressed that being given this information once, at a time when they did not necessarily have the capacity to engage with exploring support services was unhelpful.

⁴² [2 Management Structure for Family Liaison.pdf](#)

While a Family Liaison Officer is following procedure in providing the booklet of information, what victims described needing was more proactive engagement. This included their Family Liaison Officers referring them into support services instead of having to do it themselves, or a more regular check in to signpost them to services as the case progressed.

The FLO gave us a booklet that's been developed by Brake. So I contacted Brake. I contacted Road Peace. I contacted our own counsellor. None of that was arranged by the FLO. And I think it should be...my daughter asked the FLO [about support for the bereaved victim's grandson], yeah, and the FLO said that she could provide some numbers for her, yeah, to contact. Never happened. Never happened. Okay, so what support did we get really, that was organised by the FLO? Very little, if any... I don't think there's any reason why the FLO couldn't have asked us, "Have you phoned Brake? Have you phoned RoadPeace? Have you done this?" (Bereaved family member)

This Brake booklet was handed over. And basically said, all the information that you need is in there, and that's where it stopped... we subsequently found afterwards that the police, the FLO should have asked us, for our consent, I guess, "Do you want us to refer you to Brake or do you want to do it yourself?" That question was never asked, and we ended up self-referring. (Bereaved family member)

We've not had services reach out to us. The onus is on us to do that... you need people to kind of make those referrals for you when you're in that position, you're handed a big thing full of leaflets. Three days after my sister's died, I'm not picking up the phone to try and get support. I'm arranging a funeral, we're doing probate, there's all of that going on. So it's very much, "here's some things" and you're sort of left to it... Unless you're incredibly proactive when you're given a set of leaflets 24 hours after you've watched your family member die. I think what you need is more long term offers of help. That first bit fine, but then a check in later on from a family liaison officer four weeks down the line, three months down the line, after the appeal, after the hearings after this after that. "Hey, just checking in, did you know, you've seen this pack, have you come across this?" And if somebody says no, I'm not interested. Fine. That's up to them. But when you're first given it, there is no way you've got the capacity to consider it. There's a lot of paperwork involved when somebody dies, it gets lost in that paperwork. (Bereaved family member)

Several victims also reflected on the need for a consistent point of contact. Many victims told us about the multiple different Family Liaison Officers they had throughout their criminal justice journey which they felt disrupted the continuity of care and support they received. This turnover of staff left gaps in the communication provided to victims, meaning they had less understanding and engagement with what was happening in the case. Part of the

Family Liaison Officer role is to support the bereaved family and build a trusting relationship; this is difficult to achieve when families have to build relationships with four or five different Family Liaison Officers as their case progresses through the criminal justice system. Having a consistent point of contact throughout the criminal justice system can better manage victim's expectations and improve both the quality of communication and support at each stage of the process. It is also key for building trust, by reminding the victim they are important and the system is not forgetting about them. This is particularly crucial given the extensive delays they are experiencing.

We actually ended up throughout the whole process having four FLOs, which wasn't good for several reasons. (Bereaved family member)

I was on about my third FLO at that point... But then by the time the day come around, I'd had two more FLOs, so it was like I was on 5 FLOs in total, by the actual day in court...Probably having different FLOs or whatever along the way like you know that wasn't helping. (Bereaved family member)

The police are typically the first point of contact victims have with the criminal justice system following a road traffic collision resulting in serious injury or death. Victims should be able to expect a response that is thorough, timely and compassionate. They should have confidence that the collision is being properly investigated, that they will be kept informed of developments, and that they will be treated with dignity, respect and sensitivity throughout the process.

A victim-centred approach is essential. Victims and bereaved families should not be left feeling marginalised or forced to relive their trauma unnecessarily in order to secure information, support or justice. This research demonstrates that where Family Liaison Officers adopt a trauma-informed approach, victims report significantly more positive experiences. Effective support is characterised by empathetic, transparent and proactive communication, consistent engagement, and clear management of expectations. These practices help victims to feel recognised and supported, providing much-needed certainty and stability during a period of profound grief, trauma and uncertainty.

However, while some victims described exemplary support from the police, too many did not. Victims reported lengthy delays in receiving information, extended periods without meaningful updates, and, in some cases, months of uncertainty about the circumstances of the collision itself. Bereaved families should not have to wait months to understand whether their loved one was responsible for, or a victim of, a collision, nor should they be left chasing for updates from their assigned Family Liaison Officer.

If public confidence in roads policing and the wider criminal justice system is to be strengthened, victims must receive timely and effective communication alongside thorough and efficient investigations. Embedding consistent, trauma-informed practice across roads policing would represent an important step towards ensuring that victims and bereaved families receive the support, information and treatment they deserve.

3. Experience of the Courts

For victims of criminal road traffic collisions, the court stage is a vital part of their journey to receive justice, as this is where it is determined if the defendant is guilty of the crime. Navigating the court process and attending court can be an incredibly difficult and stressful time for victims and it is crucial that this is not further exacerbated unnecessarily.

Victims' experiences of the court process were mixed. Some spoke positively about being consulted on court dates and appreciated efforts to accommodate their needs. However, many others described the frustration and distress caused by repeated adjournments and delays, which prolonged uncertainty and extended the emotional impact of the collision.

Victims also identified practical barriers within the court environment. These included poor courtroom audio quality, which made it difficult to follow proceedings, and, in Magistrates' Courts, having to sit in close proximity to the defendant. For many, these experiences heightened anxiety and undermined their ability to engage fully with the process.

Victim Impact Statements (VIS) were frequently viewed as one of the most meaningful aspects of the court process. Victims who read their VIS in court often described the experience as empowering, providing an opportunity to ensure that the impact of the collision on their lives was recognised and heard. However, several victims felt inadequately supported in preparing their statement and reported being given insufficient information, guidance or time to complete it effectively.

We also heard from victims who were disappointed by sentencing outcomes. In particular, some questioned decisions not to impose custodial sentences for death by dangerous driving offences, while others expressed concern about the length of driving disqualifications and delays in their implementation, which in some cases occurred years after the fatal collision. These experiences left some victims feeling that the seriousness of the harm caused had not been fully reflected in the sentence imposed.

Court dates and delays

Throughout this research, victims described mixed experiences of the court process. Some welcomed efforts to accommodate their availability and personal circumstances when hearings were listed. However, many others experienced repeated adjournments⁴³ often at short notice, which delayed the progression of their case. These delays prolonged victims' engagement with the criminal justice system, extending uncertainty and causing additional emotional distress at a time when many were seeking answers, resolution and closure.

There are lots of logistical factors that influence when trials and hearings are scheduled within the courts. Victims were pleased when their availability and preferences were considered in the scheduling decisions.

I said, "I want it to happen before my birthday, because I don't want to start another year with that still ongoing". So they actually put it in for the day before my birthday which was great, you know, and my FLO was able to be with me then for that. (Bereaved family member)

⁴³ An adjournment is a court trial or hearing being postponed to another date.

*They did ask me about holiday times when we could go [to court].
(Bereaved family member)*

However, other victims described their experiences of having court hearings adjourned multiple times or with short notice. Figures from the Ministry of Justice show that 15% of all listed trials for 'causing death and serious injury whilst driving' cases that were completed in 2025 did not go ahead on the day and needed rescheduling.⁴⁴ Victims commonly cited criminal justice agencies having not made the necessary preparations for hearings to go ahead. They voiced their frustrations at the amount of money wasted with each adjournment and the impact on them having psyched themselves up for the court hearing only for it not to go ahead. This only adds to the feeling of being forgotten and like they are not important or centred in the process.

*We went to Magistrates Court about eight times. It could save the country a lot of money, not going. She'd be there 10 minutes that first time she just says her name. You know, the next time the solicitor goes up. "Oh I haven't got this done" or the police just go up and say "we haven't got the forensic report" so it just holds again another three months. And then another three months and that process just kept going on because the police hadn't got this forensic report... We've been to Crown Court twice now because we went September sometime because that's when the defence we're supposed to have put up all what they were defending on. They hadn't got it ready. They gave them another time, which is now 5th of December. This will be three times at the Crown Court itself, you know, but like eight times in Magistrates court. This the expense, like the three police usually turned up with us and I don't think they needed the three... it's an expense on the country with that and that could be used on better things couldn't it, either investigating the crime or the system's just so outdated. You know if they haven't got the evidence and it's not there, surely the judges and the two defences could agree on zoom like us saying, well, we haven't got this, you know, this can just be held for another three months.
(Bereaved family member)*

It [the hearing] was adjourned on the day because they wanted to do a mental health assessment of the driver. So we've got all psyched up to go ... So it was really frustrating and I think because it's like, why, why hadn't they done a mental health assessment of him leading up to it if they didn't know what sentence to give him based on his mental health ... I just thought it seems such a waste of everybody's time to get there and then the judge go "well we need a mental health assessment"... So it was adjourned for a month. (Bereaved family member)

Another victim described how the trial for the road traffic collision she was seriously injured in has now been delayed four times. She described the logistical and emotional toll of these

⁴⁴ Data provided to the Victims' Commissioner by MOJ on 3/6/26.

repeated delays on her and her support network, emphasising how the criminal justice system worsens victims' experiences as it prolongs the trauma and distress victims are facing. This replicates findings from the previous Victims' Commissioner's report on delays in the Crown Court which highlighted the detrimental impact of court delays on victims' recovery, mental health and ability to move on.⁴⁵ Repeated delays also erode any sense of agency victims might have in the criminal justice process, as they feel acted upon rather than supported.

I've been in a bad place because of it all. Starting to try and get my life back on track. It took a long time. And the criminal justice system does not help. They've made it worse. You know, it's bad enough going through the impact, but delay, delay, delay. Why does it take four years to get to court? Why?... You don't keep people waiting four years and longer down the line. You just don't, because you can't get on. The victims are forgotten. It affects, like you say, me, my family, my friends, all the arrangements that you have to go through, every time you think you're going to court. I get friends in place, take time off work. They're going to support me because none of them want me driving there and back, because my mind's not probably going to be on it. And I have to let everybody down and we all have to change our plans and it's not just once, it's twice, it's three, it's four [times]. And who's to know, who's going to give me guarantees that mine will go ahead [in January]? (Injured victim)

Issues with court infrastructure

In our research, we found that one of the factors negatively influencing victims' court experiences was issues with court infrastructure. These included problems with court buildings which resulted in last minute location changes, as well as poor audio in the court rooms preventing victims from hearing proceedings. Victims also described how the layout of court rooms meant they were seated near defendants during hearings.

One victim had the court location changed at short notice due to a gas leak at the original court building. Although they acknowledged this could not be avoided, the last-minute requirement to change their travel arrangements added extra stress to the situation. It is not uncommon for cases to be disrupted by issues with court infrastructure. A recent report by the Law Society found almost two-thirds of responding solicitors reported experiencing delays in cases being heard in the past 12 months due to the state of the courts.⁴⁶ Additionally, Sir Brian Leveson's Independent Review of the Criminal Courts found many older courts can no longer manage the volume, duration or complexity of today's cases or the range of court users they now serve and suggested maintenance issues regularly render courts unusable.⁴⁷ The impact of court infrastructure and maintenance issues on

⁴⁵ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁴⁶ [State of the courts – three years after our five-point plan | The Law Society](#)

⁴⁷ [Independent Review of the Criminal Courts – Part II: Volume 2](#)

court efficiency is concerning, when there are already significant delays in the court system due to the outstanding caseload.

