

Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses:

Annual Report for 2015-16

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Baroness Newlove of Warrington

Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales

Summary

1. This is my third Annual Report for the Secretary of State for Justice which marks the end of my first three years as the Independent Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales. In January this year I accepted a further three year term so this report also sets out my priorities from April 2016 onwards.

Introduction

2. Meeting with victims of crime, and the services that try to support them, has been my priority from the outset. The creation of my website in my second year has enabled me to obtain the views of a much wider group of victims and has resulted in many more victims contacting me for advice and support or simply to share their experiences. This year, I have increasingly drawn on what victims have told me to expose failings in the criminal justice system to those who make policy and legislation. I am grateful that in most cases this has secured a commitment by the government and criminal justice agencies to make positive changes for victims. I am aware, however, that a commitment to making things better is not enough; I want action. I want to know that every victim will receive all of their entitlements under The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (The Victims' Code), and that these entitlements are delivered with dignity, sensitivity and respect by every person or service that comes into contact with them. Too often agencies work hard at changing their policies but spend less time ensuring effective and consistent delivery. The gap between what policies intend and what victims experience is documented in most of my reviews.
3. If victims are genuinely to be placed at the heart of the criminal justice system we need more than clever words and good intentions. Many agencies will have more work to do because there is a growing body of evidence to indicate that victims are simply not receiving the things to which they are entitled. Although my reviews into Restorative Justice (RJ) and the Victim Personal Statements (VPS) both found examples of good practice, the findings are startling in that the basic entitlements are simply not being offered in the vast majority of cases. To have a set of entitlements which are not being delivered is in my view, a fundamental failure of our criminal justice system. The many traumatised and distressed victims I have met do not feel they are at the heart of the system instead they have been made to feel they are a rather dysfunctional, although necessary, appendage!
4. My reviews are accessible on the website - <http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/review/past-reviews/>

Context

5. In my first annual report I said that the single most important function of my role had been to hear and represent the views of victims. I said that in my second and third years I wanted to see improvements for victims. I wanted to see evidence that things had changed as a result of victims speaking out and from the recommendations in my reviews. Looking back I think the picture is mixed.
6. Yet again I have seen the introduction of a number of new policies and guidance which aim to make things better for victims. The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (The Victims' Code) was updated again in 2015 to ensure it was compliant with the European Union (EU) Directive. Pilots to give further protection to vulnerable victims and witnesses which enable recorded pre-trial cross examination of vulnerable witnesses (under section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999) have been completed. A Ministerial Taskforce has been set up to try to co-ordinate and improve the support given to victims of terrorism overseas such as in Tunisia, Paris and Brussels. The national website and information line (the Victims' Information Service) have been up and running for some time and the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) have developed some innovative ways of commissioning and managing local services for victims.
7. I am aware that everyone is operating in a continually changing social and economic environment. The scale of childhood sexual abuse and failings by agencies is shocking and it seems that what we know may only be the tip of the iceberg. Terrorist attacks appear to be more frequent and more unpredictable; and agencies are still learning how best to respond to crimes such as online exploitation, fraud and identity theft. This is all happening against a background of tight finances and increasing demand on victims' services.
8. I have no doubt that criminal justice agencies are genuinely aware of the importance of engaging with victims and treating them decently. There is certainly no lack of written statements and intentions. Yet from what my reviews have highlighted there is a gap between what is intended and what actually happens. My systematic review of the national and international literature, published in March this year, shows that what victims value more than anything else is information and being kept informed. My reviews into Victim Personal Statements, Restorative Justice (RJ) and complaints found no shortage of policies and leaflets setting out what information victims were entitled to and in what timescales. The reviews consistently found, however, that victims do not consider that they receive the right information at the right time and in a way in which they can understand it. This applied to information about their entitlements in the criminal justice system, about their eligibility to claim compensation and about what information they might be entitled to after an offender had been sentenced. I appreciate there are methodological limits in my reviews; however they accord with my own experience and that of other victims I have met.
9. More positively, I have been impressed with the responses to the findings of my reviews. The government, criminal justice agencies and services providers have generally accepted my recommendations and are working towards meeting some of the standards which I developed to help support them in their work. I have also welcomed discussions with a number of different agencies about how they can engage with victims more effectively. Staff from these agencies have appeared very genuine in trying to make improvements and I have been impressed by their determination and commitment.
10. At the end of my three year tenure, the landscape for victims is mixed. There seems to be an emerging culture where the needs of victims are being increasingly recognised although there is no doubt that more work is needed if the many good intentions are to lead to positive and tangible changes. The proposed Victims' Law gives a unique opportunity for good intentions to become good practice and to make a real difference to victims. However, there is also a risk that

