



# How to Stand by me

Sharing achievements in tackling disability hate crime

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## **Sharing achievements in tackling disability hate crime**

Last year Mencap launched the 'Stand by me' campaign by calling on police services to do more to tackle disability hate crime.

Many police services were already working hard to improve the way they respond to disability hate crime and support victims and Mencap has been delighted with the way more than 30 police services signed up to support the campaign, committing themselves to do more.

Things are not perfect and there is a lot of work that still needs to be done, but despite the difficult financial situation in which many police services find themselves, they are finding ways to make a difference.

This update report celebrates those achievements and Mencap hopes that this will be a useful tool for all police services as they look for ways they take further steps to tackle disability hate crime.

### **The Stand by me promise**

The Stand by me promise called on police services to focus their efforts in a number of areas to improve the way hate crime is recorded, victims supported and to develop the way services are responding to disability hate crime.

More than 30 police forces have signed up to the campaign, pledging to work to:

1. Make sure that information is available and presented in a suitable form.
2. Get better evidence and increase convictions by allowing more time for interviews, particularly where the victim has difficulty communicating.
3. Understand how to identify if someone has a learning disability.
4. Listen to, respect and involve families, carers and support staff of disabled people.
5. Challenge discriminatory attitudes and language among fellow officers.
6. Ensure that victims are kept up to date with the progress of the case once they have reported a crime.
7. Recognise that disability hate crime is as harmful as other types of hate crime.
8. Avoid labelling disability hate crime as antisocial behaviour – identify the crime and deal with it.
9. Hold regular beat meetings and ensure they are open to disabled people.
10. Display the Stand by me promises where everyone can see them.

This report celebrates achievements made by police services in each of these areas. We hope by sharing ideas and celebrating success, all police services will be able to make the most of opportunities to stand by people with a learning disability to tackle hate crime.

## **1. Make sure that information is available and presented in a suitable form.**

### **True Vision reporting packs**

Many police services are using the True Vision reporting packs to make reporting easier for people who have a learning disability. Other forces have also trialled bespoke Easy Read reporting forms that are now being rolled out across the region. Other services have also developed packs for people with a learning disability to help them understand their rights, how to make a report and how to stay safe.

### **Easy Read letters**

Some services have developed Easy Read letters in conjunction with the CPS Witness Care Units that are sent to people with a learning disability who are required to give evidence in court.

### **Building 'in-house' capacity**

Many other services have also begun to convert frequently used letters into Easy Read. In some areas this has been done by external consultants but other areas are taking a more sustainable approach by working with providers to train staff to produce Easy Read documents. This means a wider range of documents can be made available in Easy Read in house, at a lower cost.

### **Sense checking**

In many areas police forces are working with local learning disability self-advocacy groups to improve accessibility of their information.

**Learning point:** Police services are not just making existing information accessible but creating information aimed specifically at people with a learning disability, tailored to their needs.

## **2. Get better evidence and increase convictions by allowing more time for interviews, particularly where the victim has difficulty communicating.**

### **Partnership with Crown Prosecution Service**

The collection and preparation of evidence from victims has benefitted where there are close relationships with the CPS locally. In many forces, flagging systems have been developed so that the CPS is immediately made aware of cases where a vulnerable or intimidated witness is involved, particularly in hate crime cases.

### **Victim Care Centres**

In the majority of police service areas, victims of hate crime are frequently interviewed in Victim Care Centres, away from the police station. This provides a

much less threatening environment and police that are using these facilities for hate crime victims have reported a positive response. Officers carrying out these specialised video interviews have, in many areas, received extensive training in learning disability to help them provide further support where necessary.

### **Public Protection Unit**

Some forces have put in place a system whereby if a victim or witness is deemed to have any special requirements or is considered to be a vulnerable adult, a police officer from the Public Protection Unit (PPU) will conduct the interview. They are specifically trained to interview people who have special requirements.

### **Intermediaries and ‘Special measures’**

In the case of R v Watts (2010) police were involved in ensuring the victims’ vulnerability and communication needs were identified at an early stage. By working with prosecutors and intermediaries reliable evidence was secured. An intermediary was utilised pre-trial and one was available for the trial to support profoundly disabled women to communicate through the use of specially designed symbols. The Court of Appeal ruled safe a conviction for a sexual assault after it was argued by the defence that evidence given by intermediaries was inaccurate and therefore not credible or reliable. The role of the police in ensuring adequate identification and provision of support was an important part of securing that conviction.