The plea hearing was due to take place in Lincoln Crown Court. The crash happened in South Lincolnshire. It was changed at the last minute to Nottingham because there was some building issue with Lincoln Crown Court that couldn't be helped. It's a really old building. I believe it was a gas leak or something like that. Anyway. So yeah, last minute we had to change our arrangements and get ourselves to Nottingham. (Bereaved family member)

Courtroom audibility is vital for everyone in the court room, regardless of access needs. A recent report by Transform Justice found that Magistrates Court hearings were consistently audible only 23% of the time.⁴⁸ In our research, several victims told us they were unable to hear the court proceedings due to microphones not being used and hearing loops⁴⁹ not working. For some victims, this happened on multiple occasions, despite them raising the issue with their Family Liaison Officer. This left victims feeling excluded from proceedings and unable to engage fully with the justice process, undermining confidence that their interests and experiences were being properly recognised by the court.

I'm very hard of hearing...And every time I went to magistrate's court, I couldn't hear a thing. The loop wasn't working and then they said, "oh, the loop will work with this gadget" but when I put it on my hearing aids, it squealed. I took my hearing aids off, I put it on, still couldn't hear. So a lot of things, I couldn't hear what's going on and that's not good. The one day they did sit me in the court. The clerk said, "oh, you sit in the court, you can see their faces" And then in Crown Court it was the same...she'd [the judge] been told that one of us was hard of hearing so she had everybody speak up when they got the microphones on. So that was a lot better. She said "sorry the loops not working in here, but we'll make sure it is on the trial date". For the second hearing, then nothing was working again. I couldn't hear much and it was a different judge... So that's quite poor. But in a court situation like that and when you've told them you can't hear and the family liaison officer I told, he never sorted it out in time, you know. (Bereaved family member)

I'm hard of hearing and during the first hearing, they didn't have the microphones on. I couldn't really understand what the judge was saying. So, I was really worried that was going to happen again. And it was better. They did have microphones. They did have them on. The judge was still quite softly spoken, but he printed out his remarks. And, it was okay, but it was just quite a faff because they're like, oh, we've got a hearing loop. And then just say, well, these hearing aids don't

⁴⁸ ["Why are you here?" Open justice in London magistrates' courts - Transform Justice](#)

⁴⁹ A hearing loop is an assistive listening system used in public premises to transmit audio directly to users' hearing aids or cochlear implants.

have a loop function. So I don't know what, how I benefit from that. So there was a bit of kerfuffle about that, that should have been quite a simple thing, just turn the microphones on and turn them up. Because it's a public venue. Like if you go into, say, a church, then they always, you can always hear what's happening. But it seemed to be an afterthought in the Crown Court. Yeah, after all that time, I did need to be hearing things. I did need to be involved. (Bereaved family member)

One bereaved victim described having to pay to access the court transcript despite only needing it because of poor audio in the court room meaning he had been unable to hear what was being said. This caused immense frustration to the victim who felt it should have been provided for free as it was of no fault of his own. For justice to be delivered openly and transparently, victims need to be able to access and engage with proceedings and it is a concern that audibility issues at court are undermining this.

The other major, major problem with the second court case was actually the audio was off, so I couldn't hear. The barristers were speaking quite quietly. I couldn't hear what was going on at all. And I had to pay for a transcript for the court case, which I had to pay £150 for. It wasn't my fault, you know and if you're invited to go to a court, you need to understand what's going on. I could hear what the judge was saying, but because we were behind the barristers as opposed to in the front, there were some places the other side, where the jury would be, we could easily have sat there and we would have heard a lot more. So that was really, really, really disappointing. And then for the judge to say yes, I'll give you permission to have access to transcript. You know, how dare they. You know it's, you know. If they failed in their process, they should jolly well do it for free, but no. (Bereaved family member)

Another issue victims faced in the Magistrates Court was how close they had to be to the defendant. Attending court can be incredibly daunting and traumatic for bereaved victims and they described how this was heightened by being seated within touching distance of the defendant in the court room. Where victims are not expecting this to be the case, this can further compound the trauma they experience. At a minimum, bereaved victims should be adequately informed and prepared that they will be in close proximity to the defendant when attending court.

The only thing is I was sat next to the defendant in the court, so literally he was sort of he's like sat facing the judge and the family is on the side. And my son had to move his feet when they brought him in so he could sit down and I found that really, really tough. I hadn't expected to be that close to... I hadn't expected to be that I literally could have probably touched him on the shoulder if I'd wanted to. That was quite a shock for me. I just kind of I think everyone you always assume you're not close to the people you know, I knew I'd see him, but I kind of expected him to maybe be the opposite side of the room to where I was not literally

sat in front of me. So that was like, that was really tough. (Bereaved family member)

I've got to say, magistrates, what's pretty bad because it sits you in a room the size of an egg box and you're sat right next to the offender. And it is, you know, right next to them and that's quite a hard thing, you know. (Bereaved family member)

Victim Impact Statements⁵⁰

One of the key rights in the Victims' Code is the ability for victims to make a Victim Impact Statement (VIS).⁵¹ The Victim Impact Statement gives victims a powerful opportunity to explain how the crime has impacted them physically, emotionally, psychologically, financially or in any other way. The Victim Impact Statement is used when a defendant is sentenced, and victims, including bereaved close relatives, are entitled to make the statement at any stage before the defendant is convicted.

Several victims who participated in this research described positive experiences of reading their Victim Impact Statement aloud during the sentencing hearing. Victims told us that being given the opportunity and time to deliver their statement in full helped them feel heard and recognised within the court process. For some, it provided a rare opportunity to explain directly how the offence had affected their lives and those of their families.

One victim also highlighted the importance of the direct human connection that reading a Victim Impact Statement can create between victims and the judiciary. It was clear that, when used effectively, Victim Impact Statements provide an important mechanism for ensuring victims' voices are heard within proceedings. They offer victims an opportunity to communicate the impact of the offence in their own words, helping them feel acknowledged and respected within a process that can otherwise feel distant and disempowering. For many, this opportunity provided a greater sense of validation, participation and agency within the criminal justice process.

As a whole, in the end, I felt quite empowered by that sentencing...my victim impact statement, it took me 35 minutes to read. And they let me read the whole thing and they gave me a microphone for it, and it felt really good to get it said. (Bereaved family member)

So sentencing, we were given the option to read out our victim impact statements if we wanted to, which was a really positive experience because it again, it kind of gives that control you lose...The opportunity to speak to the judge, to give our statements was a positive thing and I really appreciated that he sat and he looked at us and he listened. He'd already read them all obviously, but I felt so listened to that he put everything to one side. He could have just sat there and sort of listened because he already knew it. But he looked me dead in the eyes. And he listened. So that was really important to feel heard because like I

⁵⁰ This was previously called the Victim Personal Statement.

⁵¹ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

say, you know, you've got no control. You don't feel heard at all in any of this. And that made me feel heard. So that that's a big positive for me. (Bereaved family member)

It is evident from this research how important it is to victims to have the harm caused to them and their family by the collision recognised rather than dismissed or discounted. This emphasises the importance of the Victim Impact Statement in giving the victim a voice. It is often the only opportunity they have to have their loss recognised by the justice system. This is apparent throughout this research, where victims expressed feeling forgotten and not taken seriously, in comparison to other victims.

However, there were clear examples that highlighted where handling of the Victim Impact Statement process needed to be improved. One victim expressed concern that not all Victim Impact Statements are read out fully in court. While they read out their Victim Impact Statement in full as a bereaved spouse, only extracts of the victims' daughter, son and mothers' Victim Impact Statements were read out by the advocate. They felt this was unfair and that all victims should feel fully heard in the process.

I read my VIS out, but they didn't read out my daughter or my sons or my mother-in-law 's. They just, the advocate read extracts. For me, that's something that should change, that it should be a legal obligation, that every single VIS should be read out. (Bereaved family member)

Other victims felt they were not given enough time or support to write their Victim Impact Statement in the first place. One victim was only given four days to write their statement, and another had to rely on support from a friend to write it following a lack of help from police. This is concerning when the Victim Impact Statement is often one of the only means victims have to feel heard and listened to in the justice process and is a key right in the Victims' Code. Feeling rushed and ill-prepared disempowers victims and undermines the intended purpose of this right. It is crucial that victims should be given adequate time and support to have their voice heard.

Then we had this, "we're charging him with dangerous driving", out of the blue. Unexpected. Whoa. OK. The police phoned me, and they literally gave me 4 days to write it [victim impact statement]. We're coming to collect it in four days. And I was like, OK. You know, and that was a really big, important piece to me...I never expected to be given such a short deadline to write it. I think had I known I was only going to get four days, I probably would have written it earlier or at least made a start, made some notes. (Injured victim)

When I had to do an impact [statement], my very first one, I wasn't given any help. I didn't even know where to start, and I think, my understanding is the police are meant to help me to a certain extent there... when I was told to do an impact statement, I couldn't put my head together. I couldn't do it. I needed some help and, in the end, a friend of mine, she was at work and she goes right, "I'm coming around

with my laptop, you're going to talk, I'm going to write" and that's how I got it done in the end. (Injured victim)

Whilst the Victim Impact Statement gives bereaved victims a voice in the criminal justice process, we heard from bereaved relatives who felt that the deceased victim themselves is not given a voice. One victim proposed that the deceased victim should also be entitled to a Victim Impact Statement written on their behalf.

None of this takes into account the person who has died... There's no voice for that person. There's no voice to say who he was, what he did, what he's lost. You know he's lost his whole aspirations in life, hasn't he?... there is no voice for that person who's been killed... and the effect it's had on lives and the loss and effect, you know, the loss that [my son's] had of his life, you know what he's going to miss. (Bereaved family member)

Who is the victim? To me, the victim is the person who's died. So is that victim allowed an impact statement? And I was hell bent getting an impact statement written by me about what she'd have written. (Bereaved family member)

Sentencing

Several of the victims we spoke to raised concerns about sentencing decisions following a fatal road traffic collision. Bereaved family members told us they were disappointed by sentences imposed for causing death by dangerous driving, particularly where these did not result in a custodial sentence. In the year ending December 2025, over a third of convictions for causing death by driving did not result in a custodial sentence.⁵² Research has also highlighted that sentencing outcomes in road death cases can come as a shock to bereaved families, who often perceive them as too lenient.⁵³

While the law distinguishes between offences such as murder, manslaughter and causing death by dangerous driving, the emotional and psychological impact on bereaved families can be equally devastating. Our findings suggest that many bereaved relatives struggled to reconcile the profound loss they had experienced with the sentences imposed by the courts. When sentencing outcomes did not reflect their expectations of the seriousness of the harm caused, some felt that the value of their loved one's life had not been fully recognised by the criminal justice system. As the quotes below illustrate, this disconnect between the lived experience of bereavement and the statutory sentencing framework was a significant source of distress for some families.

⁵² [Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly: December 2025 - GOV.UK](#) The driving offences included are causing death by dangerous driving, causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs, causing death by careless or inconsiderate driving, causing death by driving unlicensed or uninsured, causing death by driving without due care/consideration while over the prescribed limit (specified controlled drug), causing death by driving whilst disqualified and causing death by aggravated vehicle taking.

⁵³ ["We are the forgotten grievers": Bereaved family members' experiences of support and mental ill-health](#)

It is therefore important that more victims are made aware of mechanisms such as the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme⁵⁴, which allows eligible Crown Court sentences to be reviewed where there are concerns that the sentence does not adequately reflect the seriousness of the offence⁵⁵. To make use of the scheme, victims and bereaved families must be informed of its existence and submit a request within the relevant time limits.

