

Commissioner for Victims and Witnesses:

Annual Report for 2016-17

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PART ONE

OVERVIEW



“...I have been privileged to meet hundreds of victims, people whose courage and dignity in the face of terrible adversity has never ceased to inspire me.”

Introduction

This is my fourth Annual Report for the Secretary of State for Justice. It marks the end of my fourth year as the Independent Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales. This report also sets out my objectives for the business year 2017-18 and the strategic objectives for my second term which expires in March 2019.

Overview

Throughout my tenure as Victims' Commissioner, I have always considered that the most important part of my role is meeting victims from all parts of the country and listening to their experiences of the criminal justice system. Over the past year I have been privileged to meet hundreds of victims, people whose courage and dignity in the face of terrible adversity have never ceased to inspire me. I have also been contacted by increasing numbers of victims, keen to share their stories and often seeking my guidance and support.

These first hand accounts of the criminal justice system highlight to me that whilst much has been achieved in improving services, there is still so much more we need to do. This overview sets out some, but not all, of the issues that I have focused on during the past 12 months. They are themes that are reflected throughout this report.

I have been particularly concerned about the support given to vulnerable victims. As this report sets out, vulnerable victims have occupied much of my activity over the year.

During 2016/17, more survivors of child sexual abuse have come forward and I fear that many more are still suffering in silence. It is important that criminal justice agencies, health, social services, education and other statutory agencies have the capacity to be able to provide these survivors with the help and support they need to rebuild their lives and to recover from the appalling abuse from which they have suffered. Many have been let down in the past by those who were meant to protect them. It is important that we do not let them down again.

I have always maintained that central to supporting survivors of non-recent sexual abuse, as well as those who have been subject to sexual violence as an adult, is the sense of being believed when they report the crimes committed against them. It is the conveyance of this belief, coupled with empathy and understanding, that will help survivors start the long process of recovery. I know that this position has been challenged, with a counter view that victims should be considered as “complainants” until there is a conviction, and that those they turn to should adopt a neutral stance. I strongly disagree with these views and believe that if they prevail, we will be turning back the clock, deterring many victims from stepping forward for fear of rejection.

As a victim of crime, one of the most harrowing experiences for me was seeing my three young daughters go through the criminal justice process. All of them had witnessed their father being beaten to death and, as a result, they were all required to testify at the trial. The memories of seeing my children in the witness box will never leave me. For this reason, I was keen to review how child victims were being treated by the criminal justice system nine years on. This small scale review was in part based upon earlier reviews undertaken by other authors and provided a snapshot, with examples of both good and poor practice.

Another vulnerable group is victims of modern slavery. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was a landmark piece of legislation and I am pleased to see the number of prosecutions and convictions of perpetrators rising steadily, albeit, as the Anti Slavery Commissioner has observed, these are just the “tip of the iceberg”. My concern is that these victims receive the support they need to help them rehabilitate their lives and recover from the trauma of their experiences. This means a more systematic approach to providing support: an approach that tailors a package of support to meet the needs of the individual.

I continue to be concerned by the number of people who suffer from persistent anti-social behaviour (ASB). It makes me angry to hear ASB described as “low level” crime, since the cumulative effect upon victims, particularly the vulnerable, is anything but low. Last year, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of the Constabulary (HMIC) warned that neighbourhood policing was being eroded and this year, they report further evidence of this. For me, this is a matter of grave concern.

It is also unclear to what extent local authorities and agencies are using the statutory powers available to them to review and tackle reports of ASB. I hear from many victims of ASB that they feel abandoned by the authorities. Charities that work with ASB victims tell me that some agencies are unaware of or do not use the powers at their disposal, powers that might enable them to tackle this crime. I am in touch with the Home Office about how we can increase awareness and improve the take-up of the statutory powers currently available.

Like so many people, I am alarmed by the rapid increase in cyber crime, whether it be fraud, bullying, harassment, revenge porn or sexual exploitation. Before the advent of the internet, these were all crimes that happened to us outside our homes. Now they can take place in our own front rooms.

I have met with many law enforcement agencies and regulators who are playing key roles in tackling this epidemic and I have been impressed by their determination and ingenuity, both in raising awareness and in keeping ahead of the criminals. Quite rightly, a huge amount of energy is going into prevention and I support this. However, it is important to ensure that we support those for whom prevention is too late. In particular, this support needs to be directed at vulnerable victims, particularly, the elderly and the young, and those who appear to have been targeted and have become victims of multiple cyber crimes.

The decision taken in 2015 to devolve the majority of victim services to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) has changed the landscape for service delivery. Devolution opens up opportunities for local innovation and good practice, and as I have travelled around the country meeting PCCs, I have seen some excellent examples of this. I am concerned, however, that service provision should not become a “postcode lottery” and therefore I welcome the Secretary of State’s drive to introduce minimum national standards. PCCs and service providers have also approached me to discuss the disruption to service delivery as a result of Ministry of Justice (MoJ) grants being allocated on an annual basis. In November, I wrote to Ministers seeking a commitment for a three year settlement instead.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that compliance on the part of criminal justice agencies with the entitlements to victims as set out in the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (the Victims' Code) is patchy. This was confirmed by my review of the national data collected by the Crime Survey for England and Wales, on the offer of Victim Personal Statements (VPS), as well as my review on victims' experience of Restorative Justice (RJ). As I have said in previous reports, I want to know that every victim will receive all of their entitlements and that these entitlements are delivered with sensitivity and respect on the part of practitioners. Often this does not require a change in legislation or policy, but does require time and effort to ensure effective delivery of existing policies.

Over the course of the year there have been some welcome announcements by Ministers in improving the treatment of victims and witnesses, including the roll-out of video-links for child and vulnerable victims and witnesses to pre-record their evidence, legislation to prevent perpetrators of domestic abuse from interrogating their victims in the Family Courts, a commitment to review and enforce legislation in respect of domestic abuse and a review of the questioning of rape victims in criminal trials in respect of previous sexual history. I also welcome the Government's commitment to publish a National Victim Strategy in early 2018.

The 2015 Queen's Speech confirmed the Government's commitment to a Victims Law. Whilst acknowledging the huge pressures on Parliamentary time over the coming two years, I remain of the view that such a law offers the opportunity for a considered debate on how to enhance and enforce the rights of victims within our criminal justice system.

This is important. For me and many other victims, our criminal justice system can have the appearance of being all about the offender, whether it be how we provide justice for offenders, or manage their risk, or help them rehabilitate their lives. If we look at the language used, we will find that offenders have human rights enshrined in the European Convention for Human Rights (ECHR). Victims on the other hand have entitlements set out in a Code that lawyers tactfully describe as "persuasive guidance".

This does not mean that I am advocating that offenders should not have rights, nor do I accept that giving rights to victims can only be at the expense of offenders. I believe that true justice requires both offenders and victims to be given rights in order to guarantee that both are treated fairly.

Any law for victims must therefore offer the opportunity to give them a more established position within the criminal justice system, with a set of core "rights" that are on the face of statute.

Such rights will undoubtedly replicate some of the entitlements already in place, opening us to the allegation that we are simply replicating what already exists. My response is that re-defining entitlements as rights is important, as first and foremost we are seeking to achieve a culture change, whereby victims are formally regarded as being an integral part of the criminal justice system.

The role of the Victims' Commissioner

I was appointed Victims' Commissioner on 21 December 2012 and took up my post on 4 March 2013. I was re-appointed for a second term in March 2016 and this expires in March 2019.