it becomes another set of good intentions. As I said when I spoke in the debate on the Queen's Speech in the House of Lords, I welcome the planned consultation on the Victims' Law but whatever the content of the law, it must be enforceable, there must be consequences for non-compliance and it should clearly inform victims how to seek redress under it. There is already a Victims' Code which has failed to ensure that victims receive their key entitlements. The Victims' Law must not be expensive window dressing for an elegant display of worthless promises.

The role of the Victims' Commissioner

11. I was appointed Victims' Commissioner on 21 December 2012 and took up my post on 4 March 2013. The role of the Victims' Commissioner is defined in the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and can be summarised as:
 - Promoting the interests of victims and witnesses;
 - Encouraging good practice in the treatment of victims and witnesses; and,
 - Keeping the operation of the Victims' Code under review.
12. The Victims' Commissioner must also produce an Annual Report for the Secretary of State for Justice which must be published.
13. In carrying out my role I am fortunate to have established an advisory group (The Victims' Commissioner's Forum). This includes members from a range of backgrounds with very diverse skills and experiences. Together they constitute a 'critical friend' and I am grateful to have this group to advise and challenge me in my work.

Definition of victims

14. As was acknowledged in my recent joint report with University of Portsmouth, some victims do not like the negative connotations occasionally associated with the term 'victim'. Some victims and many non-statutory agencies prefer to use the word 'survivor' and I respect this point of view. For the purposes of this report, however I will use the term 'victim' because it is the term that the majority of agencies use and understand when referring to someone who has experienced victimisation.
15. My definition of a victim therefore remains the same as in my previous annual reports. I accept the definition given in the Victims' Code when considering relevant policy areas but, the legislation which underpins my role as Victims' Commissioner makes it clear that my remit includes all victims regardless of the type of crime committed against them or whether or not they report the crime to the police.

Delivering improvements for Victims' Commissioner: Summary of activities 2015-16

16. As a victim of crime who continues to experience the trauma caused by our criminal justice system, I am more determined than ever to make things better for other victims. From when I first took up post in 2013 I have stressed that my role as Victims' Commissioner is independent. I am not a civil servant or politician but, I have learned how to work with the heads of the criminal justice agencies and the policy makers to reflect the victim's voice in order to secure some positive changes. In my previous two annual reports I set out five priorities to deliver improvements for victims. I have summarised some of my achievements in each of these priority areas below:

Priority One: Monitor compliance with the Victims' Code

Review into Victim Personal Statement (VPS)

