

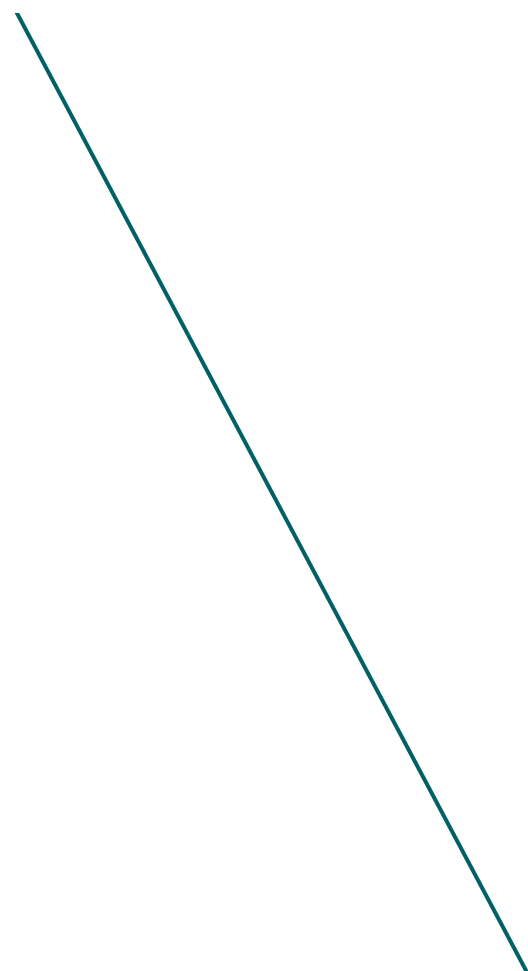


EMPOWERING VICTIMS
THROUGH DATA AND
TECHNOLOGY

REPORT

Rick Muir

June 2012
© IPPR 2012





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rick Muir is associate director for public service reform at IPPR.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks go to Andy Stuckey who carried out the primary research upon which this paper is based. Thanks also go to Victim Support for funding the research without whose generosity it would not have been possible.

ABOUT IPPR

IPPR, the Institute for Public Policy Research, is the UK's leading progressive thinktank. We produce rigorous research and innovative policy ideas for a fair, democratic and sustainable world.

We are open and independent in how we work, and with offices in London and the North of England, IPPR spans a full range of local and national policy debates. Our international partnerships extend IPPR's influence and reputation across the world.

IPPR
4th Floor
14 Buckingham Street
London WC2N 6DF
T: +44 (0)20 7470 6100
E: info@ippr.org
www.ippr.org
Registered charity no. 800065

This paper was first published in June 2012. © 2012
The contents and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) only.

SMART IDEAS
for CHANGE

CONTENTS

Executive summary	2
1. Introduction	3
2. The value of open data and digital technologies in public services	4
2.1 Implications for public services	5
2.2 Conclusions	7
3. Data and digital technology in the criminal justice system	8
3.1 Open data in the criminal justice system	8
3.2 Digital and social media innovations in crime and justice	11
3.3 Victims' views	14
3.4 Conclusions	16
4. Future potential	17
4.1 Crime-tracking services	17
4.2 Interactive crime maps with real-time data	17
4.3 Online peer support communities	18
4.4 Court transparency and accessibility	18
4.5 Conclusions	19
5. Conclusions	20
References	21
Appendix: Interviews	23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital technology has already transformed the way we live and work. The emergence of new digital infrastructures, such as wireless networks, mobile devices and positioning technologies, means that wherever we go we are now constantly computing, using smart phones or tablet computers to find out where we are, send texts and emails, read the news and watch our favourite television programmes. The emergence of social media means that people can now proactively create, publish and communicate online.

This paper explores the implications of these changes for how the criminal justice system serves the victims of crime.

First, it shows how this ubiquitous digital environment has the potential to make public services such as the criminal justice agencies more accountable, participatory, collaborative, accessible, responsive and efficient.

Second, it assesses the degree to which such technologies have so far been utilised within the criminal justice system and reports what victims think of them. It finds that poor communication is a major driver of dissatisfaction among victims, and it is critical to improving the quality of the service they receive. However, to be effective the information passed on to victims needs to reflect and address their concerns, and be of direct practical relevance to them. Although there is a great deal of non-personal data available online about the operation of the criminal justice system, including financial and performance data, this is of limited practical use to most victims of crime. Victims in our focus groups felt that crime maps (the biggest, most recent innovation in this area at time of reporting) were of relatively limited use to them. At present, it is very difficult or almost impossible to access meaningful data that shows the full journey from a crime being committed to justice being served. The courts in particular publish very little information on the cases they are dealing with and their outcomes. Online victim peer support networks remain in their infancy.

Third, it describes the future potential of these technologies and makes a number of recommendations for policymakers, the police and the courts. These are intended to give victims the kind of information that they told us they would find most useful.

- Every police force in England and Wales should develop a crime-tracking app to enable all victims in their area to follow their case through the system.
- The courts and the Crown Prosecution Service should work with the police locally to ensure that data is shared and that victims can follow their case all the way from reporting an incident to the outcome of court proceedings and beyond.
- Crime maps should be made interactive and display real-time information to change them from being purely a tool of transparency and accountability to one that could help prevent and reduce crime.
- The criminal justice agencies should systematically refer victims to online peer support networks where they exist. Where they do not, independent victim support organisations, such as Victim Support, should help to set up such forums and recruit members.
- The courts should become more accessible and transparent by publishing details online of the cases they are dealing with, including judgments reached and a transcript of the case.

1. INTRODUCTION

We now live in a ubiquitous digital environment in which information held by ordinary people can reach thousands of others at the touch of a button. The spread of digital technologies such as the internet, personal computers, wireless networks, positioning technologies and mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets have led to an information revolution that is transforming the way we live and work.

This paper looks at the implications of this information and communications revolution for the victims of crime. There is an abundance of evidence showing that victims feel that the criminal justice system is unresponsive, poor at keeping victims informed, and insensitive to their needs and concerns. This paper explores how open data and new digital technologies could help to empower the victims of crime.

The paper does three things.