The role of the Victims' Commissioner is set out in section 49 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, as amended by the Coroners and Justice Act 2009:

(1) *The Commissioner must—*

- (a) promote the interests of victims and witnesses;*
- (b) take such steps as he considers appropriate with a view to encouraging good practice in the treatment of victims and witnesses;*
- (c) keep under review the operation of the code of practice issued under section 32.*

(2) The Commissioner may, for any purpose connected with the performance of his duties under subsection (1)—

- (a) make proposals to the Secretary of State for amending the code (at the request of the Secretary of State or on his own initiative);
- (b) make a report to the Secretary of State;
- (c) make recommendations to an authority within his remit;
- (e) consult any person he thinks appropriate.

(3) If the Commissioner makes a report to the Secretary of State under subsection (2)(b)—

- (a) the Commissioner must send a copy of the report to the Attorney General and the Secretary of State for the Home Department;

(4) The Commissioner must prepare in respect of each calendar year a report on the carrying out of the functions of the Commissioner during the year.

(5) The Commissioner must send a copy of each report prepared under subsection (4) to—

- (a) the Secretary of State for Justice,
- (b) the Attorney General, and
- (c) the Secretary of State for the Home Department.

(6) Reports under subsection (2)(b) or (4) must be published by the Commissioner.

(7) If section 48 comes into force after the beginning of a calendar year, the first report under subsection (4) may relate to a period beginning with the day on which that section comes into force and ending with the end of the next calendar year.

In carrying out my role I am fortunate to have the support of my small but dedicated team. I was sorry to lose my CEO, Claire Wiggins, who returned to the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in October 2016. She was replaced by Russell A'Court, who was also previously based in NOMS. This prompted a restructuring of the team and Russell is supported by Lena Parmar, who is Head of Policy and Stakeholder Engagement and Dr Elaine Wedlock, Head of Analysis and Review. I am also fortunate to have the support of Michelle Brown, who is an Implementation Manager, as well as a part time Press Officer and part time Personal Assistant.

In addition to my office, I also have the able support of my advisory group (The Victims' Commissioner's Forum). This group includes members from a range of backgrounds with very diverse skills and experiences. As of the end of the year, the membership was: Stephen Wooler, Sir Denis O'Connor, Andrew Bridges, Rachel Griffin, Dr Jackie Tapley, Fiona McKay, Janette Berry, Maggie Hughes and Iqbal Bana.

Together they constitute a 'critical friend' and I am grateful to have this group to advise and challenge me in my work. At the end of the year, we reviewed the terms of reference for the group and looking ahead, we plan to use the expertise of the members specifically at looking areas of policy and practice. With this in mind I am delighted to welcome three new members: Dame Vera Baird, PCC for Northumbria, Julian Hendy, Director of the charity Hundred Families, and Gabrielle Shaw, CEO of the National Association for People Abused in Childhood. We are planning further to extend the membership in the coming year.

Definition of victims

As was acknowledged in my 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 have generally used the term 'victim' because it is the term that the majority of agencies use and understand when referring to someone who has experienced victimisation.

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.

Second Term Strategic Plan

Following my re-appointment last year, I published my Second Term Strategic Plan which is designed to set out the broad outline of my strategy for the remainder of my second term, which expires in March 2019.

It builds on the work that I undertook in my first term of office and which is set out in previous Annual Reports.

Looking ahead, my focus is to ensure that victims of crime are supported in coping and recovering from the impact of crime they have suffered. I want to see all victims receiving their entitlements as set out in the Victims' Code and that they are treated as individuals, with recognition given to their individual needs.

I am committed to championing the cause of victims in all appropriate forums across the criminal justice systems, as well as other agencies which have a statutory duty to provide support to victims.

Successful implementation of this strategy is dependent on the cooperation of those responsible for supporting victims, providing services and developing policy and practice.

My Strategic Plan sets out five overarching strategic aims:

- A. Work with all criminal justice agencies to ensure that victims of crime and witnesses are treated with humanity and decency at all times, so as to aid their ability to cope and recover from the impact of crime;
- B. Monitor and report on criminal justice agencies' compliance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime and the Witness Charter; identifying areas that are deficient and making recommendations based on evidence of best practice;
- C. Review the provision of victim services on the basis of the four principles identified in "What Works", namely: communication, procedural justice, inter-agency cooperation and professionalisation, and make recommendations on how services should develop and improve;
- D. Through regular contact with victims and practitioners of victims' services, articulate a view of the criminal justice system from the perspective of victims; review and challenge decisions taken by policy makers and those responsible for developing practice;
- E. Through gaining first hand knowledge and understanding of victims' services, identify and actively promote examples of best practice and excellence.

PART TWO

REVIEWING THE DELIVERY OF VICTIMS' SERVICES

“...statistical and anecdotal evidence tells me that victims are not always receiving their entitlements as set out in the Victims’ Code. This is not acceptable and victims deserve better.”

Having had first hand experience of the criminal justice system as a victim of crime, I am totally committed to ensuring that all victims receive the high quality services that they deserve so that they can be supported through the criminal justice system and helped both to cope and recover. As I have stated earlier in this Report, statistical and anecdotal evidence tells me that victims are not always receiving their entitlements as set out in the Victims’ Code. This is not acceptable and victims deserve better.

I am determined to make things better for victims, by undertaking reviews of victims’ services, raising issues of concern with Ministers and criminal justice agencies and highlighting victims’ concerns through the media, speaking events and through my role in Parliament.

All of my work is based upon regular meetings with victims across the country, as well as practitioners of frontline services and those responsible for policy making.

I have published three reviews during the year and have commenced work on two further reviews, which will be covered in my next Annual Report.

Victim Commissioner's Reviews

Restorative Justice (2)



My second review on restorative justice attracted the interest of the media. It highlighted that many victims were not being offered the chance to participate.

This report looked at Restorative Justice from the victim perspective and found that while victims take part in Restorative Justice to assist their own recovery, many also participate in order to find out why they had been targeted by the offender and to encourage offenders to turn their lives around, in order to prevent the suffering of future victims.

Most of the 35 victims interviewed as part of the review were satisfied they received a Restorative Justice service tailored to their needs and requirements. However, the proportion of victims offered the opportunity to participate in Restorative Justice has fallen significantly, despite the Government allocating £23m in funding for services between April 2013 and March 2016. Statistics from the Crime Survey for England and Wales 2015-16 revealed that only 4.2 per cent of all victims of crime were offered the opportunity to meet with their offender. This is significantly lower than in 2014-15, and is the lowest proportion of victims offered Restorative Justice since 2010.

Victim Personal Statements and Vulnerable Victims

By carrying out statistical analysis on data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales 2015/16, I found that less than one in five victims recall being offered the chance to make a Victim Personal Statement for court hearings. Some groups of victims are at an even greater disadvantage, as there is significant variation by age, ethnicity, religion, disability, geographical region, crime type and marital status.

Following my Report on the Victim Personal Statement in November 2015, my office has also been working with cross-agency representatives to develop a core script on the definition of the Victim Personal Statement. My report recommended that a commons script was essential, as there was a lack of consistency in the explanation given to victims as to the purpose of the Statement.

I am pleased that agencies have been working together to implement my recommendations and I await the publication of the final Government response. Once the publication has taken place, I will also produce a video and script specifically for victims, to help them understand the process and participate in providing a Victim Personal Statement.

Delivering Services to Child Victims of Crime

My review into children's entitlements under the Victims' Code investigated the treatment of children and young victims of crime by criminal justice agencies. Twelve children and/or their families took part in this small scale qualitative review. It found a mixture of experiences for these children when receiving their entitlements under the Code.