Recent legislative changes will strengthen awareness of the scheme by placing a duty on relevant agencies to inform eligible victims and bereaved families about the ULS scheme. The changes also introduce greater flexibility around the application deadline in certain circumstances, helping to ensure that victims are better able to exercise this right where it applies⁵⁶.

Eight years for a 20 year olds life which also gets two thirds come off of that anyway. So really he only gets 5 and a bit years and then we're told he might try and get less... it's just it makes it feel like her life has no value at all. And I know things are greatly improving with sentencing around dangerous driving, but things were already improving by the time this happened and we still got what is considered a very good sentence compared to what I see some people go through. And I just think while the guidelines have changed, I don't think they're actually being used to the extent they should be. You know you make a decision to get in a car when you shouldn't and you kill somebody and you can be out of prison after five years. I think that's just disgusting in my opinion. (Bereaved family member)

She pleaded guilty to causing death by dangerous driving. She was given a one year suspended sentence, so she didn't go to prison. She was given 200 hours of community service, a six month curfew between 7pm and 7am and a 30 month driving ban. I mean, 30 months ...that sentence does not bring a deterrent. And there is a statutory requirement that actually part of the sentencing is a deterrent. It's not. Yeah, so there you go...I do believe that there should be a statutory requirement that anybody caught guilty of causing death by dangerous driving has to serve a custodial sentence. Whether that's in a closed or an open prison, I don't care. For how long it is, I don't care. But it should be your liberty should be taken away from you. (Bereaved family member)

⁵⁴The Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme allows eligible Crown Court sentences to be referred to the Attorney General for review. Of the offences considered in this research, the scheme applies only to a limited number of cases. See: [Ask for a Crown Court sentence to be reviewed - GOV.UK](#)

⁵⁵ Of the offences considered in this research, only a limited number qualify for the scheme, including causing death by dangerous driving and causing death by driving whilst disqualified. [Unduly Lenient Sentences | The Crown Prosecution Service](#)

⁵⁶ [Victims given more time to challenge unduly lenient sentences in 'significant and long-overdue reform' - Victims Commissioner](#)

Several victims also expressed dissatisfaction with the mitigating factors used by judges when determining sentences for causing death by dangerous driving.⁵⁷ Examples cited by participants included a previously good driving record, the age of the offender and expressions of remorse, particularly where victims felt the defendant had not accepted responsibility for their actions during the investigation.

Many struggled to understand how such factors influenced sentencing outcomes and questioned whether they adequately reflected the severity of the harm caused. As a result, some victims perceived the sentences imposed as unfair and felt that insufficient weight had been given to the devastating impact of the offence on them and their families.

It's always mentioned about a good driving license. It's irrelevant. All a good driving licence shows is that you've not been caught. There are thousands of, you know, hundreds of thousands of miles of road, there are only, you know, 4000 odd policemen. You're never going to catch people. People can drive for the whole of their career and not get caught doing anything. So it's irrelevant. It's not fair to give people credit for that... you give mitigation that it was a young driver, inexperienced. Hold on a minute, if you've passed your test to drive on our roads, you then drive dangerously and kill someone, you should not be given a mitigation factor that you're inexperienced. Otherwise, you could say there's something majorly wrong with our road tests that we put any drivers on the road that are dangerous because that's what you're saying. (Bereaved family member)

We found out...he had lied to the police in both his interviews... [his] first interview, he said that [my daughter] had run out in front of him and he wasn't aware that the light had changed, and he wasn't speeding and basically, he did nothing wrong. And then 15 months later... he was still sticking to the same story, that he did nothing wrong. And then they showed him the dash cam and then he had to admit that he was guilty of causing her death by dangerous driving. But it doesn't say remorse to me...when we went to court, they did give him credit for being genuinely remorseful, which is a cliché. It's something that gets rolled out and they've got no criteria for assessing it. There's no kind of proof of somebody's genuine remorse. There's a pre-sentencing report by a probation officer who is anonymous and the document is confidential. So as victims, we're just asked to believe that this anonymous probation officer assessed this man by some random criteria and found him to be genuinely remorseful, but that goes against everything we know about him. (Bereaved family member)

⁵⁷ Mitigating factors are circumstances that may reduce an offender's culpability or the severity of a sentence. Judges take these factors into account when determining an appropriate and proportionate sentence.

Young driver road safety has been consulted on recently by the Department for Transport who have highlighted this in their road safety strategy.⁵⁸ They consulted on introducing a minimum amount of time to be spent learning, a mandated learning syllabus and how learning can be conducted.⁵⁹ Similarly, in their joint report, the All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) for Transport Safety and Cycling and Walking recommended that there should be stronger licensing requirements for young drivers to prevent avoidable tragedies.⁶⁰

Other factors considered at sentencing include whether there should be a reduction for a guilty plea. In England and Wales, if a defendant pleads guilty their sentence is reduced. If they plead guilty at the first stage of proceedings, a reduction of one-third is made. After this, the maximum level of reduction is one-quarter which decreases to one-tenth on the first day of trial.⁶¹ We heard from one victim who felt it was unfair that the defendant was credited with pleading guilty at the first opportunity when they had fled the crime scene initially. The charity RoadPeace has previously called for policies to be revised so that offenders would not receive the full discount if they only plead guilty after months (or longer) of delay.⁶²

The starting point was 11 years something, but then that was automatically reduced I think by a quarter because he was said to have pleaded guilty at first opportunity. Now that to us was a complete travesty because he had taken 3 interviews and then a refusal to appear in court [before pleading guilty]. And of course he'd run away at the point of the collision...we could not see how that could be classed as pleading guilty at first opportunity. So that was our first shock. (Bereaved family member)

A common component to sentencing for a driving offence is a driving disqualification. Several of the victims we heard from felt that the duration of the driving disqualification following a driving-related death needed to be longer. One victim described how a 30-month disqualification is not sufficient for causing death by dangerous driving. Victims proposed that if someone is found guilty of causing death by driving, it should be a 10-year ban or even a lifetime ban. The joint report by the APPGs for Transport Safety and Cycling and Walking also recommended that judges should make greater use of lifetime driving bans.⁶³ Additionally, the charity RoadPeace previously called for the greater use of driving disqualifications, and for cases where mandatory driving bans are not given to be reviewed.⁶⁴

I also believe that there should be a statutory requirement of a minimum of 10 years driving ban. You've caused the death of another human

⁵⁸ [Road safety strategy - GOV.UK](#)

⁵⁹ [Introducing a minimum learning period for learner drivers \(category B driving licence\) - GOV.UK](#)

⁶⁰ <https://transportsafetyappg.org.uk/sentencing-inquiry/>

⁶¹ [Reduction in sentence for a guilty plea - first hearing on or after 1 June 2017](#)

⁶² [Effective Sentencing - RoadPeace](#)

⁶³ <https://transportsafetyappg.org.uk/sentencing-inquiry/>

⁶⁴ [RoadPeace](#) Briefing on driving bans given at court, England and Wales

being by driving dangerously. 30 months, 2 and 1/2 years is not enough. It's not enough. (Bereaved family member)

I hope the lifetime driving ban goes through as well, because I really don't see any reason why the man should ever be allowed back in the car. (Bereaved family member)

Victims also expressed concern that individuals charged with causing a death whilst driving are not routinely prevented from driving in the period before their trial.⁶⁵ Similar concerns were raised by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Cycling and Walking, which recommended that magistrates should be empowered to impose post-charge bail conditions preventing defendants from driving whilst awaiting trial.⁶⁶

Bereaved family members described the distress of learning that the person alleged to have caused their relative's death was able to continue driving in the immediate aftermath of the collision. Given the significant delays that can occur within the criminal justice process, this can mean that defendants continue to drive for months, and in some cases years, before a case is concluded and any driving disqualification is imposed.

Victims often compared this with other serious offences, such as murder and manslaughter, where suspects are more likely to face significant restrictions on their liberty whilst awaiting trial. For many bereaved relatives, the ability of a defendant to continue driving appeared inconsistent with the seriousness of the allegation and heightened concerns about the potential risk posed to other road users.⁶⁷

These experiences contributed to feelings of frustration and injustice, compounding victims' trauma and reinforcing a perception that the harm caused by fatal road traffic offences was not being treated with sufficient seriousness by the criminal justice system.

It just popped into my head when we were in the taxi on the way back from the hospital at 3 in the morning, having switched off her ventilator and left her at the hospital. And I said to my husband, can you just make sure he's had his licence taken off him? And it turned out that he hadn't and he wouldn't have his licence taken off him until the first Crown Court hearing, which was, I've written this down, 20 months [later] in March 2025. So, between July 2023 when he killed her and March 2025, he was able just to do whatever he wanted. (Bereaved family member)

Where a family member has been killed from somebody you know, racing along above the speed limit or on drugs, on drink, that they can still go out and drive, I find that bizarre, you know. Then until the court case, which takes an awful long time to get to...something should be

⁶⁵ [A bail condition can include 'not to drive' but the CPS states that in proposing \(or considering\) conditions of bail, prosecutors must ensure that they are necessary, reasonable, proportionate and capable of being enforced.](#)

⁶⁶ [Behind-the-Headlines-Sentencing-After-Fatal-Crashes-Final.pdf](#)

⁶⁷ This concern of reoffending is not unwarranted. [A Freedom of Information request to the Ministry of Justice](#) showed that there were 3,193 instances of drug-driving reoffending in 2024 which is 134% higher than the 1,363 instances in 2020.

done about that... I don't think they should be allowed to drive until it's all, you know, completed really. (Bereaved family member)

She returned to work three weeks after killing [my wife], driving past our house, past the point where she killed [my wife] ...at the end of the day, should we really allow a dangerous driver to continue driving for 13 months after killing someone? We know she's dangerous. We know that actually she's got to take an advanced driving test before she's back on the road. But we've allowed her to continue driving. (Bereaved family member)

The Department for Transport recently consulted on whether a person under investigation for a serious driving offence that leads to a fatality or serious injury should have their driving license suspended and whether the current minimum driving disqualification period for causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs is appropriate.⁶⁸ The Victims' Commissioner welcomes the consultation on these important issues and wants to work with the Department for Transport as they respond to the consultation findings.

Support at court

Attending court can be an incredibly difficult and stressful time for victims. Some of the victims we spoke to praised the court volunteers that supported them when they attended court, managing their expectations of what would happen and providing a place for them to wait. For many victims, it will be their first time attending court, so the environment and processes feel very unfamiliar. Receiving help and support can therefore improve this experience by making victims feel more comfortable.

They have these people in the court. They're like volunteers. So they also talked you through things. So that was really, really useful. (Bereaved family member)

When we were in court, there was a witness's room that was staffed by somebody from Citizens Advice and she was very good, (Bereaved family member)

However, other victims did not get the same support experience from court volunteers when they attended court. A Road Victims Needs Assessment also reported that victims who attended court received no support from the Witness Service.⁶⁹ This is a concern when they could have facilitated options such as a pre-trial visit or a quiet place to wait at court. Previous research by the Victims' Commissioner has demonstrated the importance of Witness Service volunteers at courts, helping victims to feel supported and making the experience less daunting.⁷⁰

There's no sort of support offered by the court when you go into these places and there's a lot of sitting around, there's a lot of waiting and it

⁶⁸ [Proposed changes to penalties for motoring offences - GOV.UK](#)

⁶⁹ [Road-Victims-Report-Full-Staffordshire-University-Supporting-Justice-pdf.pdf](#)

⁷⁰ [Annual Victims' Survey 2024 - Victims Commissioner](#)

is an incredibly upsetting and really stressful experience (Bereaved family member)

After navigating the earlier stages of the criminal justice system, it is important that victims have a positive and empowering experience at court, despite what can often be a daunting and stressful environment. In this research, victims described positive experiences where their personal circumstances were considered when scheduling hearings, and where they were given the opportunity to read their Victim Impact Statement aloud, allowing them to feel heard and recognised within the process.

