

VICTIMS' COMMISSIONER FOR ENGLAND AND WALES STRATEGY

October 2023 – October 2024

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to set out the interim Victims' Commissioner for England and Wales' (VC) strategy for her 12- month term, October 2023 to October 2024. The Victims' Commissioner is Baroness Newlove.

This plan sets out high level strategic priorities for the VC.

THE VC'S STATUTORY REMIT

Pursuant to Section 49 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004, the VC 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.

The Commissioner may:

- (a) make proposals to the Secretary of State for amending the Code;
- (b) make a report to the Secretary of State;
- (c) make recommendations to an authority within his remit;
- (d) undertake or arrange for or support (financially or otherwise) the carrying out of research;
- (e) consult any person he thinks appropriate.

2 STRATEGIC AIMS 2023 - 2024

The Victims' Commissioner has five key strategic aims:

Supporting victims in coping and recovering (A) Work with criminal justice agencies to ensure victims are supported in coping and recovering from the impact of crime and are empowered to play a full part in the criminal justice system, including Crown and Magistrates Courts, Coroners inquests, Parole Board hearings, Mental Health Review Tribunals and ASB Case Reviews. This includes being able to access victim services tailored to their needs and being treated with respect and decency.

Monitoring and enhancing compliance (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; identify areas that are deficient and make recommendations for change based on evidence of best practice; and improve public awareness of entitlements.

Act as the voice of victims (C) Ensure the interests of victims and witnesses are fully considered at all stages in any proposals for development and/or change to the criminal justice system, with specific focus on the Victims and Prisoners Bill currently making its way through Parliament.

Amplify the victim's voice. (D) Through regular contact with victims and practitioners of victims' services, articulate a view of the criminal justice system from the perspective of victims lived

experiences; contribute to, review and challenge decisions taken by policy makers and those responsible for developing practice.

Promoting best practice and excellence (E) Through gaining first-hand knowledge and understanding of victims' services, identify and actively promote examples of good practice and excellence.

ETHICS AND BEHAVIOURS

The Victims' Commissioner will work in accordance with the Nolan principles. She and her team will aspire to demonstrate positive and ethical standards of behaviour at all times:

- **Human rights:** She will ensure all victims and witnesses enjoy full respect and support for all of their human rights throughout the criminal justice process.
- **Independent:** Taking into account with equal measure the views of all victims and stakeholders, she will make independent and impartial assessments of policy and practice and offer a perspective independent of government.
- **Public Interest:** In all external relations, she will endeavour to deal fairly, openly and supportively, with the intention of serving the public interest in every interaction
- **Equality:** Her work will be targeted on all communities, mindful of the nine protected strands within the Equality Act 2010.
- **Analytical:** She will employ a rigorous analytical approach to all aspects of her remit.
- **Collegiate:** She will adopt a collaborative, open and friendly working relationship with all stakeholders.
- **Transparent:** She will make a presumption of full openness and disclosure in all aspects of her work.
- **Reflective:** She will adopt a reflective approach to her work and that of her office, and how it can be improved. She will be open to different approaches and empathetic to the experience of victims.
- **Fairness:** She will deal with all individuals fairly and with sensitivity.

4 OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: A Victims and Prisoners Bill that delivers transformational change for victims.

Advocate for the development of a comprehensive Victims and Prisoners Bill that not only upholds government commitments to victims but brings about significant structural improvements.

- Collaborate with government, Parliamentarians and criminal justice stakeholders to enhance the Victims and Prisoners Bill with a view to delivering a more effective criminal justice experience for victims.
- Advocate a legal framework within the Bill that can: achieve full compliance with the Victims' Code by making agencies fully accountable for delivery; ensure access to specialist support services tailored to victims' needs; and extend support and entitlements to include currently underserved victim groups.
- Evaluate the potential impacts of the Victims and Prisoners Bill in preparation for implementing any additional statutory responsibilities relating to future office holders of the Victims Commissioner.

Objective 2: An effective justice system that works for all and promotes and supports active victim participation.

Advocate for an effective and efficient justice system that is sensitive to the needs and interests of victims, delivers procedural justice and gives victims a voice in proceedings.