First, it shows how this ubiquitous digital environment has the potential to make public services such as the criminal justice agencies more accountable, participatory, collaborative, accessible, responsive and efficient.

Second, it assesses the degree to which such technologies have so far been utilised within the criminal justice system and explores what victims think about these innovations. In doing so, it looks at surveys of victims' attitudes towards the criminal justice system and draws on the findings of focus groups undertaken with victims of crime for the purposes of this report.

Third, it describes the future potential of these technologies and makes a number of recommendations for policymakers, the police and the courts. These are intended to give victims the kind of information that they told us they would find most useful.

The government has been admirable in its push to open up more and more official data and make it available online to enhance transparency and public accountability. This is crucial because a lack of information and poor communication are some of the main factors driving victim dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system. However, our research shows that most of the data released so far in the criminal justice system has gone unnoticed by victims of crime, and is largely not of direct interest, relevance or use to victims. This paper calls on agencies to listen more closely to what victims say they want and to prioritise developing those tools that most directly meet their concerns.

2. THE VALUE OF OPEN DATA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN PUBLIC SERVICES

Increasingly we live in an environment in which digital technologies are embedded in public and private spaces. Wherever we go we are now constantly computing: for example, using smart phones or tablets like the iPad to find out where we are, send texts and emails, read the news or watch our favourite television programmes.

The spread of low-cost digital technologies has been accompanied by the emergence of social media, which means that people can now proactively create, publish and communicate online (Leadbeater 2009). Social media tools are now familiar to most people, for example:

- wiki sites such as Wikipedia that allow anyone with access rights to log on and directly edit content on a web page
- social networking sites or apps such as Facebook that allow people to meet and stay in touch with hundreds if not thousands of friends and contacts all around the world
- photo- and video-sharing sites or apps such as Flickr and YouTube
- blogs that enable people to edit and publish material instantly, and micro-blogs like Twitter enabling people to keep thousands of 'followers' up to date on their thoughts and movements.

These web tools have transformed the internet from a world of 'web 1.0', programmed only by those with the sophisticated skills required and largely presenting static information to a passive public, to 'web 2.0', an internet that is programmed and co-created by millions of people. Don Tapscott and Anthony D Williams characterise this new type of internet as 'a global, living, networked computer that anyone can programme' (Tapscott and Williams 2008: 19).

These tools have also enabled a new form of many-to-many communication. In the past, the two basic forms of media were broadcast media that enabled one-to-many communication, and communications media like the telephone, which involved interactive one-to-one communication, normally between just two people. Social media means that over time thousands of people can hold collective conversations, and in this way social media enables mass collaboration in a way older forms of media did not (Shirky 2009: 86–90).

The emergence of these technologies has affected all societies in important ways.

- It is now possible for large numbers of people to organise themselves collectively without formal leadership or organisation (Leadbeater 2009: 19). During England's August 2011 riots, for example, both the rioters and those who volunteered to clean up afterwards used new media to organise spontaneous collective acts.
- It is blurring the boundary between producers and consumers. Everything from music mash-ups and participatory computer games to the human genome project show how users and amateurs are now transforming products and co-creating them with paid specialists.
- It is challenging the power of institutions and subverting the control of large-scale organisations in areas as diverse as the music industry, newspapers and politics.
- It is accelerating the pace of innovation, by enabling large-scale collaborative learning processes to take place at speed (Tapscott and Williams 2008:101–108).

2.1 Implications for public services

There are six main ways in which digital technologies and new media are changing public services, including the criminal justice agencies.

Accountability

Digital technology enables the public to hold those providing public services to account much more effectively than in the past. This is in part because information and communication technologies can enable governments to make official information much more accessible to the citizen.

It is now possible to make vast quantities of public data available online in a way that was simply inconceivable even 10 years ago. As a result, across developed countries we have seen moves towards a more open approach to public data, often under public pressure. Those calling for open data argue that information held by government should be freely available to use and remix by the public. By ‘unlocking’ the reams of data and information produced by government officials, they argue that we could enhance immensely the quality of services received by citizens (Open Rights Group 2010).¹

The Coalition government has outlined its intention to be ‘the most open and transparent government in the world’.² The Coalition programme for government (2010) set out the government’s initial transparency commitments which included central and local government spending transparency and the opening up of other key government datasets, including (for example) a more granular breakdown of crime data.

However, this is not just simply about government departments publishing more official data online. These technologies are also enabling the public to hold agencies to account from the bottom up. During the G20 and student tuition fees demonstrations, for example, police tactics such as ‘kettling’ were subject to intense public scrutiny. This was in large part enabled by the ability of activists to take photos and videos of police officers and then publish them online. It was this kind of evidence that led to officers being held to account following the tragic death of Ian Tomlinson in April 2009.

Co-production

All public goods are the product not simply of action by the state but also by the private sector, civil society and individual citizens. For example, in order to promote public safety all societies rely on processes of informal policing, with local residents watching their streets, noting any acts of crime or deviance, and then either intervening themselves or contacting the police (Shapland and Vagg 1988).

The arrival of digital technology opens up the possibilities for much greater co-production across all public services.

For example, the website School of Everything³ allows current or retired teachers and skilled amateurs to link up with potential students to provide them with personal tuition. Originally the idea of the late social entrepreneur Michael Young, School of Everything acts as a skills and learning exchange in which people who want to learn can seek out people who (either for money or voluntarily) have knowledge to pass on.

1 See <http://www.openrightsgroup.org/ourwork/reports/open-data-a-quiet-revolution>

2 See <http://transparency.number10.gov.uk>

3 See <http://schoolofeverything.com>

There is also the potential for web-enabled co-production in the area of public health. We know that the state spends very significant amounts of money financing routine health checks and dealing with minor medical enquiries. If someone is concerned about their health, they will generally make an appointment to see their GP. The introduction of the NHS Direct phone line was a significant step away from this rather expensive approach. But web 2.0 could take this concept further: for example, by allowing peer-to-peer support networks to develop online, which people can access and use to discuss their concerns with professionals and others with similar issues. Health-oriented discussions of this sort, for example, regularly take place on the popular mother's site MumsNet.⁴ In other words, by sharing information with each other online, citizens would be co-producing healthy outcomes with the state.