For courts to effectively deliver justice, proceedings must be as transparent, accessible and understandable for victims as possible. This includes ensuring that victims are able to engage meaningfully with proceedings and that the impact of the offence on them and their families is recognised, acknowledged and heard.

However, many victims reported experiencing repeated delays, difficulties hearing court proceedings and dissatisfaction with sentencing outcomes. These experiences could leave victims feeling excluded from the process and undermine confidence in the justice system. It is therefore vital that good practice is built upon and embedded more consistently across the courts, so that all victims receive timely justice and are treated with dignity, respect and compassion throughout their journey.

4. Wider criminal justice system issues

In addition to the issues identified within policing and the courts, this research highlighted several concerns that span the wider criminal justice system. Victims frequently questioned whether road crime is treated with the seriousness it warrants and described feeling that the impact on them and their families was not always fully recognised. Delays were a recurring theme, with many victims reporting that the slow pace of the justice process prolonged their trauma and delayed their ability to move forward. Victims also raised concerns about their experiences of probation processes, including Serious Further Offence reviews and the Victim Contact Scheme, which some felt lacked transparency and meaningful victim engagement.

The treatment of victims of road traffic collisions across the criminal justice system

Through their experiences of the criminal justice system, many victims felt that road crime was not afforded the same level of seriousness as other forms of offending. Victims described a perception that deaths and serious injuries on the roads are too often viewed as an unavoidable part of everyday life, rather than as crimes that can cause devastating and lasting harm. As a result, many felt frustrated and disheartened by what they saw as a lack of urgency and priority in the response of criminal justice agencies.

These perceptions are not unique to the victims who participated in this research. HMICFRS similarly found that the lack of prominence given to road safety by some police leaders was reflected in the priority afforded to roads policing by certain police forces and Police and Crime Commissioners.⁷¹

Many victims compared their experiences to the response they believed would follow other forms of serious or fatal harm and questioned whether road crime was treated with equivalent gravity. For some, this contributed to a sense that the profound impact on them and their families had not been fully recognised. Such experiences can undermine trust and confidence in the criminal justice system and leave victims feeling overlooked, invalidated and, in some cases, re-traumatised.

It's frustrating, it's like, why? Why does it seem that road deaths or road injuries are like an acceptable commodity. That's the impression I've got...And that's got to change. (Bereaved family member)

Another thing we tried was to get the inquest reopened in the light of new information being received, that new information being the SFO [Serious Further Offence]. What we wanted was for the coroner to issue a prevention of future death report to the probation service to again make them take road crime more seriously. The coroner refused on the grounds that it was not high enough risk. Yet between four and five people a day are killed on the roads in this country. How can that not be high risk? If that many people were being killed by domestic

⁷¹ [Roads Policing: Not optional - An inspection of roads policing in England and Wales - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

violence, knife crime? Any other form of crime there would be a huge outcry, but road deaths are just accepted as a part of everyday life and they shouldn't be. There is so much that could be done to just improve attitudes...unfortunately there are always going to be people that ignore bans, the rules of the road but if even the justice system is not taking it seriously, then it's just disheartening. It really is. (Bereaved family member)

Road Crime is not taken seriously, not at all. It's not treated as a real crime and that's the way you feel the [whole] way through. It's just another accident, and it's not, it's often by bad drivers, drunk drivers. But road crime is not treated seriously. (Bereaved family member)

Several victims also reflected on the disparity in treatment of perpetrators compared to victims and their bereaved relatives throughout the criminal justice system. Research has reported bereaved victims of road traffic collisions feeling they were given less consideration than the perpetrator.⁷² In our research, we found victims felt the communication, support and consideration received by perpetrators from the criminal justice system was better than what they had received. Whilst the justice system is required to protect offenders' procedural rights, this can leave victims and bereaved families feeling sidelined when they should feel centred in the justice process.

He's had a lot of support. He had visits in person to give him news. We never had that, we just got WhatsApp messages and it felt very, very wrong. (Bereaved victim)

There's not enough support by the justice system for victims. It is all about the offender. (Bereaved family member)

The driver was at Lincoln Prison and supposed to be transferred over to Nottingham for the hearing. He refused to appear, so it was then a long wait while they tried to arrange a video link for him to be there and that for us was sort of the first in the first real feeling that that, that, this, this driver was getting so much consideration, he could just refuse to go and we had to wait for him. I think quite a lot of the experience you've got a lot, it really feels like there's a lot of access given to perpetrators to support and stuff that just isn't really given to us...The driver attended by Video Link set up specifically so that we can see him, but he doesn't have to see us, which I think, well, I've got to look at the face of the man that killed my sister. Why doesn't he have to look at the faces of her family? Again It feels like that, like, high, really high consideration for the offender over the victims. (Bereaved family member)

⁷² ["We are the forgotten grievers": Bereaved family members' experiences of support and mental ill-health following a road traffic collision](#)

The negative impact of the criminal justice system on victims

Other victims felt their involvement with the criminal justice system after the collision made their experiences even worse. Victims should be able to navigate the criminal justice system without having to endure additional hardship but for several victims we spoke to this was unfortunately not the case. Victims described how the criminal justice system worsened an already terrible situation.

If we're talking about the justice system, I just want you to know that it made things worse on every...on every level...the criminal justice system has made a horrible, nightmarish situation more nightmarish and worse. (Bereaved family member)

The criminal justice system does not help. They've made it worse. (Injured victim)

More specifically, recent research with bereaved family members following a road traffic collision heard from several victims who reported that the criminal justice system exacerbated mental health issues and caused secondary victimisation.⁷³

One aspect of the criminal justice process that many victims struggled with was how slowly cases progressed through the system. We heard from both injured victims and bereaved victims of road traffic collisions who experienced slow progress and delays within the criminal justice system. In comparison to murder or manslaughter, the suspect in a fatal road traffic collision is much less likely to be remanded into custody ahead of trial which means the case will not be expedited. As we found in the previous Victims' Commissioner's research into the Crown Court backlog, delays not only cause additional stress, but they impact on victims' mental health. This prevents victims and bereaved families from moving forward and beginning to rebuild following the traumatic event.⁷⁴

There were several charges he's been charged for, it took them a year to charge him with serious injury caused by dangerous driving. And don't ask me why the CPS took so long. It was ridiculous...You know, it's bad enough going through the impact, but delay, delay, delay. Why does it take four years to get to court? Why? (Injured victim)

So the police passed on the file to the CPS at 15 months and then they gave a 30 day estimate of how long it would take, which they just thoroughly broke again. So it took 18 months for him to be charged with death by dangerous driving. And then the magistrates was 20 months, the first hearing was 21 and the sentencing was 22 months and three weeks. So it was lengthy... we haven't even seen the police file yet. The coroner hasn't signed us off, so we haven't read the witness

⁷³ ["We are the forgotten grievers": Bereaved family members' experiences of support and mental ill-health following a road traffic collision](#)

⁷⁴ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

reports. We haven't had her clothes back. So, it's been two years and three months and it's still not finished. (Bereaved family member)

Victims highlighted the need for better expectation management at the outset of their criminal justice journey, to understand what the length of the process could be. Victims described having no idea they would still be involved with the criminal justice system after several years.

Managing expectations early on. Like I had no idea how long the criminal justice system was going to take. You know, I had no idea [that] three years down the line, I'd still be in it. You just don't expect it. (Bereaved victim)

Issues with Probation processes

In this research, victims told us about several issues they faced with the Probation Service, these included their experiences of Serious Further Offence (SFO) reviews⁷⁵ and of the Victim Contact Scheme.⁷⁶

Serious Further Offence Reviews

One family we spoke to told us that the driver responsible for the death of their relative was under probation supervision at the time of the collision. This meant the offence was termed a 'serious further offence' and triggered a Serious Further Offence review⁷⁷ conducted by the Probation Service.

They were dissatisfied with the Serious Further Offence report and the actions of the Probation Service. They highlighted the lack of sensitivity and accountability in the report, as well as how inaccessible it was. They felt that the report should be easily digestible to fulfil its purpose to drive continuous improvement.

So the report lists out all of the mistakes made and there were a lot. There was no apology in the SFO itself. [The deceased victim] isn't named at all. The only reference to her is that it's sort of in chronological order from when he was released from prison to when he killed her and the final line of the report, it just says the SFO occurred on this day, at this time, the SFO being her being killed. So knowing you're going to present that to families. And it's so heartless. It's so cold. (Bereaved family member)

It's a 76-page report. It's huge... They sort of came in, presented it and left. There was no apology for the mistakes. And it took it took a few months, I think, for then for me to read it and trying to read it is so hard to read. And I think if this is an internal learning document, it should be

⁷⁵ [Serious Further Offence reviews – HM Inspectorate of Probation](#)

⁷⁶ [Information about the Victim Contact Scheme - GOV.UK](#)

⁷⁷ A Serious Further Offence review is conducted to assess the circumstances surrounding the offence and the services provided to the offender with the aim of identifying any potential failings that may have contributed to the offence.

easy to read, you know, and I don't see how you could ever implement the changes that you want to make in a report that's so difficult to read. (Bereaved family member)

They were also frustrated by the Probation Service not taking driving offences and road crime seriously in comparison to other crimes. They felt incredibly angry and let down that the defendant had not been recalled despite committing driving offences and felt this resulted in the death of their loved one. They highlighted how the seriousness of driving-related breaches of the perpetrator's licence were minimised by the Probation Service, which meant dangerous behaviour was excused rather than challenged. It is clear from their testimony that they felt their relative's death was avoidable, if driving offences had been taken more seriously.

Shortly after he came out after the last spell in prison, he crashed his car and was found to be under the influence of drugs, and so he was disqualified...So he'd breached the terms of his licence just in doing that. Quite apart from the missed meetings, the excuses, the missed phone calls, so many feeble excuses that nobody, nobody pulled him up on. He should have been recalled to prison. Not only should he not have been driving, he should have been recalled to prison, and nobody took those steps and as a result, he was on the road that night and killed her. So we are, as a family, incredibly angry...the attitude all the way through the SFO was that the driving offences didn't really matter. And this is something that we feel very strongly about that driving offences matter every bit as much as every other crime. They were keeping a closer eye on him as far as making sure he wasn't getting back into his old drug dealing groups, that he wasn't committing domestic abuse because there'd been some suspicions of that. Of course, those are crimes that need to be dealt with. But the driving was just pushed aside and in the SFO, it is categorically said that they knew he was driving but they just swept it aside with excuses of "it's a rural area, how can you get to work if you don't drive?" and it was just ignored. It just did not seem to figure that dangerous driving kills so many people. (Bereaved family member)

Victim Contact Scheme

The Victim Contact Scheme provides victims of serious violent or sexual offences where the offender is sentenced to 12 months or more in prison with information on the offender's sentence and release. However, one victim we spoke to was disappointed that they were not told the offender would be released earlier than they had originally been told due to the government introduction of the early release scheme⁷⁸. Release is a key stage in the offender's sentence that victims opted in to the Contact Scheme are entitled to be informed of, as part of their Victim's Code rights. This lapse in communication around the changes to

⁷⁸ [New change to some offenders' automatic release dates - GOV.UK](#)

the offender's release arrangements is therefore concerning. It also leaves the victim feeling forgotten and disengaged from the process.