There were some examples of good practice, particularly in relation to young victims' attendance at court, but some of the young victims who were interviewed were neither informed about nor receive all of their entitlements under the Code. Some of the children and their families did not feel that they were treated with dignity and respect by criminal justice agencies, with some feeling that they were neither believed nor taken seriously because of their age.



Although this was a very small review and the findings cannot be generalised to all young victims, the experiences of all children in the Criminal Justice System matter and some of these children did not receive all of the support that they are entitled to expect.

The review concluded that the provision of a professional victims' advocate service would help alleviate many of the frustrations and difficulties that children, young people and their families reported in this review.

Police and Crime Commissioners

In 2015 the Government took the decision to devolve certain victim services to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC). This has changed the landscape in respect of the delivery of victim services and I have been keen to visit PCCs to find out for myself how PCCs are undertaking their responsibilities and what obstacles might be in their way.

When undertaking these visits, I always take the opportunity to have face-to-face meetings with both victims and service providers. The plan is to visit every PCC by the end of my second term in March 2019.

Whilst every visit raises new issues and highlights new initiatives, I always leave with the overriding impression that there are extremely committed individuals doing great work. So far, all my visits have helped me understand the good practice that is taking place around the country. It is important that innovation and good practice are shared so that they become the norm for all victims. My team and I are working on how best to promulgate best practice to maximum effect.

North Wales

I visited St Asaph and Colwyn Bay in North Wales in October, where I met with staff and volunteers working in the Victim Help Centre, and also visited a Sexual Assault Referral Centre. I was particularly impressed by the fact that all staff at the Victim Help Centre were bi-lingual in Welsh and English and were able to talk to victims in their preferred language. This was because it was recognised that when people are suffering from trauma, they default to their first language. In this part of Wales, 30% of the population speaks Welsh as their first language.



Good to meet the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales and his staff. I was able to find out how victims of crime were being supported in their journey through the criminal justice system.

Thames Valley

I visited Kidlington in Thames Valley in October where I met with staff providing services for young victims of crime, as well as for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. I was pleased to hear about the additional support measures provided for domestic abuse victims – it was so heartening to hear about the way in which the service offered both practical and emotional support, but also assisted victims to find relevant services that would support their recovery.

I was also fortunate to meet with service providers who help young victims of crime recover. I heard about the services offered to children and young people, the counselling that is made available and the flexible approach they adopt. This service provider reassured me that the most vulnerable young victims were receiving support and help for their specific needs.

Cheshire

In November, I visited Winsford in Cheshire, where I met with staff from Cheshire CARES and learnt about the services they provide to victims in the local area, and specifically their approach to cyber crime and sexual assault. I noted an initiative set up by Cheshire Police to work with local post offices to help identify postal scams, and prevent victims from being targets of fraud and associated crimes. It was inspiring to see this initiative of local partners working together to help victims in their local area.

I was also touched to hear about the way that staff in the sexual assault service goes above and beyond to assist all the victims they come into contact with.

Avon and Somerset

I also visited Bristol in November to meet the service providers in Avon and Somerset. Interestingly, I had opened the first PCC-commissioned victim service in the country in Avon and Somerset, so it was pleasing to go back and to see what developments there had been since 2014.

I was particularly impressed by the descriptions of how staff in the Lighthouse Victims and Witness Hub are trained upon joining the hub and how they receive ongoing professional development, in order that they can provide a high level of service to local victims.

Gloucestershire

My last visit of 2016 took place in Gloucester where I met with the victim service provider to discuss how to help and support older victims of crime and those who have been victims of cyber crime. It was an interesting visit and one which highlighted that the PCC wanted to do more in supporting victims in these areas.

The victims I met in Gloucestershire provided useful insights, which reflected some good feedback about the service provider, but also highlighted gaps that the PCC has already recognised.

Derbyshire

In January, I visited Ripley in Derbyshire to meet providers delivering services for victims of child sexual exploitation and victims of cyber crime. I was pleased to see the extent of the multi-agency partnerships operating, in particular with regard to child sexual exploitation. It was great to see the way that the police are working with schools and young people to manage and reduce risk and avoid further victimisation.

It was also encouraging to see that this multi-agency approach was mirrored for adult services for sexual violence and domestic abuse, ensuring that victims had a holistic service from providers and also had access to the most relevant sources of help.

Suffolk

In March, I visited Ipswich in Suffolk. During the visit, I met with service providers for victims of domestic abuse and non-recent sexual abuse and was impressed by the support and counselling on offer to victims and the fact that it was tailored to the needs of the individual. The PCC and his team were working to good effect to improve multi-agency working, but shared some of their experiences in respect of working with both victims and offenders who suffered from mental health.

The team was also committed to encouraging “consortium bids” for contracts to reduce central overheads and ensure that a higher proportion of grants were being spent on front line services.

Durham

My next visit in March saw me travelling to Durham where I met with service providers delivering support and assistance to victims suffering from hate crime and those victims with mental health issues. The service provider had specialists in place to work with victims who had suffered from these sensitive crimes. All the victims I met in Durham told me about how supportive and helpful the service provider was, which was of course very good to hear!

West Midlands

During my visit to Birmingham in the West Midlands, I met with service providers delivering support to victims of female genital mutilation, domestic abuse and fatal road traffic incidents. It was a very varied day and full of interesting insights.

West Midlands is the only area in the country at the moment which has a dedicated team dealing with road traffic fatalities; families receive a tailored and personalised service, whether there is criminal action or not. This is a commendable initiative.

Norfolk

My visit to Wymondham in Norfolk also took place in March. Here I met with service providers assisting the most vulnerable victims, such as those who are disabled, and also heard about those services catering for male victims. It was clear that despite the excellent efforts of service providers for victims suffering from mental health issues, wider partnership working was preventing the most impactful support from being made available.

I was pleased to see that service providers had also recognised this and were trying to work differently together to improve this situation.

Criminal Justice Agencies

My role as Victims' Commissioner is independent from Government, but I meet regularly with senior officials from a number of different criminal justice agencies to try to secure a better deal for victims. I place great importance on these meetings, as they present me with an opportunity to influence operational policies and practice based upon the feedback I receive from meeting victims.

From January 2017, and in line with my commitment to greater transparency, notes of these meetings have been placed on my website so that victims and practitioners can see the issues I am raising and the response of the agency concerned.

The table below sets out the meetings I have held with agencies, policy makers and Ministers since April 2016:

Name	Date
Children's Commissioner	13 April 2016
Parole Board	28 April 2016
MoJ Criminal Court Policy team	27 April 2016
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	04 May 2016
HM Inspectorate of Probation	08 June 2016
Director of Public Prosecutions	06 July 2016
Anti-Slavery Commissioner	14 September 2016
Parl. Under Secretary of State for Youth Justice, Victims, Female Offenders and Offender Health	24 October 2016

Name	Date
Association of Business Recovery Professionals	26 October 2016
Parl. Under Secretary of State for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Counter-Extremism	15 November 2016
Home Secretary	17 November 2016
Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service	05 December 2016
Secretary of State for Justice	12 December 2016
Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service	12 January 2017
Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority	16 January 2017
Director of Public Prosecutions	16 January 2017
National Policing Lead with Victim and Witness Portfolio	19 January 2017
Youth Justice Board	23 January 2017
Association of Police and Crime Commissioners	23 January 2017
Serious Fraud Office	31 January 2017
Parl. Under Secretary of State for Youth Justice, Victims, Female Offenders and Offender Health	06 February 2017
Commissioner for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland	07 February 2017
Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service	07 February 2017
Parole Board	21 February 2017
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Probation	22 February 2017
Gambling Commissioner	22 February 2017
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	28 February 2017
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for the Constabulary	02 March 2017
HM Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate	14 March 2017
Office of Rail and Road	15 March 2017
Financial Conduct Authority	20 March 2017
Lord Chief Justice	20 March 2017
Criminal Cases Review Commission	21 March 2017
Home Office Immigration Enforcement	21 March 2017

I have set out below just some of the issues I have raised.

Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

I am delighted that over the last 12 months there has been a real effort by the CPS to improve victims experiences during the trial. I welcome the roll-out of the 'speaking to victims and witnesses at court' policy, although I recognise from speaking to victims that the practice is still bedding in. It is important that prosecutors take time during the court process to explain what will happen in the case. I look forward to seeing how this develops.

I have spoken with the head of the CPS (the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP]) about the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee Inquiry, looking into the efficiency of the criminal justice system. A recurring theme in the Committee's Inquiry was how the efficiencies supported by criminal justice agencies, including the CPS, were impacting on victims. I fully accept the need for the system to be more efficient and for delays to be avoided, but this must not be to the detriment of victims. I am keen to work closely with the DPP to look at how the CPS can further improve victims' experience of the criminal justice system.

I have also raised concerns about the handling of stalking and harassment cases, as well as the disclosure of rape and sexual assault victims' previous sexual history (known as Section 41 applications by the defence). Both issues trouble me, although I understand that both are subject to ongoing reviews and I await the results. The handling of these cases goes to the heart of my concerns about the treatment of vulnerable victims by the criminal justice system. I want to see better conviction rates and better treatment of victims in the witness box.

Parole Board

The Parole Board has focused on how to assist victims who submit victim personal statements to parole panels. I welcome the practice of the CEO or Chairman writing handwritten cards to every victim attending an oral hearing to read out their statement. I also welcome the pilots in which these victims are offered the opportunity to apply for a refund for their travel costs. The work the Parole Board is doing in supporting victims through the parole process reflects my desire to see victims receiving services tailored to their individual needs.

I have asked the Parole Board to consider whether there is scope for panels to provide victims with "redacted reasons" for their decisions, which respect data protection requirements, but offer victims some understanding of how decisions were reached.

The Parole Board has also agreed to meet some victims to discuss how reports of restorative justice are fed into the parole process.



I was pleased to be able to speak at the Annual Parole Board Conference and discuss with members how their decisions might be better explained to victims.

Police

I am only too aware from my own experiences that the police have an important role to play in a victim's journey through the criminal justice process and I welcome the opportunity to meet with them to discuss how they support victims.

Issues that I have raised in recent months include the report by a retired judge, Sir Richard Henriques on the handling of Operation Midland and, in particular, his recommendations that the police start any investigation of a sexual crime from a neutral position and that they refer to a victim as a 'complainant' until there is a conviction. As set out earlier in this Report, I do not support either recommendation and am keen to know the final and formal response to the report.



I have raised more specific issues, such as the handling of so called 'honour-based' violence and forced marriage issues. I have expressed my concerns about the risks posed to victims in reporting such crimes and the need for enhanced support to be in place. I look forward to working with police colleagues and other partners to take this work forward in the coming year.

I have also raised concerns about the need for improved communication with victims. This hasn't just been limited to my work with regional police forces, but also with the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), where I have highlighted the need for regular, timely and sensitive communication with victims. Again, I am keen to pursue this area of work in the coming year and hope that further improvements can be made for victims.

Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS)

I have met with both of the Chief Executives of the HMCTS during this year. Both were victim-focused and I look forward to working with the current Chief Executive in the coming year.



I have been especially pleased to see the start of a cultural shift which has recognised that victims shouldn't be seen as part of a wider group of 'court users/customers', but as a distinct group of individuals using the court system. There has been a concerted move by HMCTS to ensure that victims' needs are identified and better recognised and I look forward to seeing how this will develop. I have been told of work that is already underway to improve victim facilities at court and how services are to be more 'victim-focused'. I am also interested to see how the increased digitalisation of the courts system will impact upon victims.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA)

I have raised with CICA the difficulties victims have in providing evidence of psychological damage arising from their crimes. I welcome the decision of CICA to set up a pilot, whereby an in-house psychologist examines these applications with a view to speeding up the process. I look forward to hearing about the results of this pilot.

I have raised concerns about delays in claims being processed, the two year cut off point in making a claim and the accessibility of the scheme for survivors of historic child sex abuse.

National Probation Service (NPS)

I have worked with the NPS to improve the initial letters received by victims offering them the opportunity to join the Victim Contact Scheme (VCS), making the letters more personal and empathetic.

I have pressed the NPS to offer victims whose cases will eventually go to the Parole Board to be offered a free copy of the judge's sentencing remarks (at present, some victims have to pay for these). In response, the NPS has agreed that new members of the scheme will be offered a copy of their sentencing remarks and will pilot extending this offer to existing members of the scheme. This is a welcome development and will be appreciated by victims.

I have had useful discussions with the Director of the NPS about changes to the Victim Contact Scheme and have been consulted on these changes. I am pleased to note the Director's commitment to providing victim liaison officers with professional training and accreditation. I am strongly of the view that the VCS should not simply be viewed as a conduit of information to victims, but that it is a key part of victim services, focused on helping victims cope and recover from the crimes perpetrated against them.

I have called for victim liaison officers to be provided with refresher training on the supported needed by victims of mentally disordered offenders and this has been agreed.

Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC)

I have discussed with the Chairman of the CCRC how they engage with victims when reviewing a conviction. I am only too aware of the anxiety and distress notice of such a review can cause. I have asked the CCRC to consider providing briefing material to the Victim Contact Scheme so that victims might be better informed and more re-assured.

Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC)

I am working with the APCC to develop the concept of a compliance dashboard to facilitate monitoring and understanding of the extent to which the requirements of the Victims' Code are being complied with.

I am supporting a bid made by the PCC for Northumbria for funding from the Violence Against Women and Girls fund to pilot a small scheme offering the support of a "victims advocate" to women who are victims of violent or sexual crimes.

Inspectories and Judiciary

I worked with the judiciary to secure a definitive explanation of the purpose of the Victim Personal Statement (VPS). This is a significant achievement in that all agencies can use it in future when devising training materials to explain the purpose of the VPS to their staff.

I am working with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to identify and share examples of good practice within police forces in supporting victims of crime.

Chief Coroner

I am keen to look beyond the traditional parameters of the criminal justice system and consider how more peripheral processes affect victims. One example is the remit of the coroner in the event of a suspicious death. I know only too well from personal experience how the coronial process can affect bereaved families in cases where a criminal act has led to the death of a loved one and I am keen to ensure that other families going through this are treated with sensitivity.

I have met with the Chief Coroner to discuss matters such as inquest proceedings, victim care and support, and legal representation for families in more complex cases. I have met with families who have told me of their experiences. I want to make sure that bereaved families have a level of support that will help them through the process and help them understand the complexities of the hearing.

I will continue to work on improvements in the coming year, and look forward to working with the Chief Coroner and others on these matters.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)

I am committed to improving the experience of victims of crime committed overseas as inevitably they are not covered by the Victims' Code. I have met again with officials from the FCO to discuss progress and it is clear that they are seeking to provide full and effective support to victims. I have asked to have a better understanding of how these victims are referred to local victims support services.

An Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee was set up to support the victims of the Tunisian attacks and to understand what systems must be in place to support victims in the event of any future terrorist attacks. I was invited to be a member of this Committee and was privileged and deeply touched to meet many of the victims. I also attended the Westminster Abbey Memorial Service.

