

Victoria Police Manual

The Victoria Police Manual is issued under the authority of the Chief Commissioner of Police in s.60, Victoria Police Act 2013. Non-compliance with or a departure from the Victoria Police Manual may be subject to management or disciplinary action. Employees must use VPM Professional and ethical standards to inform the decisions they make to support compliance.

Policing beat locations

Context

Effective community policing requires members to engage with the local community to understand their perceptions of safety in the community. Members can use this understanding to work in partnership with their local community to address crime and safety concerns and improve trust and confidence in Victoria Police.

Safety in public spaces is one of the key concerns for local neighbourhoods. Communities come together to share amenities and spaces and need to feel safe as users of these spaces.

Beats are public spaces frequented by people, generally men, for social and sexual contact with other people and can include parks, beaches, public car parks or public toilet blocks. People who use beats are community members from all types of cultural, social, religious, economic, political and sexual backgrounds.

Members have a responsibility as part of their community policing role to police beat locations sensitively. This involves listening to the needs of people who use beats and the broader community using the same public spaces, understanding these needs, and responding appropriately.

Members should use established community engagement and human rights principles to engage with users of spaces that contain beats. This is vital for community trust and confidence, which increases the community's willingness to report crime and work with police as witnesses.

Policy at a glance

This policy includes:

- member responsibilities when policing beat locations
- member considerations when responding to offences committed against a person using a beat
- reporting of prejudice motivated crime and incidents against people who use beats
- member considerations when responding to offences committed by a person using a beat
- information about the use of proactive policing resources when engaging with the local community about the safety/perceptions of safety of beat locations

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Definitions

Beat – a public space used by people for social and/or sexual contact with other people. Beats can vary by location and may occur in beaches, parks, public toilet blocks, or public car parks.

Beat user – a person attending a beat location for the purposes of social and/or sexual contact.

Outing – the disclosure of an individual's sexual or gender identity without their consent and/or knowledge.

Scope and application

This policy applies to all members.

Responsibilities and procedures

1. Overview

Members have a responsibility to balance the privacy and safety of people who use beats with the safety of other community members who access public spaces where beats are located.

Members should work together with their local community to understand local issues around beats.

Using a community engagement approach when policing beats, members must:

- engage in actions and make decisions which are proportionate, lawful, accountable and necessary
- use inclusive and respectful language, communication styles and approaches when engaging with community.

Members must be mindful that some people who use beats are from priority communities. These communities may be overrepresented or underrepresented in their contact with police either as offenders or victims and/or have experienced long-standing or historical challenges in engaging with Victoria Police.

2. Human rights

Under the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter), members must appropriately balance human rights when making decisions, taking actions, and developing plans that impact on a person's human rights. Exercising police powers in accordance with the Charter means putting people and their rights at the centre of decisions.

When considering any police action in relation to beats, any of the protected human rights under the Charter may be engaged. This includes, but is not limited to:

- the right to recognition and equality before the law, including protection from discrimination (s.8)

- the right to protection from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatments (s.10)
- the right to freedom of movement (s.12)
- the right to privacy (s.13)
- the right to protection of families and children (s.17)
- the right to property (s.20)
- the right to liberty (s.21)
- the right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty (s.22)

3. Response to offences committed against a person using a beat

3.1 *Considerations for responding to reports from a person using a beat*

A person using a beat can be vulnerable while using a beat, both from other people who use beats and from the public. People who use beats can also be targeted for their usage of beats.

Offences committed against people who use beats are underreported for several reasons, including:

- fear of 'outing' oneself
- embarrassment or shame
- not wanting to risk having family, friends or associates know that they were at a beat
- fear that police will not take the report seriously
- fear that someone will recognise them at the police station, especially if it is in a rural area
- belief that the incident was minor and not worth reporting, or that nothing can be done about it
- many people who use beats identify as heterosexual men and may have a female partner.

All reports of offences against people who use beats must be given serious consideration and investigated in line with standard procedure.

When responding to offences committed against people who use beats, members should consider liaising with a LGBTIQA+ Liaison Officer (LLO) for further support and referrals.