17. This year I undertook a review into the extent that agencies were complying with the requirement in the Code regarding a victim's entitlement to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS) at Court and at Parole Board hearings. I chose to examine this because the VPS is the only point in the entire criminal justice process where victims have the opportunity to say how a crime has impacted on them; quite simply it is the only opportunity victims have to use their voice. Some of the findings in my review did not surprise me; for example victims value the opportunity to make VPS, although most sentences and parole hearings are finalised without one. Yet it was surprising to learn how highly judges, magistrates and the Parole Board members value a VPS. I believe this may have been the first time these key players have been asked for their views about the role, purpose and importance of the VPS. I have no doubt that the way they expressed their commitment to the value of the VPS will be a critical factor in motivating agencies to improve how often they fulfil their duties under the Code to deliver this entitlement to victims.
18. I appreciate the challenging economic climate in which everyone is currently operating and this was reflected in my recommendations. I also developed a set of Victims' Commissioner's Standards to help agencies carry out their obligations regarding the VPS (Annex A). I am aware the police are considering whether it might be preferable to take a VPS at a later point in the criminal justice process, for example after the accused has been charged or after a conviction. This may provide additional support to the victim and create potential savings on police time.
19. I am grateful that the Secretary of State, as chair of the Criminal Justice Board, has agreed to implement all of my recommendations and to provide me with feedback on progress.
20. The full copy of my review into the VPS can be found at: <http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/The-Silenced-Victim-A-review-of-the-Victim-Personal-Statement.pdf>

A single point of contact for victims

21. Over the past two years I have highlighted the importance for victims to have a single point of contact (SPoC) from the time when they report a crime, during any court proceedings and after sentence. This SPoC would be a trained professional, with sufficient knowledge of the criminal justice system. They would respond to victims' needs, provide the right information at the right time, refer victims to appropriate support services and assist victims to make informed choices and enable them to gain access to their rights and entitlements. It would avoid them having to repeat their situation to a succession of different faces, would avoid them being referred to services which don't meet their needs and would ensure they know who to go to for help at any time. This role could be created or commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) from existing funding sources. I have written to all PCCs to encourage them to take this idea forward and I have visited a number of PCC areas who have structured their victim services using this model.
22. My recent review, in partnership with the University of Portsmouth, titled 'What works in supporting victims of crime' found academic evidence that a single point of contact is likely to be an effective model when delivering victim entitlements in a meaningful way. I am hopeful that this review of the international evidence, which echoes what many victims have told me, will persuade all PCCs to provide a single point of contact for all victims of crime.
23. You can read the full report at: <http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-works-in-supporting-victims-of-crime.pdf>

Priority Two: Complaints and redress for victims

24. In 2014-15 I published my review into how victims' complaints were dealt with by agencies. My report found that despite a commitment by agencies to support victims who wanted to complain, many victims described feeling confused, ignored and dismissed. I developed a set of Victims' Commissioner's Standards to help agencies address the problems identified in my report. In 2015-16 all of the agencies have written to me to say how they are working towards implementing my standards and many provide me with regular updates on their progress. I have met with agencies not covered by the Victims' Code, such as the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). I have had constructive discussions about some of the changes they are planning in order to give victims a better experience when they contact them. More generally, I have published a leaflet to help victims who want to make a complaint to do so effectively.
25. This leaflet is published on my website at: <http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/I-am-a-victim-and-I-want-to-make-a-complaint.pdf>

Priority Three: Restorative Justice (RJ)

26. In November 2014 I published my first review into the potential benefits and risks of RJ. I concluded that RJ can be beneficial to victims providing it is victim focused, is delivered by trained and skilled staff, and that victims are supported before, during and after the RJ activity. However, I was concerned by the primary focus on offenders' rehabilitation and that victims' participation appeared to be a secondary concern. In summary, I found insufficient attention appeared to be given to the needs of victims before, during and after the RJ activity so I decided to assess whether this situation had improved two years later.
27. My review in March this year found that the number of victims who take part in Restorative Justice (RJ) is very low compared to the number of individuals who become victims of crime. However, this has enabled Restorative Justice service providers to deliver a bespoke service to the small number of victims who do take part, based on a careful assessment of their needs. My report also found that some PCC areas automatically excluded victims of certain crime types from participating in RJ, for example victims of domestic abuse, hate crime and sexual abuse/violence. This suggests that the availability and quality of RJ continues to vary geographically. I will conduct and publish a second part to this RJ review which will compare victims' experiences of RJ against the perspective of the practitioners and service providers. This report will be published later this year. In the meantime, although there is evidence of some good quality RJ work, my review found it was not possible to say if RJ is now more focussed on the needs of victims, compared to 2014.
28. You can read my report into RJ at: http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/A-question-of-quality_RJ-review-part-1-service-providers.pdf