### **Witness Profilers**

Witness Profilers are being used in some areas to support victims with a learning disability through the process of preparing for court and giving evidence. This helps the police and the CPS to identify what special measures might be appropriate at an early stage. The profiler can also help to ensure that the victim is comfortable with the interview process and, through witness profiles, help court staff know how to treat people. This approach has helped to secure convictions and improve the experience of people, from reporting a crime through to trial.

**Learning point:** Early identification of needs in the reporting stage and the increased use of special measures at pre-trial and court stages is yielding better results for many police services.

## **3. Understand how to identify if someone has a learning disability.**

### **Basic screening tools**

Some services have developed sets of just a few questions that help staff at call handling centres to identify if someone is likely to need additional support or have a learning disability. Officers attending an incident can then carry out a fuller assessment to identify the ways in which the victim can be supported.

### **Awareness training**

A limited number of police services have funded relatively low cost projects which train a small number of people with a learning disability to deliver training themselves. These people deliver training to police across the service area with the intention that the training will both raise the awareness of why disability hate

crime is important whilst also helping officers to understand learning disability more generally.

### **DVD and online training**

A number of police services have struggled with finding the capacity and resource for face to face training. Where they are unable to do so, some services have created DVDs and online resources that are filmed and created with disabled people. Averaging about an hour in length and being compulsory viewing for all staff, these resources provide a useful introduction to and raise awareness of disability hate crime. Whilst they will never be as effective as face to face training, they nevertheless serve as a useful foundation where resources are limited which can be further developed and built on later.

### **Quick reference guides**

Simple, printed 'aide memoirs' have been used in many areas as a quick way for officers to remind themselves of things to consider around disability hate crime and identifying if someone has a learning disability. The aim has not been to make officers experts in assessing a person's needs, but to make them aware that somebody may need additional support and to seek an appropriate way of ensuring that support is provided.

**Learning point:** Simple, low cost measures can be very effective in increasing awareness and understanding amongst officers, with many services developing innovative approaches to training and development.

## **4. Listen to, respect and involve families, carers and support staff of disabled people.**

### **Working with service providers**

Several police forces have tried to encourage reporting through the development of third party reporting centres. Where this is working best, police are engaging with local learning disability service providers. This openness and cooperation means that people with a learning disability are able to report to a service they know and trust, in a safe, comfortable surrounding. This is helping to ensure that more crimes and incidents are reported and is also ensuring service providers see the benefits of reporting incidents in terms of the welfare of the people they support.

### **Specialist Officers**

Hate Crime Officers or Disability Liaison Officers have been either newly introduced or retained and provide a useful link with families and other support networks. This helps police in their investigations as the support and understanding of these networks can help police ensure reliable evidence is gathered as well as helping victims feel more confident. These officers can also act as champions, encouraging other officers to become more aware of their role in tackling disability hate crime.

### **Involving a social worker**

Some police forces will often consult a primary carer if a victim identifies themselves as having a disability. Further, some forces have the policy that if a victim is considered to be a vulnerable adult then a social worker will be consulted.

**Learning point:** Engaging with existing support networks that victims may have, make the experience of reporting hate crime less daunting and improve reporting levels.

## **5. Challenge discriminatory attitudes and language among fellow officers.**

### **Zero tolerance**

Most police services provide a basic level of equality training to staff and will deal with any discriminatory attitudes with a zero tolerance policy. Some services actively promote the option to complain, both to ensure that any such behaviour is identified and also to reinforce the message that discrimination in any form is not to be tolerated.

### **Staff training**

In some areas e-training tools help to make officers more aware of the impact of words that are often in common use but are highly offensive to people with a learning disability (the 'r-word' for example).

**Learning point:** Ongoing development and training of staff in terms of equality is important. Police officers should be beyond reproach in both their attitude and the words they use.

## **6. Ensure that victims are kept up to date with the progress of the case once they have reported a crime.**

### **'Victim of crime contracts'**

Many services have introduced minimum standards on how often a victim is updated. In some services this has been agreed with the victim themselves so as to ensure the system is responsive to the needs of the people using it. This can take the form of a '*Victim of crime contract*' to ensure regular contact with the investigating officer and, where they are used, Hate Crime Officers. In many of these cases, an enhanced service is provided for vulnerable and intimidated witness and victims, including victims of hate crime.