- Engage with HMCTS, Ministers and judiciary to promote action to eliminate court backlogs and to assess and highlight the impact these backlogs are having on victims and their engagement with the criminal justice process.
- Engage with CPS and NPCC on delays in respect of charging decisions and the impact these delays are having on victims and those supporting them.
- Engage with police, judiciary, and legal profession to build greater awareness and sensitivity towards the needs and interests of victims, with a view to improving their experience in the court room as well as at inquests, parole hearings and mental health review tribunals.
- Monitor the rollout of the pre-recording of evidence and cross-examination and assess the impact this is having on victims.
- Engage with MoJ policy leads and the Tribunal Service on delivering victim access to Mental Health Review Tribunals equivalent to that given to victims in the parole process.
- Engage with the Parole Board and HMPPS on the delivery of the pilots of victims observing parole hearings, as well as improved information sharing on the parole process.
- Engage with CICA on improving the victim experience claiming criminal injuries compensation.
- Monitor and feedback on work arising from the recommendations of the Government's Rape review.
- Work collaboratively with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner in respect of victims of VAWG and domestic abuse.

Objective 3: Strong oversight and accountability mechanisms.

Advocate for robust oversight and accountability mechanisms to hold criminal justice agencies and organisations accountable for their performance and quality of service to victims and compliance with the Victims' Code.

- Collaborate with stakeholders to ensure accountability, transparency, and consistent victim entitlements and raise with Ministers, policy makers and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) examples of non-compliance with the Code.
- Raise public awareness of the victim experience of the criminal justice process through media and speaking opportunities and continue to include the quality of engagement between practitioners and victims as a part of all future VC reviews.
- Commission a victims' survey to receive feedback and first-hand accounts of victim experiences.
- Undertake and publish a report specifically on the availability of accurate data across the criminal justice system that will enable effective monitoring of VCOP compliance.

Objective 4: Quality support for all victims.

Advocate for all victims to have access to high-quality and best practice support services, regardless of their location or the nature of the crime they have experienced.

- Encourage and support criminal justice agencies in improving practice for victims and witnesses and utilise visits across England and Wales to identify and promote best practice.

- Work with policymakers and service providers to develop a clearer understanding of “what good looks like” and highlight examples of good practice when presenting Victims’ Commissioner reviews and reports.
- Mark the fifth anniversary of the Victims’ Commissioner’s 2019 report on victims of anti-social behaviour *Living A Nightmare* by evaluating the government’s response to the report’s
- Publish a comprehensive report on the role and impact of victim advocates within the justice system, highlighting their functions, effectiveness, and potential improvements.
- Through engagement with victims and their support organisations, feedback victim experiences to criminal justice agencies, so that it can help to shape policy and practice.
- Work closely with the Welsh Assembly Government having regard to their legislation in this area and exchange good practice between England and Wales.

MEASURES

The key measures we will need to monitor these aims and objectives are:

Resource: The staff resource that can be applied to undertaking reviews

Progress: The number of reviews completed and published and the quality of evidence they present

Progress: A programme of engagement with victims.

Progress: Increased press and social media coverage of Victims’ Commissioner activity

Outcomes: Victims’ Commissioner recommendations accepted and implemented

Outcomes: Policy makers and practitioners taking on board changes advocated by the VC

Outcomes: Greater awareness of the Victims’ Commissioner’s work, as evidenced by high levels of contact with victims through correspondence, more invitations to meet with victims’ groups and practitioners, increased number of Twitter followers, etc.

Outcomes: Examples of good practice being implemented more widely.

RISKS

The Victims’ Commissioner’s key strategic risks include:

Budget: Insufficient funds to deliver the strategy.

Staff recruitment: Unable to recruit the staff she requires, with the necessary skill set, in timely way, therefore having a detrimental impact on OVC team’s output; time lags between staff recruitment delaying the work programme.

IT failures: MoJ IT failing to provide adequate support to deliver the business.

Reputational Damage: Inaccurate information published in reviews and statements that cause reputational damage.

Strategy: The VC is unable to obtain sufficient support for the strategy from internal and external stakeholders.

IMPLEMENTATION

It is important the VC receives buy-in to the strategy from those who will have to implement it, including her team, as well as internal and external stakeholders. This delivery of this three-year

strategy will be supported by annual business plans, a stakeholder engagement plan and a communication plan, all of which will be reviewed on a regular basis. Progress in delivering the strategy will be clearly documented in the VC's annual reports and website.