Priority Four: Putting victims first when cases are dealt with out of court

29. In my Annual Report (2014-15) I explained that although I continue to respond to letters from victims regarding out of court disposals (OOCD), I decided not to conduct a review into this area of work until the pilots that have been underway for the last 18 months, have been completed. I have liaised with officials in the Ministry of Justice about the pilots and I am represented on the OOCD Review Programme Board. The pilot of a new framework for adult out of court disposals finished at the end of October last year. The new framework would require offenders to comply with conditions – such as victim redress – or face prosecution for the original offence. The pilot has been subject to an independent evaluation, the results of which are expected to be published later this year. The government will take a decision on whether to roll out the new framework in light of the findings of the evaluation.

Priority Five: Giving a voice to victims, including vulnerable victims

Follow Up to my VPS Review

30. My review into the VPS included a separate report on whether specific groups of victims such as those categorised by ethnicity, gender, religion or age were denied their entitlements to a greater or lesser extent than others. In summary my review found that elderly victims were less likely to have made a VPS than other age groups of victims and victims who have a long standing illness or disability were significantly less likely to be offered a VPS, compared to 2013-14. The report also found that the number of VPS's offered in each geographical region in England and Wales differed greatly. Although these figures have to be taken in the context that very few victims overall (less than 15%) recall being offered the opportunity to make a VPS, agencies must consider the needs of these groups as they work towards implementing the Victims' Commissioner's Standards and recommendations set out in my full review.
31. You can read my follow up review to the VPS at: http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CSEW-VPS-Findings_January-2016.pdf

Child Sexual Abuse

32. The extent of child sexual abuse (CSA), including the non recent abuse of children in the care of Local Authorities, is greater than most people would ever have imagined and has been widely reported in the media. I have met with many victims of child sexual abuse and listened to what they have told me. I have met with the Honourable Dame Lowell Goddard, Chair of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales. In addition, I have seen the painstaking work undertaken by the police in their work on Operation Stovewood and Operation Hydrant to identify victims and perpetrators.
33. I welcome these inquiries and initiatives but I don't think we can 'prosecute our way out' of this dreadful situation. What matters to me is that all victims are given the support that they need for as long as they need it. They should not be regarded simply as a means to secure a prosecution and left to fend for themselves when the prosecution or inquiry is complete. I know that victims of sexual abuse will often need help with a range of issues, including accommodation, employment and finances as well as with their physical and mental health. I have been impressed by many of the services for victims that I have seen, however we need to acknowledge that the years of abuse may have impacted on a victim's education, employment and ability to have healthy relationships. These victims may be mistrustful of agencies that are trying to help them. They may have problems with drugs or alcohol and exhibit behaviour which is challenging for agencies to deal with. I have therefore spoken in debates in the House of Lords about the need for a more sustained, intensive and joined up response to the needs of victims of sexual abuse, domestic abuse, modern day slavery and child online exploitation.

Increased awareness of the Victims' Commissioner's role

34. To ensure feedback from a wide range of victims (including vulnerable victims) is used to inform the development and implementation of policy, I wanted to increase awareness of the Victims' Commissioner's role and reach a wider audience of victims within existing budget constraints.
35. By regularly updating the content and resources on the independent Victims' Commissioner website, it has enabled me to raise awareness of my work for victims and to signpost people to advice and support. It has also enabled more victims to engage and contribute to my reviews and to seek advice and help.
36. Although I am prevented by law from championing individual cases, I continue to meet with many victims, listen to their concerns and sometimes signpost them to the agencies and organisations which might be able to help them. Many victims don't want anything at all; they simply want

someone to demonstrate that they have listened to them. I am frequently moved by the number of victims who have said how much they valued the letters and correspondence from my office and by how many have been willing for me to use their experiences to illustrate the points that I make to the government and criminal justice agencies. I know victim experiences are unique and that I cannot reflect the views of each and every victim but I have listened to many different victims. I try to reflect their experiences during my public speaking engagements and when advising policy makers and officials. I hope these victims know that using their accounts of their experiences has a significant, if unquantifiable, impact on helping me to secure a positive change for other victims.