He was also released on the early release scheme a month earlier than what I was informed it was going to be and I wasn't notified by probation till a month after he'd been deported. So I wasn't aware that he'd already gone. (Bereaved family member)

In this research, we heard from many victims who feel that road crime is not taken seriously by the criminal justice system. This is distressing for the families when the impacts of a criminal road traffic collision are extremely traumatic and far reaching. Victims cited examples of being treated poorly across the justice system, with this being worsened by severe delays and poor communication around what victims could expect from the justice process. This often made it feel impossible for victims to begin to recover from the trauma caused by the road traffic collision. Previous research by the Victims' Commissioner has highlighted the inconsistency victims face in the response and treatment provided by the police, as well as having their Victims' Code rights delivered in a meaningful way.⁷⁹ However, it appears that victims of road traffic collisions are suffering an even lower level of victim satisfaction. For justice to be delivered successfully, it is important that victims are centred throughout the process. For this to happen, victims need to feel taken seriously and receive regular and transparent communication at every stage of the justice system.

⁷⁹ [Annual Victims' Survey 2024 - Victims Commissioner](#)

5. Support for road traffic collision victims

In England and Wales in the year ending June 2025, there were an estimated 29,896 killed or seriously injured⁸⁰ casualties in reported road collisions.⁸¹ Road traffic collisions can greatly impact the people involved and their family and friends.

Unlike families bereaved by murder or manslaughter, who may be eligible for support from the National Homicide Service, those bereaved as a result of a road traffic collision are not entitled to access this provision. Across England and Wales, specialist support for people affected by road traffic collisions is therefore largely delivered by charitable organisations⁸².

At the time this research was conducted, specialist support was available through a range of national and regional organisations, including Brake, RoadPeace, Aftermath Support and Road Victims Trust. These services provided practical and emotional support, advocacy, counselling, court support, befriending services and dedicated caseworkers for people injured or bereaved as a result of a road traffic collision.

However, the specialist support landscape has since become even more fragile. In January 2026, RoadPeace, one of only two UK-wide organisations providing specialist support to road crash victims and bereaved families, closed after more than 30 years of operation. Its closure represents a significant loss of expertise and capacity within the sector, further reducing the availability of specialist support for road traffic collision victims across England and Wales.

While specialist organisations generally support all those affected by road traffic collisions, this research focuses specifically on the experiences of victims injured or bereaved as a result of criminal road traffic collisions. Where a collision results in injury and a criminal offence has been committed, both injured victims and bereaved relatives are entitled to rights under the Victims' Code, including the right to be referred to support services and to receive support tailored to their needs.⁸³ However, previous research by the Victims' Commissioner has found that awareness of Victims' Code rights remains low amongst victims of crime.⁸⁴

The findings from this research demonstrate the critical value of specialist road traffic collision support services. Victims spoke positively about services that provided flexible, long-term emotional and practical support throughout their recovery and engagement with the criminal justice system. However, participants also highlighted significant challenges in accessing support. Victims consistently called for direct referrals from the police into specialist services, so that support does not depend on individuals identifying and accessing services themselves. They also emphasised the need for timely access to support following a referral, more consistent provision across geographical areas, and

⁸⁰ Injuries classed as serious include fractures, concussion, internal injuries, crushings, burns (excluding friction burns), severe cuts, severe general shock requiring medical treatment and injuries causing death 30 or more days after the collision.

⁸¹ [Reported road casualties in Great Britain, provisional estimates: year ending June 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

⁸² Beyond health and medical support provision.

⁸³ [The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales and supporting public information materials - GOV.UK](#)

⁸⁴ [Annual Victims' Survey 2024 - Victims Commissioner](#)

enhanced access to specialist counselling to help address the long-term psychological impact of road traffic collisions.

The value of road collision support services

In our research we heard from many victims who emphasised how crucial road collision support organisations were following the collision and during their journey through the criminal justice system. Victims told us how the support they received held them up emotionally and provided lifesaving care when they were at their most vulnerable. It is evident from this research and previous research from the Victims' Commissioner the significant role that support organisations play in victims' recovery.⁸⁵ They are often cited as the singular reason that victims stay engaged in a difficult and lengthy criminal justice process.⁸⁶⁸⁷

I can't praise them enough for the amount of emotional and practical support that they can do...I've got a very good friend there who I could, I've literally messaged her earlier on actually. Like, I can just message her whenever I want and she's there to help. (Bereaved family member)

Because of [road collision support organisation], I've kept me head above water and you know, so to speak, they've kept me sane... I know for a fact if it wasn't for [the support organisation], I'd be in the ground next to my wife now...they made me realise this life does have to go on...they're incredible, they're an absolutely incredible organisation. (Bereaved family member)

I can sing [member of staff's] praises at [road collision support organisation] till the end of time. You know, I have had some very, very dark times and I don't think I would still be here without her. Yeah, yeah, they need more funding. Definitely need more funding. They do a fantastic job. (Bereaved victim)

Victims also praised the wide range of different support types available to them. This includes practical support, legal support, emotional support, group support and more. The sudden nature of road traffic collisions leaves victims dealing with sudden trauma and grief, a complex criminal justice process as well as potentially navigating funeral arrangements, insurance and civil claims processes. This variety of support therefore maximises the possibility of meeting the needs of and providing effective support to all victims.

They offer emotional support, practical support from the legal side of things, from the justice system. They go through all of that if you need it. They also offered me an 8-week online resilience programme, which is what I did. (Bereaved family member)

⁸⁵ [Annual Victims' Survey 2024 - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁸⁶ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁸⁷ [Going above and beyond: Mapping the provision and impact of Victim Advocacy in the Criminal Justice System - Victims Commissioner](#)

They've been an incredible, incredible charity. They have really been there, you know...they come up with advice, if you ask a question, they'll find an answer, even if it's not always answer you want...they've got support groups...also they put on a bereavement course. It was like 10-week course and that was just to me, It was so helpful, you know. And you can ring them up whenever you want to if you wanted to... there's a monthly zoom support meeting and there's a bereaved parent support meeting. And in in the beginning, those are some things where it did help a lot and they were the biggest help ever. (Bereaved family member)

Having a wide range of support on offer is incredibly valuable to victims, especially as different support types work better for different people and at different points in their grief. Previous research from the Victims' Commissioner has highlighted that victims perceive support to be more beneficial to their recovery where it is tailored to their individual circumstances.⁸⁸ For example, we heard from several victims that did not find group support benefited them but fortunately that is not the only support available.

I had a case worker there that used to ring me every week to check how I was doing and then invited me along to like a group support session, which I did probably about six months after it happened...everybody else seemed to have had really tragic, like hit and runs and things. And I was thinking mine was just an accident and it almost felt like mine wasn't you know, there was nothing. There was no anger. I had no anger whatsoever throughout the whole thing and there was some real angry people. And so I didn't go back to the group session until about 18 months later. (Bereaved family member)

They do offer support group meetings. And I did go to a couple, but I found that I was at a stage where other people talking about what happened to them and some were getting very critical of lots of different things and going into very dark places. And I found that that wasn't for me. (Bereaved family member)

Further highlighting the benefit of not having a 'one size fits all' approach, many victims highly valued having the opportunity to speak to other victims of road traffic collisions through peer group support.⁸⁹ Victims emphasised the incredible value of being supported by others who have gone through similar experiences and completely understand how they feel. This type of support is invaluable to many bereaved victims following a road traffic collision, with one victim describing their peer support group as family. Similarly, a recent pilot of enhanced support for victims of serious road traffic collisions in London found that

⁸⁸ [Annual Victims' Survey 2024 - Victims Commissioner](#)

⁸⁹ It is important that peer group support sits within a broader support framework, with trained peer mentors, clear structure and time boundaries to ensure victims are safely supported.

service users valued being with others who had experienced similar losses as they felt understood without having to explain details.⁹⁰

They have peer support groups, one of which I was talking to last night. I'm part of the East Midlands group and we just tell each other our stories and our feelings and we compare feelings and there's nothing quite like speaking to somebody who's gone through the same experience and knows exactly how it feels. So they've been a massive support emotionally. (Bereaved family member)

I think the support you get from people that have been through it is so helpful and beneficial and I think you know, no matter how far down the line you are, you still have your bad days and actually it's quite nice to say to people I'm having a really bad day and there'll be somebody there that's ten years down the line and they go. Yeah, I still have them now. And so, you know, that's been great. (Bereaved family member)

The support we give each other is paramount...though we've all got our different stories, different scenarios. There's husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends, sons, daughters, grandchildren, fathers, who have all been killed or seriously injured on the roads and we've all got that in common. We've all got that link...we've all shared that grief, that loss, that pain, it really cemented us. we don't consider ourselves a group, we consider ourselves a family, but one that none of us want to belong to. (Bereaved family member)

Another part of support provision that victims highly valued was the long-term nature of the support available. We heard from one victim who despite being apprehensive to go to the first peer group support session, has now been attending the group for over six years. This demonstrates the value of long-term support provision to victims' recovery.

I got referred to the first meeting in Birmingham. So I went reluctantly, I would say on the day. I didn't know what to expect, who to expect...but now, a little over six years I've been with the group. (Bereaved family member)

Improving access to road collision support services

Whilst many victims praised how incredible the road collision support services were, they also reflected on the need to improve victims' access to these services. This included the need for police to refer victims directly into support services instead of victims having to find out about support themselves. Additionally, victims cited the need for prompt access to support following a referral and for access to support to be available across all geographical regions.

We heard from multiple victims who only found out about these invaluable services through family, friends or their own internet search. The onus being placed on victims to seek out

⁹⁰ [London Road Traffic Collision Victim Support Pilot: Evaluation](#)

support services themselves is unfortunately not a unique finding. Previous research has identified the lack of appropriate signposting for bereaved victims of road traffic collisions to potential support.⁹¹ This is concerning as it leaves victims faced with sudden trauma and bereavement either unsupported or burdened with trying to seek support out for themselves.

A friend told me “have you heard of [road collision support organisation]?” And I said “no”. He said “contact them, give them a ring”. Well, I rang and this lady answered the phone. Ever since then, they've been an incredible, incredible charity. They have really been there, you know...it did help a lot and they were the biggest help ever, but they were ones you had to seek out yourself, you know? (Bereaved family member)

I only came across [road collision support organisation] through the lack of information from the police and what I was doing was, I sort of looked up online, what should we be expecting from the police? What's the process in this? What happens at each point and what should we, you know, what should we be getting? And I came across [road collision support organisation]...So then that sort of started off my communications and support with them...they invited me to monthly online sessions, support group sessions, so they helped with sort of like, emotional support if it was required...they gave practical guidance. So, in one of the support sessions, they actually have a panel of solicitors that join them... They gave a talk to the victims on the civil case process and what's involved, and what you should look for, and you know your rights and everything. And so I found that really useful and it would have been better, had I had that up front? And I didn't know that that existed. (Bereaved family member)

The fact that there's no support out there unless you look for it yourself is letting a lot of people down. (Bereaved family member)

Victims we spoke to emphasised why it is so important for victims to be referred into services instead of having to seek out support themselves. They highlighted how the sudden and traumatic nature of road traffic collisions make it extremely difficult for victims to seek out their own support, despite how much they may need it. Victims acknowledged the information guide⁹² they were given by police following the fatal collision which includes details about support services. However, some explained feeling overwhelmed by information and not feeling in a position to proactively use this. This further highlights the need for trauma-informed support, which recognises the complex trauma that victims experiencing a sudden bereavement will be facing.