It is important that the learning from this exercise is not lost. Responsibility for this work has been transferred to the Home Office and I was grateful to the officials in the new team for keeping me informed.

Feeding into Consultations, Policies and Procedures

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 2016-17 includes:

- CPS Social Media Guidelines for Prosecutors Consultation.
- Sentencing Guidelines Council Discount for guilty plea
- Sentencing Guidelines Council (structure consistency)
- Safeguarding (mandatory reporting of children/vulnerable adults abuse)
- HMIC Effectiveness Reference Group
- Law Commissions 13th Programme of Law Reform
- IICSA Criminal Compensation
- Mandatory reporting of Child abuse and Neglect
- Prosecuting Social Media cases
- Sentencing Council Breach sentencing guidelines

PART THREE

TREATING VICTIMS WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT

“Making sure that victims are treated with sensitivity and respect goes to the heart of what I want to see for victims in the criminal justice system.”

On the basis of my own experience as a victim within the criminal justice system, I understand that much of the time what matters most is not what you are entitled to, but how you are treated.

There are many practitioners who treat victims with respect and empathy and respect, but I still hear stories of victims who feel that they have been poorly treated. In most cases I am sure that this is not the intention of the practitioner, but nevertheless, the impact this treatment has on victims who are traumatised and anxious can be profound.

Attitudes and approach cannot be changed by policy or legislation. Instead softer skills are required, including raising awareness and understanding and, in some cases, challenging long held views.

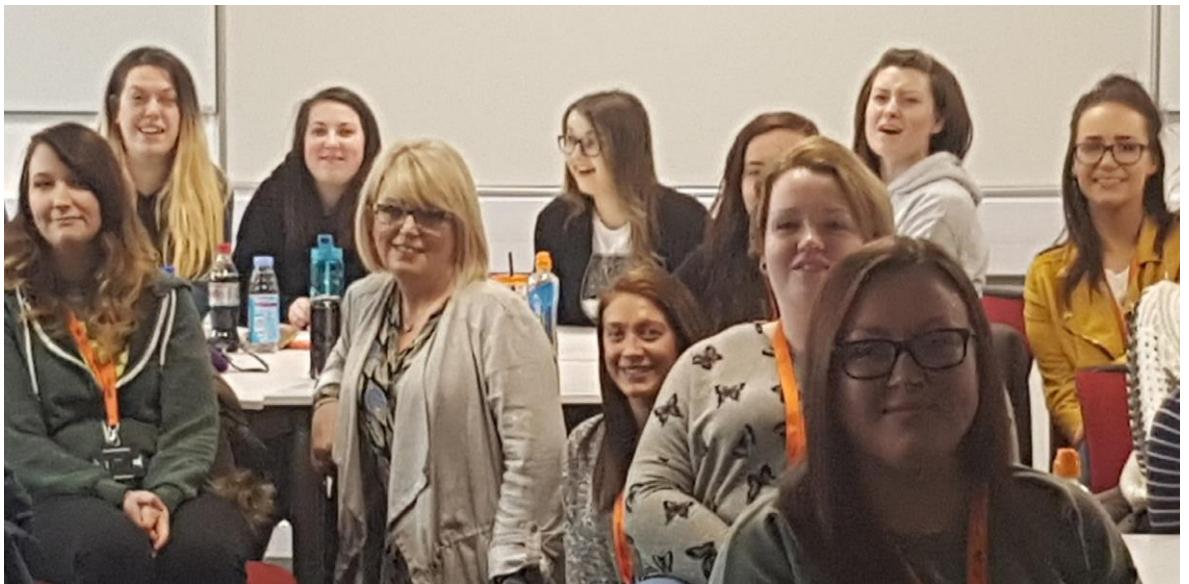
Decency Pledge

Making sure that victims are treated with sensitivity and respect goes to the heart of what I want to see for victims in the criminal justice system. With this in mind, I have instigated a coordinated piece of work with all criminal justice agencies in devising a pan criminal justice system campaign to raise the awareness of victims, their needs and their entitlements. I have invited all agencies to join with me in planning this campaign and have been overwhelmed by their positive response.

My office is now engaged with all these agencies in taking this important piece of work forward.

Students

Building on this theme of making sure that victims are treated with sensitivity, I have been keen to engage the next generation of practitioners, lawyers and service providers in thinking about where victims sit within the criminal justice system and how they should be treated. In order to do this I have sought opportunities to speak to students, including law students, those studying criminology and those studying to become community and social workers.



It was great to meet with students at Derby University and explain how victims should be supported.

I have spoken at several law schools and colleges to both students and staff about the importance of victim empathy when practising as professionals in the criminal justice arena. To increase awareness I have also delivered seminars and presentations, and the reception has been extremely reassuring. The discussions and feedback have been positive and I have been impressed with the enthusiasm with which students have endorsed my messages. I am keen to build on this by developing material that can be used more widely and to a bigger audience.

In the same theme, I am also pleased to have worked with the Duchess of Cornwall's office to consider how the needs of victims can be addressed in lawyer training, an issue I have also raised directly with the Inns of Court.

Training

I have also been invited by agencies to assist them in delivering training to staff and I see this as a valuable means of delivering my messages to an important audience.

At the end of the year I worked with the Independent Police Complaints Commission to deliver a training video on the issue of handling victims in trauma. I very much hope that this video can be used more widely in other criminal justice agencies, such as the police.



I met with Lorin Lafave of the Breck Foundation to share our experiences of the criminal justice system as part of a training video for the IPCC.

I have attended an Independent Police Complaints Commission training day for Commissioners, spoken at the Parole Board annual conference and spoken at a victim advocacy conference for the Crown Prosecution Service, hopefully helping these organisations to improve their treatment of victims. I have observed two Parole Board oral hearings, feeding back to the Parole Board my observations in respect of victim engagement.

I have also participated in and observed training provided to Citizens' Advice Bureau Court Based Service staff in Kent. I was impressed by the quality of the training and also the engagement and enthusiasm of the volunteers.

In addition, my office has actively contributed to workshops and training events with a range of criminal justice agencies, sharing examples of good practice and advocating measures to improve victim engagement. In particular, they attended a College of Policing Code of Practice Vulnerability exercise where a group of practitioners met together to share ideas on what should go into a police code of practice for working on child sexual exploitation cases.

I look forward to doing more of this in the forthcoming year, with training events planned with the police and others.

PART FOUR

REACHING OUT TO VICTIMS

"I welcome the opportunity to find out how victims are being supported and I am often energised by the enthusiasm and professionalism of the many practitioners that I meet."

I am determined to build the profile of the post of Victims' Commissioner so that more victims are aware that I am here and able to raise general issues of concern. I am particularly keen to raise awareness amongst vulnerable victims and they are often the most difficult to reach.

Stakeholder Engagement

In order to highlight my role and make contact with a wider range of organisations who are working for victims, my office has put in place a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan. This plan has been the foundation for my work with a much wider range of agencies. In particular, the plan has prompted more meetings with third sector charities and support groups. I welcome the opportunity to find out how victims are being supported and I am often energised by the enthusiasm and professionalism of the practitioners that I meet. Many go over and beyond the call of duty, such is their commitment and dedication.



It was an honour to be able to open the new Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Cambridgeshire.

The table below is a list of the organisations with which I have had face to face meetings.