Extending the reach of the victim's voice

37. I have continued to meet with victims, victims' organisations, representatives from the criminal justice system and other agencies. Although the needs of victims is given more attention these days, I was struck – when listening to victims of crime – by how little had changed since my experience following the murder of my husband Garry in 2007. I wanted to reach out to as many victims as possible to let them know they are not alone and to share some of the things that would have been of help to me. I therefore published my 'What I wish I had known' information pack in March 2016. It is my very personal account to help inform victims about the criminal justice process, to help them know what questions to ask if they need to find out more about their case and who to go to for any assistance. It also contains a number of hints and tips such as bringing your own refreshments to court – a cheaper alternative to the court cafeteria and it means victims are less likely to see the family of the accused.
38. The What I wish I had known information pack can be accessed here:
<http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/What-I-wish-I-had-known.pdf>
39. Supporting victims from England and Wales who have become victims of crime committed overseas such as in Tunisia, Paris and Brussels is another area of work that is very important to me. The Prime Minister asked that I represent the interests of victims on a Ministerial Committee established to coordinate support to the victims of the terrorist attacks in Tunisia in 2015. I have since worked closely with officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to ensure that anyone affected by the attacks in Tunisia is approached sensitively by Government departments. I also met with victims of the Sousse attacks at a series of meetings across the UK, with FCO Minister Tobias Ellwood, and was also able to ensure that the Service of Solemn Commemoration that was held at Westminster Abbey on 12 April 2016 was accessible to those on low incomes. My ongoing membership of the EU Justice Sub-Committee will be a further way of enabling me to ensure proper consideration of the needs of victims when a crime takes place abroad.
40. I have also:
 - Consolidated my relationship with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCCs). I was grateful to them for assisting my team in gaining access to PCCs as part of my review into RJ.
 - Met regularly with the senior judiciary including the Lord Chief Justice, The Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd. I am very grateful for his support in enabling my staff to interview judges as part of my review into Victim Personal Statements.
 - Developed a positive relationship with the Magistrates Association Network; the survey of their members was a critical source of evidence for my recommendations in my VPS review.
 - Appreciated that the Approved Professional Practice for victim and witness section and information about the VPS has been moved to the top of the College of Policing guidance for police (<https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/prosecution-and-case-management/victim-and-witness-care/>).

- Confirmed agreement from the Ministry of Justice that all calls to the National Victims' Information Line (mobile or landline) will be free whereas initially only calls from a landline were free.
- Provided advice to the Museum of London in relation to their Crime Museum exhibition in order to reduce the risk of sensationalising crime and demonstrate sensitivity towards the deceased and remaining surviving victims and their families. I featured in a short video, which was shown as part of the exhibition. I was impressed that the museum was so attentive to victim issues, this marks a change in culture which might not have been evident even a few years ago.
- Consulted with heads of the Criminal Justice inspectorates and the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection Team (CJIT) to consider how findings relating to victims during their inspections can be used to drive up the quality of victim experiences of the criminal justice system.

Contributions to conferences and training events

41. I have spoken at a number of conferences, training events and have visited a number of service providers. I have been grateful for the positive feedback I have received. Although I cannot attend every event to which I am invited, I try to ensure a wide geographical spread and have prioritised PCC events which are launching new services for victims, especially where they are providing a single point of contact for victims. The opportunity to meet with staff and victims at some of these events was very rewarding and I look forward to finding out how effective some of these new services have been. Some of the areas I have visited are listed below:

Organisation	Date	Location
National Offender Management service (NOMS) Offender Management and Public Protection Group	April 2015	London
College of Policing Professional Development Event on 'Vulnerability'	May 2015	Coventry
Launch of the new Gwent Connect Victims' Care Service	May 2015	Wales
Compass House launch in Kent	June 2015	Kent
Cambridgeshire PCC Hub visit	June 2015	Cambridgeshire
'This Lady Loves' conference at Liverpool Football club	June 2015	Liverpool
Thames Valley PCC Conference	July 2015	Oxford
Staffordshire PCC launch of new service	September 2015	Staffordshire

Launch of Bedfordshire Victims Partnership	September 2015	Bedfordshire
Road Victims Trust	September 2015	Bedfordshire
Devon & Cornwall victim unit	September 2015	Exeter
Victim Care Group Event	October 2015	Grimsby
Westminster Legal Policy Forum	October 2015	London
Wiltshire Police Horizon Victim and Witness Care Unit	October 2015	Wiltshire
Visit to Dorset & Wiltshire Witness Service	November 2015	Weymouth
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) conference	November 2015	Warwick
Cheshire Supporting Victims Event	November 2015	Cheshire
Visit to Catch 22	December 2015	Cheshire
Northumbria PCC visit (Vera Baird)	January 2016	Northumbria
Essex PCC Annual Conference – “Tackling Hidden Harms together”	January 2016	Essex
Visit to Major Incident Room - Operation Stovewood (NCA)	March 2016	Sheffield

Input into consultations, policies and procedures

42. My expanding network of criminal justice contacts means I have been asked to contribute to various consultations, policies and guidance documents, which impact upon victims. Some of the work I have contributed to in 2015-16 include:

- The revised service specifications for the Probation Victim Contact Scheme to ensure staff make relevant victims aware of the possibility of an application for a tariff review. I have also expressed my concern about victim liaison officers (VLOs) also managing offenders and am grateful that the revised operating model for VLOs is solely for victim related work.
- I have discussed a potential increase in contact from victims with the Criminal Cases Review Commission following the Commission's referral of a high profile case to the Court of Appeal.
- Contributing to COPAC's (Complaints Police and Crime Commissioners) possible development of a quality mark for victim services.
- The Cabinet Office: Review of the Public Ombudsmen landscape about whether there should be one single ombudsman for dealing with complaints.
- The EU Victims' Directive and consequent changes to the Victims' Code.

- The Home Office Review of how police complaints are handled.
- Consultations into Court Closures, Child Safety Online, Stalking, HMCTS customer Directorate and the Sentencing Guideline Council consultation on credit for not guilty pleas.

43. I have published my responses to some of these consultations on my website. These can be found at: <http://victimscommissioner.org.uk/news/>

Meetings with stakeholders

44. The role of Victims' Commissioner is independent from government but I meet regularly with ministers and senior officials from a number of different government departments to try to secure a better deal for victims. The meetings I have particularly welcomed in the past year include:

- A meeting with the Honourable Dame Lowell Goddard, Chair of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, to find out more about how victims will be supported before, during and after the inquiry and whether there is anything I can do to assist.
- Regular meetings with the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland. We have agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to clarify our respective responsibilities in relation to victims. I am confident that this MOU will help promote consistency, reduce the risk of duplication and maximise any opportunities for joint or shared working.
- Meetings with the Chief Executive of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority to consider how victims of crime committed both in the UK and overseas could be assisted when making applications and whether clarification of existing eligibility criteria or guidance is needed.
- Negotiations with the Parole Board to consider how victims who attend Oral Hearings to present their VPS can receive some form of formal acknowledgement for their contribution. I am pleased that a pilot to test this out is planned for later this year.
- A meeting with the Attorney General's Office. The Solicitor General was willing to consider improving their letters to victims to ensure a full understanding of what is happening. In some cases this means being clear that, after acknowledging receipt of the letter, victims might not hear from them again for up to 28 days. A month is not a long time to those who work in government departments but it is a very long time for a victim who is waiting for a decision.