As we shall discuss below, similar virtual forums could open up possibilities for greater support for the victims of crime, enabling victims with similar experiences to come together to offer mutual support and advice.

Collective intelligence

Public services could benefit enormously from the sharing of knowledge and experiences online. For example, Singapore's pioneering Public Services 21 programme encourages frontline staff and service users to get in touch with ideas for how services could be delivered much more effectively, recognising that it is very often on the frontline where people can really assess what works and what does not. The government encourages people to contact the prime minister's office via the PS21 website with ideas for how to save money and deliver services more effectively.⁵

In another example, in 2007 the Dutch police launched a website, Politieonderzoeken.nl,⁶ which invites the public to help solve suspected murder cases. For their first case, they posted details of the violent death of 18-year-old Sjaak Gerwig, whose body was dredged up from a canal in Utrecht in April 1995. The website offered a reward of €15,000 for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrator. It included a map of the crime scene, details of the investigation, press reports and even illustrations of the wounds inflicted. The site is a classic example of what Charles Leadbeater calls 'we-think', because it allows readers to post up their own ideas, and therefore allows a community of contributors to work collaboratively to solve a crime. In its first month alone, the site received over 50,000 hits and as a result of the work of amateur detectives, produced six new witnesses and a new scenario for the murder.

Accessibility

Web 2.0 lowers the costs of communication between service providers and the public, and means that users should be able to access services much more quickly and easily. We have already seen that a range of new online intermediaries are making services much more navigable for the public. For example, the website Patient Opinion⁷ was set up by GP Paul Hodgkin to allow patients to register problems with NHS care. These are then passed on to the relevant managers in different parts of the NHS. This is much easier than citizens having to track down the right person to complain to at each individual hospital or surgery. The site also allows users to rate different services at particular hospitals,

4 See <http://www.mumsnet.com>

5 See <http://app.ps21.gov.sg/newps21>

6 See <http://www.politieonderzoeken.nl>

7 See <http://www.patientopinion.org.uk>

thus helping patients hold different parts of the health service accountable for their performance in such a way that should help to trigger improvements.

More personal and responsive services

Information and communications technologies should also enable public services to collect and store information easily about their users. This means that they should be able to become more responsive and able to tailor their work to personal needs. For example, the Connecting for Health project aimed to replace the disjointed IT systems previously used by doctors and the health service by connecting around 5,000 different computer systems with a nationwide infrastructure. Although the project has been scaled back, the government is still committed to greater data sharing to create a better interface between patient and service, and facilitate better communication between health professionals. This should mean that data about a patient is retrievable more easily in different parts of the service, facilitating more personalised care.

Value for money

Technological innovations may finally help the state 'do more for less', which is particularly important in the context of the immediate and long-term pressures on public spending (OBR 2011).

For example, the use of online interfaces means that providers can save money spent on contact centre and front counter services. The Canadian province of Ontario has done this by launching Service Ontario, a website which signposts residents to all provincial services, from birth registrations to how to file tax returns.⁸

2.2 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated the potential of new technologies to help improve public services in a number of important ways: helping citizens hold service providers to account; enhancing the possibilities for the co-production of services between the citizen and the state; fostering greater collective intelligence; making services more accessible, personalised and responsive; and helping to achieve greater value for money.

In what follows, the paper explores how far the criminal justice system has been making the most of these opportunities in order to better serve victims of crime.

8 See <http://www.serviceontario.ca>

3. DATA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

This chapter assesses how well existing data and technological innovation in the criminal justice system meet victims' priorities. It looks at what victim-relevant criminal justice data is currently available and at recent digital and social media innovations making this data available to the public in new forms. Finally, it examines victims' attitudes to these developments to assess whether or not they meet their needs and priorities.

3.1 Open data in the criminal justice system

The government has committed itself to an 'open data' agenda across public services. Box 3.1 summarises the public data principles the government has adopted across all departments.

Box 3.1: The Public Sector Transparency Board's public data principles

The Board has outlined the following draft public data principles.

- Public data policy and practice will be driven clearly by the public and businesses who want and use the data, including what data is released when and in what form.
- Public data will be published in reusable, machine-readable form.
- Public data will be released under the same open licence which enables free reuse, including commercial reuse.
- Public data will be available and easy to find through a single easy to use online access point.⁹
- Public data will be published using open standards, and following relevant recommendations of the World Wide Web Consortium.
- Public data underlying the government's own websites will be published in reusable form for others to use.
- Public data will be timely and fine-grained.
- Release data quickly, and then republish it in linked data form.
- Public data will be freely available to use in any lawful way.
- Public bodies should actively encourage the reuse of their public data.
- Public bodies should maintain and publish inventories of their data holdings.

So, what victim-relevant data is currently published by the criminal justice system? There is a great deal of non-personal data available online which is indirectly relevant to victims of crime because it will allow victims like other members of the public to hold the criminal justice agencies to account for their performance. This includes data on expenditure, costs and performance.

3.1.1 Financial data

As part of the government's transparency agenda, each department is now required to publish, online, any expenditure in excess of £25,000. For the criminal justice system, citizens are now able to keep an eye on expenditure within different agencies by looking at the datasets published by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, through the Combined Online Information System (COINS).

⁹ See <http://data.gov.uk>

Part of the government's transparency agenda was for all departments to publish financial input indicators, which measure the resources allocated to a particular government programme. Financial input indicators provide the public with an understanding of what it costs public service providers to carry out their routine functions. Because it is published down to the level of the court, prison or probation service this data allows the public to assess the efficiency of each institution, and should flag up areas in need of improvement.

The Ministry of Justice, for example, started by giving data on the cost of delivering an effective courts and tribunals system, such as staff and judicial costs per sitting day in the crown court and in the magistrates court. Many more financial input indicators are set to be released, such as cost per prison place and cost per community order.¹⁰ The Home Office have already adopted a number of input indicators, such as cost per head of population of total police force cost, and cost per case of managing a drug-misusing offender into treatment and recovery.

3.1.2 Performance data

For years, the well-respected British Crime Survey has provided researchers, the media and the wider public with a range of information on crime and the public perceptions of crime (see box 3.2).