Name	Date	Purpose
Agenda: Women and Girls at Risk	April 2016	Discuss work on helping protect women and girls from violence
Faith Matters	April 2016	Discuss hate crimes against Muslims and how to address key concerns for victims
Safe CPS	June 2016	Discussion on how to protect victims of domestic abuse where perpetrators access information of their whereabouts through other means
Mania Movements	July 2016	Discuss work of mentoring scheme targeted towards children at risk and diversion away from crime
Voice4Victims	July 2016	Discussion on Victims' Law event in Parliament
Association of Business Recovery Professionals	October 2016	Discussion on how businesses as victims of fraud also need support
National Association for People Abused in Childhood	October 2016	Discuss the provision of support for survivors of non-recent abuse
Victim Support	October 2016	Provision of victim services in a devolved arena
National Citizen Service Trust	November 2016	The work of the JCS in supporting young people and improving community cohesion
OnSide Youth Zone	November 2016	Introductory meeting to charity working to provide children and young people safe places for leisure activities
Why me?	December 2016	Discussion regarding RJ report published by VCO and how victims can be better supported
Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson	January 2017	Duty of care in respect of young participants in sport
Action Fraud	January 2017	What work is being done to support victims of on line fraud and how to increase public awareness
Road Peace	January 2017	To discuss work support victims of road traffic accidents and fatalities

These meetings have been valuable in giving me a fresh perspective on victim issues. They have given me the opportunity to learn first hand of the issues that they are dealing with and to see for myself how victims are being helped to cope and recover. I am grateful to all of these groups for their support and advice, and for all the good work that they are doing.

Social Media

I have been keen to use social media to reach out to more victims. My use of social media has focused on Twitter and I am pleased to report that my Twitter following has increased by 50% in the last six months of the year. It has also resulted in more victims finding me and contacting me for information and support.

My office is looking at how my use of social media can be further developed as we recognise that this is the preferred means of contact for certain groups of victims.

Website

I am pleased to report that the number of visitors to my website has also increased by over a third over the past twelve months. This is in part a result of publicity and social media.

We have decided to use the website to publish more information on my meetings and activities, as well as my PCC visits and some of my correspondence with Ministers. We are also looking at what additional information would assist those victims who are looking to navigate themselves through the criminal justice system.

I recognise that the website needs to be further developed as my role and the work of my office evolves. My office is currently in discussion with MoJ about how to consult users before enhancing the site. This work will be a high priority in the coming year.

Victims' Commissioner Newsletter

In addition to my website, I have also started issuing bi-monthly newsletters to victims, practitioners, stakeholders and other victim groups, updating on my work and highlighting examples of good practice. The feedback to the newsletter has been positive and I want this to become a permanent feature.

Attending events

I have been honoured to have been invited to visit groups across the country and speak at their events. As ever, it has not been possible to accept every invitation but I have tried to maintain a geographical spread.

I have tried to attend the launch of new services as well as to visit new and innovative practices. I have been particularly keen to visit groups who are supporting vulnerable groups of victims and survivors.



I was delighted to speak at a conference organised by South Yorkshire and Humberside PCCs, which showcased their future plans for supporting victims.

Some of the events I have been to are listed below:

Name	Date	Location	Short description
Independent Police Complaints Commission Training event	May 2016	London	Speaking on how to give victims a better experience during an IPCC investigation
National Senior Women in Policing Conference	May 2016	Manchester	Speaking about my experiences throughout my criminal justice journey
Bexhill School Event	June 2016	Sussex	Speaking about my work for victims and communities
West Midlands Police – best practice event	June 2016	Birmingham	Speaking on the importance of complying with the Victims' Code
Children's Support Centre – organised by Dare2Care	July 2016	Rotherham	Meeting victims and survivors of abuse
West Yorkshire Police Community Engagement Event	July 2017	West Yorkshire Police Training School – Wakefield	Promote the need for police actively to listen to the needs of victims/witnesses
Legal Practice Course at BPP University Law School (students)	October 2016	London	Promoting the need for future practitioners to understand the needs of victims and to treat them with sensitivity
Birkenhead Sixth Form College	November 2016	Merseyside	Speaking about the effects of Anti Social Behaviour
Launch of new Victim Care and Advice Service (VCAS)	November 2016	Darlington	Speaking about What Works in Supporting Victims of Crime
CPS Advocacy conference	November 2016	London	Speaking on the treatment of victims and witnesses in court
The Hub for Families of Victims of Homicide 'Families Fighting for Justice'	November 2016	Liverpool	Meeting victims and volunteers and hearing about the work of the hub
Westminster Briefing: 'Code of Practice for Victims of Crime'	November 2016	London	Speaking about putting victims at the heart of criminal justice system and the need for a Victims' Law
Parole Board Member Annual Conference	December 2016	Derbyshire	Speaking on the need to deliver justice to victims and victims in the parole system
South Yorkshire Victims Service Showcase event	December 2016	Rotherham	Speaking on the need to support victims of CSA and sexual violence
Westminster Debate – Justice Select Committee Report on Restorative Justice	January 2017	London	Showing support for the JSC Report on Restorative Justice

Name	Date	Location	Short description
Launch of National Standards of Support (NSS) – Support for Families following an Acquittal in Murder Cases	January 2017	London	Showing support for bereaved families in murder and manslaughter cases where there has been no conviction
Witness Service Volunteer Training & Impact	February 2017	Ashford	Participating in volunteer training for the Kent Witness Service
Voicing Child Sexual Abuse	February 2017	Cheshire	Speaking at an open meeting on supporting survivors of child sexual abuse
IICSA Investigation – Accountability and Reparations: Inquiry Seminar	February 2017	London	Giving evidence to the Inquiry on CSA victims accessing compensation.
Official Opening of The Elms Sexual Abuse Referral Centre (SARC)	March 2017	Huntington	Opening a new SARC in Cambridgeshire
International Women's Day: Empowering Women Event	March 2017	Peterborough	Speaking about my work as Victims Commissioner
Ryder Lecture at University of Bolton	March 2017	Bolton	Speaking on the importance of treating victims with respect and sensitivity during legal proceedings
University of Derbyshire	March 2017	Derby	Promoting the need for future practitioners to understand the needs of victims and to treat them with sensitivity
'Revenge Pornography, Two Years On: Building Partnerships and Addressing Gaps in the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015'	March 2017	London	Speaking partnership working and supporting victims of revenge pornography

Individual enquiries

The table below gives a monthly breakdown of the number of victims who have contacted my office to discuss their cases and share their experiences of the criminal justice system. As can be seen, the number of victims approaching the office has increased over the year, in part reflecting the higher profile of my work both in the press and on social media.

Month	Number of victims contacting the Office of the Victims' Commissioner for the first time	Number of repeat contacts from victims
April	6	0
May	13	1
June	13	0

Month	Number of victims contacting the Office of the Victims' Commissioner for the first time	Number of repeat contacts from victims
July	8	1
August	7	1
September	14	3
October	13	8
November	18	6
December	21	3
January	30	13
February	33	9
March	36	25

Although I am prevented by law from taking up individual cases, I believe that it is a key part of my role to meet with victims, listen to their concerns and, where possible, signpost them to the agencies and organisations which might be able to help them.

Many victims that I meet understand that I cannot take up their cases, but they do want someone to listen and if I am able to share these experiences with service providers and policy makers, they can illustrate the points I make to government. In some cases, they have informed and led to improvements in practice.

I am often touched by victims who have told me how much they valued the letters and correspondence from my office. My frustration all too often is that I am unable to do more to assist them. I only hope that these victims feel some comfort from the knowledge that, in using their accounts of their experiences, I am able to have an impact in helping to secure a positive change for other victims.

Press Coverage

Over the course of the year, my work has received a significant amount of media interest, particularly in the latter part of the year. The press has taken an interest in the publication of my three reviews and I have also spoken on television and radio on issues such as reforming laws on domestic violence and a statutory duty on those who are responsible for the welfare of children to report any suspicions that the child might be a victim of abuse. Invitations by radio stations to review the newspapers have also offered opportunities for me to talk about my role as Victims' Commissioner.