Office of the Victims' Commissioner budget

45. The budget for 2015-16 and for the two previous years of my tenure are set out in tables one to three below:

Table One: Budget for the Office of the Victims' Commissioner 2015-16

	Budget £	Expenditure £
Original Budget	474,000	466,771
Pay Budget	436,000	458,472
Non Pay Budget	38,000	8,300
Non Pay Budget		
IT & Telecommunications		1,349
Travel & Other		6,904
Events and Conferences		32
Printing / Postage & Office Expenditure		15

Table Two: Budget for the Office of the Victims' Commissioner 2014-15

	Budget £	Expenditure £
Original Budget	474,000	358,273
Pay Budget	436,000	341,261
Non Pay Budget	38,000	17,012
Non Pay Budget		
IT & Telecommunications		1,506
Travel & Other*		12,899
Printing/ Postage & Office Expenditure		64
Property Rent & Rates		1,028
Fuel & Utilities		1,515

*Note:

Travel and Other includes an over payment of £2,705 which was recovered during 2015/16.

Pay is inclusive of agency staff.

Table Three: Budget for the Office of the Victims' Commissioner 2013-14

	Budget £	Expenditure £
Original Budget	265,000	265,670
Pay Budget	228,000	209,465
Non Pay Budget	37,000	56,205
Non Pay Budget (Approximate expenditure)		
Agency Staff		11,000
Estate Costs		13,000
Printing and Postage		200
IT and Telecommunications		500
Travel and Other		26,500
Events and Conferences		5,000

Victims' Commissioner plans 2016-17 and beyond

46. Over the next three years, as I embark on my second term as Victims' Commissioner, I want to further develop and embed positive changes for victims into policy, guidance and, most importantly, into practice.
47. There may be changes to delivery of victim services following the PCC elections in May 2016, any emerging findings in the annual reports from the Goddard Inquiry and possibly from the referendum on British membership of the EU. We are also seeing large scale reform of the court services, an extensive prison reform programme and sadly there may be more terrorist incidents affecting British Citizens. I am also aware any improvements for victims have to be delivered against a background of tight financial constraints. The provision of an effective criminal justice system is, however, one of the fundamental responsibilities of government in a civilised society and victims are an essential part of this process. The impact on victims should not be overlooked in the drive to address affordability, speed and efficiency.
48. Over the next three years I will continue to highlight problems facing victims of crime and try to persuade government and policy makers to ensure changes not only give victims a better experience of the criminal justice system but that their rights are fully recognised. I want to ensure that the proposed Victims' Law genuinely delivers improvements for victims and that it is accessible, meaningful and enforceable.
49. In addition to exposing failings in the treatment of victims, I want to use my role to help those who commission and deliver services for victims. My team is now well established and together we have built up considerable knowledge and expertise about how even relatively small changes can deliver big improvements for victims. We have a growing body of evidence about what works in providing effective services for victims and I want to consider how this knowledge base can be more effectively utilised in the planning, delivery, management and commissioning of victim services. I want to consider how my office can become a 'Centre of Excellence' which disseminates good practice in the treatment of victims.

50. My work plan for 2016-17 will therefore include:

- Conduct further reviews into compliance with the Victims' Code. Subject areas are likely to include the treatment of vulnerable victims, RJ Part Two (victims' perspective) and an area to be identified based on the most frequent concerns raised with my office.
- Set out what I want to see in a Victims' Law and working with those leading on the proposed legislation to ensure it delivers genuine improvements for victims of crime.
- Establish a Community of Practice for organisations working with victims. This will be a Victims' Commissioner's problem solving forum for those who would like to discuss and address specific topics relating to victims. It will also be used as a forum to identify good practice and to consider how it can best be shared for the benefit of others.
- Undertake a three year programme of structured visits to PCCs to find out more about their services for victims, to promote a Single Point of Contact (SPoC), meet with victims and share good practice.
- Review agencies data returns to MoJ regarding their monitoring of compliance with the Victims' Code. As in the previous year I will provide feedback to each agency.
- Ask relevant agencies to update me on how they are complying with my Victims' Commissioner's Standards regarding how they are delivering their entitlements on victim complaints and the VPS.
- Contribute to a common understanding about the role and purpose of the VPS and develop supporting training materials.
- Consider how a victims' module might be included as part of law degrees or Legal Practice Courses.
- Develop training materials to support service providers.
- I will continue to consider how I might reach a wider audience of victims. This will include how I use my Victims' Commissioner's website.
- Continue to feed into relevant work streams to ensure victims' issues are given appropriate attention. For example, I will contribute to the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection programme and to the scoping of relevant inspections.
- I will continue to meet with victims, victim's organisations, heads of the criminal justice agencies and with government ministers. I will also continue to meet with holders of public office which are relevant to identifying and supporting victims. These include Justice Goddard, the Independent Anti Slavery Commissioner and the Children's Commissioner.