Box 3.2: The British Crime Survey

The BCS measures the amount of crime in England and Wales. Crucially, this includes crimes which may not have been reported to the police, or recorded by them. It thus provides an important alternative to police-recorded crime statistics. Without the BCS, the government would have no information on these unreported crimes. The BCS also helps identify those most at risk of different types of crime, and is used in designing and informing crime prevention programmes. It is also used to assess people's attitudes to crime and towards the criminal justice system. The BCS is one of the major sources of information about levels of crime, public and victims' attitudes to crime and other Home Office issues.

This allows the public to assess the overall performance of the criminal justice system at the national level, by monitoring the level of crime and antisocial behaviour, people's fear of crime, and attitudes among both victims and the wider public towards the criminal justice agencies. Unfortunately the BCS is not publicly broken down below regional level, and so it is less effective as a tool for local accountability in which the public remain dependent on recorded crime statistics collected by each police force.

It is important that performance data is published according to consistent, standardised categories so that meaningful comparisons can be made between services. For example, the Data.gov.uk website contains the data set 'Police performance value for money profiles',¹¹ which combines information on income and expenditure with the number of police officers relative to population in each police force. Local communities, including victims of crime, should be able to use this data to push for improvements in productivity and efficiency where their local forces are performing poorly.

10 A full list can be found at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/transparency/find-all-other-government-data/ministry-of-justice-indicator-data>

11 See <http://data.gov.uk/dataset/police-performance-value-for-money-profiles>

The government has become more innovative in its use of sentencing data, and the Ministry of Justice has launched a website that provides an interactive guide to sentencing statistics.¹² The site allows you to use a map to select your location and find out about the sentences given in your local court, as well as sentencing for different types of crime. Traffic for the sentencing site since launch has been between 30,000–40,000 people visiting each month, without any publicity. Ministry of Justice officials believe the success of the site is in part related to the availability of local data, and that it is at the local level that we can most effectively engage the public in statistics.

Providing open data about sentencing could help build confidence in the criminal justice system by realigning the public's perceptions with the facts. [Open.justice.gov.uk](http://open.justice.gov.uk) includes an interactive game called You be the Judge. This allows the public to decide on sentences themselves when given information from real cases. The results show that people are often far more lenient with their sentencing than those actually given in court. Using a criminal damage case as an example, 68 per cent gave a more lenient sentence, 27 per cent gave the same and only 5 per cent opted for a tougher sentence.

3.1.3 Case-tracking data

While there have been important steps forward in terms of generic financial and performance data, there is much less information available that would allow a victim of crime to follow their own case. Such data would include progress with a case since a crime was reported, the progress of any investigation, whether anyone had been charged, when a case is going to court, when a trial is taking place, and the outcome of a court case.

At present, it is very difficult (almost impossible) to access meaningful data that shows the full journey from a crime being committed to justice being served.¹³ With greater transparency there is real potential for victims to see the progression of a case through the justice system, aiding their understanding of patterns and trends in crime, making the whole system much more accountable.

One pioneering example is TrackMyCrime (TMC) introduced by Avon and Somerset Constabulary in March 2011, which allows victims of crime to access the progress of the investigation of their crime as well as contact the officer leading the investigation. The service offers the option of using the service or speaking directly with a police officer. It allows victims to access the current status of their crime online in the same way they might expect when accessing a bank or mobile phone account online.

In the past, people have had to wait for a police officer investigating the crime to contact them with updates that would often be at a time that was not convenient for them. TMC sends information to the website as soon as the police computer system receives it, and victims are automatically alerted to updates via a text or email alert. This allows people to access the information at a time convenient to them.

An early evaluation of the scheme has shown that there is a high level of satisfaction among both users and police officers:

- 89 per cent of surveyed victim users felt that the information they needed was provided quickly

¹² See <http://open.justice.gov.uk>

¹³ Local Public Data Panel, <http://data.gov.uk/blog/final-local-public-data-panel-response-home-office-consultation-policing-21st-century>.

- 93 per cent of TMC victims felt their questions were answered adequately
- 77 per cent of TMC victims were satisfied with the follow-up service provided
- 95 per cent of TMC victims were satisfied with how they were treated
- 64 per cent of police officers thought TMC was good or excellent
- 51 per cent of officers felt that TMC fitted better around their working patterns
- 66 per cent of officers said that using TMC saved them time when updating a victim
- 76 per cent of police officers who had used TMC would recommend the service to victims.¹⁴

Sussex, Derbyshire and South Wales forces are all progressing to roll out their versions. Avon and Somerset told Victim Support and IPPR that over 30 forces have been in touch to look at the service.

3.1.4 Complaints data

Victims of crime who have complained about the way the police have treated them need to know that any complaint will be taken seriously and dealt with fairly and consistently. By making data on the volume and nature of police complaints online, victims can make judgments about the effectiveness of the police or the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) in dealing with any complaints made.

Unfortunately, there is relatively little complaints data available online in England and Wales. The IPCC publishes a report each year presenting statistics on complaints recorded by police forces in England and Wales. However, there are only two data sets currently on the Data.gov.uk website relating to the IPCC. Data on police stop-and-search complaints has not been released since 2004.

3.2 Digital and social media innovations in crime and justice

Having explored what victim-relevant data has been available about the performance and operation of the criminal justice system, we now scope out how digital technologies, especially new media, have been used to help empower victims of crime in England and Wales.

3.2.1 Accountability

New technologies have armed citizens with new means of challenging authority and there are a number of ways they have been employed in this country to help victims hold the criminal justice system to account.

MyPolice

One recent citizen-led innovation in police accountability is MyPolice.¹⁵ The site, created by two members of the public, was set up in part due to their concern about the police response to a burglary, when they found there was no easy way to make a complaint. The concept of MyPolice is to act as a simple way of submitting complaints online and receiving a quicker response from a local police officer. The site went live in the pilot area of Tayside in January 2011, and ran for three months.

¹⁴ Information from *Track My Crime: An introduction and insight of user experience*, February 2012, from Avon and Somerset Constabulary. A survey of police officers who have updated a victim using TMC was completed in August 2011, and 59 of 144 police officers responded. To date, 157 TMC victims are represented in the Home Office mandated user satisfaction survey sample of respondents. Note that this sample size is small and unrepresentative of TMC users, but some insights can be gleaned from the responses.

