



Citizens Advice Witness Service Policy (131/2024)

Abstract

This policy covers the referral of victims and witnesses of crime in Sussex to victim and witness services for free help and advice. It covers the responsibilities of Citizens Advice Witness Service (CAWS) in their dealings with the Witness Care Unit within Sussex Police to support victims and witnesses through the court process.

Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy is required to comply with the Government strategy to transform the Criminal Justice System and ensure victims and witnesses of crime are treated in a respectful, sensitive, and professional manner and that they are fully supported throughout the judicial process. This policy is the Sussex Police response to that strategy.

2. Scope

2.1 This policy and associated procedures highlight the valuable service provided to victims and witnesses of crime by Citizens Advice Witness Service (CAWS) and informs those involved in the judicial process of the benefits derived from utilising this service and how to access these benefits.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 Sussex Police are fully committed to utilising the services provided by CAWS to benefit the victims and witnesses of crime in our County. The support provided to victims and witnesses throughout the judicial process is independent and practical with the offer of emotional support prior to and during trial when giving evidence as well as post trial if sentencing to mitigate against suffering the effects of crime. This is intended to provide the confidence to attend court and give evidence, thereby facilitating the administering of justice.

Procedure

1. Citizens Advice Witness Service (CAWS)

1.1 CAWS is a national charity funded by the Ministry of Justice. They provide free and independent support for both prosecution and defence witnesses in every criminal court in England and Wales. The organisation has paid staff and volunteers. CAWS volunteers are thoroughly trained and managed to provide practical information about the court process. They also provide emotional support to help witnesses feel more confident when giving evidence. Additionally, based on individual witness' needs CAWS provides

signposting and/or referrals to partners, including Local Citizens Advice after the trial for support with other issues.

CAWS Headquarters

1 Easton Street

Clerkenwell

London

WC1X 0DW

[Citizens Advice's main public website](#)

2. Referrals

2.1 All referrals on behalf of victims and witnesses from Sussex Police to CAWS are made with witness' consent in line with the needs of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018, The Victim Code of Practice 2021, and The Witness Charter 2013.

2.2 Referrals are made for all adult witnesses where the trial is at Crown or Magistrates' court as well trials at Magistrates' Courts for children and young people. Witnesses are also supported by CAWS at the Sussex Remote Link Suites (and in live links from court to court within Sussex as well as from Sussex court to other courts in England and Wales). Referrals should be made to CAWS at the earliest opportunity once the trial, or warned for, date is confirmed.

2.3 Please note, in an arrangement unique to Sussex, witnesses who are children and young people attending trials at Crown Court are supported by the separate partner volunteer organisation The Young Witness Service, Victim Support.

2.4 Referral by Sussex Police to CAWS is made by secure on-line referral in Citizens Advice main public website or by phone to the CAWS National Contact Centre.

The Witness Service Referral Hub is open 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday. Main phone number is 0300 332 1000.

Link to [Citizens Advice Witness Service referral](#)

On receipt of referral the Witness Service Referral Hub will make three attempts of contact with the witness over a period of 5 working days at different times. A needs assessment is then completed which is a continuation of the needs assessment established by Sussex Police (Witness Care Officer or Officer in Case).

2.5 Sussex Police should reference CAWS on the MG11 form so that witnesses are given contact and general information about the service when they have completed their witness statement.

3. Pre-trial / Trial Support

3.1 Trial support by CAWS is provided to all witnesses who arrive at court to give evidence on a criminal trial. Additionally, witnesses referred are made an offer of pre-trial

support. This helps to facilitate any special measures granted or where there is a request for alternative access.

3.2 For vulnerable and intimidated witnesses (as prescribed by Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999) an offer of CAWS Outreach Support is given as a choice for witnesses. Outreach is an enhanced service that includes support sessions that can be provided by phone, and/or video or in a third-party location (usually a Local Citizens Advice Office) in combination with a pre-trial visit to court or remote link site. In exceptional cases support can be provided in a witness' home if safe for volunteer and staff and supported by the police.

Team: Criminal Justice