3.2 *Prejudice motivated crime and incidents*

When responding to offences committed against people who use beats, members must consider if an offence committed against a beat user was motivated by prejudice or hate (including homophobia). This increases the severity of the crime and can result in a harsher sentence at court. See **VPMG Prejudice motivated crime** for more information.

Where members believe an offence to be motivated (in whole or part) by prejudice or hate, members must:

- complete the prejudice motivated crime section (modus operandi) in LEDR MK2 or the relevant LEAP Form - Offence Against Person [Form L2A] and/or Offence Against Property [Form L2B]
- add relevant details to the case narrative.

Members should submit Information Reports for non-criminal prejudice motivated incidents in line with **VPMG Prejudice motivated crime**.

Members should also consider whether a referral to a relevant support service and/or a Victoria Police eReferral (VPeR) is appropriate for the person. See the Community Support Hub for an extensive list of support services and refer to **VPM Victim support** for further information.

4. Response to offences committed by a person using a beat

Offences committed by a person using a beat must be managed in accordance with standard crime attendance and investigation procedures.

Members have discretion as to whether enforcement action is taken against persons found committing an offence, in line with **VPM Disposition**, depending on the nature and seriousness of the offence and a range of other factors.

Members should consider:

- a discussion with the person about their impact on other people at the location
- educating the person around the responsibilities that accompany the right to use a public space and the impacts on the community.

Members should also consider whether a referral to a relevant support service and/or a Victoria Police eReferral (VPeR) for peer support and/or education about community use of public spaces, for example, would be appropriate. See the Community Support Hub for an extensive list of support services.

Members should refrain from requesting a person's name and address unless an offence is identified. A Field Contact must only be submitted as per the criteria in **VPM Field Contacts**. Members are not required to identify beat users for intelligence purposes.

5. Station tasking

If a report regarding a beat location from a member of the community or a person using a beat warrant proactive action, Work Unit Managers should consider adding the location to station proactive eTaskings. Beat locations must not be targeted solely because they are beat locations unless there is an identified need to do so.

When creating an eTasking for a beat location Work Unit Managers should:

- liaise with the LGBTIQA+ Community Portfolio, Priority and Safer Communities Division (PSCD) for assistance with using inclusive and appropriate language when creating the eTasking
- communicate to the local community that efforts are being made to address the issue
- engage with relevant agencies (as outlined in section 6 of this policy)
- conduct community reassurance tasks throughout the area
- attach/refer to Factsheet – Managing beats.

Members should consider adding community concerns about beats in their Police Service Area Community Issues Register. This may assist in identifying issues of safety/perception of safety around specific beat locations.

6. Community consultation

- If violence or harm experienced at a beat location requires a proactive response, the Work Unit Manager or their representative should work with a LLO, the local Proactive Policing Unit, the Neighbourhood Policing Team and PSCD to develop a collaborative response with community groups.
- This should occur regardless of whether the reporting party is a person using a beat or another person.

7. Confidentiality

- Under the *Victoria Police Act*, members must only access, use, or disclose police information where it is directly related to their duties to do so. Failure to act in accordance with this duty may lead to management or disciplinary action, or charges under sections 227 and 228 of the *Victoria Police Act*. See **VPMP Appropriate use of information** for more information.
- Outing a person using a beat can have a significant impact on their relationships, their mental health, and in some cases their safety. Members should not alert family, friends or associates to beat activity by a beat user, including where a crime or incident has occurred at a beat, without the person's express consent, unless exceptional circumstances warrant the disclosure.
- Refer to **VPM Notification of offences** for more information on a person's privacy considerations when notifying others in exceptional circumstances.

Related documents

- VPM Community policing
- VPMG Prejudice motivated crime
- Factsheet – Managing beats

Further advice and information

For assistance regarding this policy contact a local LLO who can provide advice and support on issues relating to beats and engaging with beat users. A full list of LLOs state-wide can be found at the PSCD Community Support Hub - LGBTIQA+ Communities.

Alternatively, contact PSCD if you have further questions via OFFICE-OF-CMDR-PSCD PBEA.

Update history

DATE UPDATED	SUMMARY OF CHANGE	FORCE FILE NUMBER
21/01/2025	Update of VPMG Policing beat locations to VPM Policing beat locations	FF-233515