¹⁵ See <http://www.mypolice.org>

The pilot area consisted of 10 small rural areas, whereas the founders envisaged the service working best in a more heavily populated urban area. This was because market research suggested that local communities in these smaller neighbourhoods tend to have much closer relationships with their local police officers, and therefore would be less likely to need an avenue such as MyPolice to engage with the local police service. Nevertheless, people still used the website. This is encouraging for the potential of MyPolice operating in urban areas where public interaction with their local police service is likely to be more limited. The founders are now in the process of formally evaluating the pilot project and hope that the service will soon be implemented by other forces across the country.

Crime maps

The major digital initiative in enhancing police accountability to victims and the wider public has been the roll out of online crime maps. In February 2011, the government launched Police.gov.uk, which allows the public to access crime maps from one location – without having to visit different police force websites – and provides more detail, down to the street level, than the existing online crime maps provided by forces in England and Wales.

The site enables residents to key in their postcodes, find out about the level of crime in their area, and monitor the performance of the police in tracking it over time. It also gives details of the local policing team and beat meetings.

The relaunch of these crime maps is a good example of the government using web 2.0 technology in its promise to provide open data to the public. The data is presented in its more granular form in a clear and usable way. From May 2012, the site will provide the public with information on what happens next for crime occurring on their streets, that is, on police action and justice outcomes.

After some initial media coverage, the site was heavily inundated with hits not just domestically but globally too. The Home Office stated that they were receiving around five million hits an hour, or 75,000 a minute. However, previous iterations received only 50,000 hits a month, and findings from the British Crime Survey showed that both awareness and use of online crime maps were low; 10 per cent of people were aware of crime maps and three per cent had used them. I return to victims' evaluations of the crime maps below.

3.2.2 Collective intelligence

Social media and the ubiquity of mobile digital devices have the potential to allow much greater sharing of information between victims, the wider public and the police, which should help the police detect and investigate crime. One recent innovation in this area has been the launch of Streetviolence.org, a new website to help cut violent crime. This site allows victims of street robberies and attacks to report to the police online, post witness appeals and warn their local community by pinpointing the crime on a Google map. People who witnessed the incident and are able to help can then get in touch with the right police team at the click of a button.

The site has been set up by the charity Witness Confidential, which hopes that by providing a secure and private channel of communication between victim, witnesses and the police, more people will be encouraged to come forward to help bring perpetrators to justice.

Some police forces are also embracing social media to help collate greater intelligence about crime, which will support victims by enabling the police to successfully investigate crime and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Greater Manchester Police have launched a Share Your Suspicions section on their website. Through this page residents can anonymously submit concerns and upload photos or videos as evidence of suspected offences.¹⁶

Most forces have now joined social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter as a way of sharing information with residents. Followers or friends of these forces receive regular updates or 'tweets' about suspected crimes that have been committed locally, allowing the police to much more easily make appeals for information. Jeremy Crump (2011) has researched the spread of police use of Twitter and has found that as of July 2011:

- 40 of the 43 forces had official Twitter accounts (up from 33 in late 2010)
- there were 418 local police teams on Twitter (up from 140 in late 2010)
- the 40 forces have a total of 121,300 followers (mean 3,032) and the local police teams a total of 107,700 (mean 258).

Following the August 2011 riots, the number of police followers rose sharply from 121,000 to 347,000, with big increases in the big metropolitan forces where most of the riots took place. The Metropolitan Police Service saw its Twitter following grow from around 3,000 to over 30,000 in a month (ibid). Some individual officers saw their following increase by thousands and there was a 54 per cent growth in the following of local police teams.

Greater Manchester Police have actively scanned the 'chatter' on Twitter for crime-relevant information, so that they can see what is being said, for example, about gun or knife crime in their local area. This was aimed at boosting their intelligence and getting 'a feel' for public concerns about these topics.

3.2.3 Accessibility

The police have started to deploy digital media tools to make it easier for victims and witnesses to contact them. For example, most local neighbourhood policing teams have a website with an email address and details of how to get in touch. It is now generally possible to report crimes online without having to phone in. This is much more convenient and accessible than the days when members of the public had to phone a remote call centre and wait weeks for a formal response to a non-emergency call.

Surrey Police recently became the first force in the UK to pilot an app that will enable users to engage with their local neighbourhood teams through their smart phone or iPad. This includes contact information for the local police, local crime data, the ability for the public to vote on local police priorities, and updates on officers' daily activity.

The courts by and large remain inaccessible unless victims choose to be physically present. This is because until recently journalists and others have had to ask permission before being able to tweet or publish proceedings online. However, in December 2011, the lord chief justice issued guidance stating that live text-based communications could be permitted in court. Properly regulated, the use of new media in the courts should be a step forward to a more transparent court system in which victims have much easier access to proceedings.

3.2.4 Victim support services

Group-networking sites like MumsNet allow young mothers to support themselves through a peer-to-peer support network and there is no reason why the same could not be done by and for the victims of crime.

¹⁶ See <http://www.gmp.police.uk/mainsite/contacting.htm>

The emergence of Facebook offers the possibilities for such a service, which some victims are using. The ubiquitous social networking site has a number of closed, private groups that allow victims of crime to interact with each other, offer support and raise awareness of the crimes that have affected their lives. There are already a variety of groups, from a general ‘victims of crime’ group, to groups for more specific crimes such as ‘survivors of domestic abuse’ and ‘victims of violent crimes’.

3.3 Victims’ views

So, what do victims think about the information they receive from the criminal justice system? We know that victim confidence in the criminal justice system is not high. In general, victims have less confidence in the justice system than the general public as a whole. According to the British Crime Survey, for every element of the criminal justice system, victims of crime are more dissatisfied than non-victims (Chaplin et al 2011).