⁹¹ ["We are the forgotten grievers": Bereaved family members' experiences of support and mental ill-health following a road traffic collision - PubMed](#)

⁹² [Police are required to hand out printed copies of Brake's guides for bereaved people.](#)

When people are grieving, when people are traumatised and they're in shock, they are not in a position to seek support, doesn't matter who you are, you're not. (Bereaved family member)

It feels like a tick box thing to hand over, you know... The police or that didn't say about [road collision support organisation], they just hand you this folder and think "that's solved that problem". They just think you're going to be able to read all that file, pick it up and then ring up and ask questions. You can't even think straight. You can't even get out of bed and think what day you are, who you are, what your name is you know and your heart's so broken, you know... I think it should perhaps be somebody saying do you want somebody to ring you up, not you going to look for the information because you're just scrambling around at the bottom wondering what to do, you know? (Bereaved family member)

I don't know if you know the leaflets they got. There's a big kind of plastic folder. It's almost got too much in it and there's a lot of stuff in there and I wasn't thinking properly and you don't think properly for quite a long time afterwards. (Bereaved family member)

Road Victims Trust and Aftermath Support, two road traffic collision specialist support organisations already successfully collaborate with policing to operate a direct referral model in their respective operating areas.^{93 94 95} A recent pilot of enhanced support for victims of serious road traffic collisions in London demonstrated the positive impact direct referrals from the police have on victims receiving support.⁹⁶ They found a 60% increase in the number of victims supported by Brake and RoadPeace where police directly referred victims into the support service. This resulted in more victims receiving support at the time they need it and reduced the mental burden on them.⁹⁷ In response to the Ministry of Justice's Victims' Code consultation, the Victim Commissioner called for an automatic, opt-out referral model to victim support services to ensure victims are proactively contacted, rather than required to seek support themselves.⁹⁸ This reflects the need to shift the burden from victims to agencies, improve information sharing in referrals, and ensure access to timely and well-resourced support services.

To ensure that direct referrals are effective in helping victims, they need to be informed by up-to-date details and clear communication. This was highlighted by one victim we spoke to who described his experience of receiving a direct referral from his Family Liaison Officer but was prevented from accessing support as the office had been closed. He did not know this until he had travelled to their offices.

⁹³ [RVT and the Police - Road Victims Trust](#)

⁹⁴ [Post Crash Support - Merseyside Road Safety Partnership and Aftermath Support](#)

⁹⁵ Road Victims Trust operates in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire, whilst Aftermath Support operates across all police force areas in North West England.

⁹⁶ This initiative has now moved out of the pilot phase, with committed multi-year funding and is being run by Brake.

⁹⁷ [London Road Traffic Collision Victim Support Pilot: Evaluation](#)

⁹⁸ [A new Victims' Code: consultation response - Victims Commissioner](#)

I've got referred to [support organisation] [by Family Liaison Officer], should I say, in the very early stages. And I went all the way down there. The address I was given in Leicester, but the office was closed literally, they'd moved out, but it was still being advertised as to where they were being situated. That was a bit, I thought, well, why? Why is that information not being updated? ...I know a lot of these organisations are voluntary or whatever like, you know but why wasn't that information shared? or changed you know...I mean this was only about six weeks after, I needed to speak to somebody. But no, got down there and the office had been closed. So that was like another kick in the teeth, I suppose, a push back. (Bereaved family member)

When victims did seek out support services themselves, there were mixed views on the speed with which services started supporting them. Several victims praised the speed of the initial response from support services and one victim noted receiving a response on a Sunday afternoon.

When I contacted [road collision support organisation] first of all someone got back to me on Sunday afternoon. Just in case someone's suicidal, I presume you know and we followed it up on the Monday. (Bereaved family member)

Both organisations came back really quickly when I chose to e-mail them. (Bereaved family member)

However, one victim told us they experienced a long delay following the initial triage call before they were able to access support. They described having to wait two months to get the caseworker support they needed, which was much longer than the ten days they were told it would take. This delay intensified the stress and isolation they were experiencing around the unfamiliar processes they had been suddenly faced with, highlighting how crucial timely support is in these circumstances. Previous research by the Victims' Commissioner has indicated that the funding challenges faced by victim services organisations adversely impacts the resource that service providers have available, resulting in long waiting times.⁹⁹

I phoned up in December and this was mainly because we weren't getting anything from the FLO. We just thought, you know, they have this lovely website. This lovely booklet. They obviously offer support in many ways. Didn't really know what we're phoning up to ask for, but it's what, what do people do in this situation? Do we need to get a solicitor on board? You know, what should we be looking at? What should we be expecting from the police type thing? So phoned up and had an initial triage. The lady on the triage explained that we would get a phone call back within the next 10 days...I was told it would be 10 days for a

⁹⁹ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

caseworker to come back to us, but it took almost a month before anybody got in touch. So it was the January when somebody got in touch, and then it wasn't till February that an actual phone call had been arranged. So that was sort of two months after that we actually could speak to anybody properly. (Bereaved family member)

Another factor impacting the accessibility of support is the variation in support available across England and Wales. A recent report by the Department for Transport described a 'postcode lottery' of the level and type of support victims receive as well as whether they will be referred for support in the first place.¹⁰⁰ This can leave victims experiencing acute grief and trauma without the crucial support they need to cope, as well as to navigate the criminal justice system. Similarly, in this research we heard from a victim who was unable to access support in their local area so had to travel further afield to access the support they needed. This is concerning as it again adds to the burden on the victim to pursue the support they deserve.

She said "I can't see anyone in [local area], the nearest group I can see that is active is in [further away area]", she goes. "Would you be interested?" I went "well yeah, I need some help". (Bereaved family member)

This geographical variation is unsurprising given the recent Department for Transport survey found only 31 of 43 (72%) Police and Crime Commissioner's provide support to those affected by fatal and serious injury road traffic collisions (in addition to deploying a Family Liaison Officer).¹⁰¹

Improving support provided to road traffic collision victims

Most victims we spoke to as part of this research highly praised the support they received from support organisations. However, there were a few areas they identified that could improve the support they received such as enhanced counselling provision and better staff training.

Enhanced counselling provision

Counselling is incredibly important following a traumatic and sudden bereavement and can help victims in their grieving process.¹⁰² One victim described accessing counselling support from a support service but noted that this only involved six counselling sessions.

If you go to the doctor, they'll give you the telephone number for [support organisation] and you can get, I think, 6 weeks counselling with [support organisation] who are also overworked. (Bereaved family member)

¹⁰⁰ [Support for victims of road traffic collisions - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰¹ [Support for victims of road traffic collisions - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰² [Giving Hope to Rebuild Lives: Practical and Emotional Support for Those Bereaved by Road Traffic Collisions](#)

Previous research from the Victims' Commissioner has highlighted that limited availability of counselling sessions can leave victims feeling unsupported, particularly during a lengthy journey through the justice system.¹⁰³

For many victims, the only way to receive further counselling support is by arranging this privately. However, several victims described the significant financial burden this posed, with this being particularly difficult for those receiving government financial support. Victims described feeling they had no choice as counselling support was something they needed.

We managed to get a local counsellor and I spent 18 months with her with counselling, which we paid for. But we again, we organised that ourselves...it was definitely something I needed to do. (Bereaved family member)

The cost of private counselling. It's extortionate. I have organised private counselling for my oldest daughter because she has Downs Syndrome and she has found it very hard. We've all found it horrible, but for her it's been really difficult to accept that her baby sister is gone and she is a young woman with a learning disability on benefits who still has to pay to see a counsellor. (Bereaved family member)

Consistent caseworker training

Another area of improvement that victims described was the need to ensure caseworkers were adequately trained and able to support vulnerable victims following a fatal road collision. One victim felt their caseworker lacked the necessary understanding to help them. For another victim, despite the established value of lived experience in peer group support settings, they felt their caseworkers' personal experience of a road collision negatively impacted their one-to-one support experience. It is evident from this research that effective support can be transformative in helping victims to navigate an unfamiliar system and feel less isolated. It is therefore important that all victims experience support that helps them to move forward in their recovery.

The caseworker, she was a very, very friendly person, you know, very nice to talk to, but I just didn't feel she had that understanding or competence, unfortunately, to help me. (Bereaved family member)

I had a caseworker briefly with [road collision support organisation].. I didn't find it very helpful... I got the impression that they had experience of a crash and I felt like I was being compared to their situation and I guess that's quite hard when the these charities use people that have been through it I guess getting that balance right of it not sounding like, "Oh yeah, that happened to me". And I'm thinking well, you're ringing to talk about how I'm feeling and what I'm going through and you're telling me about you a lot...it's just making sure almost that the people that are talking to people are probably in the right place themselves so that

¹⁰³ [Justice delayed: The impact of the Crown Court backlog on victims, victim services and the criminal justice system - Victims Commissioner](#)

there's not necessarily that feeling that you're sort of supporting them as well and it might have just been my perception of it at the time. (Bereaved family member)

Better communication about Restorative Justice¹⁰⁴

Victims' rights to be referred to services that support victims also extend to Restorative Justice services.¹⁰⁵ Several victims who participated in this research expressed a desire to engage in Restorative Justice following the conclusion of their case.

Restorative Justice brings together those harmed by crime and those responsible for that harm in a structured and voluntary process. It aims to give those affected an opportunity to communicate about the impact of the offence and, where appropriate, contribute to repairing the harm caused.

Several victims told us that taking part in Restorative Justice could have helped them find answers to unanswered questions, better understand the circumstances surrounding the collision and achieve a greater sense of closure following sentencing. For these victims, Restorative Justice represented an important opportunity to move forward after a process that had often felt lengthy, difficult and emotionally demanding.

It was 8 [years], so yeah, fine, but I just...I can't say it [the custodial sentence] gave me anything, because this man is, he's still a complete stranger to me. And he's gone from lurking in my neighbourhood to lurking in jail and he hasn't given us any...any acknowledgement that he's killed our daughter. Remorse to me means being desperate to atone for something, to say you're sorry, to make amends, to kind of put things right. But I don't get any sense that he feels that. If he feels anything, it's shame, and he should feel shame. But I would like him also to feel remorse. And I don't know if he's going to, and I've started a restorative justice process, but they haven't got his consent yet. They're going to, they've got consent to explain it to him. (Bereaved family member)

One victim had expressed an interest in Restorative Justice but never heard anything further about it from their Family Liaison Officer which left them without closure, unsure if the perpetrator had declined to take part or whether the police had never followed it up. Receiving information about how to access Restorative Justice is a key part of a victim's Code rights¹⁰⁶ so this lapse in communication is concerning. It also results in a victim not being able to engage with a process which could have empowered them and offered accountability from the perpetrator.

We talked about what's it called where they say they sort of say sorry [restorative justice]. And I said I wouldn't mind hearing from him, but I never. I didn't get anything at all. That was probably the only bit I sort of

¹⁰⁴ [What is restorative justice? | Restorative Justice Council](#)

¹⁰⁵ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰⁶ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

thought we talked about it and I didn't know, you know, I didn't know whether it was they [the Family Liaison Officer] just didn't deal with it or he [the perpetrator] didn't want to do it. So that was probably the only bit where for months after you know, it's like I didn't really get closure on that bit you know, it's like it sounded like a bit of a positive experience and to help closure on both sides potentially. But yeah, I didn't hear anything about it. (Bereaved family member)

Victim support services can play a vital role in helping victims cope with and recover from the impact of crime, and all victims should be able to access timely, effective and tailored support. This research highlighted the excellent, and often life-changing, support provided by specialist road traffic collision organisations. Victims described these services as a crucial source of practical advice, emotional support and advocacy, helping them navigate both the immediate aftermath of a collision and the often lengthy criminal justice process that followed.