Conclusion

51. As I begin my fourth year as Victims' Commissioner and the first year of my new tenure, the government and criminal justice agencies have made unprecedented commitments to deliver improved experiences for victims through legislation, reform of the courts and through developments in technology. I welcome many of these changes and want to do all I can to help ensure they lead to positive changes in practice rather than merely to changes in written policy. However, I have reservations that these planned changes such as the introduction of a Victims' Law and better use of IT to enable vulnerable witnesses to give evidence remotely will only be delivered in the longer term. Many victims need help right now and, as my reviews have highlighted, agencies are already in a position to deliver significant improvements for victims at no extra cost. If victims are treated kindly, sensitively and with some acknowledgement of their unique personal circumstances they can accept decisions that are not to their liking and they can be helped on their journey towards recovery. Investing time to deal with victims empathically from the outset can often save time and resources further down the line.

As I have said many times before:

'Victims don't care how much you know until they know how much you care'

Annex A

Victims' Commissioner's standards: Delivering the VPS process

1. The findings of this review have highlighted that there needs to be an improvement in the way that criminal justice agencies carry out their obligations regarding the VPS process to victims. The recommendations I have made will go some way to help that happen and close the gap between what should be happening and what happens in practice for victims.
2. The way these improvements can be brought about will be through a number of changes that cannot all necessarily be measured, but are important to victims. I have therefore used this review to identify a number of standards which I think will assist agencies to carry out these recommendations.
3. Where agencies are able to demonstrate that they are meeting these standards, they will be more likely to be fulfilling their duties to victims under the Victims' Code.

Victims' Commissioner's Standards:

- All relevant agencies should ensure the VPS process is applied effectively and must put sufficient monitoring in place to demonstrate this. It is for each agency to determine which of the following they need to monitor to enable the Criminal Justice Board, and others, to accurately identify:
 - number (and percentage) of VPSs offered
 - reasons why a VPS was not offered or taken up
 - when the VPS was offered
 - whether (and how often) the victim was offered to update the VPS
 - number (and percentage) of requests to read a VPS aloud
 - number (and percentage) of requests to read a VPS aloud and whether the VPS was granted or refused (including reasons for refusal)
 - number (and percentage) of cases finalised where a VPS was considered
 - whether victims were told if (and how) their VPS was used
- Agencies should provide sufficient help to support victims throughout the VPS process and provide assurances of how this will be delivered.
- All agencies should commit to using a standard 'script' describing the purpose of the VPS once it has been produced and to reflect this in their training materials. In the meantime, agencies should set out how they will ensure that their staff provide accurate explanations to victims about the purpose and contents of a VPS.
- Agencies should ensure that staff (including staff commissioned to do this work on their behalf) are properly trained on the VPS process from beginning to end, as well as training regarding their own agency's specific VPS function.
- Agencies should demonstrate their commitment to ensure that all staff (including staff commissioned to do this work on their behalf) have in place a performance objective reflecting how they will be held accountable for treating victims making a VPS with sensitivity, dignity and respect.

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us via email on victims.commissioner@victimscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk or via post at
Victims' Commissioner's Office, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