The 2011 Victim’s Voice survey under taken by Victim Support found significant levels of dissatisfaction. Nearly half of the victims surveyed (46 per cent) did not feel that the criminal justice system treats victims fairly, compared to under one-third (32 per cent) who felt it does treat victims fairly. More people (46 per cent) felt that the criminal justice agencies do as much as they can to treat victims with consideration and respect, while 27 per cent disagreed; 38 per cent felt criminal justice agencies do as much as they can to deliver justice, but only slightly less (36 per cent) felt they do not (Victim Support 2011).¹⁷

The evidence tells us that a major reason, perhaps the biggest single cause, for this dissatisfaction is poor communication. The Victim’s Voice survey found that most victims (58 per cent) who reported incidents to police were not given any updates on case progression. In most cases (35 per cent overall) the victim received no further communication from authorities whatsoever after reporting, while the remainder were informed of the outcome but not updated in between. Of the remaining 42 per cent who did receive updates, only 30 per cent were updated within the Victim’s Code standard (at least monthly).

This has a direct impact on confidence in the system. Victims who are updated less than monthly (or not at all) are less likely than victims who are kept regularly updated to agree (and more likely to disagree) that the criminal justice system treats victims fairly, that criminal justice agencies do as much as they can to treat victims with consideration and respect, and that criminal justice agencies do as much as they can to deliver justice (Victim Support 2011).

The latest analysis of the 2009–2010 Witness and Victim Experience Survey by the Ministry of Justice confirms these findings:

‘The findings from the logistic regression analyses suggest that keeping victims and witnesses informed of the progress of their case and of what to expect throughout the justice process may result in increased levels of satisfaction with their contact with the CJS [criminal justice system]. The strongest factors that are independently associated with

17 The Victim’s Voice survey was conducted for Victim Support by Ipsos MORI, using their face-to-face omnibus survey. A total of 5,396 interviews were carried out with adults (15+) face to face at home across England and Wales between 3–23 June 2011. Of these 1,134 respondents (21 per cent) identified themselves as having been a victim of crime within the previous two years at an initial filter question, and proceeded to complete the questionnaire. Quotas were set to ensure that a representative sample of the population was obtained, and final data was also weighted by age, gender, ethnicity, social class, working status and government office region to reflect the population profile.

higher levels of victim and witness satisfaction (and dissatisfaction) with their contact with the CJS relate to provision of information'

Ministry of Justice 2012

These findings are consistent with a 'procedural justice' explanation of what determines attitudes towards the criminal justice system. They add to a body of evidence suggesting that aspects of the process of interaction between individuals and legal authorities are valued much more than material or instrumental outcomes (for example, compensation awards or the outcome of the case). Moreover, they indicate that within this, procedural factors concerned with information provision are of paramount value and are the key factors in dictating level of satisfaction.

Do recent innovations of the kind discussed above have the potential to help deal with the lack of communication between victims and the criminal justice agencies? Respondents to the Victim's Voice survey expressed scepticism about the ability of social media tools to make much of a difference. When asked to identify what improvements should be made to the system, more use of information and technology was a priority for just 7 per cent of respondents. Far more important for victims were greater clarity over sentencing (48 per cent), a faster justice system that processed cases more quickly (39 per cent), greater focus on rehabilitation (32 per cent) and better enforcement of victims' rights (31 per cent).

This demonstrates that the key priorities for victims are structural and substantive: they want reform to sentencing and speedier justice. As Victim Support (2011) concludes, they 'are unlikely to be won over by the increasing use of the internet and new media by the criminal justice system (... online accounts, crime mapping, Facebook, Twitter)'.

However, this does not mean that victims see no potential in better use of digital technology in the system. Scepticism is likely to reflect the fact that people are unfamiliar with the different possibilities this technology opens up.

To explore these possibilities in more detail, IPPR and Victim Support carried out two focus groups with small groups of victims of crime in Bradford and London.

The findings from these groups are set out below.

- There were low levels of awareness about the sort of information that had already been published by government, such as through the new online crime maps. The information participants received about crime was largely through face-to-face contact with police officers or through reading the local newspaper.
- When people were made aware of what is available, there was a broadly muted response. Some participants thought innovations such as crime maps could be useful but they were generally seen as having limited practical use. The following comment was typical: 'I am aware of it [crime data] but I don't think it is very relevant to us here as victims. It's highly relevant to those making decisions about how to run the justice system, but I am far more interested in my crime, and getting information about the crime that happened to me. I don't give a damn about [crime map] statistics unless I'm moving house ... I think it's important but not for me.'
- Participants wanted to see more granular data about how the criminal justice system was working: this means going beyond a record of a crime being reported and should cover offences brought to justice, sentences given by the courts, and reasons why cases did not go to court.

- There was a common appetite among participants for information about what happens to offenders. They all read or heard in the media about crimes committed and were frustrated that they then had no idea what happened to the offender: ‘You hear about stories in the paper and you don’t know what happens next ... it’s all very well releasing statistics but what’s being done about it?’ Others added: ‘The most important thing is to find out what is being done. Not just what has happened but what are you doing about it.’ ‘You hear on the news about all these crimes and when they’re due in court, but then there’s no way of knowing what the outcome is.’
- There was widespread support for a service that would allow people to track individual cases. This was the overwhelming favourite of the digital and social media innovations we presented to the focus groups.

3.4 Conclusions

Poor communication and lack of information are key drivers of dissatisfaction among victims of crime about how the criminal justice system operates. In theory, the emergence of digital communications technology, including the internet, social media and smart phones, has the potential to help the criminal justice system close this communications gap. We have already seen the development of a new generation of services for victims of crime. These range from spontaneously developed support groups on Facebook to applications to make it easier to report crime or make a complaint about the police. Nevertheless these services are in their infancy and there remain significant gaps, particularly given the evidence we have seen on the views of victims.

- The data available about the criminal justice system online is largely non-personal data allowing the public to assess the overall performance of the criminal justice agencies. While this should (in theory) allow the public to better hold the criminal justice system to account, what victims want is data that is directly relevant and useful, such as case progression data.
- The innovation that has achieved the most scale is the development of online crime maps. However the victims we spoke to saw these as of limited relevance to victims looking for information about their case and seeking out support and advice.
- The courts have still to engage fully with new technology: information about cases and their outcomes is generally not available online, although they have now allowed live text-based communications from court which should improve the transparency of the system.
- There is much more potential for forms of peer support to develop using social media, which would be of value in particular to the victims of violent crime who have expressed a real demand for this kind of service. What innovations there have been have not received much engagement and support from the criminal justice agencies.