However, access to this support was inconsistent. Many victims told us they only became aware of specialist services through family and friends or by conducting their own online searches. Participants emphasised the need for direct referrals from the police, so that victims are connected with support automatically rather than having to identify and seek out services themselves during a period of trauma and uncertainty.

Victims also highlighted gaps in the availability of specialist counselling and psychological support, with several describing how they had been forced to fund private counselling to help them cope following a serious or fatal road traffic collision. These findings demonstrate the importance of ensuring that specialist victim services are adequately funded and consistently available, so that all victims of criminal road traffic collisions can access the support they need, regardless of where they live or their ability to pay

6. Compensation following a serious road traffic collision

Individuals seriously injured or killed in road traffic collisions and their relatives are not automatically entitled to compensation. Whilst there is a Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme,¹⁰⁷ this is exclusively for victims of violent crime. As road crime is often not classified as violent, road collision victims are unlikely to be eligible for this.¹⁰⁸ Instead, compensation can be sought through civil law and paid by the responsible person's insurance company or the Motor Insurers' Bureau if the person responsible cannot be found or was not insured. To pursue a civil claim, victims must instruct a solicitor.

In this research, victims told us about several difficulties they faced navigating the compensation process after a road traffic collision. Firstly, whilst some victims were informed by their Family Liaison Officer about applying for compensation, many others were not. They were either unaware or only found out about the compensation process through personal connections to a solicitor. When victims did pursue compensation through a civil claim, they faced a lengthy, burdensome and stressful process. This often required them to complete large amounts of paperwork, collate evidence, revisit their trauma and spend a considerable amount of money on solicitor's fees.

Provision of information about compensation

The Victims' Code outlines that victims have the right to be provided with information about compensation, including how to claim compensation for any loss, damage or injury caused as a result of crime.¹⁰⁹ We heard from one victim who was helpfully advised about compensation by their Family Liaison Officer, who also managed their expectations about the length of the process.

My FLO, she was the one who advised me towards that [compensation] actually to begin with, I said, "what are you going on about compensation for?" She said "what I'm trying to notify you is that this is the experience I've had doing this work over the years, applying for Compensation or whatever you want to call it, that in itself is a long, complicated process." And she was just trying to tell me, "If you decide to go down that road, you need to do it sooner rather than later. start the process. Because it is a very long complicated process"... it's only advice she was trying to give me...she said there are specialist lawyers and solicitors out there that deal with that kind of thing, "I can't help you with that, I'm afraid so you need to go find somebody who deals with that". So I did. (Bereaved family member)

However, we also heard from bereaved relatives following a criminal road traffic collision who had not been told about the possibility of receiving compensation. Some victims were

¹⁰⁷ [Criminal injuries compensation: a guide - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰⁸ Victims may be eligible for Criminal Injuries Compensation if the driver had used their vehicle as a weapon.

¹⁰⁹ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

completely unaware seeking compensation was an option available to them and others only found out because they knew a solicitor personally. This is a concern because not only are victims not receiving their Code rights¹¹⁰ but it may also prevent them being able to receive compensation through a civil claim which could benefit them greatly, for example, the payout could be used to fund private counselling. It is clear throughout this research that the more signposting and guidance that can be provided to victims by their Family Liaison Officer, the more prepared they feel for what can be a very complex journey.

We haven't sought any compensation at all. We wouldn't even know where to start. Certainly haven't been told that there's any recourse for compensation or anything like that. It's never a conversation we've had. (Bereaved family member)

My best friend, one of her other friends is [a solicitor]. He came to help talk me through just as a friend initially. So he told me [that] I could get the funeral paid for, which I had no idea at all about. I hadn't got that information from anybody else. So he helped me fill the forms in for that, and he then said that I could take out the sort of a civil compensation thing, he was happy to take that on if I wanted it, he said, that he could recommend other companies that could do it. He hadn't come to help me, you know. And I knew him through my friend. And so he dealt with that for me. (Bereaved family member)

Those that were aware they could seek compensation found that they were not provided with enough information to enable them to navigate the often-complicated compensation process. This meant that they felt burdened with researching the process and looking for the information themselves.

No, that was a massive bug bear of mine. I wasn't signposted to anyone. I was blindly calling solicitors to start with. (Bereaved victim)

I've had to go online. I've had to dig out documents...So, I'd say, whilst the solicitors [have] been good, I've had to sort of, find a lot of information out myself, understanding what can be claimed for. I've had to ask the solicitor a lot of questions, because they've not actively come with the information to us. So for example, I've realised looking up information online, you can claim for what they call, 'loss of consortium'...So had I not brought up that lack of consortium, I would never know whether that would really be included in the claim or not, whether they've missed it...in law, you've got these professionals that you're relying on. It's not always foolproof in my opinion, so I think it would be really helpful, because you know, you've never done anything like this before., you don't have the understanding. (Bereaved family member)

¹¹⁰ [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales \(Victims' Code\) - GOV.UK](#)

Additional stress of seeking compensation

Navigating the complicated compensation process was particularly difficult at a time when victims were experiencing trauma and grief following the collision. The compensation process itself also proved stressful and burdensome, as victims were required to collate all the documentation needed. This was further exacerbated by victims having to navigate insurance companies repeatedly making low compensation offers.

They recorded everything, made a note of everything, and then he says, "you know what? I think we're on a good case. We're on a good thing here. I think we've definitely got a good case we can take on." But it ends up being a bit of a frigging sham, to be honest. That caused another level of stress, pain, that I'd never want to experience again. Because within about two months of starting the process, maybe three, I started filling out mountains, literally signing paperwork after paperwork. I don't know how much many forms I did have to read through and sign it was unbelievable. (Bereaved family member)

So we started the process in January 2024. It's now October 2025, so that's still ongoing and it's just a long drawn-out process, getting all the documentation together. The main thing is the insurance company messing about. They've been given a file, the case file...they've constantly been pushing back and coming back, trying to knock [settlement amount] down and they've come back with silly, silly offers and we've gone back and [said] "no, we're not accepting these" and then they ask for something else, so you give them something else. And it's got to the point now, where I did actually message the solicitor the other day and said, "look, is it worth starting court proceedings if they're not going to put an end to this? Because how long does it go on for?" ...in a situation like this, where it's absolutely clear what's happened and payment is due, and rightly so, they're just holding back and holding back and making excuses and sort of trying to grind you down. In fact, you know, my mum has said at some points, "I'll just accept what they've offered" because she's had enough, you know, and that's what they're playing on and it's not fair. So that's also been very difficult and stressful. And unfortunately, that's still ongoing. (Bereaved family member)

The stress of going back and forth with the insurance company about their compensation claim led to some victims settling with the insurance company earlier than they felt they should have, for a lower sum of money. This decision was often driven by the expense of the civil claim process and the need to be able to move on from the process. Victims described how the elongated process made them revisit their trauma and opened old wounds.

I put it to bed earlier than I should of because I couldn't cope with it, it was too much. Even trying to get receipts [for] this, that, the other. Oh

my God. I tried my hardest to keep things together with it and get all the data and everything. But I closed it sooner than I should have. Yeah, without a doubt... Did I hang out for as long as I really should have? No, I closed it, because I needed to close the door. I couldn't cope with it, you know, all the costs it was incurring. It was too expensive for me to financially keep going on. (Injured victim)

I want to get it finished, done with, and this is nearly 2 1/2 years down the road, just close it. I want to get it finished... I don't want to deal with this anymore. You know, I said, "it's constant, you keep on sending me the same kind of paperwork over and over again and you're asking the same questions." It's like I've got to go through everything in my head again, you know? No, you're keeping the wounds open and I don't want that. So yeah, so I ended it. I said I'll close. I'll get whatever's on the table. (Bereaved family member)

Due to the long and drawn-out process of applying for compensation, some victims were facing additional stress about running out of time to receive compensation. This was particularly a concern due to the three-year deadline to submit a civil compensation claim following the collision.¹¹¹ Some victims described how the lengthy criminal justice process, from waiting to find out whether the offence would be charged to waiting for the case to proceed to court led to them fearing being timed out of being able to apply for compensation. This caused additional stress and anxiety for victims, with little reprieve once the criminal case concluded as they still faced the protracted compensation process.

I'm getting quite concerned because obviously I know there's a three-year deadline on this and we're fast approaching it now. We're a month and a half away from it. So I'm like, what are we doing, we've got to submit it to court, if it's going to do anything. (Bereaved victim)

The insurance had accepted liability. So he's going through that. He's just waiting for the court case. You're given three years from date of death, aren't you? But we've only got 6 months after the court case for him to do all that, but he said he'll wait until the court hearing in April to put in his final whatever against the insurance company... It's maybe neither here nor there is it, but it just makes insurance more difficult. (Bereaved family member)

The lengthy process of applying for compensation also created difficulties for victims waiting for the compensation in order to receive therapy and counselling to address trauma from the collision. Victims highlighted how delays with the police investigation further contributed to delays with the civil claims process. Even when victims were able to receive

¹¹¹ Section 11 of the Limitation Act 1980 states the limitation period for a personal injury claim, which includes road traffic collision claims, is three years. This means that civil court proceedings must be issued within three years of the collision.

interim payments¹¹² to fund treatment such as counselling, when this ran out, they would have to halt their counselling and wait for the next payment. This has implications for the effectiveness of treatment to help victims cope and recover.

I really struggled to access other support. I'm still fighting to get counselling through the civil claim. Three years later, I've got referrals to say that I need EMDR therapy, but it's still just waiting to be authorised, which is frustrating because I know I need it... We're now three years down the line... But with the case going nowhere, I can't start. I'm on the NHS wait list again, but that's taking forever. So it feels like you know, this man took, he took my first child away from me... And they're taking that from me now, because of the delays with the civil [case]. That's partly because of the delays with the police. There's been this like, we don't want to push the civil [case], till we've got the outcome of the criminal [case]. So we've just been left in limbo. We haven't had any interim payments. (Bereaved victim)

Was there delays in getting the money from the third party [insurer]? Absolutely. For my treatment, I'd be on certain things, with certain counselling and then it will come to a halt because we've run out of money [from the interim payments] ... I'm having to wait for that money to come into place before I could have any further [treatment], you know, again, not right, not right. (Injured victim)

It was positive to hear that some victims had positive experiences with applying for compensation, where their insurance company took on a lot of the process for them, as well as being supportive and understanding.