### **Direct contact**

Some police forces have agreed specified response times for officers to communicate with victims and have set up a local call system so victims have a direct route to their reporting officer. If a reporting officer is unavailable, an email enquiry is sent and this is followed up to ensure all enquiries are dealt with in the agreed timescales.

**Learning point:** Agreed response times and designated channels of communication help to remove uncertainty for victims and provide a high quality and responsive service.

## **7. Recognise that disability hate crime is as harmful as other types of hate crime.**

### **Local partnerships**

Police in some areas work with local Disability Hate Crime Centres to develop joined up strategies. This complements the work of Independent Advisory Groups who have helped to raise the profile of disability hate crime in many services, giving it the same high importance as racist crime. In a more limited number of areas, services have created Learning Disability Police Liaison Committees that meet regularly to provide specific input from that sector of the community. This helps to maintain the focus of police services and recognise the level of harm that disability hate crime can cause.

### **Scenario training**

Additionally, some police services have developed online and live scenario based training which has the double impact of helping officers to see both how to recognise and tackle disability hate crime and how serious it is in relation to other sorts of crime.

### **Inspiring confidence**

Where Hate Crime Officer or Disability Liaison Officer roles are present, it seems disabled people are also feeling more confident that the police service is serious about tackling disability hate crime. It is expected that this confidence will have a positive impact on levels of reporting.

### **Renewed focus**

In some areas '*Hate crime crack-down*' schemes have been piloted and are subsequently being rolled out to other areas, following a dramatic increase in the number of reported incidents. Community watch schemes have also proved successful, led by local Mencap advocacy groups, and these schemes have been rolled out county-wide by some forces.

**Learning point:** Building partnerships with local disability services helps to raise the profile of existing work that the police are doing and raises confidence that the police are serious about tackling disability hate crime.

## **8. Avoid labelling disability hate crime as antisocial behaviour – identify the crime and deal with it.**

### **Better call handling procedures**

Many police services have responded to '*Stand by me*' and other reports to completely overhaul their approach to anti-social behaviour. Identifying callers as vulnerable (see point 3) in some forces now triggers an enhanced response where support is given earlier and calls prioritised to ensure people who require

additional support or who may be victims of hate crime receive help earlier, regardless of whether the incident is labelled as “crime” or “anti social behaviour.”

Some forces have changed the way they flag up hate related incidents. In the best cases, all disability hostility related incidents, whether hate crimes or less serious hate incidents, are flagged up as having a disability motive and assigned to appropriate officers. This seems to be most effective where a disabled person’s impairment type is also recorded, allowing for arrangements to be made in terms of intermediaries or BSL interpreters as appropriate.

In the most proactive services, cases that are opened and flagged up as hate crimes/incidents or having a disability motive are reviewed regularly to ensure they have been assigned correctly and to check that incidents have been followed up appropriately.

### **Request for charging forms**

Police in many areas are also making use of modified forms to make a request for charging to the CPS. Where these are being used it is easier to flag up to CPS the fact that somebody needs additional support. This helps both police and prosecutors to ensure the process for obtaining special measures in court and support before trial is in place at an early stage and to consider how to bring to the attention of the court the possibility of enhanced sentencing under Section 146 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003.

### **Recognising the impact**

In one high profile case a barber was successfully convicted for shaving the word “fool” into the hair of a man with a severe learning disability. Police treated this as a hate crime and appreciated the additional impact this crime had on the victim and his family.

**Learning point:** Understanding both the additional impact that hate crime has on the victim and the need to provide support at an early stage of the process has been important in increasing the satisfaction of victims around how they are supported and their case progressed.

## **9. Hold regular beat meetings and ensure they are open to disabled people.**

### **Working with local disabled people’s organisations**

Many police forces have recognised that higher levels of confidence in the police and reporting come when victims can report to a familiar face, and regular contact makes problems known earlier. To be effective, building this recognition must happen before incidents take place. Therefore police forces have found success in regular meetings with disabled people. In some areas police have identified local organisations working with and often led by disabled people, including those offering residential support. Where this has happened, and police community support officers and neighbourhood teams meet with groups regularly, police services are informing us that disabled people are more likely to report.

### **Mencap local groups**

As a result of the campaign, some police services are working closely with local Mencap groups. These partnerships have been invaluable in building up a sense of trust and partnership at a local level that has helped police to understand the needs of disabled people, through regular visits and collaboration.