The use of technology to improve communication is not just a nice add-on. Given the evidence that poor communication is a major driver of dissatisfaction among victims, it could be critical to improving the quality of the service they receive. However, to be effective this data needs to reflect and address victims’ concerns, and be of direct practical relevance to them. In the next chapter we explore some ideas for achieving this.

4. FUTURE POTENTIAL

There is enormous potential for new digital technologies to be deployed across public services to achieve a number of objectives: greater accountability; collaboratively generating ideas and innovation; more accessible, personal and responsive services; further co-production of services between professionals and the public; and better value for money.

Making more information available in new forms could be crucial to improving confidence in the criminal justice system. We have seen how victim dissatisfaction with the performance of the criminal justice agencies is in large part driven by a lack of information and communication. Victims are too often left in the dark.

Although the government has been admirable in its efforts to publish more and more official data, our focus groups showed that as yet much of this is not of direct or practical relevance to the victims of crime. In what follows we explore some ideas that would make the most of the technological opportunities to develop new tools that better match victims' priorities.

4.1 Crime-tracking services

The most popular idea discussed in the victims' focus groups was TrackMyCrime, a website hosted by Avon and Somerset Constabulary which allows anyone who has reported a crime to follow developments (privately) online (see p10 above). This is similar to the Post Office's package-tracking system, or an airline's lost-baggage website, which allow a customer to enter their personal details and receive the most up-to-date information about the progress of their mail or lost belongings.

As noted previously, the service is now spreading fast: South Wales, Sussex and Derbyshire are also looking to roll out such a platform.

We recommend that all forces develop a crime-tracking site and app for victims. Such a service should offer victims:

- a secure service that ensures their personal data remains confidential
- up-to-date information about the progress of their case from the reporting of the incident, to the progress of an investigation, any arrests, whether or not the offender has been charged with an offence and whether the case will go to trial
- the service should go beyond the police handling of the case and follow the progress of a case through the courts and penal system; this will require effective data sharing between the police and the rest of the criminal justice system locally and nationally
- a simple means for victims to raise concerns about the progress of their case directly with those managing it at any point through the system
- signposting to support agencies such as Victim Support, therapy and counselling services, sources of practical help and peer-to-peer support groups.

4.2 Interactive crime maps with real-time data

In our focus groups, victims thought that the police crime maps were of limited use, because they couldn't see what they could do with the information published. If you discover that your street does have a high crime rate it is not obvious what you can do about it, beyond asking the police to focus more resources on the area.

Maps might have a more direct crime-reduction application if they used real-time information. This would mean that people could see where crimes were taking place soon after they had occurred and avoid particular areas, for instance. We know from our

interviews with civil servants that the Home Office is currently looking at the possibility of having as close to real-time data as possible, through a series of pilot projects. Examples from the US tell us that it is possible. The Oakland Crimespotting website¹⁸ has crime maps which contain information less than a day old, and it does this using government data.

If they allowed user input, the maps could also act as a way of victims themselves calling for information to help tackle a crime, allowing for direct communication between victims, witnesses and the police, as with the new Streetviolence.org site. People might be more willing to come forward with information if the victim has called for it.

Crime maps should be developed further so that they can act also as a crime reduction and crime prevention tool.

- They should show real-time data with crimes displayed as soon as they are reported.
- The use of real-time data should enable the public to see immediately crime hot spots as they develop, meaning they can avoid them, so preventing further crime. For example, if lots of bicycles were being stolen from outside a particular shopping centre, victims could demonstrate this on a map, meaning that others will make sure not to leave their bikes in that particular spot.
- They should be interactive so that victims can report crimes via the maps and through them issue calls for information and support.

4.3 Online peer support communities

Very many victims do not receive the support they require after the incident. Only around half of victim respondents to the Victim's Voice survey said they received the support they needed. Information provision, emotional support and formal counselling and therapy were received by a little over half of the respondents who needed them, while under half had their practical support and financial support needs met (45 per cent and 41 per cent respectively)(Victim Support 2011).

When victims who needed support were asked why they did not receive it, 43 per cent said it was because it was not offered (and 91 per cent of those cases were known to the police). Despite the referral links that have been built up between the police and Victim Support, it seems there are still many victims who are falling through the cracks.

While in general emotional support is best provided in person, social media can, by allowing instant forms of many-to-many communication, help to put victims in touch with others who have been through similar experiences. This can help provide victims with important information, advice and guidance at no cost to the taxpayer.

Some online peer-to-peer groups already exist for some types of victim, but more could be done by the criminal justice agencies to refer victims on to such groups. Where support groups do not exist online, Victim Support could help host such a group and recruit members to it.

4.4 Court transparency and accessibility

Once cases go to court, victims often find it difficult to follow proceedings unless they are able to be physically present. There have been improvements in making courts more accessible online:

¹⁸ See <http://oakland.crimespotting.org>

- You can now enter your postcode in the ‘court finder’ section of the Ministry of Justice website, where you will be given details of when the court is open, the type of cases it deals with, its location on a map and key email contacts.
- The lord chief justice has now permitted live tweeting from courts, which was previously prohibited, although in any particular case the judge can suspend this if it would prejudice proceedings, such as by allowing witnesses to hear what other witnesses have said.
- The government has agreed that cameras can now be allowed in court, to allow the judge’s summary remarks to be broadcast. The government believes this should improve the transparency of the system and make the judgment more a form of ‘public reckoning’.
- To enhance accountability, the government has also said that comparable data will now be available at court level, setting out sentences and how long it takes courts to process cases.

The courts could however go further and publish details of the cases they are hearing online, in much the same way that Parliament.uk publishes details of parliamentary business. This should set out the history of a case, the point it has now reached in the process and should include details of the final sentence. For example, this is now done by the UK supreme court.¹⁹ There is no reason why in principle the full transcript of a case should not be published online, subject to all the standing safeguards regarding anonymity and special protections.

4.5 Conclusions

The government is moving in the right direction on open data, including in the criminal justice system. Making the justice system more transparent and accessible is important because it is to a very great extent a lack of information and communication that is driving victim dissatisfaction. This is not simply an ‘add on’ to existing services, but gets at the heart of why so many victims feel shut out of the criminal justice system.