This media coverage is important, as it increases public awareness of my role and the work that I am doing. My office has noted an increase in emails and letters from victims following on from each of my appearances.

PART FIVE

SPEAKING UP FOR VICTIMS

"I have met and spoken to many survivors and victims of child sexual abuse throughout the year. Through their stories they have made me aware of the ongoing and prolonged suffering and pain that they feel."

Speaking and media opportunities enable me to speak up for victims, highlighting where services can be improved and telling policy makers and service providers about the victims' experiences of the criminal justice system. I see this as an important part of my role, speaking for those who feel that they do not have a voice.



The national media gives me an opportunity to draw to the attention of the public issues affecting victims.

As well as speaking at events arranged by criminal justice agencies, Police and Crime Commissioners and charities, I occasionally get an opportunity to speak more widely about victims' policy and practice. I value these opportunities to reflect upon issues affecting victims more widely.

The speech at the Westminster Briefing Seminar in November was one such opportunity. I used it to talk about what changes needed to be made to our criminal justice system before we can say that it has placed victims "at its heart". It was also an opportunity for me to raise the need for a Victim Law, which strengthens victims' rights and entitlements.

In December, I spoke at a conference organised by the police in Rotherham, where I was able to respond to recommendations in respect of police handling of non-recent child sexual abuse cases. I challenged what I considered to be deeply flawed recommendations that victims should be labelled as "complainants" and that they should not be believed until the point at which a perpetrator had been convicted.

In March, I was honoured to be invited to give the Annual Ryder Lecture at Bolton University. This was an opportunity for me to highlight key concerns about the lack of importance given to victims in legal proceedings. I also highlighted the role of the victim not just in criminal proceedings, but also in coronial proceedings and family proceedings. I wanted to raise awareness of the importance of listening to what a victim has to say in all proceedings.

Parliamentary Debates

As a member of the House of Lords I also get the opportunity to speak in the chamber on issues that directly and indirectly affect victims.

Over the past year I have used this opportunity on several occasions to speak on victim related issues, including the need for a Victim Law, introducing tougher penalties for drivers who cause serious road traffic accidents when using mobile devices, raising awareness of the failure to provide support to some victims of child sexual abuse and offering support for the National Citizens Service as a means of creating more cohesive communities and reducing antisocial behaviour.



I have spoken in the House of Lords on issues relating to victims

Justice Select Committee

As well as my speaking opportunities in the chamber of the House of Lords, I was pleased to have the opportunity to give evidence on my work to the House of Commons Justice Select Committee. I attended on three separate occasions, twice in open session and once in closed.



Giving evidence to the Justice Select Committee on my work for victims (www.Parliament.tv – 8 November 2016)

In May, I was invited to give evidence to the Justice Select Committee as part of their Inquiry into Restorative Justice following the publication of my report in March 2016, *A Question of Quality: A Review of Restorative Justice Part 1 – Service Providers*. The Inquiry was focused on the use of Restorative Justice in the criminal justice system, particularly the findings of my report which highlighted the low-take up of Restorative Justice by victims and compliance of the Restorative Justice offer, as set out in the Victims' Code.

The Committee's Inquiry Report was published in September and reiterated many of the findings of my Report. The Committee went one step further to highlight that the Government should do more to help victims gain access to Restorative Justice opportunities. Further recommendations around better compliance with the Victims' Code were also made, including for the Government to make Restorative Justice a key entitlement when considering draft the contents of a possible law for victims.

I returned to the Committee on 8 November 2016 to give evidence about the work of my office together with my Chief Executive Officer, Russell A'Court. This evidence giving session prompted a further meeting with the Committee, this time in closed session.

In the open session the Committee asked a wide range of questions about the work of the office and my views on a range of victim and witness related issues. The Committee was keen to understand more about the strategy for the office, how I influenced Government policy and whether I had sufficient resources to be able effectively to undertake my statutory duties.

The discussions with the Committee prompted me to reflect upon how I undertook my duties, with a view to victims and the general public having a better understanding of my work, the issues I was raising with Ministers and criminal justice agencies, as well as their responses. It resulted in my adopting a more transparent approach to my engagement with policy makers and those responsible for service delivery. From January 2017 my office has published notes of all meetings I have held with Ministers and heads of agencies. We have also started to publish some exchanges of correspondence. Looking ahead, we are planning to review this approach with a view to further enhancing the transparency of our operation.

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)

I have met and spoken to many survivors and victims of child sexual abuse throughout the year. Through their stories they have made me aware of their ongoing and prolonged suffering and pain. I know what it's like to have someone taken from you. But I'm thankful not to have lived through the trauma of being abused or seeing my loved ones go through it. I can't begin to imagine how hard this must be.

I have followed closely the progress of IICSA. My fear is that in the midst of all the media and political speculation about fallouts and disputes, we are seriously in danger of forgetting about the people who really matter: the victims who have suffered so much pain and injustice.

As well as meeting many victims individually, I was honoured to have the opportunity to speak at an open meeting of the charity "Voicing CSA". I have also met with charities such as National Association for People Abused in Childhood (NAPAC) to discuss the provision of support services for victims and survivors. I have also raised the issue of provision for victims and survivors of CSA when I meet PCCs and service providers around the country.

Their feedback tells me that on-the-ground services are struggling to cope as thousands of survivors find the courage to come forward and ask for help. Many need the support of highly trained and specialist counsellors in order to deal with the affects of the abuse and the resulting trauma. For some, the abuse may have triggered dependency on alcohol or drugs; others may have difficulties with relationships; some may have difficulty coping with the demands of employment or parenthood.

It is also clear to me that a wide range of agencies are required to be involved in supporting survivors. Providing effective support requires close cooperation and involvement of health services, schools and colleges, job centres, housing authorities and social services, to name but a few. It is vital that these agencies work together to ensure that each survivor has the chance to move on with their lives and put the past behind them.

We must also be sure that there are enough practitioners in all of these services with the skills to be able to provide professional support to survivors. Whilst good intentions are laudable, on their own they are simply not enough. Staff need to be trained fully to understand the complex and variable impact that child sex abuse has on survivors as well as how to offer them the support they badly need.

A key part of supporting these victims and survivors is to ensure that they receive access to compensation. In February, I attended an IICSA Inquiry Seminar to give evidence in person on giving victims and survivors of CSA compensation. I spoke of the importance of providing a simplified means of access to compensation for CSA victims, as a common complaint is that the current systems can be perceived as bureaucratic and complex. I also raised concerns about the eligibility criteria and the need to improve accessibility to the scheme.

PART SIX

CREATING A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

“As I travel around the country I am often being presented with examples of innovative practice,...”

In my last Annual Report I talked about my ambition to turn my office into a “Centre of Excellence”, sharing examples of good practice and innovation. I remain committed to this goal and it is one of my five strategic objectives for my second term.

As I travel around the country, I am often being presented with examples of innovative practice, some of which are referred to in this report. I intend to use my website to publicise examples in the coming year.

I am often asked what, in my view, constitutes an example of good practice. Another of my strategic objectives is to apply the learning from my review '[What Works](#)'. This review identified four key principles which underpinned effective victim services, namely communication, procedural justice, inter-agency cooperation and professionalisation.

These principles have influenced our approach to reviewing victim services and recommending improvements. Examples of good practice must therefore demonstrate the application of one or more of these principles. I have also started to frame my reviews, speeches and presentations around these principles and my team have done the same.