The insurance company luckily which is doing a compensation claim on my behalf at no cost to me, they're being paid by the insurance company. My insurance, my wife's insurance company. Yeah. So it's always worth getting legal cover. I realised now it's £20 a year, but it's worth it. (Bereaved family member)

Compensation can go some way to help to address the psychological distress and financial hardship faced by those seriously injured or bereaved by a road traffic collision. However, this research found not enough victims are informed about compensation following a road traffic collision resulting in serious injury or death. The complex, lengthy and expensive nature of making a civil compensation claim caused additional stress for victims who were already traumatised and grieving. The lengthy process also has negative implications on victims' ability to cope and recover, where they are awaiting the compensation payout to pay for vital treatment such as counselling. It is clear from this research that where Family Liaison Officers signpost and manage expectations around compensation routes, victims feel more prepared for the process. To avoid placing an additional burden on victims, it is

¹¹² The solicitor may request Interim Payments to be made in advance of any final settlement. These are early partial payments to cover costs such as funeral expenses where the claim is likely to take a long time.

important that they receive clear information upfront that enables them to navigate the often-complex compensation claims process.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Road safety is a prevalent issue in England and Wales, with 29,896 people killed or seriously injured in reported road collisions in the year ending June 2025.¹¹³ Many of these road traffic collisions will be criminal. This means victims injured by the road traffic collision and the family of those killed in a road traffic collision will be required to navigate the criminal justice system. Many victims will also be engaging with support services and compensation processes. This research explores road traffic collision victims' experiences of the police, the courts, support services and the compensation process and identifies examples of good practice and areas for improvement.

This research highlights the additional stress victims face when experiencing slow and poorly handled police investigations, inadequate police communication and poor treatment. We found that when victims were assigned an excellent Family Liaison Officer, who was able to implement trauma-informed care, they had far more positive experiences of the police. At the court stage, several victims faced further delays, and poor audio prevented them from hearing court proceedings. Whilst we found that reading out their Victim Impact Statement was an incredibly empowering part of victims' court experiences, too many victims felt they did not receive sufficient time or support to write it.

It was evident throughout the research that in comparison to other forms of lethal harm, such as murder or manslaughter, bereaved victims of fatal road traffic collisions felt that the crime was not taken as seriously, and they were not recognised in the same way by the justice system. This damaged the trust they had in criminal justice agencies to deliver justice. This is compounded by the lack of ringfenced government funding for these bereaved victims.

Our findings identify the invaluable support that specialist road traffic collision charities provide to victims. It is vital that victims are not left to discover these organisations by themselves and are effectively referred to these organisations, as is their Victims' Code right. Too many victims were also not informed of their ability to claim compensation following the road traffic collision, another important Victims' Code right.

Systemic change is needed to improve how victims of road traffic collisions are treated, supported and communicated with by criminal justice agencies.

Recommendations

This research includes findings specific to victims of criminal road traffic collisions and findings that reflect experiences of victims of crime more generally.

For the purposes of this report, our policy recommendations will focus on addressing road traffic collision victim experiences specifically.

Strengthening national standards, oversight and accountability in road traffic collision investigations.

Our research shows that Road Traffic Collision (RTC) investigations are incredibly slow, and witness statements are not being taken promptly – sometimes more than two months

¹¹³ [Reported road casualties in Great Britain, provisional estimates: year ending June 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

after the collision. In the year ending September 2025, it took an average of 372 days for police to record an outcome in causing death by driving cases, rising to 524 days for causing death by driving whilst disqualified. Additionally, the implications of delays in police investigations are an issue seen more broadly across the RTC landscape, where victims of summary-only motoring offences face the consequences of being 'timed out' of the system where the six-month deadline to charge is not met. These delays cause victims further stress and frustration and leave them feeling deprioritised and dismissed following an already traumatic experience.

The need to improve roads policing has been recognised through a number of national reviews including the 2020 HMICFRS inspection of roads policing [‘Not Optional – An inspection of roads policing in England and Wales’](#) and the Government’s recent [Road Safety Strategy 2026](#), although there remains limited clarity on how this will deliver consistent national standards or improvements in victim experience.

Alongside system reform, there is a clear need for both greater consistency in police operational practice when responding to victims of RTCs and stronger national oversight of performance. The Victims’ Commissioner is calling on government, through the new Police Reform Bill 2026, to ensure that roads policing is treated as a specialist capability, with consideration given to placing roads policing strategy and oversight within the new National Policing Service structure to ensure greater consistency and a strengthening of standards.

While these wider reforms are underway, immediate action is needed to improve both the quality and accountability of police responses. We therefore recommend:

Recommendation 1: The College of Policing and National Police Chiefs’ Council should review and revise standards and guidance for police responses to fatal and serious RTCs, to better address the needs of victims, particularly in relation to timely evidence collection, outcome recording, and victim engagement, communication and support.

Recommendation 2: The Home Secretary and/or Secretary of State for Transport should commission HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary under s54 powers to undertake a thematic inspection of roads policing, focusing on fatal and serious RTC investigations, including the victim experience, quality of Family Liaison Officers and the use of ‘not to drive’ bail conditions, and assessing progress against its 2020 ‘Roads Policing – Not optional’ recommendations.

Implement consistent, trauma informed RTC training for police officers and staff.

Police are the primary point of contact for victims following a road traffic collision. However, victims described inconsistent communication, and a lack of compassion and respect, leaving them feeling de-centred and that their case was not being treated as a priority.

In contrast, positive experiences—particularly with Family Liaison Officers—were often transformative. Where officers applied a trauma-informed approach, victims felt supported, understood and better able to navigate the criminal justice process.

Recommendation 3: The College of Policing should ensure that the update to their FLO learning and development package (currently at scoping stage) includes trauma-informed training for all officers and staff working in and around roads policing, with improved consistency of practice across geographical areas. The training should be developed in consultation with victims who have lived experience, specialist victim support organisations and cover language, victim needs, and the specific role of Family Liaison Officers in RTC cases.

Secure sustainable funding for RTC-specific victim support services.

There is a lack of parity with other victim groups, such as bereaved victims of homicide, when it comes to government investment for road traffic collision victims. Our findings, in combination with other published material and reports, highlight geographical variation in the availability of RTC specialist support services for victims, and delays in accessing support following a referral. These issues will likely be exacerbated by the recent closure of the support organisation RoadPeace in January 2026, further limiting provision for victims who rely on specialist support.

Recommendation 4: The Department for Transport, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, should ensure sustained and adequate funding for support services for victims of RTCs, including those where a collision has not yet been recorded as a crime. The Ministry of Justice should, through its victim support services grant, require all Police and Crime Commissioners and wider Police and Crime Bodies to commission RTC specialist support services locally.

Roll out direct police referrals into specialist RTC victim support services.

RTC victim support organisations provide invaluable support, yet our findings show that victims are often left to identify and contact these support services themselves. This places an unnecessary burden on victims and bereaved families at a time of acute trauma, when they may be unable to process information or seek help proactively.

Evidence from a recent pilot in London found a 60% increase in the number of victims supported by Brake and RoadPeace where police made direct referrals into services. Road Victims Trust and Aftermath Support have also successfully operated direct referral models for several years.

Recommendation 5: The National Police Chiefs' Council should coordinate a national roll-out of direct police referrals to RTC specialist support services, building on direct referral arrangements across England and Wales which are well established and operating successfully,¹¹⁴ so that seriously injured and bereaved RTC victims are automatically referred directly into specialist services.

¹¹⁴ Following the successful direct referral pilot, a multi-year contract has been established with Brake in London, Road Victims Trust uses a direct referral model as standard across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire, and Aftermath Support receives direct referrals as standard from the police across Merseyside.

Improve access to clear information on compensation and civil claims processes for RTC victims.

RTC victims are unlikely to be eligible for CICA, and our research found that RTC victims have a lack of awareness of and information on the compensation routes that are available to them. When victims did pursue compensation through a civil claim, they faced a lengthy, burdensome, stressful and expensive process.

Recommendation 6: The Ministry of Justice and Department for Transport should develop and publish clear, accessible guidance for victims of RTCs on compensation and civil claims processes. The guidance should be developed in consultation with specialist services and should be accessible to victims and to those agencies supporting victims.

Appendix

Appendix A – Methodology

With this research, the Victims' Commissioner aimed to gain insight into the experiences of injured and bereaved victims of criminal road traffic collisions in England and Wales. To facilitate hearing from a range of victims from this group, we conducted a screener survey to identify interview participants. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with a sample of the victims who had completed the survey.

Screener survey

The screener survey comprised of 10 questions to identify details about respondents' road traffic collision experiences, in addition to demographic questions.

The survey was launched on Smart Survey and promoted by the Victims' Commissioner through X and LinkedIn. It was also distributed via stakeholders including victims' organisations to distribute information about the survey to members of their networks.

Interview design and sampling

Of the 168 respondents who gave their consent in the survey to being contacted by the Victims' Commissioner's Office to participate in a follow-up interview to discuss their experiences in more detail, we contacted a total of 19 respondents to invite them to participate. We used a combination of random and purposive sampling to achieve a diverse group of respondents for interview. Interview invitations were then emailed out to respondents with an information sheet about the research and a consent form. Based on the response rate of the initial interview sample, additional survey invitations were sent using a combination of random and purposive sampling again with the aim of ensuring representation across sex, age, region, ethnicity and whether they were an injured or bereaved victim. Safeguarding criteria was also applied when selecting participants to take part in research interview, only selecting respondents who stated they had received some form of support from support services in the screener survey.

We interviewed 12 respondents in total, three respondents had been injured by a criminal road traffic collision, and nine respondents had been bereaved by a criminal road traffic collision. Interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams, using the recording and transcription tool included in the Teams software.

Ethics

The design of the research integrated ethical considerations through informed consent processes and clear boundaries to protect both participants and researchers. A trauma-informed approach underpinned survey design, development of the interview schedule and conduct of interviews with victim participants, ensuring that interactions were sensitive, participant-led and minimised risk of harm. Interviewers used a structured guide alongside the question schedule to ensure trauma-informed and safeguarding practice that prioritised safety and emotional wellbeing. Ethical risks, including re-traumatisation and power imbalances were mitigated through interviewer training, reflexive practice and clearly defined boundaries. Mechanisms were also in place to respond to issues as they arose, for

example by pausing interviews, ensuring support was clearly signposted and adapting questioning where necessary.

Interview analysis

The 12 transcripts were initially refined using the interview recording shortly after the interview had taken place, to ensure accuracy and understanding of what the respondent had said. All transcripts were then coded using NVivo software. A thematic analysis was then conducted to identify recurring themes and issues. To exemplify the key themes in the research, we have included anonymised quotations in the report.

Appendix B - Limitations

Interviews

The sample of interview respondents was small and was limited to those respondents who had completed the screener survey, gave their consent to be contacted about a follow-up interview and responded to the interview invitation. Additionally, due to the complex nature of road traffic collision cases, experiences drawn upon were individual and varied. Therefore, this report does not claim to represent the experiences of all road traffic collision victims in England and Wales. The intention of this research is to capture a subset of victims' experiences to highlight the issues this group face. The quotes included in this report are used for the purpose of illustrating and representing common themes, but it is important to note that they do not represent all experiences and views of victims.

It is also worth acknowledging the potential for response bias. Individuals who have had particularly negative experiences may have felt more strongly motivated to share their views. However, it is important to recognise that victims' journeys through the criminal justice system are nuanced, and a strength of qualitative interviewing is its ability to capture this complexity, enabling both examples of good practice and poorer experiences to be explored.

Over and under representation in sampling

The sample included an overrepresentation of victims where the collision had taken place in England. There were no interviews with victims where the collision had taken place in Wales. This limits the degree to which findings from this report can be assumed to represent victims' experiences of road traffic collisions in Wales.

There was also an overrepresentation of victims from a white ethnic background and older victims (age 44+) within the sample. As a consequence, victims from other ethnic groups and younger victims (below 44 years old) were underrepresented. This has implications for the representativeness of the findings to the wider population. However, the selection of experiences included in this report are intended to contribute to further understanding the specific challenges facing this under-researched victim group.

Appendix C – Road traffic collision victims' journey map