### **Meeting in familiar places**

Some services have trialled “Café Conversations” events, which give people with a learning disability the opportunity to meet their local neighbourhood police officers and police community support officers in a relaxed setting, away from a police station. Other police services have developed similar initiatives, basing “surgeries” in libraries and supermarkets which are easily accessible and well known to disabled people. Again there are strong links with Keep Safe/Safe Places Schemes in those buildings which helps to break down barriers between police and the public.

### **Facilitating participation**

To ensure that local meetings are accessible, services are trialling a number of different ways of supporting people to attend. One method that has been working well for people with physical access difficulties has been the provision of a bus that can pick people up and take them to meetings. Other areas have produced Easy Read posters to let people know about where and when they can meet local officers.

**Learning point:** Providing a safe and familiar environment for people with a learning disability to talk about hate crime will improve the relationship between disabled people and police officers and involve local disability groups in the fight against disability hate crime.

## **10. Display the Stand by me promises where everyone can see them.**

### **Public awareness**

Many services have a dedicated ‘Stand by me’ page on their website to publicise the work they are doing to tackle disability hate crime. This helps to make that work visible and gives confidence to people who may be hesitant to report a crime in the assumption that nothing will be done. These websites are most effective when they include Easy Read material, making them more accessible for a greater number of people. The majority of police services are also moving to display the police promise in public areas of each of their police stations with a similar effect.

### **Staff ownership**

It is important too that staff are aware of the promise and their role in fulfilling the principles. Many police services have posted copies of the promise in staff rooms of all police stations. Additionally, services have put information on their intranet about how they are supporting the Stand by me campaign and how staff can get involved as part of their job roles. In other areas officers have been sent a

copy of the promises directly with an outline of how their role should be working to achieve the aims.

**Learning point:** Public support of the ‘Stand by me’ promises has enabled police services to demonstrate their commitment to tackling disability hate crime in a way that has inspired confidence amongst people with a learning disability and many other disabled people, whilst keeping the issue at the forefront of officers’ minds.

## 11. Beyond the promises.

Mencap is aware that the ‘Stand by me’ promises are a starting point for tackling disability hate crime. Many police services have launched initiatives which are a valuable contribution to the aim of ‘Stand by me’ to improve the response to disability hate crime. Here are some of the useful initiatives police services have shared with us:

Local coalitions and partnerships have formed in several areas. In one police service area this has brought together several local authorities. In another, local Mencap groups have worked with police to organise hate crime conferences that have raised awareness of the issues and brought together many of the local agencies as well as disabled people. Similar strategic partnerships in other areas are also ensuring that diverse groups are able to face the challenges together in a joined up and consistent way.

In some areas police are also working with housing authorities and other local agencies to identify people at risk and to make interventions into hate crime and hate incidents at an early stage. This has included running joint investigations with social services. This joined up approach is preventing the escalation that has been seen in the worst examples of hate crime.

IT systems are being updated to not only link multiple incidents together, but also to link victims, incidents and locations to ensure that patterns can be identified and interventions and support offered at an earlier stage.

Third party reporting systems are being developed in many areas. These are helping to encourage people to report to familiar places. In many areas these have been combined with Safe Places schemes, so that places disabled people are likely to visit can operate as both a place to feel safe and report crime. In some cases third party reporting is provided by external agencies such as Stop Hate UK, who provide a 24 hour telephone based service.

**Learning point:** There are many different ways of improving the response to disability hate crime; the best approaches will take account of local circumstances. Nevertheless we hope that this report will help to generate new ideas to still further improve the response.

Mencap would like to thank the following police services for their participation in developing this report. The many examples of good and improving practice they have shared help us all to understand the ways we can tackle disability hate crime effectively.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary  
Cumbria Constabulary  
Derbyshire Constabulary  
Devon and Cornwall Police  
Dorset Police  
Durham Constabulary  
Essex  
Greater Manchester Police  
Hertfordshire Constabulary  
Lancashire Constabulary  
Leicestershire Police  
Lincolnshire Police  
Metropolitan Police Service  
Northamptonshire Police  
Northumbria Police  
North Yorkshire Police  
Police Service of Northern Ireland  
Staffordshire Police  
Suffolk Constabulary  
Thames Valley Police  
West Mercia Police

We also acknowledge and thank the police services that have supported the Stand by me campaign, and hope that this report will help to develop still further the work being carried out to stop disability hate crime.