However the kind of data that is currently available is not directly relevant to the practical needs of victims. This paper recommends four potential avenues for improving this: case-tracking data throughout the whole criminal justice system, interactive crime maps using real-time data, promoting the development of online peer support communities, and much greater court transparency online.

¹⁹ See <http://www.supremecourt.gov.uk>

5. CONCLUSIONS

We know that one of the most important drivers of victims' lack of confidence in the criminal justice system is a lack of information and poor communication. In theory, the continuing revolution in information and communications technology should mean that victims can have much greater access to information and therefore much greater power within the system.

This paper has examined how the criminal justice system has adapted to the emergence of a ubiquitous digital environment. There is now a wide range of data available to the public on how the criminal justice system works; in particular, the government has published lots of performance and financial data on the different agencies. However, our focus groups found that most of this data was not of direct and practical relevance to the victims of crime. Crime maps and financial data online are important accountability tools, but victims wanted information about (or relevant to) their own case to be made easily available to them.

There are a number of agencies and nongovernmental organisations which are pioneering new ways of using data that is of direct and practical use to victims. Avon and Somerset Constabulary has led the way with a crime-tracking system so that victims can find out what has happened to their case and can have easier access to relevant officers. Witness Confident has launched a new website that allows victims and witnesses to post information onto crime maps in such a way that should aid communication between victims, witnesses and the police. The supreme court is now publishing details online of all of the cases it is looking at and the judgments reached.

Building on these innovations, we make the recommendations below.

- Every police force in England and Wales should develop a crime-tracking app to enable all victims in their area to follow their case through the system.
- The courts and the Crown Prosecution Service should work with the police locally to ensure that data is shared and that victims can follow their cases all the way from reporting an incident to the outcome of a court case and beyond.
- Crime maps should be made interactive and display real-time information to change them from being purely a tool of transparency and accountability to one that could help prevent and reduce crime.
- The criminal justice agencies should systematically refer victims to online peer support networks where they exist. Where they do not, independent victim support organisations, such as Victim Support, should help to set up such forums and recruit members.
- The courts should become more accessible and transparent by publishing details online of the cases they are dealing with, including judgments reached and a transcript of the case.

The effectiveness of the criminal justice system depends crucially on the public's confidence in it. Given that so much of that confidence is linked to information and communication technology, this potentially enables us to develop a more transparent, accessible and responsive criminal justice system with victims at its heart.

References

- Allen J, Edmonds S, Patterson A and Smith D (2006) *Policing and the criminal justice system – public confidence and perceptions: Findings from the 2004/05 British Crime Survey*, London: Home Office
- Audit Commission (2003) *Victims and Witnesses: Providing better support*, London
- Casey L (2008) *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime: A review by Louise Casey*, London: Cabinet Office
- Cameron D (2010) A transcript of the prime minister's podcast on transparency from 29 May. <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-podcast-on-transparency>
- Davies T (2010) 'Open data, democracy and public sector reform: A look at open data from Data.gov.uk', MSc dissertation, University of Oxford
- Docking M (2003) *Public perceptions of police accountability and decision-making*, London: Home Office
- Flanagan R (2008) *The Review of Policing: Final Report*, London: Review of Policing
- Flatley J, Kershaw C, Smith K, Chaplin R and Moon D (eds)(2010) *Crime in England and Wales 2009/10: Findings from the British Crime Survey and police recorded crime*, third edition, London: Home Office
- Grace K and Bucke T (2009) *Public annoyance and complaints about the police: Findings from the 2006/07 British Crime Survey*, London: IPCC
- Home Office (2002) *Justice for all*, London. <http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/jfawhitepaper.pdf>
- Home Office (2003) *A New Deal for Victims and Witnesses, National Strategy to Deliver Improved Services*, London
- Home Office (2010) *Policing in the 21st Century: Reconnecting police and the people*, London
- HM Government (2010) *The Coalition: Our programme for government*, London: Cabinet Office
- HM Inspectorate of Constabulary [HMIC] (2011) *Demanding Times: The front line and police visibility*. http://www.hmic.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Thematics/THM_20110330.pdf
- Hopkins A (2010) *The police service: Consumer experiences with the police*, London: Consumer Focus
- Local Public Data Panel (2010) Final Local Public Data Panel response to the Home Office consultation, Policing in the 21st Century. <http://data.gov.uk/blog/final-local-public-data-panel-response-home-office-consultation-policing-21st-century>
- Moorhead R, Sefton M and Scanlan L (2008) *Just Satisfaction? What drives public and participant satisfaction with courts and tribunals*, London: Ministry of Justice
- Muir R (2009) *Arrested Development: Unlocking change in the police service*, London: IPPR. <http://www.ippr.org/publications/55/1741/arrested-developmentunlocking-change-in-the-police-service>
- Office for Criminal Justice Reform (2010) Provisional Quarterly Criminal Justice System Performance Information – September 2009, London: Ministry of Justice

- Open Rights Group (2010) *Open Data – A Quiet Revolution*. <http://www.openrightsgroup.org/ourwork/reports/open-data-a-quiet-revolution>
- Povey K (2001) *Open All Hours*, London: Home Office, HMIC
- Rogers B (2004) *Reinventing the police station: Police-public relations, reassurance and the future of the Police Estate*, London: IPPR. <http://www.ippr.org/publications/55/1328/reinventing-the-police-station>
- Transparency Board (2010) 'New Public Sector Transparency Board and Public Sector Data Principles'. <http://data.gov.uk/blog/new-public-sector-transparency-board-and-public-data-transparency-principles>
- Victim Support (2011) *Left in the dark: Why victims of crime need to be kept informed*, London

APPENDIX: INTERVIEWS

IPPR conducted interviews with the following people during the course of this research. The interviews took place in person between May 2011 and June 2011.

- Sarah Drummond, interface architect, MyPolice
- Nick Keane, digital engagement and knowledge business advisor with the National Policing Improvement Agency
- Steve Wilkes, Strategy and Architecture Team, Office of Chief Information Officer, Financial and Commercial Group
- Ian Bell, chief statistician, Ministry of Justice
- Asha Odera, Local Policing, Crime and Justice Unit, Home Office
- Alison Cotterill, Home Office