In particular, my Head of Analysis and Review has delivered a presentation on what works in supporting victims of crime at the launch of Durham, Darlington and Cleveland Victims' Services. She co-authored and delivered a presentation on “Sharing and Collaboration in Victim Services” with an academic at the Annual British Society of Criminology Conference and delivered a presentation entitled “What Works in Supporting Victims of Crime” at an undergraduate conference at Nottingham Trent University.

As part of our drive to promote best practice, my office has been working with HMIC in looking at examples of best practice in supporting victims. The joint report is due to be published later this year. It is also working on the production of a checklist for quality of letters, with the first draft being circulated for consultation.

My work plan for last year included a commitment to set up a virtual “community of practice which can share innovation and best practice and promote debate and discussion on how to improve services. Whilst this has not been possible, due to IT restrictions, this very much remains one of my top priorities for the year ahead.

PART SEVEN

LOOKING AHEAD

Victims' Commissioner's plans for 2016/17 and beyond

"I want to use my role to facilitate improvements to victims' services and to promote examples of good practice."

My Second Term Strategic Plan sets out the framework for my activities through to March 2019. All of my work and that of my office will be focused on delivering my five strategic objectives.

Within this framework, I am committed to working with and on behalf of victims to make sure that they receive their entitlements and are treated with decency and respect. As in the past, I will do this by meeting with service providers and criminal justice agencies and reviewing their performance against the Victims' Code.

Most importantly, I am committed to listening to victims and learning first hand from their experiences. I view this as the most important part of my role. The feedback I receive from victims enables me to identify areas that need improvement and to challenge those who are responsible for service delivery. I will therefore be focusing on building the profile of my post, thereby enabling me to reach out to more victims and hearing about a wider range of experiences.

I want to use my role to facilitate improvements to victims' services and to promote examples of good practice. Against a backdrop of devolved services it is important that innovation and good practice are shared and emulated so that more victims can benefit from them.

I also remain committed to seeing statutory change that will enhance the status of victims within the criminal justice system.

On the basis of my Strategic Plan and the priorities set out above, I have published my detailed work plan for 2017/18, available at <http://victimscommissioner.org.uk>. I have set out below the key areas of activity for me and my office in the coming year.

I am committed to undertaking further reviews into compliance with the Victims' Code, with particular emphasis on vulnerable victims. Therefore I plan to review the operation of Registered Intermediaries in respect of child witnesses and victims. I also plan to review the support given to victims who suffer from mental illness.

When I attended the Justice Select Committee I was asked to consider reviewing the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. Having reviewed my workload for the year, I plan to undertake a review of how effectively victims are able to access the Scheme and understand how it works.

One of my strategic objectives is to review the provision of victim services on the basis of the four principles identified in "What Works", namely: communication, procedural justice, inter-agency cooperation and professionalisation, and make recommendations on how services should develop and improve. With this in mind, I plan to review the capture of victim satisfaction and how this data is used to improve victim services. I also plan to undertake a scoping review to look at how practitioners are trained and supported in delivering a professional service to victims.

I will publish the outcome of my joint review, working with the HMIC, on best practice in respect of victims' services. This report will highlight good examples on innovative working with victims.

I am committed to developing my ideas on how a Victims' Law might be used to benefit all victims of crime. My proposals will be published in the summer.

My office will continue to work with criminal justice agencies and the Ministry of Justice to formulate a campaign across the criminal justice system to raise victim awareness and ensure that they are treated with sensitivity and respect at all times. I am hopeful that the campaign can be launched in early 2018.

I will be meeting with or contacting all agencies listed under the Victims' Code to discuss how they plan to deliver entitlements to victims and the extent to which they are complying with the Code. I will publish the results of these discussions on my website.

I will continue to travel around the country meeting police and crime commissioners, finding out how they are delivering victims' services, talking to local practitioners and meeting local victims. This will enable me to report to Ministers and national agencies on how devolved victims' services are working on the ground.

I have written to Ministers to highlight some of the inequities in respect of entitlements under the Victims' Code as applied to victims of mentally disordered offenders. I am committed to ensuring that this small but important group of victims are receiving the same entitlements and support as all other victims.

I am working with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and the Ministry of Justice in exploring the possibility of devising a dashboard of compliance data in respect of the Victims' Code. The intention is to use the dashboard to inform on the extent to which victims are receiving their entitlements.

My office will be working on information leaflets which explain to victims what to expect following trial and sentencing. Too many victims are unaware of what to expect and can be re-traumatised by developments that take place during the offender's sentence.

I will work closely with HMCTS in monitoring court reforms and digitalisation, and how these impact upon victims.

I am committed to developing a training package on the treatment of victims to be used in universities and colleges. This gives me an opportunity to influence the practitioners and opinion formers of the future.

I plan to continue working with the Northumbria PCC in support of her bid for funding to pilot the concept of a "victims' advocate" for women who are the victims of sexual or violent crime. This pilot, if successful, will highlight the importance of the personal relationship between victims' services and victims suffering high levels of trauma.

I will continue to meet with victims and survivors of non-recent child sexual abuse to hear about how they are being supported and helped to recover. I also plan to meet and listen to those organisations that support this group of victims to identify the obstacles to recovery and how they might be overcome.

I will continue to be in contact with groups supporting victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. I want to focus on how identified victims are supported through to recovery.

I want to work with the Home Office, police forces and other agencies to highlight the enforcement powers available to tackle anti-social behaviour, as well as to promote examples of best practice.

I want to explore how vulnerable victims of cyber crime are being supported.

I am keen to develop my website and ensure that it provides victims with information that will help them to understand their entitlements under the Victims' Code. My website will also provide more information for practitioners and policy makers in respect of the work of my office and the issues that I am focusing on as well as providing a platform for a community of practice.

This "Community of Practice" will promote innovation and good practice. It will also act as a problem solving forum. This has proved difficult to achieve in the past, but the development of my website should provide the functionality to make this a reality.

I plan to review and hopefully extend my use of social media, with the view to making me more accessible to a wider range of victims.

PART EIGHT

CONCLUSION

“My overriding priority is to ensure that every victim receives a service that is responsive to their needs and which helps them at every stage of their difficult journey through the criminal justice system ...”

Looking ahead, there are many challenges and opportunities facing agencies responsible for supporting victims. Court reforms, the possible further devolution of victims' services, high levels of demand for support from survivors of child sexual abuse, the increase in cyber crime and human trafficking, the roll-out of video-links for child and vulnerable witnesses, are just some of the many pressing issues facing victims and practitioners.

At the same time as meeting these challenges, it is important that we do not lose sight of the importance of treating all victims with respect and sensitivity. Each victim is an individual, with their own individual needs and anxieties. Many are suffering from trauma and loss. This human dimension must never be overlooked in the drive for efficiencies and attempts to “manage down” demand.

My overriding priority, therefore, is to ensure that every victim receives a service that is responsive to their needs and which helps them at every stage of their difficult journey through the criminal justice system and, in some cases, beyond.

PART NINE

OFFICE OF THE VICTIMS' COMMISSIONER BUDGET

Table 1. Budget for the Office of the Victims' Commissioner 2016-17

	Budget £	Expenditure £
Original Budget	492,000	490,787
Pay Budget	470,000	476,572
Non Pay Budget	22,000	14,215
Non Pay		
IT & Telecommunications	7,600	1,800
Travel & Other	14,150	12,388
Printing/Postage & Office Expenditure	250	27

Table 2: 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		
IT & Telecommunications		1,349
Travel & Other		6,904
Events and Conferences		32
Printing/Postage & Office Expenditure		15

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